Wisconsin District Conference 2015
Breakout Session
Pastor Jeremy Mavis

Children, Youth and Family Discipleship

Breakout Session Description

What is the church's role in the faith formation of students (children and teenagers) and their families? Dan Bickel wants people to understand a little about the philosophy as well as the how to. Folks need a compelling reason why, then how to.

Introduction.

Important Note

This is the start of a conversation. There is no way I can communicate a holistic vision of children, youth and family ministry in 45-minutes…especially with all the tension that comes with various contexts, personalities, convictions, and giftedness. I'm assuming that I'm starting a conversation in the WI district with my thoughts on the matter. I'm not anyone special. I struggle each and every week to engage children, teenagers and their families. Don't think for a second that I am anyone special. Your contribution to the discussion is crucial to see the lives of the emerging generation and beyond engaged in the kingdom of God.

Isaiah 6:1-8

- Ruined, undone
- Atonement
- Here am I, send me

What is the local church going to need to do in order to serve the needs for the spiritual formation of children in the postmodern era?

I received this question over email back in April from a college student. Here is what I wrote:

I think the postmodern era has awoken the church (although most probably aren't waking up to this yet) that there really isn't such a thing as traditional families. Sure, it would seem, biblically at least, and somewhat historically as well, that families, by design, should contain an intact martial relationship with a father and a mother and other family members in close proximity. In our post-Industrial and more mobile society, we see the distance and seemingly rapid job changes that force families to move away from embedded family members. Additionally, for whatever reason, whether by death, divorce, abandonment, drug use, prison time, extended adolescence, etc, there seems to not be as many intact

marriages where a mother and father have been together for an extended period of time. However, the family has undergone many shifts and changes over the centuries that the term "traditional" can't really be defined in any explicit way. "Traditional" usually means: "It's not how it was when I was growing up... that's the traditional way." My kids are going to define "traditional" in drastically different ways than I would define it.

So once we've given up on what "traditional" is, then we can start looking at what transcends time and history and culture regarding the spiritual formation of children.

It would seem that from very early on in the formation of the Hebrew people that faith was passed down from father to son (i.e. Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, from Jacob to his 12 sons). When the nation was formed post-Exodus, we see Moses admonishing God's newly-minted people to "impress [commandments] on your children...talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road..." (Deut. 6:6-9). It would be the job of the parents to pass down the commandments of God to their children. I think this methodology is what transcends time and history and culture. Whether a parent realizes it or not they are discipling their children. The real question is what are they discipling their children in? The ways of the world, culture, etc? Or the way of Jesus? Whether that is one parent involved in this process or two parents, or grandparents or uncles or aunts, or cousins, someone from the family gets to impress the commandments of God on the children. If there are no family members available to do so, then the people of God (the church) steps in and helps impress.

The church is often seen more as an organization or an institution rather than a collection of families who are trying to impress faith onto their children. Perhaps in our postmodern era, the church should spend more of its energy gathering, training, and assisting families in their discipleship task, and less time pulling them away from families with excessive programming. The church should be a collection of families working together, not necessarily a centralized programming expert. That's not to say that a formal time of instruction is bad. Actually, there are things that formal environments really help with in the spiritual formation of children. However, the informal environment of the family is WAY MORE influential in the spiritual vitality of an emerging and growing adolescent, than a church youth group or thriving children's ministry. Kids are ALWAYS going to follow the lives they SEE, informally, rather than just the ones they were taught, formally.

I wonder if children's ministry will look more like co-ops (cooperative) than highly structured environments like those found in most American churches today (including mine)? A collection of families working together to encourage, equip, challenge their children in spiritual formation in less structured ways and in way more highly relational ways.

In all honesty, folks like me, a specialized children's pastor and self-proclaimed faith development expert :), will be unnecessary other than to resource the growing movement of cooperatives rather than perpetuating the highly structured and entertainment-driven programming available in most churches today!

I better start looking for some more work :) No, I think this is going to take a while...maybe even beyond my generation.

Let me share with you some things I've learned as a children and youth pastor for the past 12 years.

Intent of the Family

I remember several years having this telling realization. I was noticing a growing trend of having defined small groups in children's ministry… not just discussion groups or Sunday school classes, but a relational environment where a spiritual mentor guided a group of children relationally and spiritually from week-to-week. As I considered this addition to our hour-long programming, God revealed to me that He already had small groups for children… it was called their family!

Formal and Informal Environments

At church, due to the very nature of the environment, I would call it formal. While a home environment is more informal. Church brings forth systems, programs, structures, lesson plans and organization, therefore formal. Home, on the other hand, is more relational, unplanned, unstructured, no lesson plans, therefore informal.

Sometimes I think we as children's ministry educators, at the formal level, try to cram both of these "environments" together. And while the aim and intent isn't bad, we will always fall short of the mark (in my opinion).

We need to recognize that the formal environment has its limits and we can't do both really well in one hour on one day a week. Once we know our limitations I think it will free us as formal educators to do the formal environment much more successfully.

Can you combine formal and informal environments?

It is on this informal level that real, long lasting life change is fostered, developed and matured. God has ordained the family to be the primary vehicle for the laboratory of faith development. It is regular, mundane, average life that incubates a robust spirituality. And the best context for that is a home.

Some are privileged with a home where a father and/or a mother lead their children in an intentional way. Most are not.

In the absence of this natural laboratory, the church seeks to compromise its formal environment to incorporate an informal one. This is a response to the obvious vacancy. The problem presents itself in regard to time constraints. The church tries to accomplish formal and informal teaching in one hour, one day a week. It takes over a year of these consistent environments to equal one week of influence in a home environment.

The response is often a noble one. Small groups are created to bridge the gap between formality and informality. These small groups seek to recreate a "formal" sort of informal environment. This might be a necessary corrective to over-formality (what church children's ministry was like when I was a kid),

however one cannot effectively combine a formal endeavor with one that is dependent on relational means.

Thus it's important to not try to do all things in one context. It takes several contexts to accomplish maturing a disciple of Jesus Christ. Some we can construct ourselves, most we must merely place and submit ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe another solution is to deconstruct the whole thing, both formal and informal. Perhaps the church was never meant to teach formally, but rather be a collection of informal family environments. This is also a noble pursuit, but it misses those who are spiritual orphans.

Summary of Ministry Thus Far

At the ten-year mark, I summarized my first 10-years in full-time ministry by reflecting back on and identifying two things I tended to do on a regular basis:

1. Teach about the God revealed in the Bible (the Scriptures are the curriculum, the Trinitarian God is the subject).
2. Have a lot of fun (play, relationships, memories, interaction).

I would probably add a couple of more to the list now:

3. Be a student, disciple, and learner alongside of children and teenagers (in other words, I am not over and above/against, but a fellow sojourner along the way).
4. Be honest, open, and frank about your growth along the journey. I have found this to be especially true of high school students. It is really impactful when a student in my small group reminds me of how I am growing in Christ (Hunter H. and trusting the Spirit).

A Couple of Potential Models—Hayward Wesleyan Church (hwcYouth)

Family Ministry Purpose Statement

The purpose of the family ministry at Hayward Wesleyan Church is to participate, in partnership with the church, in the story God is revealing and weaving in the lives of families as they live and bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of families at HWC is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Families will participate in God's story and foster discipleship through teaching, partnering, and connecting.

Teaching (education)—Church Teaching and Family Teaching

Much like a church's formal environment of teaching, a family must provide an environment of instruction in the home. We do not know how to live in God's story or have faith in the Gospel if we do not know what God's story is or what the Gospel means. This teaching component could look like daily family devotions or Bible reading, once a week more significant family devotion or faith talk, or maybe more informal, yet intentional, times of Biblical instruction scattered sporadically all throughout a family's week. Regardless of the delivery vehicle, the goal is to transmit faith through teaching. Furthermore, a family that does not believe the Gospel will not be able to transmit faith in the home. Sure, these weekly instructions times can be practiced, but more is caught than taught. Therefore, if a family is not modeling or seeking to engage with faith, then there is no real faith to pass on.

Partnering (relationships)—Families Partnering with a Church, and Church Partnering with Families

Families cannot grow in faith in isolation. Sure, an attempt can be made, but that faith will always be deficient when not exposed and shaped by community. The church is a body of believers all connected to the head which is Christ. It is the duty of both the church and the family to partner with one another. A church cannot partner with an unwilling and disengaged family, nor can a family partner with an unwilling and disengaged church. Holistic family formation takes a unique and robust partnership from the church as well as the family. Therefore, families need to engage in the life of the church and the church needs to engage in the life of the family.

Connecting (environments)—Families connected with other Families

Families need to be living life with other families in community. It is often through the routine and mundane aspects of life where real family issues and challenges come out. In a church setting, it is easy for a family to put on a smile all the while hiding their true selves. It is vital that any ministry with families include a vehicle for families becoming known and living regular life with other families. This connecting with one another through weekly gatherings, regular times of recreation and play, and shared traditions and experiences foster incredible faith formation for families (both its parents as well as its offspring).

Model of Ministry and Practical Application: Choo-Choo Train

For a train to move forward it needs two rails and hundreds of wooden ties. For either a whole family's faith or an individual family member's faith to move forward, I propose that two rails and many wooden

ties are needed. The church as the redeemed people of God in Jesus Christ represents one rail, while the basic social structure known as the family constitutes the second rail. The anticipated partnership and collusion between the church and the family represents the wooden ties that keeps the rails in their proper place so that the train of faith can move forward.

What does it look like to foster a long, polished, and productive church rail? What does it look like to be an intentional and engaged family rail? What does the collaborative effort look like between the church and the family rail in order to keep both being laid at the same rate and at a consistent and defined width apart?

Church Rail

Over the years, Hayward Wesleyan Church's age-segregation ministries have been well-established, intentional, and comprehensive. There is an intentional plan within our youth and children's ministries, for the most part, of beginning with the end in mind and working backward toward that end. I have spent the last ten years polishing, refining, fixing, and adjusting the church's programmatic ministries with youth and children. The church rail is getting better and better, and longer and longer. This seeming sense of success on the church rail is clouded by the failure of the family rail to keep pace. Perhaps it is because I never thought that the church rail needed to keep pace and help the family rail. I thought the family rail, for the most part and with limited engagement, would take care of itself. Well, unintentionally I had dismissed the family's influence on our church's rail.

Hayward Wesleyan Church's responsibility on the church rail includes: 1) having a strategic, educational (curricular) plan, 2) engaging with small group leaders and their peers (relational), and 3)participating together in worship (spiritual).

1) First, formal, biblical education is something that a church is both well-equipped and poised to accomplish. Dividing up the age groups into developmentally appropriate settings provides for an ideal environment to instruct and engage with students on a formal, educational level.
2) Second, recognizing the need to include other significant adults in students' life (Powell & Clark, 2011), the church can provide well-trained, Gospel-centered small group leaders (mentors) amidst a peer environment where many share the same struggles and can talk through relevant spiritual application.
3) Third, the church is a body made up of many parts, which introduces students and models to them what worship looks like and how to engage in it. Preaching, singing, communion, sharing of testimonies, gathering for a meal, and various rituals and traditions are practices that are unique to the church's position.

Family Rail

The family can best be described as spaghetti. It is possible to bring order to the mixing of meat and noodles, but once one begins to eat it, it all gets jumbled together. Sure, one could lay all the noodles in a straight line and set the meat off to one side, but that takes too much work. It is just easier to eat the disorganization. Family life can be a little like spaghetti. One could organize and structure it, but in

reality, the family is not meant to be straightened and set apart from one another, it is meant to be lived. As such, things tend to get all mixed up and just eaten. I wonder if the intent to bring order to the family is an elusive task. I wonder if ministry to families is less about order and more about engaging the spaghetti.

I am a professional children's and youth pastor. My family life, by definition, should be perfectly ordered, correct? Not really. Why? Because it is spaghetti. Let's say that we make Sunday evening our set aside time for family faith talks. These are faith conversations any on the family rail should be practicing. What if the Green Bay Packers and the Minnesota Vikings are playing a head-to-head football game on Sunday Night Football on NBC? And what if our small group organizes a party to watch the game together? Does our family forgo our weekly Sunday night practice in lieu of new developments, or do we stick to our plan and stay ordered? No. Life is spaghetti. You have to eat it and enjoy it. This does not mean that you do not set a regular time to have faith conversations. The family should. However, the family should also be flexible in its application of these practices amidst the regular, spaghetti-filled life.

I believe at its basic function, families of faith should engage in: 1) biblical education and Christian life conversations on an informal level, which includes reading the Bible, praying, and worshiping together (faith conversations); 2) craft intentional environments that can place your children in the path of the divine (environments); and 3) engage in Christian community both on a large, whole church worship scale (where intergenerational connections can happen) as well as a small group scale (where connections with other families can be made more intimately and students can engage with their peers).

1) First, faith conversations can be intimidating mainly because families live such hectic lives that it is not normal to stop and have a casual conversation, let alone one that involves the topic of faith and spirituality. Stonehouse and May (2010) help by saying: "Conversations initiated by parents are valuable, but the teachable moments that often take us by surprise also offer significant opportunities to help children make connections between everyday life and the Christian story so that they can become aware of God's presence in the ordinary." (p. 131). This type of informal conversation discussed in the course of regular ordinary life is simply not possible on the church rail. The family is the environment where ordinary life is lived and the teachable moments abound.
2) Second, families need to be create and foster an environment in the home where faith can be both modeled and practiced. Anthony (2011) best describes this second tenet of the family faith rail: "If parents believe that the Holy Spirit is God's chosen teacher in children's hearts and that He is the one who causes spiritual growth when and as He chooses, then they must be willing to cultivate environments in their home that will allow their children not only to hear God's words but also to have an opportunity to put them into practice." (p. 189).
3) Third, Renfro (2009) is the man best suited to emphasize the benefit of families worshiping together: "These experiences [worshiping as a family] build memories of worship with their particular family and with the family of God that will remain with them throughout their lives" (p. 57) and "weekly small groups provide further instruction and fellowship." (p. 59). While Renfro (2009) takes an extreme approach and disdains any form of age-segregation, his

admonition to families worshiping together both in large group and small group is important to heed.

Wooden Railroad Ties

Establishing the two distinct rails and their function is vital to defining and practicing family ministry at Hayward Wesleyan Church. The community of faith (church) is God's design for His redeemed humanity for the sake of the world and the family holds the biblical responsibility to pass on faith to their children. The wooden railroad ties in the Choo-Choo train approach constitute how the church and the family can work together—to keep pace and to remain distinct from one another. It seems to me that the church's responsibilities is to resource and equip families while a family's responsibility is to participate and engage with church (both for the family as well as for the sake of the world).

It would seem, then, that the wooden railroad ties work when the church and family both are engaged. Perhaps engagement could look like establishing a set of developmental milestones in the life of a family. For example, every human being is born. Child dedication (or baptism) can be celebrated as a church and the family engages in this practice. Coupled with this first milestone could be a natural place to discuss a family of faith's responsibility as the primary discipler of their children. The church and the family work together in dedicating the child. Other natural, developmental milestones could be celebrated and engaged: salvation, baptism, preparing for adolescence, manhood and womanhood, purity, passing on blessing, driving, and graduation. Setting a natural developmental pathway will allow both the church and the family to tie life together, each doing their unique part in the spiritual development of children, youth, and the families that contain them. Perhaps a unique and context-specific map could be drawn of a set of train tracks—two rails and the ties—that outlines the milestones from birth through graduation with both the stated responsibility of the church and the family written on each (see Family Map via 1Semester.com/familymap, Darren Kizer, 2012).

Furthermore, the church can meet with families one-on-one and help listen, understand, and resource for faith formation. The church can offer parenting education classes based on the needs of families at Hayward Wesleyan Church. Additionally, each age-segregated ministry needs to continue to formally educate in the ecclesial setting but be redeployed to resource families to informally educate and lead faith conversation and foster intentional environments where spiritual growth can take place. Families will need to be instructed and resourced on how to create those intentional environments as well as lead the faith talks at home.

Additionally, something that would take both rails' intentionality and active engagement will be bringing children into the worship service on Sunday mornings. Renfro (2009) is correct when he says that it is important for adults and children to be worshiping together as a family. What the transition to and the end product will be, I do not know. However, somehow the church needs to provide space in its main worship service environment for children's participation and families will need to actively engage with this change as well as with their children sitting next to them. "Children mature spiritually as they experience authentic fellowship with God's people... they soak up far more than many people might think as they watch their parents worshiping, praying, listening, and humbling themselves week by

week." (Renfro, 2009, p. 57). Of course having children in the worship service is not convenient for the family, but faith training is not always a matter of convenience. It is a matter of regular, consistent training, and it seems like the church can easily partner with families in this regard and craft an intentional environment in our worship service where children are welcome, valued, included, and accommodated.

Description of How Family Ministry Strategy Will Unfold

The Choo-Choo train family ministry model is already underway. I imagine for many churches the church rail is being laid and worked on continually, while the family rail may be stunted (like HWC's is) due to inattention, lack of focus, and clear direction. So let us be clear with a direction Hayward Wesleyan Church needs to take.

First, the two rails need to be clearly demarcated and established. It needs to be spoken that both rails are vital to family faith formation and both are distinct. They are not interconnected and intertwined. The church is the new covenanted people of God formed to be the light to the world of what God is like and how His Gospel is good news. Only the church, the body of Christ, can accomplish this evangelistic task. The family is the structural and functional institution where those related by blood, adopted, and grafted into a network of love, accountability, responsibility, and connection. A person does not live life inside of a church, rather he/she lives regular life amidst a family environment. Thus, faith is best shaped and formed along the family rail, while expressed, challenged, and lit up on the church rail. Speaking out of the differentiated importance and responsibility of the two rails is the first step in the family ministry implementation at Hayward Wesleyan Church. Perhaps a theology of the church and a theology of the family needs to be written in simple, understandable language (perhaps in a story) to communicate this first task.

The church rail is fairly established at Hayward Wesleyan Church (though not without its continued tweaks and redirects here and there), therefore, the area of intense focus and energy needs to be on shoring up the family rail. A number of things need to happen here on this second step. We need to begin to resource families in their Christian duty within the home. As mentioned above in the family rail of the Choo-Choo train model, families need to begin having weekly intentionally organized faith talks (or devotions) with their families, foster a spiritual environment where their children can be exposed to the divine, and engage in Christian fellowship on a large, church-wide scale as well as a small group scale. Hayward Wesleyan Church can begin to gather resources to point people toward ways, means, and methods on having faith talks. Giving people options seems to work best in our area, therefore I propose that we offer once a week kind of devotionals as well as everyday kinds. If the encouragement could be to engage in an intentional faith talk once a week that is the minimum expectation, I think people will find that doable in their busy schedules to find time. Additionally, HWC needs to do a sermon series with the church as a whole on the crafting of spiritual environments with families. Using the materials from Michelle Anthony's Spiritual Parenting book and DVD series could be great information for crafting sermons and examples of how to engage with these various environments. This material and discussion would lead to families having information faith conversations about God and life with their children in many different types of settings and about many different types of topics.

Moreover, families cannot be isolated faith communities themselves. They need to be connected to the new covenanted people of God in a church setting and then with a small group in a home setting. Communicating expectations, but administering lavish grace can be the heartbeat of a communicated commitment to be regular in church attendance. HWC also needs to both create and foster healthy small group communities where families can join together to share the Gospel-ed life together.

This second step will take a significant amount of time to communicate, resource, and coordinate. However, this is the step where we are actively engaging and equipping families. We are concretely communicating to them what it means to be a home where Christian faith is discussed, practiced, and shared with others in community. This step could take a year or two to plan and execute. Of course this step does not stop once it is completed. The family rail is never completed. There are three components to continue to foster and there are probably a few more things Christian families need to be engaged in that we will hopefully learn about along the way.

Once the family rail plan has been executed and is being sustained, the third step can begin to be engaged—the wooden railroad ties. These ties are what keep the church and the family separate and moving in the same direction at approximately the same pace. We could begin to work on the pieces to the milestones behind the scenes, but with family input while we are engaging and equipping families in the second step. I would love to see a robust and involved set of both natural and spiritual milestones being celebrated on a regular basis (in the large church as well in small groups and on the church rail). Babies will always be born and need to be dedicated, and parents will need to be trained to be intentional with the family rail. More natural milestones could include: entering preschool, kindergarten, middle school, and high school, losing your first tooth, driver's license, graduation, and leaving home (Staats, 2008). Spiritual milestones could include: salvation, baptism, first communion, becoming a man or woman, and purity. Some milestones are important and appropriate to be celebrated on a particular rail. For example, the onset of puberty should not include coming up on the stage in church to rounding applause. Perhaps that milestone is best celebrated on the family rail. A team of parents and ministry leaders could compile a robust list of milestones to accompany the three components of the Choo-Choo train model. Implementing these milestones might take several years.

A plan can be formed about what family education classes can be offered to tie in the church and the family rails. There needs to be developmental stage theory parenting classes as well as appropriate classes for families in need in our church. I see parents in those different developmental stages as well as specialty classes as being ideal facilitators of these educational classes. These ties will be implemented concurrently to the milestones above and probably take as much time to execute.

Most likely the greatest challenge in the Choo-Choo train model will be to include children (to whatever degree possible) in the worship service at church. Our children and youth desperately need to engage in intergenerational worship where they see the whole family of God worshipping. Our culture of outsourcing our children's spiritual development to the professionals comes to its head in this stage of family ministry. Will the family, even the larger family of God, see the need to incorporate children and youth into our time of worship rather than relegate them to a backroom for niche-teaching? I hope that defining the two distinct rails—church and family—combined with the understanding of what needs to

tie those two together will result in a church family that is willing to make room for intergenerational worship because they see the long-term spiritual impact of having all ages worshipping together. This might take a while, but it might not take a while. We shall see.

Church Rail	Family Rail	Wooden Ties
• **Faith education** Bible stories, theology, etc. • **Relational connections** Small groups (leaders and peers) • **Spiritual environments** Worship as the body of Christ	• **Faith education** Faith conversations in the home • **Relational connections** large group church, small group • **Spiritual environments** intentional places to see God amidst regular life	• **Faith education** Parenting/marriage classes • **Relational connections** Milestones • **Spiritual environments** Intergenerational worship

A Couple of Potential Models—Real Life Ministries (Kyle Bostock)

Five Key Components for Biblical Disciple Making

1) A biblical foundation, 2) an intentional leader, 3) a relational environment, 4) a reproducible process, and 5) alignment.

A Biblical Foundation

We must always start with the SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE. If we are going to think Biblically about the home we have to always keep two truths in front of us:

1. Family was God's IDEA from the very beginning.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:27-28 ESV

2. God's desire is for ALL PEOPLE to be in relationship with Him.

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 ESV

The priority of EVERY CHRISTIAN HOME is three fold:

1. To create GODLY offspring...

"Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth." Malachi 2:15 ESV

2. ...who FULFILL the Great Commission...

RLM Vision – "We will reach the world for Jesus one person at a time."

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-19 ESV

3. ...through LIVING OUT the Great Commandment.

People were created to love God and enjoy relationship with Him forever.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first

commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:36-40 ESV

THE 'SHEMA'

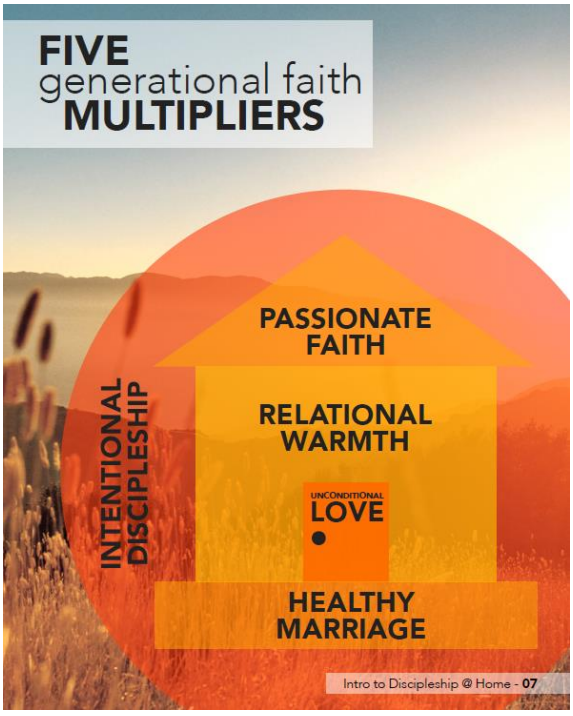
"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV

An Intentional Leader

God breathed intentionality into every corner of His good creation. God designed the home to play a key role in the fulfillment of God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. Therefore the mission of the church is largely dependent on the strength of leadership that is found within our homes.

"A house is actually a school and a church, and the head of the household is a pastor in his house."
--Martin Luther

When individual families do their part nations are changed. When parents begin to see the enormous role their family has in significantly impacting the mission of the church amazing things happen. As we strive to be intentional parents and grandparents there are five key areas we must focus as we pass our faith on from generation to generation (see image below).



A Relational Environment

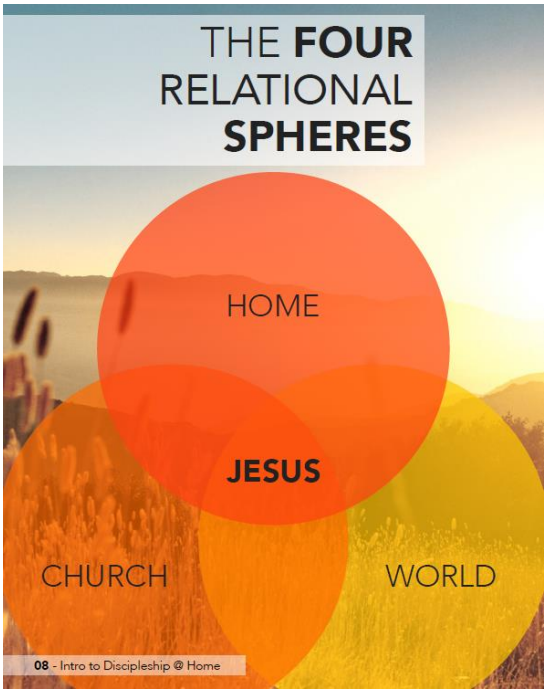
1. God designed our HOME SPHERE relationships to be the primary environment for the condition of our hearts to be revealed. There are four spheres in which we grow: in relationship to God, at home, in relationship to the church and in relationship to the world. But it is in our home sphere relationships that our true hearts are revealed.

2. The HOME is the FOUNDATIONAL relational environment for creating Biblical Disciples. God specifically designed families to be discipleship centers. There is no environment like the home where truly authentic community takes place.

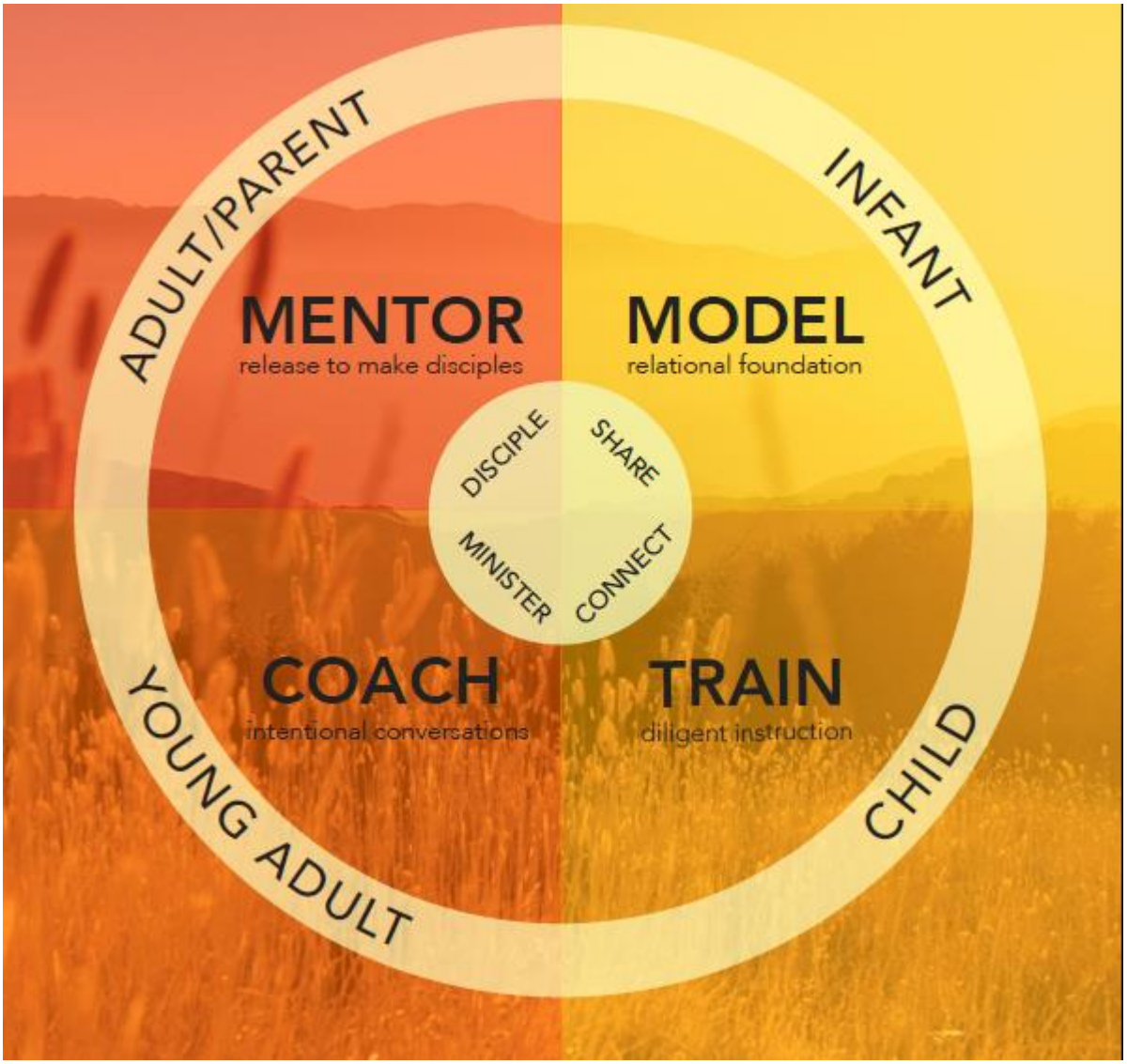
   "Home is the place where we are most real and where others are the most real with us."
   -- Rob Rienow

3. The FULFILLMENT of the Great Commission begins in our homes. There is a natural flow of discipleship that takes place within our lives. It is the purposeful movement of the gospel through our lives to heal the relationships around us.

   "[Paul] understood that we cannot compartmentalize our relationships, that the Holy Spirit wants to influence every sphere of a believer's life, and that the best place to make disciples is in our own families. Not every Christian has the gift of leadership, but every believer is supposed to make disciples, and the most important place to focus is in our homes. I have always been convicted that it would be my biggest failure to win the whole world and lose my own children."
   -- Jim Putman, DiscipleShift



A Reproducible Process



The 'Modeling' Season (Ages 0-5)

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 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." - Deuteronomy 6:4-6 ESV

Christ's Example: And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." - Matthew 4:19 ESV

Parenting Goal: BUILD A RELATIONAL FOUNDATION

Discipleship Goal: CHILD LEARNS TO SHARE LIFE

The 4 Ps: PRAY - PRAISE - PASSAGE - PLAY

The ‘Training’ Season (Ages 6-12)

“You shall teach them diligently to your children...” - Deuteronomy 6:7a ESV

Christ’s Example: One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. - Matthew 5:1-2 NLT

Parenting Goal: DILIGENT INSTRUCTION

Discipleship Goal: CHILD CONNECTS WITH GOD AND OTHERS

The 3 Ws: WORSHIP - WORD – WONDER

> *What do elementary-aged children need on the formal level?*
>
> I believe that elementary aged students should be taught Bible stories. I think they should be immersed in Bible stories. They should hear them, see them, act them out, engage with them, review them, memorize them, be able to retell them. For six whole grades (six years), a children’s ministry should, on the formal level, immerse children in the stories of the Bible.
>
> Bible stories don’t have to be taught in a chronological order, although I recommend it. After all, you typically don’t start the Lord of the Rings Trilogy in the climax of the second book, then jump to the opening plot twist of the third book, all the while referencing the “Fellowship of the Ring” that is created in the first book. It makes sense to start at the beginning of the story and work your way to the end.
>
> Granted, if you think in terms of C.S. Lewis who fashioned his Chronicles of Narnia series, not in chronological order, but rather intentionally jumping forward and backward with literary precision. There could be an intentionally creative intent by which a wise Christian educator could craft such an interesting weave of jumping in and out of stories in Scripture in order to create a marvelous tapestry of Biblical wonderment.

The ‘Coaching’ Season (Ages 13-18)

“...and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” - Deuteronomy 6:7b-9 ESV

Christ’s Example: But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. - Galatians 4:4-5 ESV

Matthew 10 - Teens need a bigger vision for their lives. Too little Risk

Parenting Goal: INTENTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Discipleship Goal: CHILD BEGINS TO MINISTER

The 2 Ts: TOPIC - TIME

<u>The ‘Mentoring’ Season (Ages 18+)</u>

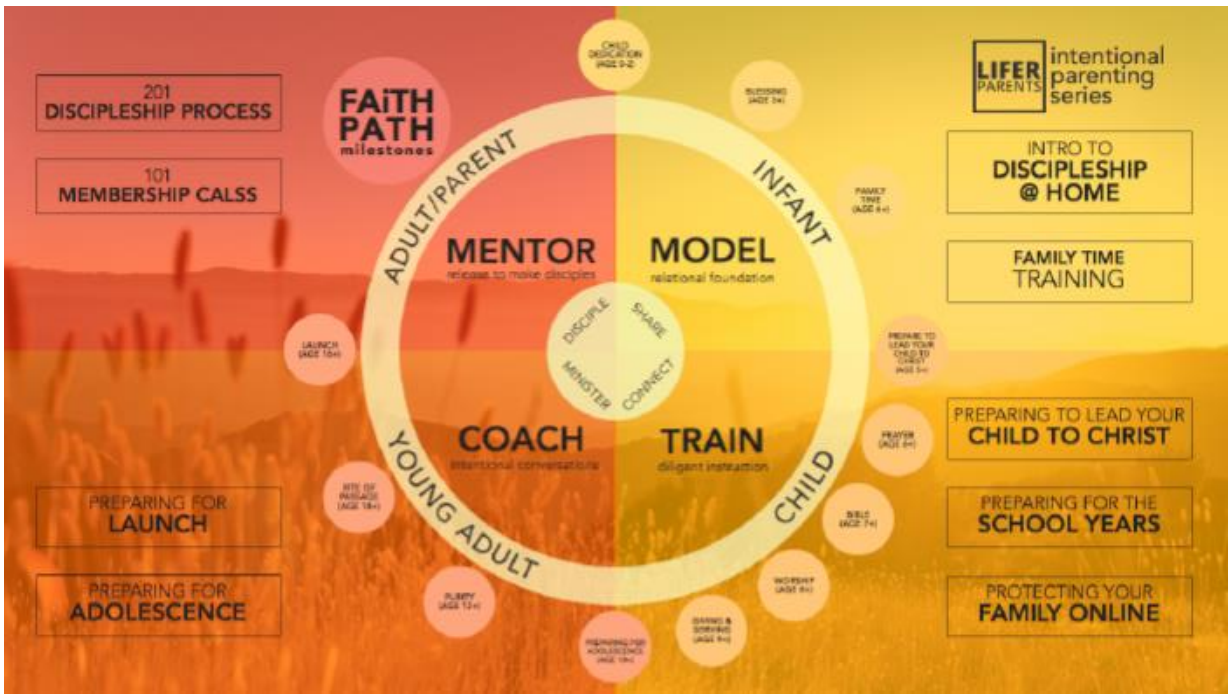
“And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.” - Deuteronomy 6:25 ESV

Christ’s Example: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ... 26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” - John 15:15, 26 ESV

Parenting Goal: RELEASE TO MAKE DISCIPLES

Discipleship Goal: CHILD IS RELEASED AS A CO-LABORER

One Things Remains: JESUS



Alignment

An effective Game Plan consists of three equally important elements. First we have to define the win, we are going to call this Mission. Next we have to decide the things we will intentionally do to accomplish the win, we are going to call this Rhythm. And finally we need other people who make sure we stay on task, we are going to call this Accountability.

1. MISSION

Mission is all about uniting your family around the great commission. The mission of the church is not to make healthy families. However, healthy families make healthy churches and healthy churches are the most effective at accomplishing the great commission. A family mission statement helps you to stay headed in the right direction by keeping the end in mind. It reminds you where you are headed, helps you keep the right priorities and gives you hope as you navigate the difficulties of parenting.

Homework: Create a Family Mission Statement (See Appendix I)

2. RHYTHM

Getting your family in rhythm means getting on the same page about priorities. If your family is going to accomplish their portion of the great commission, and make a difference in your slice of history, what daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms need to take priority in your life?

Homework: Get your family in sync by picking specific rhythms to prioritize this year based on your unique season of parenting. (See Appendix II)

APPENDIX II:

GETTING YOUR FAMILY IN RHYTHM

Increasing the quantity of quality time you spend together.

Accomplishing your family mission means assessing your priorities and establishing healthy rhythms in your home that will make success more likely. If we do not intentionally establish rhythms for our family the world will determine the song that we sing and the story that we tell.

Sample Rhythms to help you accomplish your family mission:

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly
Personal	Personal Prayer Meditation on God's Word	Church Attendance Small Group Men's Group Women's Group Ministry Service Sabbath Rest Scripture Memory	Spiritual Check-up Solitude and Silence Fasting	Spiritual Growth Plan Yearly Calendar Planning Personal Retreat
Marriage	Prayer w/ Spouse Check-in w/ Spouse	Bible Study Date Night	Calendar Review and Planning Budget Review and Planning	Marriage Plan Marriage Seminar, Retreat or Class Romantic Vacation or Weekend Away
Parenting	Prayer w/ Kids Check-in w/ Kids Play w/ Kids	Family Night Faith Talks w/ Kids Eat Dinner Together	Calendar Review and Planning Family Activity	Parenting Plan Parenting Seminar, Retreat or Class Family Vacation

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

Growth requires accountability. That's why Jesus said in John 15 that the vine keeper prunes those he loves so that they will produce more fruit. A Game Plan is only beneficial if you stick to it. And it is impossible to stick to a game plan on our own. Church is a team sport. We need others who are in the game with us to sharpen us and push us and correct us so that we can be more effective. We need other people to help us stay on mission and keep our rhythms.

Homework: If you are not already connected in a group it is time to get connected. If you are already connected ask your home group leader or coach to help you stay accountable to the mission and rhythms you are committing to this year. (See Appendix III)

Interaction with Kyle

Kyle -

Hey man! I'm a part of a men's group on Tuesday mornings and we've been going through the Real-Life Discipleship Manual. It's been really good for us, and I think it's going to launch most of us "spiritual young adults" into spiritual parenting when we're done with the manual.

As I'm going through this manual as a children and youth pastor, it's giving me all sorts of ideas, categories and trajectories within my area of ministry. And I remembered when you told me that you guys (@real life) were going to create one of these for family discipleship. How's that coming? As I'm going through this material so much of it dovetails with actively and spiritually parenting my children. It reminds me that God has entrusted me with two young hearts and I get to live life with them and engage in teachable moments and formal institutional environments (bedtime, meal time, car time, etc), all with intentional leadership (two parents, male and female), within an already established relational environment (the family), and a sort of reproducible process (regular life engagement, memories, shared experiences, etc).

Anyway, I'm rambling... I just remembered our conversation the last time I saw you and what family discipleship, according to the Real Life language (all from Jesus) would look like in a manual.

// Jeremy

Hey Jeremy,

So good to hear from you! I hope your family is doing well. What you have been processing is exactly where many of our conversations around discipleship have focused over the past year.

As we continue to journey through scripture, and specifically Ephesians, it has become apparent that the fruit of an abiding relationship with Jesus permeates and brings healing to the broken relationship in

three foundational relational environments in which every follower of Jesus finds themselves. The Home Sphere, Church Sphere and World Sphere. We have recognized that the manual and many of our trainings are focused heavily on the Church Sphere, hit on the World Sphere but are lacking in addressing the foundational relational environment of the Home. What has been a help as I have lead through several of our trainings is to help people understand that our maturity and growth is evidence by the relational fruit that is produced in each of these relational environments. The reality is that it is pretty easy to fake our maturity in the world, and even in our church environments…that is not the case with our homes. Our families get to see the real us, and it is the home sphere that is the baseline for the inspection of spiritual fruit. This produces a more holistic view of discipleship then our manual current provides.

Because of this I developed what we call our Intro to Discipleship @ Home Class. It is designed to come along side our current discipleship process had help parents and grandparents understand God's vision for the home and what a reproducible process for discipleship in the home could look like. I attached a leaders guide for the class…you should be able to fill in the gaps, but if you want to sit down and talk it over I would actually love to get your feedback and insight. But basically we looked at the way God parented His children throughout scripture and attempted to overlay that with the seasons of parenting. Which gave us four Season we call, Model, Train, Coach and Mentor. With the outcomes of those seasons correlating to the discipleship process of Share, Connect, Minister, Disciple. And then we have used this framework to create our overall Home Discipleship strategy.

Anyways…that was just a rapid fire in between meetings…would love to do a Skype call to talk more if you are interested…if nothing else it would be great to catch up.

Talk to you soon!

KB

Kyle -

Wow. Oh man... I have so many thoughts coming to me when I read your material. Gordon MacDonald wrote an impactful article a while back called Reparenting. He took a handful of couples and did a year of intentional discipleship with them with fantastic results. It spurred on more groups... but I don't think the process was reproducible like Real Life's is. I've thought about taking Gordon's idea of Reparenting and applying that to discipline families. I don't see systemic family change happening in our community by blog posts, educational campaigns, and regular church programming. I do see the possibility of systemic change when I see Jesus making disciples and sending them out to make more disciples. My thought is to grab 4-5 married couples that are hungry (probably with young children, because that's the life stage at I'm in), and engage in personal, marriage, and parenting education, accountability, and rhythmic processes to model discipleship in the home. The hope would be to create some sort of simple,

reproducible process that those families could then take and do with another group. There are so many young families that I know in my community (both in and out of our church) that would love and benefit from something highly relational and practical like this. I think families and people in our culture today don't see the transformative power of the Gospel in the personal lives, marriages, and kids' lives. Church services and non-intentional small groups just don't cut it. There needs to be more intentionality and a simple, easy-to-understand grid to think, lead, and model discipleship through...

Thanks so much for emailing me back and sharing your resources! I really appreciate it Kyle! What you've produced really dovetails and helps fill out more deeply what be been thinking about lately. Thanks!

// Jeremy