

GOD'S REVIVALIST

September 2023

and Bible Advocate



PART FOUR

Discipleship Series

Discipleship in the Home



thinking out loud

WHIPPING KENNY

I heard the fingers snapping. The misbehavior of me and my best bud, Kenny Sexton, had caught the attention of Betty Farmer, my mother, the enforcer of proper church decorum. She held her index finger up and then softly patted her hands together. This was parental code for “one more time and you will get a spanking.” Quite frequently, church services were inextricably followed by the well-established ritual of “go home, whip Kenny, and set the dinner table,” a pattern firmly fixed in the family agenda. There were ample occasions for non-church-related whippings, too. It wasn’t that I was mean—just mischievous and rambunctious. A deadly duo!

My mother most frequently stepped forward for the disciplinary task—a fast whip-and-go. It sometimes involved a flyswatter for minor malefactions. At other times, I was forced to go outside to “get a switch” from the backyard tree for her use. However, for more egregious misbehaviors, I would sometimes hear, “When your father gets home, you are going to get a whipping.” That was a different story!

Elmer Farmer almost exclusively used his belt for the disciplinary action; and although he whipped harder than Mother, what I dreaded most was “the talk” which often accompanied the punishment. I can replay those in my head even today: “Son, you know how much I love you. I really hate to have to whip you. I just want you to grow up to be a good boy. This hurts me more than it does you.” I was disgusted with myself for making my father and mother feel so bad. In those moments, I would resolve to be a better boy, and I succeeded—for a while.

Frankly, I am thankful for the whippings. They functioned as guardrails to keep me from more serious problems and laid the foundation for good character development. However, the most impactful part of the disciplinary process was the loving manner in which it was administered. Betty and Elmer disciplined me because I was their son, and they dearly loved me. It was part of their method to help me grow up to be a good boy. It worked!

I am reminded of Hebrews 12:6-7: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” —KF ■

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COVER PHOTO: Phillip Mills and his three sons.

The Disciple-Making Home

by Nathan Brown



My mom can still remember the evening she realized the importance of family discipleship. It was the mid-1950s in Pasadena, California, and her parents had invited some of their college friends over for a visit. These friends had recently returned from a missionary tour in the Far East and had many fascinating stories to share. While the adults talked, my mom, who was ten years old at the time, sat in one of those large, canopied yard swings and chatted with the missionaries' daughter Mona. As they talked, Mona began to entertain my mom with stories of her own, only they weren't about witnessing or working in children's services. They were about her escapades with other missionary kids. She told of lying to her parents to attend parties and of wild car rides through the streets while sitting on some boy's lap.

My mom was shocked. How could the daughter of such godly missionaries be doing these kind of things? Now whether Mona spiced up her stories for my mom's benefit, I don't know, but from that moment, my mom determined she would do all she could to make sure her own children would never end up like Mona. She determined that she would disciple her children.

The Great Commission and Family Discipleship

Many people think of the Great Commission as a call to world evangelism. And indeed it is, for Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19a). That's why we send missionaries to foreign countries, and we send workers to large cities for inner city ministries. But if we're not careful, we can overlook another very important mission field—the home. The Great Commission is a call to make disciples of our families. As parents, we have the responsibility to do all we can to raise our children to be devoted followers of Jesus.

But isn't discipleship something that's done by pastors and church leaders? Isn't that why we take our kids to church and send them to Christian schools? While it's true that churches and Christian schools play an important part in forming disciples, the home is the true center of discipleship. One of the reasons we're losing our children to the world is because we've taken a passive role and expected the church and the school to disciple our children.

I'll never forget the time an elderly evangelist told my dad about the heartache of watching his children drift away from God. He looked at my dad and said, "I just expected my kids would follow God the same way I did. I always wanted to do right, and I just assumed my children would be the same." Friends, we cannot sit back and assume that our children will turn out like we did. We must take action—we must disciple our families!

What the Bible Says About Discipleship in the Home

The Bible makes it clear that discipleship begins in the home. We see this all the way back in Deuteronomy when God said, "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" (Deut. 6:5–7).

I want us to notice two important points here. First, before God commands us to teach our children, He reminds us of the need we have to love Him and to carry His Word in our hearts. Why? Because it's impossible to pass on something we do not possess. Example has always been and will always be the most powerful teacher. Second, the responsibility to teach and talk about God's Word is given to parents. Other believers provide supplementary support, but the primary obligation is on fathers and mothers.

The New Testament echoes this imperative: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Obedience to authority is fundamental to family discipleship. If children won't obey their parents, whom they can see, how will they obey God, whom they cannot see?

A good example of family discipleship in the New Testament is Eunice and Timothy. Paul said, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15). Timothy is an example of how a mother and grandmother (Timothy's father is not mentioned) can pass on the faith to the next generation.

The Bible makes it clear that discipleship begins in the home, with parents recognizing that their children come into the world as sinners and need to be evangelized; and once they're saved, they need to be trained in righteousness and godliness. This is so important! The future of our churches depends on it! Scripture tells us that discipleship in the home is a prerequisite for ministry in the church.

Discipleship in the home begins, first and foremost, with our personal example. The most important thing parents can do to disciple their children is to be disciples themselves.



Paul told Timothy, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer [episkopes], he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:1–5).

Paul also told Titus, *“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders [presbyters] in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination”* (Titus 1:5–6).

Successful discipleship in the home qualifies believers for ministry in the church. This means that each man must be the small group leader of his home! Lest we think that only pastors and elders are subject to this requirement,



Paul makes it clear that church ministers and workers are also in view: *“Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well”* (1 Tim. 3:12).

Recently, someone told me the story of a man who went to the mission field in another country and left his children behind in an orphanage. Can you imagine? Friends, it is not God’s will for us to sacrifice our children on the altar of ministry! “But,” someone may say, “I’ve

got a call!” Praise God, I’m glad for the call of God on your life. However, the call to the mission field is also the call to the mission field of your home. The call to evangelize is the call to evangelize your children. The call to preach is the call to share the gospel with your kids. The call to pastor is the call to pastor your own little church at home. The call to ministry is the call to minister first to your own family. Friends, we dare not neglect our children; we dare not fail to shepherd our own flock, for if we do, the Holy Spirit tells us—we will undermine our ability to shepherd the flock of God!

What Discipleship Looks Like in the Home

I believe all of us want our children to grow up to be godly men and women, and I think we’re all trying to make this happen. But it isn’t easy, and none of us can make our children serve God. So as we look at this question, I want to acknowledge that I’m still learning and growing in this area. I make mistakes, and there are times I have to apologize and ask forgiveness. So I present the ideas below as a fellow laborer in the home field, and I hope they can be of value in the common goal of family discipleship.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME BEGINS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, WITH OUR PERSONAL EXAMPLE.

The most important thing parents can do to disciple their children is to be disciples themselves. Why? Because we learn primarily by observation and imitation. This means the example parents set is the first and greatest teacher.

Remember Deuteronomy 6:4-8? Before God commanded parents to teach their children, He focused first on the affections of the parents. Why? Because it’s impossible to pass on something we don’t possess. The first duty of family discipleship actually has nothing to do with our children at all: *“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”* (Deut. 6:5-6).

Now, obviously, this covers the basics of personal discipleship, which we’ve discussed in earlier articles, but your kids are also watching your entire life:

- How you interact with authorities.
- How you talk about people with whom you disagree.
- How you answer all the “Why?” questions.
- How you react while driving.
- Your attitude about church attendance.
- Your love of God’s Word and prayer.
- Your comments about current events.
- How you entertain yourself—what you watch, listen to, and read.
- What you do to relax.

So, the number one principle is—be a good example. This is the hardest part of family discipleship, and since

all of us will make mistakes, be willing and ready to admit when you're wrong, ask your kids to forgive you, and then keep going onward and upward.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH LOVING LEADERSHIP. FOR MEN, THIS MEANS:

Personal integrity and wise management. The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, gave us qualifications for leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). These qualifications are a template for what men should strive for in their personal lives and in their homes. Since managing the home well is a prerequisite for serving in the church, every man should be working each day to be faithful in these areas.

Loving their wives. Paul said, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). Peter said, “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). The bar is set high indeed, for the example we have to follow is Christ’s sacrificial love for the church! Men, we need to love our wives in this way, not just because it’s the right thing to do, but also because our children are watching. We are showing them what it

means to be men when we obey these commands. Being a man is not about the macho things by which the world is enamored—it’s not about being able to hold your liquor and drive the big truck and have the biggest gun. If you want to know what it means to be a man, look at the life of Jesus! One of the most manly things we’ll ever do is to love our wives well.

Providing for their families. Paul said, “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you” (2 Thess. 3:7–8; cf. 1 Tim. 5:8; Col. 3:23–24). Paul left us an example of hard work and diligence, and we should follow in his steps.

Actively training their children. Paul said, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). We’re going to explore this in more detail in just a moment, but remember this is a call to men.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH RESPECTFUL OBEDIENCE. FOR WOMEN, THIS MEANS:

Being their husband’s helper. When God created Eve, he said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18–24; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8–9). Wives, before saying



Lyle and Michelle Witt Family, 2014

yes to some request or pursuing some endeavor, ask yourselves, “Does this help my husband?” This simple question will keep you focused on this fundamental role.

Submitting to and respecting their husbands. Paul said, “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph. 5:22–24; cf. 1 Pet. 3:1–6). When a wife is disrespectful and defiant to her husband, the children notice. They, in turn, often imitate her example by acting out against authority. Wives have the unique opportunity to display for their children submission to authority by submitting to their husbands, and this often sets the tone for the children’s ability to obey God for the rest of their lives.

Loving their children. Now we may think that this goes without saying—after all, don’t mothers have a natural desire to care for their children? Well, yes, they do. But then why does Paul say, “Older women likewise are to...train the young women to love their husbands and children” (Titus 2:3–5)? Paul says this because true love always does what is best for the child, and that often means reproof and rebuke. We really find out what it means to love someone when we are forced to rebuke and correct that person. That is hard to do! Many times women find themselves pampering, spoiling, or pacifying their children rather than truly loving them.

Being self-controlled, pure, working at home, and kind (Titus 2:5). While it is the man’s responsibility to be the provider of the home, it is the woman’s responsibility to be the caretaker of the home (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Tim. 5:14).

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH PROPER PRIORITIES. HERE IS THE PROPER ORDER OF PRECEDENCE THAT SHOULD GOVERN OUR LIVES:

God. Our relationship with God is our top priority. Our decisions should be made with this question in mind—“Is this in harmony with God’s will and His place of supremacy in my life?”

Spouse. Putting God first will enable us to be the spouse God wants us to be. The most important needs of husbands and wives are the affection and companionship of spouses who are totally committed to loving God with all their heart. We can’t succeed as a spouse if our relationship with God is marred by sin.

Children. Putting our spouses before our children will enable us to be the parents God wants us to be. The most important need of a child is the environment of a healthy, loving husband-wife relationship in the home. We can’t succeed as parents if we’re neglecting the needs of our spouses or if we’re undermining each other’s role in the family.

Church. The needs of the family take precedence over the needs of the church. Remember—each family IS a church! So what you’re doing here is prioritizing the needs of your “little” church for the eternal benefit of the larger, universal Church. All too often people allow their

ministries to take priority over their families. Eventually the problems created by this in the home will undermine one’s ability to minister in the church. Note that this is not an excuse to neglect or ignore the needs of our local churches! We should do our best to make sure that family interests and activities don’t keep us from attending church and edifying the body of Christ.

Job. While our jobs are essential in providing for our families, they should never prevent us from obeying God’s command to meet together regularly with other believers (Heb. 10:25). All of us are an essential part of the body of Christ, and we need each other in order to be successful disciples of Jesus.

Think about how this priority structure will guide our decision making:

- It will prompt us to find a job that allows us to attend church on a regular basis.
- It will make sure that we don’t let the time spent with our children crowd out the time we spend with our spouse (e.g., Charity and I go on a date every week, and this helps us have the marriage we need).
- It will ensure that we don’t spend more time ministering to others than we do to our own families.
- It will remind us that our job should never take priority over our spouses and children.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH PROACTIVE TRAINING. FOR PARENTS, THIS MEANS:

Teaching their children to obey. At very early ages, children can be taught the meaning of the word “No.” Be proactive about this, and set up training sessions. When our daughter Kathryn was about eight or nine months old (this can vary depending on the child), we would put a shiny toy within reach, and then tell her in a calm voice, “No,” when she started to grab it. If she grabbed it anyway, we gave her hand a little swat and simultaneously said, “No.” The swat was hard enough to make her consider the relationship between the toy, her desire, the command “No,” and a little reinforcing discomfort. It took some time, but we were consistent, and Kathryn learned to obey.

You can use this same approach for the positive commands of “Give” or “Come.” Set a child down on one side of the room and say “Come.” Give lots of praise when the child makes his/her way to you. Spend a week or two focusing on practicing these two commands, and you will be amazed at how quickly your children can be trained.

Treating a rotten attitude as the rebellion that it is. Outward compliance that conceals inward resentment must never be tolerated. This gets harder to detect as our children get older, so we need to be vigilant about this when they are young. If children obey but stick out their lips at the same time, treat it like disobedience. Sulking,

pouting, whining, complaining, begging, and such should be dealt with promptly and firmly. If we're consistent, we can avoid many of the dreaded temper tantrums that parents are forced to handle. As your children get older, teach them this definition of obedience: "Doing what I'm told, when I'm told, with a good attitude." If any of those pieces is missing, it's disobedience.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE. LOVING AND CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE IS IMPORTANT FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

It deals with the root problem in our children's hearts. "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). When we look at our children, what do we see? We see their bright, inquisitive faces, so full of life and curiosity about the world. We see how cute they are, how adorable they are. But do we see the sinful nature that is lurking there? Do we see the folly that is bound up in their hearts? Do we see their determination to have their own way, whatever the cost, and the rebellion that is just under the surface? Most of us don't. In addition to enjoying the delightfulness of our children, God also wants us to see their "other side," for all come into this world as fools and sinners. We need to learn to see our children from God's perspective!

What does it mean that folly is in our children's hearts? It means that children do NOT know what is best for them. It means that children do NOT know how to choose wisely. We should never leave decisions concerning work, entertainment, education, health, etc., solely up to them. We are the parents; we are the adults! We should be making the right choices for them, even if those choices are not to our children's liking. Remember this: your children's immediate happiness is NOT the guiding principle for parenting! God's Word and their eternal welfare is. Solomon said, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov 29:15). If you leave the garden of your child's heart untended, it will grow weeds, not roses.

It is the essential ingredient in loving our children. "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24). Solomon equated love with "discipline," and hate with "sparing the rod." By this definition, many parents hate their children. What a sobering thought! Now understand, this is not talking about the feeling of hate; it's talking about an action of hate. You can feel affection for your kids, you can feel all kinds of warm fuzzy feelings about them, and yet be hating them!

When we think about this proverb, it should remind us of Eli and his sons. He scolded his sons, but he did not discipline them or remove them from service. "What is this that I hear, my sons?" (cf. 1 Sam. 2:22–36). If we coddle our children and excuse their sin, we are setting the stage for their destruction.

Now, I want you to notice that one word keeps popping up: the rod. Proverbs emphasizes the need for physical discipline (it's not just a metaphor, it really means physical discipline), so let me give you a few tips on using the rod:

- The earlier it's used, the less it's needed.
- The more consistently it's used, the more effective it is.
- It teaches best when used in private (in our day this is important).
- It should always be accompanied with words of reproof (take time, don't just react).
- Its presence paves the way for other forms of discipline.
- When used properly, it will make our children feel loved and, in turn, they will love us.

It prepares our children for the gospel. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from [death]" (Prov. 23:13–14). Long before our children can understand words like "depravity" and "flesh" and "sin," the pain of discipline is showing them they have a problem. I'll never forget when my child, who was on his way to another painful session with the rod of discipline, asked me, "Why do I keep doing this?" Why indeed! What a great question! That gave me the chance to tell him about the true condition of his heart.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH SPIRIT-LED EVANGELISM. HERE ARE THREE THINGS WE CAN DO TO EVANGELIZE OUR CHILDREN:

Share our testimony. Do your children know the story of how you were saved? I hope so! As soon as they are able to understand, we should be telling our kids how we came to Christ. If you were saved from an adult life of sin, don't give details and make sure never to glorify or glamorize the things you used to do. Explain the scars those sins left on your life and impress on your children that they must not make the same mistakes. If you were saved as a child, all the better! You can use that to encourage your children to follow your example.

Model repentance. If (or perhaps I should say *when*) we ever treat our children unkindly or harshly, make sure to say, "I was wrong. What I did was sinful and I apologize. Will you forgive me?" Be specific; call it sin! This gives them an example of sincere repentance which they can one day use as a model for their own repentance. We can also relate other times of failure and tell our children how we asked God to forgive us (do this in moderation and with discretion). This reinforces the principle that sin must be confessed and forsaken.

Be prepared. If your daughter came to you right now and asked you to help her pray for forgiveness, are you ready to lead her in prayer? If so, wonderful! If not, let me give you a suggested prayer for kids: "God, I know that I've done bad things. I'm sorry for doing wrong. I believe that

Jesus is Your Son. I believe that He died for me and that He came back to life so that I could live in Him. I ask you to forgive me and come into my heart. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus name, Amen.” We should expect our children to serve God, and we should let them know that we expect this. Don’t tell them they’re saved if they’re really not, and don’t coerce them, but make sure they understand that serving God is the greatest thing in the world, and that it’s the smartest decision they’ll ever make.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE HOME CONTINUES WITH THOUGHTFUL INSTRUCTION. THIS INVOLVES THREE MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Lead. Encourage each member of your family to practice personal discipleship. The husband should

lead by example, and the wife and children should follow the husband’s leadership. When an entire family is engaged in personal discipleship, the results are amazing. The Bible reading and prayer system on the website (comeafterme.com) is perfect for this.

Fellowship. Take time each day to discuss what God said in the daily reading. You can use the “Think” section of the Bible page to do this. Share ideas and personal applications. Help your family develop the habit of discussing their relationship with God: what they’re learning, how they’re growing, what God has been saying to them, etc. This will prepare them to discuss spiritual things with people outside your family.

Teach. Schedule a time each week or month when your family gets together for a discipleship lesson. Make the occasion special, something your family will look forward to during the week. Pick a lesson from the website (see the “Lessons” menu), and go over the material. Encourage questions and discussion. If you do this consistently, you’ll be preparing your children to disciple their children.

Conclusion

I began this section by noting that all of us want our children to grow up to be godly men and women, and that we want to do the best we can to make this happen. I’d like to conclude with this reminder: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”* (Psa. 127:1). All our good intentions and best efforts will come to nothing without God’s help and blessing. This keeps us both humble and prayerful, for only with His guidance and direction can we succeed in having a disciple-making home. How appropriate that this verse begins a psalm that goes on to say: *“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward”* (Psa. 127:3). We parents cherish that gift from God with a grateful heart as we personally follow Christ, strive for proper priorities, and diligently instruct the “new converts” in our homes in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. ■

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