

Family Discipleship

Recalibration

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Family discipleship. This is a critical issue. What happens in the family gets turned on the church, gets turned on the state. You get your employees from the family. You get everything out of the family. It's a fountain. It issues forth a certain kind of life. What you do in your family has enormous consequences in the world and when you have people who either reject the doctrine of the family or they de-emphasize the family, you have gigantic problems in culture. People say, "Well, you don't want to over-emphasize the family," and that's absolutely true but we live in a world that so de-emphasizes the family that if you place any emphasis on the family at all, they scream idolatry. But the truth is, God has established societies that are defining for other societies and the family is one of those and so God has it so that there would be a marriage and then there would be children and then those children would depart and have other marriages and more children and this is the wisdom of God.

Now, it's a gigantic subject. We could go in and study a number of didactic passages of Scripture that speak of family life. We could go and be reminded of some of the great principles of family life that I just pray all of us would somehow grasp with all of our souls. We could go back and learn from Abraham. God said that the purpose of Abraham's life was that he would instruct his children. We could go back to Job and I pray that we who are fathers would be like Job. He prayed for his family every day. He made sacrifices for them every day because he knew what their greatest threat was, sin. He prayed that sin would not grip them and destroy them. We could go back to Joshua who said, "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord." We could go back to Moses whose heart burned many times and said this same thing in more than one place in Deuteronomy that fathers should teach their children's when they sit in the house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down and when they rise up. Or like Ezra who gathered whole families and suckling babes, everyone together to hear the reading of the law of God. Or we could go to Asaph who in Psalm 78 said so many powerful things about fatherhood and family life. We could go and look at Timothy who was instructed by his mother and his grandmother.

So there is such a rich tapestry that we could draw from when we talk about family life and we could also give many negative examples as well of family life, of marriages going in the wrong direction. We could go to Lot's wife. We could go to it and we could remember her as we're instructed in Scripture to do. We could examine consequences

from Scripture of neglecting the biblical doctrine of the family and particularly the roles of fathers and mothers. We could talk about the severe, just the terrifying warnings that were given to David if he did not disciple his sons. So it's a subject that takes us from Genesis to Revelation. It's a large subject and so I've been trying to consider how do we deal with this great subject in one hour of calibration.

So I'd like to begin with a definition of family discipleship here. What is discipleship? There are 2 texts that I think explain family discipleship in summary form and they bring together what Scripture says about it and that would be Matthew 28:18-20. This is a passage about discipleship. It tells us what discipleship is and if you co-mingle Matthew 28:18-20 with Deuteronomy 6, I think you have an excellent testimony that tells about the definition of discipleship. And family discipleship is this: it's a work of communicating the Gospel for genuine conversion and teaching to obey all that Christ has commanded. That is the role of family discipleship. It's Gospel-centered and it's eschatological in the sense that it's for purposes in the future. It's for you, your son and your grandson for many generations. So it's temporal, its eschatological and it has to do with heaven. We disciple our families because God has made it that he will convey souls to heaven.

Matthew 28:18-20, if you would open up your Bibles.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

The operative statement in here is the discipleship command to teach them "to observe all things that I have commanded." This really summarizes the kind of discipleship that God communicates in the Bible. Then, of course, Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

1 Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you - 'a land flowing with milk and honey.' 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie

down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

So these 2 passages of Scripture, Matthew 28 and Deuteronomy 6, I think form the definitional structure of family discipleship and, of course, there's more but what we learn from these passages of Scripture is that while family discipleship includes everything that you do, it includes your education, it includes your work, it includes your church life, it includes your community life, but there's one thing that stands in the midst of all of them that is the heart of all of them and that is teaching, teaching the things that Jesus Christ has commanded. There are many people who say, "Well, all of life is discipleship so I take my children wherever I go. We just do life together." But if you leave out teaching, if you're not determinatively, systematically teaching, you are not engaging in the kind of family discipleship that is spoken of in these passages of Scripture. It's one thing to have your family live life with you but there's content to that life and family discipleship has at its center teaching. I think these passages are clear enough to be able to say: if you don't have a family life that's focused on the teaching of the word of God, then you're not making disciples of Christ. God has called us here to something that captures an enormous amount of our lives. It's all of our life.

Okay, that's sort of the definition, now I want to talk about the only true guide and this should be obvious to all of us. The only true guide for family discipleship is Scripture. Scripture is sufficient. Imagine being left to this task without instructions. We're not left without instructions and that is a blessing. So when you look at Scripture, what you'll find, at least 3 broad categories that describe the way that family discipleship is engaged. Again, because Scripture is sufficient, we look to Scripture alone to help us understand how our family discipleship should look and those 3 broad categories are this: first of all, there's the discipleship that happens inside of your family life; secondly, the kind of discipleship that happens in the gathered church; and then thirdly, the kind of discipleship that happens between believers one to another. So those are the 3 categories that you see in Scripture. Maybe there are more but those are the ones that I'm able to see when I read Scripture.

So God has given us language, he's given us examples, he's given us personalities, he's given us principles to help us understand what this looks like. It's interesting, there are so many trip cord words that help us know what our family discipleship should look like. To teach, to "command," to "talk," to "tell," to "train up, instruct, guide, discipline, bring up, not provoke." There are all kinds of words, catchphrases that you find all over Scripture that help you understand what family discipleship is all about.

Now, I want to bring, you know, I said that the first component in terms of a broad category of family discipleship is what happens in family life. I'm just going to machine gun you for a minute with 22 elements of home discipleship that you'll see in the Scriptures, okay? The reason I want to do this is I want us to understand that Scripture is sufficient, that there is a rich testimony, that there are many, many, many things that we do in life that have to do with the discipleship of the next generation. The Bible is very

pro the discipleship of youth. You know, while we have canceled our youth groups in this church and all that kind of thing, we've not abandoned ministry to youth at all. In fact, what we find is the demands for the ministry to youth in Scripture, they so far outstrip anything that any programmatic youth ministry could ever possibly accomplish. It demands more. It's more detailed. It's harder and I just want to click through what I'm just going to call 22 elements of family discipleship.

First of all, there's just home life itself, when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up.

Then there is marriage. Marriage is also another important tool of discipleship of the next generation. As a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, as a wife respects and submits and is a helpmeet to her husband, there is a picture of the Gospel and you have a sacrificial husband and a submissive wife which is a picture of the church, Christ and his church. So a marriage becomes a chief instructional tool for the next generation. You could send your children to all kinds of classes and get them all cranked up intellectually on memorizing the Bible but if your marriage is all messed up, your family discipleship is messed up. If your marriage is messed up right now, get it unmessed up. The only way you unmess up a marriage is through repentance.

So marriage is a critical element as a tool for the discipleship of the next generation. Now, nobody ever had a perfect marriage so children have to live with imperfect and by looking at imperfect marriages and that also is a discipleship tool for them as well so that they understand how to live, how one might live with an imperfect helpmeet. I'm grateful for my wife because she's teaching my daughter how to live with an imperfect husband because someday she is going to get one and so my wife is playing a key role in helping her out to be a wife someday. So anyway, marriage is one of the critical components of home discipleship.

Let's talk about grandfathers. Many of the pictures of family discipleship that you see in Scripture include language of grandfathers. That's why you get this, you, your son and your grandson. The Bible just assumes that the role of a grandfather is the role of teaching so you're a father and when your children depart, you're not finished, you're teaching for all the rest of your life. Then grandmothers, we see this beautiful example of Lois and Eunice and the blessing this grandmother was too young Timothy. So through the role of grandfathers and grandmothers are also critical components to the discipleship of youth and home discipleship.

Then there's the whole principle of passing the baton on to the next generation. That's a whole other category, that there is something that is being transferred, intentionally transferred. There is a body of knowledge. There are categories of character and lifestyle that you actually forge your children on and then hopefully it becomes a part of them and they go out and do the same thing. That's passing the baton from one generation to the next.

Then there's the whole matter of old age. This is another element of ministry to youth, of family discipleship, unlike Joshua's generation who failed to teach their children who God was and what God had done. David expresses this whole matter of what those ought to do in their old age. They communicate the Majesty of God to the next generation. Psalm 71, "Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come." So there is the role of the aged, the old man, the old woman who is declaring the strength of God to the next generation.

Then there's the whole matter of declaring the word of God and the worship of God in the family. Some people call this family worship. Family worship is implied in this statement, "These words shall be in your heart and you shall teach them to your children." And the whole matter of gathering the family, centering the family around the word of God.

Then there is the communication of the law of God. This is another component of family discipleship. Deuteronomy 11:18-19 communicate this.

The communication of the praises of the Lord, this is another element of family discipleship in Isaiah 38:19, we read, "The living, the living man, he shall praise You, As I do this day; The father shall make known Your truth to the children." Here's the element of family discipleship that's all about praise. A father in a house who is so happy in Jesus Christ, who is so gratified by the presence of God that he is praising God in his house. How powerful is that when you have a father in a house who is praising God, who is a happy man because of the goodness of God? This is a key element of family discipleship. If you have an unhappy home, then family discipleship is breaking down in your family and every man in here ought to be examining in his heart, is he a happy man before God? Does he walk in the house praising God? Or is he a dark cloud in the house? Worried about this, worried about that, obsessing about things and not free in order to declare the praises of the Lord day to day in his household? It's a critical element of family discipleship.

Then there's confronting rebellion. That's another critical element of family discipleship. "Do not withhold correction from a child," says the writer of Proverbs, "for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die." Proverbs has an enormous amount of help for us about confronting rebellion in our houses.

Then there is the communication of wisdom. That's another important element. It happens in the home in this whole enterprise of family discipleship. The entire book of Proverbs is a guide for fathers and mothers for teaching of their children. You should read the book of Proverbs over and over and over again. You never get to the bottom of it. You'll read it for 15 years and still, you read it again and you can't believe how wonderful it is. The communication of wisdom is critical.

Again, we're talking about the kind of discipleship that happens in the home because there are 3 spheres: the home, the church and then there's the personal level. So we're still talking about the home.

Then there's Sabbath keeping. There is the whole matter of family celebrations. In Scripture you find the principle of families celebrating together and taking the resources of their family and having what we might call family vacations but they really are focused on the praises of God.

We could talk about joyful living and the kind of joyful living we see in Psalm 127 and 128 of the happy family gathered around the table with the olive plants and the fruitful life. It's a scene of joyful living.

Then there's the breaking of bread from house to house, eating together.

There's the home as the place of evangelism. If you read through the Gospels and through the epistles, you'll see that marvelous things happen in homes. People are healed in homes. People repent of their sins in homes. One of the great home evangelism stories were those friends who wanted to see their buddy healed so they tore off the roof and lowered their friend down to Jesus in the house and there the Lord Jesus ministered to him. There is so much ministry that happens in homes. It's evangelistic, it's discipleship oriented, it's for equipping. There's just all kinds of things that happen in homes.

There is teaching from house to house in Acts 5. This is a critical element that we see our homes as places of instruction. They are not flop houses. They are not just places of entertainment. They're not places of just relaxing but they are places of instruction. Our home should be schools in every way and we should be inviting people to come in and instruct and we instruct ourselves. Each member of the family instructing as well.

There is the whole matter of hospitality. This is another element of family discipleship.

Then there is the matter of prayer. Homes were used for the purpose of prayer in the New Testament and so that's another element of family discipleship.

The home was a place of compassion. Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus and it was a place of compassion and mercy. It was a home that the woman poured expensive ointment on Jesus' feet. Peter heals his mother-in-law in a home.

So considering this first element of family discipleship, I just want to establish that there are so many ways that discipleship happens in a family. God has established the home as one of the richest places of discipleship and the great thing about it is everyone knows one another, everyone is real, there are no airs that you can put on in your home. It's all real and it's as real as anything ever gets.

So that's the one category, the first category, the second component of family discipleship is what happens in the church and this is an incredibly important aspect of family

discipleship. If a family only focuses itself on family discipleship and neglects the discipleship of the gathered church, that family is really rebelling against another major component that God has established for the discipleship of the next generation and for the blessing of the family as well. So God has established his people. He has always established his people. He always has his people gathered together. They always come and meet and what do they do? They read. They pray. They fellowship. What God's people do today, God's people have always done and God has always gathered his people out of their families and brought them into the church and this is the divine wisdom for family life.

Families who neglect the church are making a terrible mistake and they are committing their families to all kinds of problems which I won't enumerate here but there are so many residual problems in families that neglect local church life. I'll just speak about a couple of them. One of the most helpful things about being in church life is that you get to be in close relationship with sinners who are converted and sometimes those people will sin against you so your family gets to learn how to deal with someone who sins against you, or speaks wrongfully about you, or who actually might lie, or they might even cheat you. Something like that. God has established his church for the maturing of his people so that things like this happen in the context of a family. When things like this happen in the context of your biological family, you can deal with it in a good way. The same thing in your spiritual family.

When people deprive themselves of the fellowship of the local church, they become socially, emotionally and spiritually backward in their relationships. They're just more immature because they haven't had to learn how to relate with other imperfect people in the church. And people who are immature and they think, "Well, here are the perfect people and here are the rest of us," they end up finding out that that's not true if they're in a real local church. If they go to an entertainment center where they just hear a talking head and everybody scatters like rats when the lights go on after everybody's done, then you won't have that kind of fellowship. So local church life is enormously important.

Well, let's talk about the importance of preaching in a family. It's important that families receive the preaching of the word of God. They hear another voice. They hear the voice of another shepherd. They have a shepherd called their father but they are exposed to a whole other range of speaking through other shepherds and they deliver the inerrant word of God and they end up being brought up in the training and the admonition of the Lord through another means because a father's means is not enough. You dads, you're not enough. That's just the truth. You are inadequate for all of what God has. You're not inadequate for your task but you're inadequate for the larger objectives that God has for his people and so his people need the preaching of the word of God.

They also need the prayers of the saints. They need the fellowship of the saints. They need the Lord's table. They need all these things that only the gathered church brings. What they need is a big family. They have a small family and everybody who has a small family has things that are missing in that family. There isn't a family here that doesn't have something missing and that's why God brings us into a larger family where if there's

something missing here, there is the spreading out of the blessing in the church. So in the church you get instead of one father, you have many spiritual fathers. Instead of one sister or no sisters, you get a lot of sisters. That's the wisdom of God.

So this is the second component of family discipleship and that is what happens in the gathered church. Now, my admonition to everyone in this church and every church I've ever been in is this and I just want to make the admonition to you and I know I'm speaking into the air to almost everyone here because we have a church that is highly involved and when we gather the flock together, people, everybody comes. But I just want to say how important it is for the church to gather and my perspective is that as we've established the gatherings of the church as elders and we find people who are not participating in those things, we will talk to them. I know this is obvious to some of you but if there are families who are missing prayer, quite likely I will find you and talk to you and ask you, "Why are you not bringing your family into the times of prayer with the church?" We recognize that Wednesday night is not the only time to pray but God has called his people to gather for corporate prayer and so we want to urge people to be involved in that and our gatherings here on Sundays as well.

So my admonition is this: make the church a gigantic category in your life, don't make it a small thing. Don't you dare make the church the thing that you figure out whether you're going to participate in at the last moment. The week rolls on, "Well, I'm tired this week or I'm busy this week or I have this going or that going." If you're that kind of Christian, I'm just going to say that's not the kind of Christian you should be. Don't let the church sort of get the leftovers at the end of the week or let it be subject to every other priority that you've placed in your life. Make it a big priority and don't miss it. You know, I've always had a fairly busy life but I'll tell you, I have always totally devoted myself to the gatherings of God's people. Follow my example, I think that's what I want to say. Follow my example.

So this is the second component of family discipleship, it happens in the gathered church and includes the preaching, the prayer, the relationships, all those kinds of things. Then the third component of family discipleship happens through personal ministry in the church. As we minister to one another where we experience the one another's that are in Scripture. There are over 50 one another's and our personal fellowship together, the way that we know one another, talk to one another, live life together in a local church allows this kind of personal ministry where we're not just operating on a surface level. We bear one another's burdens. We forgive one another. We're patient with one another. We sing together. There are all kinds of things that we do together to experience the one another's. Again, God is so wise. He begins us, he provides a discipleship context in the home and then the larger church and then he gives us individuals, people who would know us and love us and pray for us.

Now, all of this, I hope, helps us to see together that the family alone is not enough for the discipleship of the next generation or any of our discipleship. Your families are not enough. They are part of a wonderful matrix of blessing that God has for you but they are

not enough. So getting your children out of youth groups is not enough if it's not replaced with the rich contours of church life and family life.

Often I talk with people who tell me about their family integrated church and they say that they have people in the church who are saying, "Why can't we do something for our young people?" I get this question all the time: why can't we do something with our young people? And there are a number of things that I typically respond with when I get that question. The first thing I usually say is: why would we want to create a sociology that's really different than anything you see in Scripture? Why would you want to create something that none of the apostles ever created, none of the patriarchs? There is not a godly person in Scripture who created anything like this so why would we want to create something that is not just foreign to Scripture but it's contradictory to everything we actually see in Scripture? Because we always see inter-generational kinds of gatherings and so the first thing I say is: why would you want to create a sociology that doesn't exist in Scripture?

But the second thing is this: usually when someone says, "Why can't we do something for our young people?" usually it's code for something else. It's code for: the discipleship that we have going on in our family is really not adequate. Our spiritual life is not big enough. Our family life, my vision is not big enough to keep our young people focused on a direction that is fulfilling and it's stretching and it's godly and brings us together. Usually, "Why can't we do something for our young people?" is code for a broken discipleship pattern in the family and you can usually trace it to a busy father. You can often trace it to a very tired mother. So it actually surfaces other problems that are there.

I was speaking to some of our young men about this yesterday and one of them said, "Well Mr. Brown, what are the questions that you want youth bringing to you?" And I said, "I'm praying for a body of youth in our church," and I think we have youth like this who are saying, "How can I advance the mission of our church? How can I put my gifts into use? How can I bless the vision and calling of our family? How can I do that?" Those 3 things are pretty big jobs.

So this third component of family discipleship happening through personal ministry and the second component of family discipleship happening through the meetings of the church and the first component happening through the family life itself, just provides a very energetic, a very demanding kind of discipleship culture that we really ought to be building.

Now, I want to talk about the content of the instruction. We've talked about the context of it, the various ways that family discipleship happens but I want to talk about 4 elements of the instruction, the content of the instruction that Scripture speaks of. First of all, theology. Theology is the study of God and so the focus of our instructions ought to always include theology. In Deuteronomy 6:4 Moses declared, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." That's theology. Fathers in Israel were commanded to teach the doctrine of God so our children must be saturated with the knowledge of God. We need to be reading our Bibles from cover to cover. We need to be finding God everywhere where he declares

himself in Scripture. The Shema which is where Deuteronomy 6 hails from was repeated in Jewish families twice a day. So this whole matter of declaring the nature of God is critical.

So that's the first element of the content of the instruction. The second element is the law of God. The discipleship of our families includes, "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. This is the law of God." While we live in a world that despises the law of God and a Christian environment that makes the law of God of no account, we ought to be teaching our children the law of God.

Thirdly, history and the works of God. The psalmist indicates that youth discipleship should include the teaching of the historical works of God. Psalm 44:1 says, "We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did in their days, In days of old." This is the communication of history. It's in Christian homes that history is best communicated. I know so many of you, you study history and you should study history. The study of history is just the study of the great deeds of God.

So history is another category of the content of instruction and then fourthly, wisdom. Biblical discipleship is always wisdom-based and we talked about the book of Proverbs earlier and the Proverbs are just a fantastic baseline for all wisdom.

So these 4 things: theology, the law of God, history and the works of God and the wisdom of God. So there's content. Remember, "You shall teach them diligently." If you say, "Well, all of life is discipleship," and there isn't an intentional, decisive content that you're teaching your children, you're not engaging in what is the biblical content of discipleship.

Now I'd like to turn to the duties of family discipleship. Now, there are many duties of family discipleship but I want to just identify a few. The first duty is this: for the heads of households. When I used the term heads of households, I meant husband and wife. The first duty is this: know the condition of your flocks. Know the condition of your flocks. Proverbs 27 says it exactly like that, "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks and attend to your herds." That's just a principle of shepherding. All shepherds must know the condition of their flocks and our families are our flocks. The household, the people in the household, they are our herds, in a way. We need to understand how they're doing. The English Puritan, Philip Goodwin, says that a father needs to be an expositor. He needs to understand exactly what is going on in their lives, their cares, their dispositions, what their gifts are and their capacities and what are their necessities, what are their iniquities. There is a whole range of things that we need to know. There are so many categories of life as complex human beings that we operate in and parents need to know the condition of their flocks. That means they need to talk together. They need to walk together and be together in life.

The second duty of family discipleship is: the provision of unity in the home. The provision of unity in the home. Many of the problems in family life can be traced to disunited husbands and wives. Sometimes it's a husband and wife who just haven't

talked about things in detail like they should. They haven't covered the details of their life. What God has done is he has designed that a husband and wife would come together and form a unified body; they would become one body. In the same way that Christ and his church are one, husband and wife are one and they have to be one in everything.

So if they don't talk, they can't be one. I don't know if you men here have ever had your wife say, "You know, I just feel like we're living different lives." Well, that's disconnection. That's sort of a violation of the whole principle of marriage and so husbands and wives have to talk about every detail of life or as much as they can remember. I find that I don't remember talking about everything that is going on. Sometimes my wife finds out about things, the strangest things from the strangest sources. But the principle is obvious that God has designed a marriage to be unified and it's out of that unity that the direction of the family happens. And many child raising problems, many, many problems that happen in the home, they just go back to a husband and wife who are not unified. Sometimes because they are too busy to talk to each other. Or maybe they have no mercy for one another so when they start to talk it always turns into an argument because sin rises up in their hearts and they are not dealing with sin. They're not confessing. They're not dealing with the thing that is blowing up their conversations all the time.

This week I was reading William Gouge on this whole matter and he said that because wives are the weaker vessel, because they can tend to be hotter, in a sense, that husbands need to learn how to provoke their wives to love them. Usually when a husband is provoked, he provokes back but Gouge is saying no, husbands have a greater responsibility and therefore their sin is greater and therefore when they are sinned against by their wives, they have a greater responsibility to provoke her to love him.

So providing unity in the home is a really, really important issue in terms of family discipleship. If you think you can get your family together, have Bible studies, get them through their school work and you don't have a unified husband and wife, you are spitting into the wind in many ways. Now, I'm not suggesting that you stop all those things but I am suggesting that the strength and the reach of those things will be much less. So it is a responsibility of marriage to present to the family a unified whole of husband and wife. Husbands and wives talking with one another and loving one another and dealing with their sins one to another is a critical, critical duty of family discipleship.

Another duty of family discipleship is the protection from worldliness. It's a very important duty that the husband and wife protect their family from worldliness: from worldly songs, from worldly films, from worldly images. It's the duty of parents to protect the family from that and whatever you have to do to protect your family and understand what's going on, you should do it.

There are so many dangers in creating love for the world in your family. John said, "Do not love the world or the things that are in the world," and he said that because the world is a vicious devourer of life and so parents stand as gatekeepers in a home to protect from worldliness, to becoming like the world. You know, we were talking about this element

of worldliness this morning of wanting more than your daily bread and wanting some kind of security for the rest of your life, to have enough money that you can just live on and do whatever you want. That's just worldliness. Worldliness takes so many forms and those of you who don't have regular jobs right now, you're particularly vulnerable to this longing and this sin.

So protection from worldliness is a duty of family discipleship. Then another duty of family discipleship is love for the church, sowing a love for the church. Does your life revolve around your local church? It really ought to. The church is that important and it is something that life should be centered upon. It's not all of life but it should become a critical part of everything in your schedule.

Okay, I want to talk about some dangers lurking in family discipleship. Dangers lurking. Danger 1: I'm just going to call this drift. Drift. You might call it forgetfulness but here's how the drift works, you have 6 children and the oldest 3 children received an enormous deposit with incredible energy and then over time, you just sort of slacked off. It just happened slowly. And what you so assiduously tried to teach your older children, you're not really working that hard at it anymore because you've already won the day, right? You've turned your family around. You've turned the ship, right? And then you turn the ship and then it just kept getting slower and slower and slower. That happens to home school families. So what happens is that the younger children never got the benefit of all that energy. When the ship was turning, you were so riveted. You were so changing. It was an amazing time but now it's just sort of you're done. You're reformed. You've fixed it. The problem is now gone. But actually it isn't gone at all and you're going to wake up someday and realize that your younger ones, they really don't know hardly anything that your older ones knew because you had more passion, more energy and then what happened was you sort of thought you had it all together. You were at ease in Zion and you quit the passion and now you think you're just going to run on 5 years ago's reformation.

So often a duty of family discipleship, *semper reformanda*, keep reforming, get back on that ship and start pouring coal in that engine so that it can be cranked up again. I don't know if anybody here is in that place and they need to crank it back up and they thought they were reformed, they thought they had it going and now you pull back and I just want to ask the question: has that happened to any of us here? I've seen it happen many, many times. I've seen tendencies in my own life as well. It's easy to have early wins and far easier to have late losses. So there needs to be a deliberate, systematic, energetic discipleship that never stops. You, your son and your grandson, all the days of your life. In other words, you never stop. You push hard until you're dead. That's the deal.

So a danger lurking is drift. Here's another danger: prayerlessness. Prayerlessness. I want to read to you from Jeremiah 10:25, "Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, And on the families who do not call on Your name." Okay? Two categories of people: the Gentiles and the people of God. Jeremiah is saying, "Pour out your fury on the Gentiles but also on those who do not call upon your name," those who do not pray. We just had a message about prayer. Prayerlessness is a danger to family discipleship.

You know, God has given us a season where we were in all these passages of Scripture about prayer. There's a reason and I think the reason is we need to tighten up in the whole area of prayer. Our hearts need to burn like they used to burn to be alone with God. You know, that song in Psalm 5 that we were singing this morning, "My voice you shall hear in the morning. My voice. My voice will rise up and cry out in the morning." Well, prayerlessness is a danger lurking in family discipleship.

Another is formalism. It's another tremendous danger and that is that you've now become committed to your local church as you are and you're part of the gatherings of the church and you are seeking the Lord but it just becomes a routine.

Another is the neglect of your role. There are 3 critical roles: the role of the head, the role of the helpmeet, and the role of an arrow. Those are the 3 basic roles that you find in the family: the husband, the wife and the children all have roles, all have critical, really important roles. And when one of those roles falls out of order, all the others are affected.

I want to close with 7 principles to guide family discipleship. The first is this: all family discipleship is designed to flow from the gates of heaven itself. The 3 persons of the Trinity have modeled what ought to be applied in families. God the Father, in love and mercy looks upon the affairs of the earth. He sends his Son and his Spirit. His Son takes up the towel of service and he humbles himself to sacrifice himself on the cross. The Spirit of God is sent out as the breath of God to comfort and to guide. God is there in his fatherly care. These functions are all the kinds of functions that operate in family life and family life is patterned after nothing greater than the holy Trinity itself. The relationships in the Trinity are the fundamental relational paradigm for family life so that's just a principle that all of family life flows from the throne of God. That's why the study of theology is really important. You must know God. One of the reasons that families are in distress is that they do not have proper theology. A husband doesn't know how to lead his wife and the wife doesn't know how to submit to her husband because they do not understand the Trinity. Theology is the problem. They just do not know God and so this principle that all family discipleship is designed to flow from the gates of heaven itself.

Now, this is really important because there's a tendency with a subject like this to try to reduce it all down to a bunch of techniques and a bunch of methods of discipleship because we always want to know the practical side, "Tell me what to do. Just show me what to do every day. I just want a checklist. Tell me what you do and I'll do that too." But it's not as simple as that because God gives us a vision in heaven to copy. We are image bearers and we are image makers as well. We're designed to behold the glory of God as in a mirror and be transformed by that image. So it's not as simple as just, "Here, let's do these 10 things in our family life and structure it this way." It's far more complicated and far more beautiful and far more elegant than that because it flows from heaven itself.

The second principle is this: when considering family discipleship, every minute of life is discipleship. When you get up in the morning and proceed through the day and go to bed at night, every single thing that you have subjected your family to, every way that you

have operated is discipleship. Now, it might be good discipleship or it might be bad but it's discipleship. Everybody is discipling their family. If you're a lazy husband or a nitpicking wife, you're discipling your family. It includes all of your conversations. It includes the places you go. It includes the way that you regulate your life in your relationships. It includes the way you talk about other people. Every single minute of life is discipleship of the family.

The third principle is this: all of family discipleship somehow needs to be summed up by love because love fulfills all the commandments. Homes that are devoid of tenderness or thanksgiving or humor or hope, all contradict the laws of love that God has desired to be operating in a home. That's why Paul said to Timothy, "The goal of our instruction is love." So expressions of heartfelt affection to one another beginning with husband and wife and moving through the children is so critical. To be tenderhearted and forgiving one another. To understand what the fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The third principle of family discipleship is that it somehow all has to be summed up by love. That word should describe everything that you do in your family discipleship.

The next principle is that it must include Bible saturation. The next principle is that it must include confession of sin because confession of sin destroys all self-righteousness, it protects children from having wrong thoughts about God and duty. It identifies the poisons. It empties families of sins. It makes a family happy. If you have a family and you don't understand that your family problems are all sin problems, then you won't be able to have the confession that is designed by God to relieve your family of the sin.

Then the seventh principle is that biblical conversion must be understood. Repenting and believing in the Gospel and the bringing forth deeds that are consistent with the repentance is a critical matter. That there is biblical conversion and biblical baptism. Those 2 things are really critical. If you get one wrong, you might get the other one wrong. They affect one another tremendously.

So family discipleship causes the whole family to find its focus on God and the word of his grace and all family discipleship is a work of the kingdom of God. It's a work of evangelism. It is eschatological in nature. And it's designed to bring heaven down into the world so that the Gospel is declared from one generation to the next, that God would be glorified in the world and he has so designed a perfect little society for it called the family. And I pray that we here in our church would really understand what family discipleship ought to look like because you're not going to learn it out there in the world. It is not being practiced very well in the Christian culture that we live in. It's something that needs to be recovered and it's really worth recovering because its impact is so wonderful and so far reaching.

Would you pray with me?

Lord, I pray that you would pour your grace out upon us to govern our families in a way that pleases you in all respects. O Lord, I pray for these families that you would give

them fruit, that you would give them happiness, that you would give them all the things of your kingdom, the righteousness and joy and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that is so wonderful in this world. Amen.