Liberty University School of Divinity

Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project:

The Church is Familial and is Built on Spiritually Strong Families

Presented to Dr. Rodney Dempsey,

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by

Yat Por Lau

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

____________________________________
Dr Rodney Dempsey &
Professor of Educational Ministries

____________________________________
Dr. Frederick Smith &
Associate Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Yat Por Lau

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Mentor: Dr. Rodney Dempsey

Christ’s headship of the church has strong parallels to the husband’s headship of the family unit. As postmodernism, socio-economic factors, egalitarianism, globalization and shifts in the communicational processes drive inter-generational issues to greater heights, insidiously tear families apart—relationally, intellectually and spiritually. On the other hand, the church models the world through its discipleship programs, organization structures and has asserted itself as the spiritual head of the home. This paper will survey Christian young adults to identify key influences on their spiritual formation and family ministries the church provide to support families. The paper will provide a critique on family-equipping ministries that can help bridge the intergenerational divide in the church, re-integrate the family and reestablish spiritual leadership in the home.
Acknowledgements

Thanks be to the Lord Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of my faith. This work is dedicated to my family from which much of the experience and discussion about this subject is made heartfelt and tangible. To my wife, Sally, a special thank you for the encouragement, help, patience and inspiration.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The modern Christian family appears to be under siege from the culture at large. Its form and purpose most of all have been challenged. This paper will explore the theological basis for a family and evaluate some of the current trends in discipleship and ecclesiology about the family. It will focus on some of the current efforts to refocus the church on the family and propose a path towards reconstituting the family as it was designed to be and the role of the church in providing leadership and equipping for this.

Statement of Problem

While it is clear that the church has been called to be a new family in the New Testament, the church today has morphed into an organization, its structures streamlined for efficiency and the relationships within defined by organizational hierarchy and function. Churches have been transformed into a corporation whose bottom line is magnifying Christ in its professionalism, community contribution, and influence. As such, decreasing emphasis and focus have been put on the relational aspects of the members, especially the family in the church. Sharing and learning in Bible study groups and formal discipleship classes take a classroom and academic approach along with the structured age segregated Sunday school classes for the children.

As for the natural families in the church, the socioeconomic and prevailing cultural influences has reduced the span of close relationships to the nuclear family. Within that unit, roles and functions have become increasingly blurred between the two parents and parental relationships with their children are challenging due to generational gaps and extreme individualism. In non-traditional families such as step-parent and single parent families, the relationships are even more complex. These forces have dislodged the family unit from its divine design and purpose, resulting in the isolation of generations and decline of the church as a multi-
generational familial body. One tragic consequence of the chasm is a failure to leave a spiritual legacy to the next generation, resulting in the loss of the faith of the subsequent generation of young adults.

**Statement of Limitations**

The study will focus on the theological basis for familial relationships and articulate practical outcomes of these for the local church. The cultural context is primarily Western within its cultural elements. The research instruments will focus on Evangelical churches and its members. The samples will come from churches and students in Virginia.

**Theoretical basis for the project**

The discussion on the loss of faith in church-going young adults will entail a review of youth discipleship programs and processes. Related to this are organizational or ecclesiological postures that support these programs. Evangelism efforts toward unchurched youth is an outward looking program to engage or re-engage the loss of faith in youth. The key internal factor in this project is the family, its structure, function and consequently, its sphere of influence on the nurture of the child to adulthood. Spiritual leadership, patriarchy/egalitarianism, religious education and mentoring within the family are the associated topics for discussion.

**Statement of methodology**

The study begins with a biblical, historical and theological discussion concerning marriage and the family, to develop and ascertain the key doctrines. These will then provide a basis for a framework of what a family and the church looks like and how they should function together in unison. Then an assessment of a range of current family roles and church situations will help evaluate and identify areas of strength and opportunities. The gaps and issues that generate the problems therein will help to identify the roles such as spiritual leadership and
church responsibilities about the strengthening families and discipling the next generation. A research survey will be utilized to collect data from two groups of people. One set will address college students to validate the extent of the problem and a second set will be addressed to pastors of evangelical churches to assess family ministries currently practiced in the church today. Lastly, the data points will be analyzed and used to synthesize proposals for ministry changes and programs that will impact the family.

Summary of chapters:

I. Study of Scripture and literature on the subject of family

II. Develop a theology of the family and a family-equipping church

III. Research instrument:
   a. Young adult surveys to validate study findings on spiritual transformation
   b. Pastor surveys for best practices on family ministry

IV. Applying key ideas and activities for family ministry

Survey Questions created by author for this study:

College Student Survey:

State of faith (Self, siblings, family and friends), key spiritual and lifestyle influences (Appendix A)

Pastoral Survey on family ministries:

Family equipping ministries, discipleship programs, generational programs, modeling and development of faith community (Appendix B)
Review of Literature

Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*.

Hellerman contends that spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community and begins an exploration of the early Christian communities to rediscover the key elements missing from today’s community of believers. At the time of Christ, the communities in the Mediterranean region are collectivistic societies and the family has the strongest ties to the community. Christ formed his new family of believers based on the strong-group values of these communities. A journey through the writings of the Founding Fathers and early historical works of Philo and Josephus, confirms that the early church was such a strong-group family.\(^1\) The author argues for a needed corrective in the way salvation is viewed by Evangelicals today. Biblical soteriology restores a relationship not only with God but with other fellow human beings as well.\(^2\) These relationships clearly stand against the radical individualism that pervades Western culture and the church today.\(^3\) A crucial aspect of the strong-group church family model is that community guidance becomes a way life. The author summarizes the three fundamental characteristics of strong-group churches as the group comes first, it all about family and the strength of sibling bonds (being my brother’s keeper). Hyper-individualism is the critical problem that confronts the church today, but the response of Evangelicals so far has been to personalize faith, emphasizing a personal invitation and faith journey. There is clearly a need to

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\(^2\) Ibid., 136.

\(^3\) Ibid., 142.
return the church to being a strong-group community. These findings will help develop a wholesome theology of the family.

Michael and Michelle Anthony. *A Theology for Family Ministries.*

The book is a compilation of articles which provides a comprehensive view the theology of family ministry. The challenges to families today due to structural and sociological changes had resulted in increases in cohabitation, same-sex unions, single parent homes, blended families and negative teen attitudes toward marriage. In constructing a theology of family ministries, the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6) and the *Passover* in the OT, and Paul’s *House Code* in Ephesians 5 in the NT underscores the importance and the role of parents in bringing up their children. As a foundation of a healthy family, the church must teach and uphold the marriage covenant.

There is also an intergenerational and community aspect of child mentoring in the Bible, with the clan or tribe in the OT is replaced by the church in the NT. Churches since Paul’s generation have provided a biblical family ministry model based on parental coaching until the middle ages where it developed into institutional teaching structures which diminished a parental role. The sixteenth-century Reformers reiterated the call for the primacy of a parental role (particularly the father) in teaching children along with the structured catechism classes of the church. Due to a desire to maximize efficacy, professionalism, and centralization, the model developed into the segmented-programmatic church of the twentieth century. Contemporary family ministry models that emerged to improve on the Family Life Educational-Programmatic (therapeutic) approach

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5 Ibid., 118.

6 Ibid., 159.

7 Ibid., 162.
range from family-based, family-equipping and family-integrated models. Key axioms for these are parental responsibility, generational cooperation and missional families. Spiritual formation, equipping parents, children ministries and youth ministries became integral to the new models and are governed by them. This book offers a good historical and theological discussion on family ministries useful for setting a theological foundation for the paper.

**Greg Oden, Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a few at a time.**

Oden begins by highlighting the failure and the superficiality of discipleship programs today. The failure is due to a host of reasons: the lack of equipping of the saints, a dependence of regimented knowledge-based programs, a lack of emphasis beyond forgiveness, a belief that discipleship is only for the “super-Christians”, an unwillingness to call Christians to discipleship for fear of the cost, a lack of community, an unclear path to maturity, and a lack of personal discipleship. Oden models personal discipleship of a few from Jesus’ and Paul’s approaches. Interestingly, Oden compares discipleship to natural parenting where spiritual parenting takes the disciple through imitation (infant), identification (child), exhortation (adolescence) and finally to participation (adulthood). It is natural in the sense that every believer starts as a child in the faith and matures through a learning and experiential process. Oden’s work goes on to discuss multiplication through discipling relationships in triads which are not time-constrained. Discipleship becomes transformative when there is intimacy, truth, and accountability in the relationships. This book provides much the insight into the task of discipling, particularly in the many parallels to natural parenting and the natural triad in a child-parents relationship.

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8 Ibid., 176.


10 Ibid., 105.
Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship.*

The Church has focused on each generation’s needs in isolation of another to improve its efficacy and relevance in response to cultural shifts.\(^{11}\) The authors also go on to describe the loss of what each generation gains from the other regarding belonging, support, resources, and growth.\(^{12}\) They review biblical (OT generational communities and NT house churches), theoretical (developmental, social learning and ecological systems theories), and theological (Trinity, Koinonia and the body of Christ) support for an intergenerational Christian community.

There is also a clear call from social sciences to move toward authoritative multigenerational communities for members to be healthy emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.\(^{13}\) The book then delved into the intergenerational Christian formation practices: worship, learning, story sharing, service and missions, small group, and special cases of intergenerational practices in multicultural and mega-churches. The loss of interaction between generations diminishes the learning process and breaks the flow of faith from one generation to the next. A helpful compilation of practical ideas, ministry resources and biblical passages about intergenerationality is in the appendices of the book. The book provides a clear and excellent case for the intergenerational communities of faith. It ties into this study because the family is intergenerational but the church which supports families is increasingly age-segregated in its activities.

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 128.
Dr. Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Dr. Cheryl A. Crawford. *Sticky Faith*

The phenomenon of Christian youth falling from the faith in college (40-50%) is discussed at length in this work, as the result of Fuller Youth Institute’s extensive longitudinal research on the subject to help students “stick” to their faith. The authors point to a need for preparation programs and rituals, greater parental ownership and involvement, stronger intergenerational churches, more powerful shared stories or visions of real life faith that stick (unwavering), and firm congregation-wide commitment toward developing cohesive teams that will work to build lasting sticky faith. In this text, the role of parents is crucial in making the faith relevant and enduring for young adults living their home and churches. It also shows that age segregated discipleship classes fall short in building a strong and experiential faith because it is knowledge based and pander to making the activities interesting rather than real spiritual growth. This text highlights the ineffectiveness of the Sunday school programs in generating sticky faith in young adults and comes to the same conclusion as many familial churches that the parents must play the main role in producing children with sticky faith.

James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community.*

Spiritual formation is intentional, communal, requires our engagement, accomplished by the Holy Spirit, glorifying to God, and has as its means and end, the imitation of Christ. Wilhoit develops a curriculum for Christlikeness based on the gospel and the grace that enables it.

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15 Ibid., 186-96.

Framing the curriculum in four dimensions: receiving, remembering, responding and relating, Wilhoit develops each dimension in detail and how each takes place in and through the community.\(^\text{17}\) He argues persuasively that spiritual formation does not take place by accident or naturally in the course of time. He also points out that it does not happen in isolation or to oneself only but it happens in a community, and it impacts others through service rendered. The last critical dimension of spiritual formation is relational, and this is a recurring theme throughout the discussions on the family and the familial church in this paper.

Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Revised and Expanded Edition).

DeVries declares that despite the funding and resources made available by churches, youth ministries are ineffective in leading the young people in it to becoming mature Christian adults.\(^\text{18}\) DeVries realizes that parents are the key to effective work amongst the youth,\(^\text{19}\) but he also discovered that many parents were not mature Christians and were too busy to be involved. There needs to be at least one Christian adult with no hidden agenda cultivating a lifelong nurturing relationship with the teen to help him or her become a resilient adult. There also has to be a focus on equipping parents and the extended Christian family while maintaining an open and flexible stance toward changes in the twenty-first century.\(^\text{20}\) Half of the families in the church are non-traditional (divorced, single parent, stepparent, chemically dependent, impoverished) and their children’s needs more acute, requiring special sensitivity and equipping incorporated in programs to help them connect with Christian adults. A balance needs to be achieved.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 50.


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., 117.
maintained to encourage continuity (compliance) and allow for individuation (independence). The family-based youth ministry uses family as well as the extended Christian community to provide structures against the cultural forces of individualism, consumerism and material success prevalent amongst youth today.\textsuperscript{21} The book provides some practical ways to begin family-based youth ministry. The key takeaway is that the church needs to step up as a family for the youth; youth ministry cannot stand alone, it needs to be a part of a family ministry.

Adrian Thatcher, \textit{Theology and Families}. In the modern day context of increasing divorces, cohabitation, and single parenthood, and dwindling marriages,\textsuperscript{22} Thatcher takes a liberal view on a theological vision of what a family constitutes and how it relates to God and the wider community. He engages in many discussions on the theology of families from a multitude of sources, Scripture, Traditions, Creeds, conservative and liberal Catholic as well as Protestant voices, and contemporary social sciences to develop a Trinitarian theological perspective on families and particularly children.\textsuperscript{23} Thatcher welcomes the decline of the patriarchal grip on families after the Reformation toward an egalitarian family, and he finds support for it in the Trinitarian doctrine of co-eternal and coequal persons.\textsuperscript{24} Hence relationships in families are based on both mutual and sacrificial love. He articulates a theological vision for children whom he sees as being marginalized in every aspect of theology. Children are a gift of God and need to be given the priority in parenting, accorded the honor, joy and unconditional love Jesus bestows upon them in the gospels. These are lacking

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 155.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Adrian Thatcher. \textit{Theology and Families}. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 7.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 194.
\end{itemize}
from the conservative Protestant statements of faith concerning children which comprise primarily of teaching, modeling, and eliciting obedience.²⁵

Adrian’s perspective of the family and children fails to stay true to the biblical teachings on the subjects and in many instances echo the secular libertarian viewpoint that endorses equality and mutuality in all relationships. These views support marriages that are equal partnerships based only on mutual love. Seen from his perspective, a child also joins the parents as a gift from God to share in the relationship of equals even though it needs nurturing and cannot contribute to the relationship. Adrian also promotes a gospel of love that is forgiving and unconditionally loving that overlooks sin, a sinful nature, and the need for any repentance. Unfortunately, some of these pseudo-biblical views are creeping into the church today.

Kostenberger, Andreas J., and David Jones. God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation.

Regarding marriage and the family, the West’s Judeo-Christian heritage and foundation have largely been supplanted by a libertarian ideology that elevates human freedom and self-determination as the supreme principles for human relationships.²⁶ The book purposes to build a solid foundation for marriage and the family from God’s word. Marriage is a covenant, a sacred bond between a man and a woman, instituted by and publicly entered into before God, characterized by permanence, sacredness, intimacy, mutuality, and exclusiveness.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 15.


In biblical times, the family consists of an entire household; they were patrilineal (descendent), patrilocal (marriage into) and patriarchal (patricentric). The father, mother, and children all have clear roles which help to establish strong relationships amongst them. It is not surprising that Jesus uses the familial terms to describe relationships in the community of believers that he establishes, transcending even those of the natural relations.\textsuperscript{28} This conservative theological view of marriage and family is unequivocal and clear, but it leaves gaps in the study regarding the relationship between the natural and spiritual family. This gap leaves the assessment of current practices and church culture open to a range of interpretations.


In this hefty and contemporary guide to family ministries, Diana Garland points out that social context and cultural forces, as well as the church, have always shaped the family in the past, but in the last century, it was socioeconomic forces that had brought large changes and diversity to the family in America. The family today still has a structural definition (biological or legal), but a functional definition is more relevant to understanding complex and developing relationships (stepfamilies, single parent). Family ministries have to be sensitive to the life experiences of everyone, including those outside the nuclear families.\textsuperscript{29} It is natural to think of family ministry just as a wide assortment of programs and services, but there should also be a review every aspect of congregational life to determine its impact on families.\textsuperscript{30} A significant portion of the book discusses interactions (communication, anger management, conflict, forgiveness, and intimacy), relationships, influence and roles within contemporary families and contrasts them

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 100.


\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 144.
with relationships in the Bible. One can find in the book many examples, practical considerations, problems, and processes for implementing an inclusive family orientated and relational community program. Family ministry is not merely a set of programs to minister to the needs of the family, but it is the ministry of the church to families through families and as a family. Diana Garland describes the practice and captures the essence of family ministries in the church today honestly and vividly in her book. It would have been good if she had added a strategic and systematic approach to the family ministries that churches can use to build a holistic program for families.


The authors draw their theology of family relations from the relationality within the Trinity and man’s relationships with God.31 A familial relationship is a tightening spiral which begins with a covenant (love), expressed in grace (forgive), developing to empowerment (serve), culminating with intimacy (know) and maturing in a deeper covenant (bilateral, unconditional love). They then turn to the family-systems theory and the family-development theories to describe how the balanced application of cohesiveness, adaptability, communication, and role structure is essential for a strong family. While they comport well with a biblical framework for marriage, the expectations in a modern marriage is no longer a social institution for economic stability and a place for rearing children but a place for actualizing romantic attraction, self-fulfillment, and ego-need gratification.32 The interaction of the Christian perspectives of the family with modern

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32 Ibid., 79.
sociological theories and psychological models is very helpful in understanding the predicament faced by families today. The authors argue that the path forward is not to revert to old ways but to forge a new trajectory that is a biblical response to the changes wrought by modernization, recognizing both the good and bad.


Through a series of surveys (Longitudinal Study of Generations involving 3500 members of 357 families from 1970 to 2005) the text studied the transition of faith through 3-4 generations in Evangelical Protestant, Mainline, Catholic, Jewish and Mormon faiths, as well as the non-affiliated. The study sought to identify factors that promote intergenerational religious momentum as well as those that do not in the various faiths surveyed. The rate of transmission for Evangelicals did not change significantly (from 70% to 62%) compared to the decline in the Mainline and Catholic groups (falling 33% and 43% respectively) due to the great sociological changes over the period of study. Important patterns that emerged from the study are that: parental influence has not declined since the 1970s, parental warmth (particularly from the father) is key to successful transfer, grandparents and great-grandparents provide a positive influence, and high boundary religious groups (Evangelicals, Jewish and Mormon) have high transfer rates. In their concluding remarks, they suggest that religious communities should put greater focus on fostering ties the family unit and across the generations, exercise patience and perseverance as cultural shifts and individualism cycles through younger congregants as they mature, and lastly, to reform and innovate as new religious sensitivities emerge with later

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generations. This informative study of the transmission of faith through the generations is helpful even though the study incorporates a diverse group of faith practices. The barriers and success factors discussed in the book are pertinent to the crucial question in this paper on why youth in evangelical churches have decided to leave the faith.

Timothy Paul Jones, Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Ray Strother. Perspectives on Family Ministry.

Timothy Jones provides a general background on family ministries in this book. He points out that throughout Scripture, the home provided a primary context for discipleship and parents served as primary disciple-makers. The advent of the teenager as an identity in the nineteen forties is largely due to lengthy compulsory schooling which has kept young adults from the workforce. The church followed suit with age-focused ministries which inadvertently released parents of their responsibility for their children’s spiritual formation. Of the three perspectives on implementing family ministry presented: the family integrated ministry model (Renfro) is perhaps the most radical, breaking away from any age-segregated Sunday school classes, events, and ministries. The family worships, learns and serves together in the church’s main activities. Special teaching classes for fathers on leadership and husband and wives on parental roles are provided to organize their worship, teaching, service and evangelism activities in their homes.

Shields presents the family-based church model which while retaining age-segmented ministry structures, runs on the mindset that “Parents and family are crucial to faith development in every area of a ministry’s program.” The family-equipping ministry model (Strother) churches

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34 Timothy Paul Jones, Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Ray Strother. Perspectives on Family Ministry. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 19. Family-Based Ministry (Brandon Shields) is the remaining model.

35 Ibid., 98.
“retains some age-organized ministries but restructures the congregation to partner with parents at every level of ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children.”

Although the approaches differ in some key aspects, particularly regarding age-segregated ministries, they aim to make the home a primary place of discipleship for children and the parents the primary teachers. Many of the discussions in this book have been helpful and influential on the thoughts presented in this paper regarding the familial church.


Bavinck writes this reformed perspective of the family in 1912, in response to the liberal movements in Europe and the pressures upon the family from their new theories (evolution, urbanization, secularization, Marxism, and feminism). Beginning at the creation of mankind, the triune God frames the perspective that Bavinck sees the family: relational, functional and unique personalities. Although the original sin cast specific punishments on man and woman, it did not diminish their original purposes as a family. For God’s covenantal people, the Law was given and the patriarchal family structure affirmed with its continuation throughout Israel’s subsequent organization and history.

To promote holiness, the Roman Catholic Church perpetuated some false notions by promoting asceticism, making celibacy a lifelong requirement for the spiritual and relegating marriage to a less pious vocation. The Reformation made corrections to this, but a backlash to the excessive suppression was indifference, degeneration of morals, unbelief and revolution. These featured into the mindset of the modern state which sought to liberate marriages, sexual constraints and offer equality and freedom to women from their traditional

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36 Ibid., 144.

roles. One of Bavinck’s key assertions is to keep the patriarchal family structure. While he is optimistic that this structure will prevail till Christ’s return because it was God’s design for mankind, he does not provide much guidance for the Christian family coping with increasing pressures and cultural shifts, beyond arguing that these new trends present false and empty promises for the future.

Joiner, Reggie. *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact when Church and Family Collide*

Think Orange is about combining two influences to form a greater one. It is about having the church and family recover their waning influences to impact the lives of children in a new and radical way for the Kingdom. The key influence of the church is to illuminate Christ in the world (as the lampstand in the temple upon the showbread) but it has drifted into many peripheral issues, ones that make the church look better (doctrinally) or more influential (socio-politically). Inadvertently, two generations of Christians, older and younger, have become disconnected spiritually and personally to God.\(^{38}\) The family is also a crucial source of influence. Even though there is no perfect model in the Bible, the family exists, even in its imperfection, to display the heart of God to every generation.\(^{39}\) The Shema in Deuteronomy reminds us what the most important legacy is, as the orange thinking Moses stressed in his final exhortation to family and the nation, to remain focused on God. For the church and family, orange thinking involves synchronizing leaders and parents around a master plan to build faith and character in their sons and daughters.\(^{40}\) In Orange thinking family ministry, the church needs to be doing more with families than doing more for families. It begins with integrated strategy between church leaders


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 83.
and parents to do family ministry. Working together increases the capacity and produce better results, particularly in making a deeper and lasting impact on the next generation. The teaching process and the primary material selected is consistently taught by parents and leaders alike, amplifying the message through different environments and relationships. Parents are partners in the teaching endeavor; they are aware of the needs and plans, they are involved, engaged and invested. The church provides the energy, strategy, repeated influence and relevant information to reactivate the home. The church needs to evaluate all sources of influence from the church community that surround the child. Other influential adults and leaders in the community need to share the common language and have the common objective of developing faith skills in the lives of children. Such a community is strategically built and then tasked with providing supportive and consistent influence to the kids as they grow through phases of wonder, discovery, and passion. Children are challenged and given the opportunity to serve and minister to the community as they develop more relationships and experiences, becoming a source of influence to others. They need to be given the keys to the next generation ministries of the church.

In the Orange Family ministry model, families and the church work together to make the next generation disciples of Christ. The church equips and leverages the family for its mission and in the family return leverages the energy and community offered. Making discipleship a multi-dimensional and hands-on affair makes the faith of the children relevant and authentic. Joiner should discuss the equipping of the parents in greater detail as many modern parents relegate spiritual formation to the church to focus on the physical well-being of their children. Dysfunctional families and poor parenting models also pose a challenge to the model. Secular

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41 Ibid., 177.
education is a key source of influence that is overlooked in the evaluation of the community that the children live in, especially since it is increasingly at odds with spiritual truths. Joiner rediscover the crucial role of the family as a functional unit in the church. His discerns and uncovers the distinct roles and functions are in the family and the church, many of which has been confused over time. The book sees many of the same issues discussed in this paper from an organizational standpoint, rather than the familial one.

**Review of Scripture**

**Key Bible Passages regarding the family and its trajectory:**

1. The Creation Narrative:

   Genesis 1:26-31 (ESV). Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 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." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. 42

   The creation narrative provides great insight into the formation and function of the family. Mankind received the mandate to be fruitful and multiply (to increase), and then to fill the earth and to subdue it. The physical union of man and woman fulfills the first part of the mandate to bear fruit, and the union of purpose fulfills the second part to multiply. To multiply

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42 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bible, 2007).
implies having to nurture, provide for and to protect so that the offspring can grow into adulthood and increase. To increase is more than just increasing in numbers, which is already a given if one is to be fruitful. The increase portion of the mandate points to gaining more influence, to subdue and to dominate creation. Embedded in the command to increase is the mandate to teach and train his descendants so as to extend his will and influence.

It is a union of equals as both bore God’s image. In the detailed creation narrative of Genesis chapter two that focuses primarily on mankind, the order of Adam and Eve’s creation and their life in Eden as a prelude to the fall in chapter three. There Eve was described as a helper fit or suitable for Adam. They were equals but as a consequence of the fall, Eve is to be subject to Adam. Chapter four describes the first family suffering another setback when the sibling relationship breaks down; Cain more than failed to be his brother’s keeper, he commits the first fratricide.

The narrative describes three functional failures, the failure in obeying God taints everything with sin, leading to separation and physical death. Eve’s failure in being the first to fall for serpent’s lies results in the unequal relationship between Adam and Eve. It was the death of their equal relationship. The failure in teaching and training the children resulted in jealousy arising between the siblings, leading to murder, causing the intentional death of another. The biblical mandate for mankind, to be fruitful and to increase, is greatly hampered by the fall. Physical death is the antithesis to being fruitful. Relational death and murder lead to disunity, rebellion, and chaos, none of which contributes to the increase of man. The mandate was not revoked after the fall; God reiterates it to Noah in Gen 8:17 after the flood.

2. The Purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant:
Genesis 18:19 (ESV). For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

Although the Lord’s dealings with Abraham was personal, his immediate family and household were also covered by the covenant. This verse speaks of the mechanism that extends the coverage of the covenant to subsequent generations, through the charge given to Abraham to “command” his family and those in the household to keep the way of the Lord. This is the reason that Jewish traditions place much importance on education, particularly in the family. The main focus of the education is religious, covering the teaching the statutes and commandments of God. Education is evidently the mechanism that enables salvation to pass through the generations.

This vital function of the family as the conduit for the fulfillment of God’s covenants is also seen in the creation mandate given to Adam to increase which can only mean to start a family and have dominion over all of the creation which can only happen through his descendants.

3. The Shema:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (ESV). "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in 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 and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 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. 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.

This passage is the key to understanding the roles of the family in the OT. Known as the Shema, this prayer is recited every day and is at the heart of the Jewish family’s mission and
purpose. It is particularly significant that the command to teach the next generation (a summation of all that they experienced) was reiterated in the last instructions from Moses. It is the most pressing and important reminder to the nation of Israel as he transitions the reins of leadership to Joshua in Deut 32:46-47, “he said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.’” This important legacy not only cements the allegiance of the nation to God but also sets the mission and purpose of every Jewish family. The responsibility of passing the spiritual legacy is placed upon the shoulders of the head of the family for the subsequent generations. It becomes a daily task, a constant reminder to obey the statutes and to love the Lord. The pedagogical approach emphasized is to visualize, demonstrate and to actively teach the statutes and commandments constantly at key and opportune moments every day. Deut 6:20-21 “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’” The book of Joshua echos this process where a faithful generation was raised to claim the promise land: Joshua 4:6-7.

4. Wisdom pertaining to Child-rearing:

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

Proverbs 22:15 (ESV). Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14 (ESV). 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 Sheol.
These verses underscore the importance of instilling training and discipline upon a child. However, they now represent old-school pedagogical thinking and thus do not comport well with modern approaches which are based on positive motivational influences, inquiry and discovery, self-interest, and self-driven learning. Contemporary discipleship approaches in churches have adopted the modern teaching methods which are more compatible with the sensitivities of today’s young children and youth. There is a need to return to the wisdom of the Bible.

5. Household leadership:

Joshua 24:15 (ESV). And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua’s “house” would comprise of his family and those who dwell in his physical house, including extended family members and servants. The head of the household plays a critical role in determining the spiritual affairs and affiliation of the family and all those who live together in the house. This responsibility and span of control are consistent with the patriarchal family structures of the day. The patriarchal model permeates the OT, the NT, and Christian households up till the twentieth century where education, science, mechanization, modern technologies and liberal politics with an emphasis on equality has transformed the household into an increasingly isolated nuclear, individualistic and an egalitarian husband-wife relationship.

6. The Household roles:

Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4 (ESV). 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes
and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 30 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 ”Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 ”that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Paul’s “household rules” are perhaps the clearest and the most instructional teaching on the Christian family. It describes relationships in a typical patriarchal household at the NT time. For the married couple, Paul teaches orderly submission accentuating it with parallels to the newly established Church of Christ. For the children, Paul draws from the OT commandment and wisdom literature to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, adding that fathers do not provoke the children. For the servant-master, a relationship of submission, God is the ultimate master of both. In each relationship, Paul adds a reciprocal response and a Godward element to the existing patterns, the most notable being the relationship between the parental couple who are to submit to one another in the form of the relationship between Christ and the church. In the Greek text, the missing verb in verse 22 (submit) strongly links the passage to the preceding discourse on being filled with the spirit and mutual submission. A few egalitarian theologians have argued that Paul’s assertion to submit to one another in verse 21 over-rules the order set up in the household codes, but many have turned to Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” as a rationale to do away with the patriarchal elements in the household code. These biblical arguments for an egalitarian family are somewhat weak in the light of the OT narratives and clear readings of Paul’s letters concerning the family, but contemporary sociological factors are a much stronger reason to see the strength of Paul’s household codes.
diminish in force. The demonstrated equality of the genders in nearly all vocations, breaking of
glass ceilings in almost all governmental and corporate leadership positions, as well as
continuing feminist activism motivated a reconsideration of the patriarchal family structure as a
descriptive norm of the times (OT and NT) rather than a prescriptive one for all ages. However,
one must stand firm that the biblical precepts that span the entire Bible as timeless truths which
must take precedence over cultural forces to retain the patriarchal structure of the familial
relationship.

7. New family of brothers and sisters in Christ and the Great Commission

Mark 3:32-35 (ESV). And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your
mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." 33 And he answered them, "Who are
my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking about at those who sat around him, he said,
"Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my
brother and sister and mother."

In the NT, Jesus speaks of a new family in which everyone who does the will of God is a
brother or a sister. This is a pragmatic description of what it takes to be in the family of God, i.e.
to become a Christian. It is essentially the same requirement from Abraham’s time, that being
obedient and in servitude to God cuts to the fundamental requirement for salvation. It avoids the
hyper-Calvinist and Arminian polemics of today and the power politics that distracted the sons of
Abraham in the nation of Israel from serving God. Just as the mechanism for salvation for the
subsequent generations in Abraham times was religious education, today it is life-transforming
discipleship. As before, the responsibility for that task remains with the heads of the natural
families, not with the temple or priestly class, not even for the church (the new family) today
whose task with respect to salvation is to share the good news and make disciples of the nations
(panta ta ethne, πάντα ἔθνη) as articulated in the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV). 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, 20 teaching them to
observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of
the age."

The integral role of teaching (religious education) is clearly seen in the commission. This also
underscores the importance of the same rigor in the nurturing of children in the family.

8. Loving father and mother more than Jesus:

Matthew 10:34-39 (ESV). "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I
have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his
father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-
law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves
father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter
more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me
is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for
my sake will find it.

This challenge from Jesus relates to the cost of discipleship and the persecution that is to
come on those who follow him. These comparisons do not mean that one must cease to show
love to one’s parents or give up one’s life; Christ did not come to render close familial relations
obsolete or demand one’s death. The parallel passage in Luke 14:26-27 puts this across in
harsher terms, but it is not a command to forsake one’s parents and family but a call for absolute
commitment, which is higher than two of the highest natural commitments, to one’s life, and
one’s parents. One must not take this call out of the context of persecution it was issued and
consider it with Jesus’ supportive statements on marriage and the way he keeps normative
relationships to his earthly family.

9. Paul’s view on marriage:

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (ESV). I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is
anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is
anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And
the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be
holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to
please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you,
but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.
In this passage, Paul seems to be teaching that celibacy is a better path toward holiness of body and spirit, leading many to think of marriage as a less honorable way to pursue a Christ-centered life. However, this is not evident when considering the context of the passage fully. A balanced view of this teaching should take into account that Paul was responding to the Corinthians query about abstinence in the Corinthian church. Paul affirms that marriage is not sinful in any way and is indeed helpful in keeping natural sexual desires from causing one to sin. The practice of abstinence does not make one more devoted unless it is to allow one to serve Christ exclusively given the imminent coming of the Lord. Furthermore, Paul warns against the falsehood that the singleness is a requirement for true faith.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (ESV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

In this passage, Paul argues that marriage is indeed part of God’s good creation when discussing the subject of incorrect teachings regarding abstinence filtering into the church. All which God has created is good, and marriage which is featured prominently in the creation narrative before the fall is certainly good.

Hebrews 13:4 (ESV). Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

The author of Hebrews 13:4 concurs that marriage, as designed and purposed by God, is to be given honor as a godly way of life and be safeguarded against any acts of defilement. Jesus in Matthew 19: 4-6 also shares a high view of marriage. 10. Telos of marriage:
Luke 20:33-36 (ESV). In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

Jesus teaches that marriage will cease after the resurrection. The task of procreation, providing for, and nurturing children in the creation mandate is brought to a conclusion when the dead are resurrected; birth and death are no more. This does not diminish the importance of marriage and its natural outcome, the family because familial relationships will persist in the new family, as sons of God, adopted into His family and who will inherit the Kingdom of heaven. This dispensation underscores the family’s critical role as a framework for heavenly relationships, not unlike how it is the conduit for the covenantal promises that was discussed earlier.
Chapter 2: The family and the familial church

The position of the Christian family today continues to be a precarious one. The unending onslaught of modern ideology and socio-cultural forces threatens to derail the family its biblical form and function. This is a familiar refrain in the West. “There has never been a time when the family faced so severe a crisis as the time in which we are now living”43 exclaimed Bavinck of similar liberal movement’s new theories (evolution, sexuality, urbanization, secularization, Marxism, and feminism) that were sweeping through Europe prior to the World Wars which brought about a post-Christian Europe with a huge decline in the church. In the US, the church’s countercultural responses was focused on defending the word, being more relevant externally whilst internally, becoming better organized in discipleship and stewardship of resources to come alongside broken and struggling families with support programs and focused teaching on prevailing issues such as materialism, divorce, sexual immorality, sexual identity and abortion.

There is almost a universal struggle in all church denominations to attain a better understanding of the role of the family and its fundamental role in the church. All have seen the struggle in the families within their congregations permeate into the health of the church and its mission. The main proposition deliberated here is that weakened Christian families essentially result in a weak church and in turn, a church without a comprehensive ministry to families will perpetuate the deterioration of its families. Additionally, this paper also argues that one of the most serious consequence of the distracted and weakened Christian family is that their children fail to receive a strong spiritual inheritance resulting in diminishing numbers and a vulnerable and confused next generation.

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The marriage foundation of the family

A strong theological understanding of the family is needed in order to know how to strengthen the Christian family and set it back on its biblical trajectory. The central thought in this thesis is that the family has a crucial position in God’s purpose and plan for mankind. This is evident at creation when the mankind was brought into being. In a fundamental form, man was created in God’s image and was given the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, and then have dominion over all earth (Gen 1: 26-27). That task was designed to be fulfilled by the mankind through the first man, Adam, and his partner, Eve, by means of the family they would inaugurate. In the expanded narrative on the creation of man in Gen 2, the formation of woman was described: Gen 2:20-22, “But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” Thus, the two begins the first marriage relationship which is replicated in every generation from then on. Gen 2:24 underscores this plan, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Kostenberger and Jones surmise that in Gen 1–2, man and the woman are jointly charged with ruling the earth representatively for God, each fulfilling their God-ordained, gender-specific roles.⁴⁴ It is clear then from that biblical account that the institution of marriage between a man and a woman was established by God in the perfect work of creation for the task of filling and subduing the earth.

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The fall resulted in a disruption to that perfect plan, with the introduction of pain and suffering upon woman and man recorded in the judgments in Gen 3:14-19. The second portion of Gen 3:16 includes a puzzling pronouncement on the relationship between man and woman which in the ESV (as in most translations) reads as, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Italics added). In contrast, the NET Bible scholars argue that the noun חֶשְׁעַּ֣ה (teshuqah, "desire") which has no verb needs to be read in the same sense as Gen 4:7 where sin was crouching at the doorstep and its desire, relates to control or domination.\footnote{45 NET Bible Genesis 3:16 translation footnote 48. The translators cites Susan T. Foh, \textit{What Is the Woman’s Desire?} Westminster Theological Journal 37 (1975): 376-83.} Thus, Gen 3:16b in the NET Bible reads as, “You will want to control your husband but he will dominate you." This interpretation is also consistent with the context of the story where Eve took the fruit first and gave some to Adam to eat. Kostenberger and Jones supports this viewpoint, “As far as the woman’s relationship with her husband is concerned, loving harmony will be replaced by a pattern of struggle in which the woman seeks to exert control over her husband who responds by asserting his authority—often in an ungodly manner by either passively forcing her into action or actively dominating her"\footnote{46 Andreas J. Kostenberger and David Jones, \textit{God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation} (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2008), 27 Kindle.} Harmony in the marital relationship also suffers as a consequence of the fall. Despite this, the idea of the original design for marriage and the family remains. This is reflected in the commandments and the governing marriage laws of the OT, idealistic depictions of marriage in Proverbs 31 and the Song of Songs, and is further affirmed by Jesus when teaching against divorce in Mark 10:9, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate".
The apostle Paul provides the most comprehensive and balanced teachings in the NT concerning marriage in his letters to the Ephesian and Corinthian churches, and to Timothy, his spiritual protégé. He addressed the sexual immorality that has overcome some who have been falsely taught to shun marriage by reaffirming the goodness of marriage as God’s creation (1 Tim 4:4) and reiterated the roles of husband and wife in the light of the gospel (Eph 5: 22-33). In adding the exhortation to submit one to another (Eph 5:21) Paul provides a balanced view of the marital relationship and a corrective to a lopsided patriarchal marital relationship where the wife is simply being lorded over. However, Paul does not in the Household Codes promote an egalitarian relationship when suggesting mutual submission. Even Adrian Thatcher, a strong proponent of egalitarianism, admits that there is no support for equal regard to be found in Eph 5:21 and the Household Codes.\(^{47}\) When it is read in the context of the remaining verses of chapter 5 where Paul is seen to present a complementarian view built on the grace and sacrificial love of Christ. The clear roles for the husband and wife which has been spelled out from the very beginning at the Creation are promulgated in Paul’s Christ-centric rendition of the Household codes.

Even with these correctives following the role reversal in the fall, the ideal marriage is further subverted by polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, sterility, and a dilution of gender roles.\(^{48}\) Mankind continues to succumb to the lust of the flesh and eyes as well as the pride of life in an overly sensuous and materialistic socio-cultural environment. In the face of these threats, marriage is recognized as a crucial part of God’s creation which needs to be


celebrated and strengthened as it is the foundation for the family, the building block of the church and every community, society and civilization.

As such, it is not surprising that the church and secular society views marriage in high esteem in order to preserve the institution. The Catholic Church traditionally views marriage as a sacrament, a source of grace, even as it promotes celibacy of its clergy. Secular society views it as a legal contract, bestowing upon it legal rights, protections and benefits. Protestant churches take a covenantal view of marriage since biblical accounts of marriage is steeped in covenantal language (Gen 2; Prov 2:16-17; Mal 2:14), particularly in passages from the OT. Kostenberger and Jones lists five key attributes of the covenantal view: “that marriage is not only permanent, sacred, intimate, and mutual; it is also exclusive.” 49 This view roots the marriage relationship in God, protects the marriage from outside influences and secures up a firm foundation for the family.

The theology and trajectory of the family

By design, God’s mandate to be fruitful and multiply must necessarily be fulfilled through the family. The monogamous marital relationship provides the context for sexual relations and adding members to form a family to increase. New members require protection, provisions and nurturing which must be provided by the parents in order to survive and develop into adulthood. The family encompasses the biblical framework for all this to happen successfully.

While there is a continuity in the role of the family to be fruitful and increase throughout the ages, there are some shifts in its trajectory because of the fall and the working out of God’s salvation plan through different covenants. After the fall, the increase in men and women has

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49 Ibid., 78.
been progressively evil, corrupted with pride and the lineage contaminated with intermarriage with the “sons of God” (Gen 6:2). From the lines of descendants from Adam only Noah found favor in God’s eyes. It is important to note that his righteousness and blamelessness also provided an umbrella over his family from impending judgment. Preserving Noah meant preserving his descendants as well. Through Noah’s family, humankind was re-started, all other generations were destroyed in the flood. In the subsequent covenant that was made with Noah, God promised that his descendants will not be destroyed. The mandate to be fruitful and increase was restated to Noah and his family.

There are two mechanisms at work to bring about an increase in the family: physical reproduction and nurturance. Since the fall, this became a struggle; childbirth is no longer without pain and the role of nurturing becomes critical because the result of partaking the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that the human nature had become corrupted. Every human, more so a child, requires instruction and discipline on the commandments and statutes of the Lord to live a life pleasing to God. Prov 22:6 exhorts responsible parents or guardians to, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” This charge was a major focus of every Jewish family after Moses established the law and the commandments. The Deut 6 passage, better known as the Shema (Deut 6:4), became the heart of the Jewish confession and faith. Moses’s final decree to the nation of Israel was regarding the statutes and rules: “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 6:7) According to Atkinson, “The whole atmosphere of the Hebrew’s daily life was conducive to passing the content and reality of the faith revealed to Israel. The care with which this is to be carried out regarding children is indicated in the verb נְנִנַּת/shinnantam
which is used here. Its root הָנָן/shanan means “to sharpen” and in the form found here, means to inculcate, to teach diligently.”\footnote{Joseph C. Atkinson, "Biblical & Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church." (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 88.} Even before Moses, the matter of training and discipling children or the next generation was of utmost importance. In Gen 18:18-19, the emphasis on training the next generation is seen as the reason and mechanism for choosing Abraham to be a blessing to all nations, which he would command his children and household to keep the way of the Lord.

It is now well known that the mystery that has been revealed, the blessing to the nations of the world, is nothing less than salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3: 6). However, what is often understated is the mechanism through which the blessing flows. The concept of genealogies or toldot in the OT is based on the familial linkages. Just as sin entered through Adam’s family and its curses passed down through every human generation subsequently, God had to break into Abraham’s familial links to initiate a covenant that will be a source of blessings to all. Abraham’s obedience and faith in leaving kindred in Ur (Gen 12:1) is a step toward building a new familial generation through which the promise of blessings will flow. Abraham’s family becomes the carrier of the covenant to David’s family and subsequently to Jesus who actualized the blessing and instituted a new covenant with his own blood.

The new covenant is carried through the family as well, the new family of believers includes those without blood ties or going through circumcision rites, opening the inheritance to gentile families as well as Jewish ones. The individual families and their households are united in their faith. There is a distinct trend in the early church that many converts (Jews and Gentiles) became Christians along with their households since that had been the promise on the day of
Pentecost: “And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39) There are at least four cases of whole households coming to Christ in the book of Acts. Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:14) is probably the first gentile family, Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:32-33) are some of the early Gentile converts. Titius Justus is another gentile whose household had most likely converted when Paul (Silas and Timothy) visited him in his house (Acts 18:7) to share the Good News. In the same way next door, Crispus, the synagogue leader and his entire household also believed. The family as a unit is a significant part in God’s redemption plan.

Thus the family continues to be the carrier of covenants with God, even in the New Covenant which sees all believers and their families as one new family. It is important to see the continuity of this theological understanding of the family’s role in carrying the covenants because the mechanism of that process in the OT was religious education in the Shema (Deut 6:7) and that in the NT it is discipleship (Mat 28:20); essentially it is the same mechanism is at work in both testaments. Jesus declared that all believers are joined together as a family, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mat 12:50). The concept of a family of believers in the NT does not diminish the role of the biological family. Some may argue otherwise and point to the passages where Jesus proclaims that families will be divided on his account (Mat 10:34-39; Lk 14:26-27). However, as discussed earlier, these passages are focused on the cost of discipleship and Jesus simply uses the love for one’s parents and the love of one’s own life to show the high degree of love one must be willing exercise for
his sake. Love relationships in the family are the highest displayed naturally and externally. The NT maintains a strong view of the family since both Jesus and Paul use the OT family as a model for the church in applying familial terms such as mother, brothers, sisters, God our Father, adoption as sons, inheritance and sons/children/heirs of God. (Mark 3:35; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:5, 11; Rom 8:14-16) Unlike other metaphors such as the body and the bride of Christ that are used to explain the newly formed church, familial terms are used in greetings, proclamations and making legal and theological statements. More than the family being a metaphor for a church, the church is understood to be a family in the same way a natural family existed in NT times.

With the establishment of the church along familial lines, it makes sense then that the final trajectory of the family ultimately is the church, the universal family of believers, brothers and sisters in Christ and sons of God. This idea is consistent with Jesus’ teaching on the resurrection, after which there shall no longer be given to marriage, and as such, no more procreation and raising of children. The Creation mandate, to be fruitful and multiply, would have been completely fulfilled and mankind redeemed. The remaining elements of a family that persists are the familial relationships, and the context where love (of God and one another) is practiced intimately and demonstrated constantly.

**The church and family**

The natural family that exists in NT time communities is different from contemporary Western families in three significant ways. Firstly, the families were larger because they would include extended family members and people who work in them. Secondly, there is little room for individualism as members find security and identity within the family. Lastly, the natural family has strong ties to the community. In Hellerman’s description of the collectivistic communities of the Mediterranean of the NT time, strong-group values were clearly being
practiced extensively: the group comes first, the most important group is one’s family, and the closest family bond was between siblings. He points out that Jesus requires that the new surrogate family, the church, surpass the members’ natural families. Jesus states this in Mark 10: 29-30, responding to Peter’s assertion that they (the disciples) had sacrificed all, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.” Jesus was not anti-family or contradicting his pro-family teachings and the law in setting cost-of-discipleship demands over natural family relations; he recognizes the high level of loyalty which was already passionately practiced in the natural family of that day and expects resistance and conflict to arise when families are divided over following Christ. He is demanding for this loyalty to be directed toward the new faith-family that he is building. N. T. Wright insightfully points out regarding the apparent counter-cultural command that, “the only explanation for Jesus’ astonishing command is that he envisaged loyalty to himself and his kingdom-movement as creating an alternative family.” The alternate family is to be built upon the existing strong relations of the family and given the highest priority.

Throughout the gospels, Acts and Epistles, it is easy to see that the church family of the NT was collectivistic in their teachings and outlook: material resources were often shared within and with other congregations, members who were disadvantaged were looked after, emotional


52 Ibid., 71. Hellerman cites N. T. Wright in his ground-breaking study of the life of Jesus, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 401, for this insight on the seemingly contradicting commands from Jesus regarding the family.
solidarity as demonstrated in many of Paul’s letters to the congregations he ministered to, even painful and difficult moments (wrong teachings, discipline, persecution) were faced together as a congregation. However, apart from the specific issues, events and actions described in the NT, particularly in the book of Acts, there is little that is prescriptive for the church as a family such as a leadership structure, governance, key roles and responsibilities of members and how they are to interact with the larger (secular) community and rulers of the land. The reason for that is simple; families, communal histories, governance, and the members’ physical and emotional needs are different from place to place. People in that era are also divided by racial and socio-economic status as well. Culture is essentially an expression of the dynamism of life, ever-changing and always transforming albeit at a generational pace. At the center of this temporal dynamism is the family unit, instead of individuals because in a family the past and future interact intimately with each other. For a God-fearing family, living within the salvation plan of God, grace finds many expressions which when culminated in the Jesus’ work on the cross, continued to launch more new expressions for a far wider range of cultures. As such, the church as a family cannot be easily be formalized and must find an expression that is relevant to its context, place, and culture in time. The church as a family adapted to the very culture it had hoped to influence and changed it from within, especially so when the church grew so large that it began to influence the state. After being recognized as a valid religion in AD 313 and later embraced by the Roman Emperor Constantine himself, orthodoxy became a major concern for the soon to be the religion of the state. Even as doctrinal issues began to be formalized by the early church fathers, the church began to take on an institutionalized form and function of a state church.
At the onset of the church age, the main functions of the church \footnote{Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 1060. The Functions of the Church are: Evangelism, Edification, Worship, and Social Concern. Some would break it into five as in Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church* model: worship, discipleship, fellowship, mission and ministry. \footnote{Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), Kindle Location 16288.}: worship, discipleship, fellowship (edification of the saints), and ministry (social concern), was derived from what went on in the Jewish God-fearing natural family and its community. Additionally, it was no surprise that Jesus had built the church on the family model because the entire creation and redemption plan (carrying the covenants) for mankind is predicated on and propagated by the functions, interactions, and actions in the natural family. There are many examples of this generational and descendant based concepts in the Bible: the creation mandate that was given to Adam’s family for all mankind, that sin taints all subsequent generations, that Noah and his family were preserved to repopulate the earth, that the promise of blessings passes down through Abraham’s bloodline, and in the same way, that the Holy Spirit was promised to those who repented and were baptized together with their descendants at Pentecost. This was by design since the family unit has the capability to endure the passage of time by reproducing and nurturing the next generation, allowing a legacy to live on. Evangelism or mission is the only aspect of the NT church missing as the gospel-centric Great Commission of the new covenant was yet to be added.

Today, the natural Christian family along with other believers represents the church. The evangelical church is a continuation of the OT images: people of God, the elect, the flock, the priesthood, the remnant, or in NT images: the body of Christ, the Temple of God, and a new creation.\footnote{Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), Kindle Location 16288.} Members of the natural family serve and contribute finances to the church and the church in return provides organizational structure, discipleship, fellowship and a place for
expressing corporate worship. The church is much less a family than an efficient organization providing leadership, structure, teaching, discipleship, administering the sacraments (baptism and the communion) and opportunities to serve, pray, fellowship, evangelize and worship for its members. Worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and mission can still occur in the family unit in cases where there is a desire to do so at a personal or family level, but it is no longer expected since the church provides or offers them as its primary function. Two important functions of the family that has been relegated to the church are discipleship and mission. In discipleship, the family is seen as a group of individuals and the church teaches the Word to the entire congregation from the pulpit as well as provide Bible studies to each member of the family according to their age, life stage and areas of interest. Missions are for individuals, couples or families who are called. Members of the church may join them in providing prayer or financial support.

While the church today is not regarded or seen as a family, many of them may have some family-focused ministries, such as marriage counseling, premarital preparation, marriage enrichment, parenting, and child mentoring. In general, these family ministries are provided on an as-needed basis to support marriages, families, and children from broken homes. In the fellowship and discipleship area, many churches have cell group or small group meetings which usually take place in homes or at times as a Sunday school class. These provide great opportunities for young adults and families to fellowship, enjoy discipleship and worship in a familial setting. It is clear that most evangelical churches today are focused on the edifying the relationship between its members and God and do too little regarding relationships horizontally between members, their families and to the community. However, some churches have begun to recognize the need to be more focused on ministering to families or being more a family-like
church, what this paper will refer to as a familial church. They see the building stronger families, restoring broken ones and assimilating young adults as keys to being a thriving church family, one who will bear a great witness for Christ and draw more people to him. Randy Stinson of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary shares this sentiment,” All of this is significant because, according to Scripture, the church is a family. Every believer in Jesus Christ has “received the Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15). God is the heavenly Father (Matt 6:9) who disciplines us like children (Heb 12:5–11). The church is the family of God, and family relationships represent a divinely ordained paradigm for God’s church, which is why it is so important for our relationships in the family and in the church to reflect God’s ideal.” 55 These churches have explored different approaches to being more familial in all their functions and ministries, something which we will be discussing in the following section.

Meanwhile, for many, the Christian natural family appears to have compartmentalized their spiritual lives, family life, work life, children’s lives, personal life and recreational lives, juggling time and relational investment to keep the compartments from falling behind or falling apart. While parenting is easier concerning providing physical protection and provisions, it is exceedingly more challenging than in the past in the area of nurturance. Add to the challenge that roles in the family are increasingly indistinct, leading to conflict, duplication and the lack of direction. The growing gap between the Christian culture and the culture at large results in tremendous pressure for Christians to adopt values that may be incongruent with Christian believers. The pressure to conform applies to all members of the family, and especially so with the young who are swept deeper into libertarian currents because of their immersion in secular

education and undeveloped tether to eternal truths. With the onset of age segregated Sunday schools and attraction based youth ministries molded after the parachurch youth ministries of the 40s, many parents relegate spiritual education and growth of their children to the church after the early years of preschool Bible stories and songs at home, in the same way it was for compulsory formal education in the secular public school.\textsuperscript{56} But the church fails to effectively engage and disciple the young in their congregations within the hour or two of somewhat wooden instruction each week, resulting in alarming church problem today where as many 20\% of youth leave the church when they leave home for college.\textsuperscript{57} Of this situation, Thom Rainer laments, “But the church is not capturing and engaging these students’ spiritual interests. In fact, the church is doing the opposite. We’re losing them because the church is uninteresting to them.”\textsuperscript{58} Familial churches see the urgent need to connect more broadly and deeply to families in their congregations to provide support, teaching, and equipping. Expanding the Christian cultural context around families will help to push out some of the worldly ethos that besiege them today at work or in school, in mainstream media, social and general entertainment media.

Even though the family is no longer a microcosm of the church, many of the issues that face the evangelical church today: membership decline, lack of growth, and low interest in local or cross-cultural outreach, are reflected in the natural family as well. Families are small, isolated (from extended family), struggling with time pressures and financial issues, and the lack of

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{57} Ed Stetzer. "Keeping Our Kids." \textit{Modern Reformation} (May/June 2014 Vol. 23 No. 3), 56. This data is often cited with 80-90\% dropout rate and while Stetzer’s 2014 findings shows a high percentage of 70\% as well, he explains that it includes those who are going through a transitional period only to reconnect later to a church after a break. In the end the dropout rate is 20\% since two thirds return after the hiatus. Nonetheless it is still a concern that one of five drop out.

relationships outside even in their neighborhoods. It is not hard to see that these are related because the health of a church is essentially a reflection of its members’ health and families are a significant part of every church. The solution is not a straightforward one size fits all answer. Families are complex and dynamic entities and so are churches although on a longer time scale. As such, a range of approaches were tried out, modified and eventually developed into a systemic approach or family ministry by various churches who view that the well-being of the family and the church are deeply intertwined. Ultimately, the solutions have grown beyond therapy (to salvage) and enrichment (to strengthen) programs affixed to the existing ministries to involve all of the church’s ministries. A strong proponent of family ministry, Timothy Jones, defines it as, “the process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the persons primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children.”

Diana Garland summarizes her views, “Family ministry is a perspective, a set of 3-D glasses we put on to look at everything the church does inside its walls and out in the larger world where it serves. Family ministry intentionally seeks to influence congregational life in ways that encourage the formation of families, to equip them to live faithfully as families, and to find and live into their calling in the world. We strengthen families so that they can be more effective pictures of and witnesses to the love of God.”

Both definitions point to the need for whole church or congregation to be involved as members of a large family. The familial church should be a place to belong.


(identity), of care (physical needs), of nurture (spiritual maturity), and of propagation (new members of God’s family).  

The familial church is relational

When a church is a family, one important aspect of the church is relationships. In the natural family, relationships go beyond friendships to a relationship that is sealed by God in the case of the couple and relationship connected by bloodline for the children. God ordains these relationships and thus they are not breakable; they provide the strongest and deepest framework for grace and sacrificial love. Relationships in the church are not naturally as robust, but they are also sealed by God, sealed to one inheritance by the Holy Spirit. (Eph 1:13) Paul exhorts all believers to be united in the Spirit: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3) The familial church, the fellowship of the saints, needs to be strong in connecting and caring one another. This bond is a hallmark of familial relationships; each one is invested in other members of the family.

Just as parents have to inculcate a fair and balanced view of each of their children, the church must encourage members to practice acceptance and love, avoiding prejudice and hatred especially toward those who are struggling with addiction, weaknesses, poverty and sicknesses. Healing and recovery require patience, perseverance, and empathy through supportive relationships in the church as much as a member of the family whose bonds are blood and his or her the wellbeing is in the interest of the whole family.

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Nonetheless, there are inherent risks involved in caregiving, both to the one giving and the one receiving. As such, living as a caring community require structure, safeguards and authoritative oversight from a plurality of leadership just it was bestowed on both parents of a natural family. More critically in the West, it requires a change of values from the pervasive individualism of today to a collectivistic strong-group mindset of NT cultures. Hellerman reminds his readers right at the onset, “Radical individualism has affected our whole way of viewing the Christian faith, and it has profoundly compromised the solidarity of our relational commitments to one another.”

Much more must be made of what the Bible says about dying to self (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:4-8), and the paradoxical losing of one’s life in order to gain it (Mat 16:24-25), in order to restore a proper biblical perspective on the selfish outlook and priorities in life.

Many of today’s families are also deeply scarred and disabled with brokenness, so keeping them intact and repairing them is a daunting task without communal support in the church. Single parents need support with their children, help with juggling a job and parenting, role models and spiritual formation. Many mental illnesses relating to depression, anxiety, and shame can be averted by breaking through the isolation and the self-incrimination arising from personal failures or losses if members can seek help and support through the relationships or experiences of an extended family. Sometimes more serious conditions can be diagnosed or detected when others are close enough to observe changes or abnormalities and to provide guidance. Yarhouse and Sells in their book *Family Therapies* point out, “it is the function of love, trust, security, honesty, vulnerability, stability and so on within family relationships that

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strong teaching healthy relationships supplemented with proficient pastoral and professional counseling if necessary should be readily available as deep relationships can encounter deeply rooted hurts, insecurities, and problems. Deep relationships are often transformational.

Building strong community is a key attribute of a familial church, but sometimes deeper relationships which take time to form can result in isolation from the community at large. The time required for warm relationships to develop raises accusations against some familial churches of being cliquish and unwelcoming to outsiders in their fellowships. A plurality of leadership and diversity in the families to include members who are intergenerational, at different family life stages (singles, couples with and without kids, empty nesters), and from different ethnic groups will prevent cultish or inward looking habits and practices from developing. Hospitality and evangelism are spiritual gifts that must be encouraged and practiced in the community. Deeper men-to-men relationships and sisterhoods are also naturally formed in the community as they grow in their God-appointed roles. “Iron sharpens iron,” in Prov 27:17, is especially true when brothers and sisters can speak into one another’s lives and hold each another accountable.

Lastly, the church picks up the responsibilities of the family for those who are without one: concerning widows (1 Tim 5:3) and in providing for those in need (Acts 4:34), much like the kinsman redeemer did for Ruth and Naomi. Governing institutions of that day only provided protection (security) and laws that ensured order was maintained for the subjects to be productive and pay taxes. The early church was obviously modeled from the family in providing for the physical needs of its members who are in need and taking care of relatives who are without

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support from kinfolk. In keeping “everything in common” described in Acts 4:32, the church operated more like a family than any of the prevailing organizations, not the Pharisaical system of religious law, oppressive Roman government, Plato’s form of socialism nor the ritualistic and enterprising temple system (Mark 11:17). The influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ works on both entities, in building the church and the natural family, the patristic family model itself underwent a measure of correction through Paul’s household code, to incorporate more tenderness over oppression and selflessness over egoism in the family which is reflected in the servant leadership and altruism that permeated relationships in the church. This is because Christ is the head of the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel grace (Act 20:24) and the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (Mat 24:14). For the fathers, in particular, Christ in his relationship with the church has set a model of self-sacrificing love and holiness for him as the head of the family.

**The familial church is intergenerational**

Although the family today is typically just the nuclear family, it was not so in NT times and more so in OT times. Then families consist of multiple generations living together; the older ones provide wisdom, and the younger ones provide the strength in the largely agrarian communities. The intergenerational family allows for spiritual wisdom and spiritual disciplines to be passed down the generations along with living skills and tradecraft which will enable the family to not only grow but endure. As children reach adulthood (no adolescence), labor resources increase coupled together with greater productivity learned from the gathered wisdom of the aged, allowing for families prosper materially as well. Strong intergenerational Jewish families during biblical times prosper and increase because of the stability offered by adhering to the laws and commandments of God. The family is blessed and preserved from sin,
abominations, and straying from God’s original intent when they remain faithful to God. The foundation and growth of Israel from Jacob’s sons and subsequent generations is a testimony of God’s blessings on the faithful family even while they were interned in Egypt. God’s blessings flow through the generations of the faithful, even when there are few who remain faithful such as the generations of the remnants.

The NT church is a continuation of the blessings on the faithful generations. The NT house churches was clearly multi-generational in Paul’s eyes; he addressed a familial community comprising of all generations, “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.” (1 Tim 5:1-2) Segregation was a recent development as far as the church is concerned, occurring within the twentieth century. Many reasons were cited: the rise of compulsory modern education, the disruptive world wars, industrialization, urbanization and a growing generation gap. Within the church, the success of parachurch targeting the post-war youth made church and leaders shift toward specialized age-segregated ministries as well. A large and highly opinionated Boomer generation that had little regard for traditions because of the great developments and cultural transitions occurring in their time, drove many of the changes in the church along the lines of Piaget’s cognitive development theories that highlighted the differences in learning styles over the age groups. Church growth experts who applied Donald McGavran’s Homogeneous Units Principle to generational cohorts added to the move to segregate the congregation.64

64 Holly Catteron Allen and Christine Lawton Ross. Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 36-41. The Homogenous Units Principle was a missiological term developed by McGravan that states that a group of people that have ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, or vocational similarities would be more comfortable together, whether as a subject of outreach or as worshippers.
In the haste to be more efficient, more effective and more relevant, contemporary churches have lost sight of the need to be multigenerational. The church is also infected by the radical individualism that has given rise to the notion of a personal faith and a personal savior that does not require community or anything else. There is nothing to be gained from those who had gone before, all the crucial bits of their wisdom has been recorded for posterity. In the same way, there is nothing else that needs to be passed on beyond that is already written and incorporated into the new teaching tools and curriculum that has been developed specially for each age group. The fallacy of these thoughts becomes obvious when each generation begins to reinvent the wheel, fall into the same pitfalls and worse yet, lose a vital connection to the future by cutting off the upcoming generation. The wisdom from the past is needed to help shape the present and in the same way a connection to the future generation will help shape the future. These connections are not in lifeless words on paper that are penned in the past but alive in the form of conversations, experiencing and responding to events together, learning from each other and building something new together. Paul’s exhortation to the generations in the church underscores this dynamism that unites the faith of all believers and lets it flow to its glorious end. For generations to work together, “It requires humility, mutual submission, and respect for different strengths and passions. Those virtues don’t happen easily. They emerge as we teach them and model them.”

Worship wars is an aberration to the very definition what worship is, which is primarily about obedience and offering instead of the experience and feelings attained. The reason Cain’s


offering was not favored is not explicitly stated but it reveals itself in his attitude toward the rejection. Cain became angry and jealous because he had been expecting something in return for his offerings; perhaps he had expected approval or even special favor or blessings. At the core of the problematic offering lies a prideful heart. Segregation feeds radical individualism but diversity and community are great therapies for narcissism. In a multigenerational church the worship team comes from all ages, the songs range from hymns to contemporary worship songs. Incidentally, millennials have taken a great liking to contemporized hymns and are especially appreciative of the richly devout themes, deep theology, heartfelt inspiring poetry and glorious history within its words. It is a generation that had grown somewhat tired of the praise songs and rediscovered a rich Christian legacy which was discarded. The church needs to be intergenerational so that ever richer legacies can be built and passed on in a continuum of greatness rather than a series of restarts.

In the same way, when the church models modern learning approach of inquiry and discovery in learning spirituality, many restarts, moments of certainty and confusion, failures and success along with their attendant emotional upheavals will replay itself out in the generations that follow. Arguably it produces deeper faith but as generations are left to discover the path of truth for themselves again some get lost along the way. Like secular education which it is modeled after, the education is more about the experience of working through and rediscovering the truths than applying and building upon it. In secular education, that part comes in college where practiced professionals finally teach one to become a teacher, engineer, nurse or preacher as themselves. Inevitably, there are dropouts expected in the approach because as much as it is a training process it is a weeding process too, to take out those who may be unable to demonstrate the standard required. It is a long process to the point where one can finally apply that which is
being taught in a vocation and most of the time is focused on priming the mind to think and communicate critically (inquiry), and then formulate core knowledge about everything (discovery). Teachers are trained to be facilitators in this process and little intergeneration interaction is expected. In the parallel spiritual education model in churches, the last step is completely missing or sometimes implemented as a young adult ministry.

The pedagogical approach of the Bible (seen mainly in the OT) which applies mainly to teaching of the law, statutes and eternal truths is fundamentally intergenerational, having the one who has walked the path in accordance with those precepts to teach the ones who will be doing the same in the future. This was set in the approach that Moses decreed to Israel in the Shema, to have the teacher first obey the statutes and then diligently teach them to those who will come of age to be accountable to the statutes as well. In the OT times the age of accountability is twelve. The account of Jesus in the temple at twelve seems to indicate that Jesus went through the learning process. There are three key aspects to this learning process: the student learns through studying and observing application, the teacher is a seasoned practitioner from the community of practice and the graduate is held accountable by a community of practice at an early stage.

In the last century, education in the church has to a large extent has adopted modern learning approaches for the spiritual formation of children based on schooling and age-specific curriculums. Education teaches about Jesus and the religion but not necessarily faith says John Westerhoff, a renowned Christian educationist.\(^67\) He rejects the Schooling-Instruction Paradigm secular approach as a good model for the church and proposes the Community of Faith-Enculturation paradigm for religious education. The faith community being the parents and church family who will provide common stories, authority, rituals, and life for the children.

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Enculturation being the interaction with all persons of every age in the community of faith. In Westerhoff’s mind, a Christian alone is not a Christian, and the teaching of faith must go beyond lessons about Jesus and the stories in the bible to an interaction with people who live and demonstrate these stories. Faith grows when it is demonstrated, both to the practitioner and the apprentice. The community of faith essentially needs to be intergenerational as the older generation exercises authority over the child to keep him or her accountable and growing in faith. In the secular model, teachers may be of an older generation, but they are relegated to be facilitators who have little authority outside their class and the narrow precincts of the curriculum.

The church is intergenerational as the older members have specific roles to play, particularly in teaching the young. In Tit 2:3-5 and in 1 Tim 5:1-2 there is a clear role for the older members of the church, much like in the household which was much larger and extensive at that time. In the family, older members are also expected to teach the younger ones who in return accord them respect and obedience, Kostenberger points this out as well,

“Paul encourages older women to train young women as mothers would their daughters in the natural household, encouraging them to love their husbands and children, to be working at home, and to be submissive to their own husbands. The same is true for older men in the church in relation to younger men, who need to be grounded in the Word of God and learn to overcome the Evil One (e.g., 1 John 2:12-14). This picture accentuates more keenly the fact that the church is built upon the model of the natural household as its spiritual equivalent.”

In the familial church, youth and children build trusting relationships with other older members of the church who in turn demonstrate an invested interest in the wellbeing and growth

68 Ibid., 75, 82.
69 Andreas J. Kostenberger and David Jones, God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2008), 253 Kindle.
of those who are younger. In this way, experiences, wisdom and spiritual truths can be passed down to the next generation.

Lastly, in relation to living a common life, serving in multigenerational teams is necessary because in a family, a call to serve goes to out to the entire family even when one member hears it first. As the member’s contribution to the family will be impacted by the call, then the whole family needs to answer the call. In the same sense, when a couple from church is called to the mission field, they need to share the call with the larger congregation who will rally behind in prayer, provide wise counsel and give financial support. There is clearly intergenerational interaction needed in doing service within or outside the community of faith since every member there has a vested interest in each other’s lives. Familial churches are intergenerational because every member of the family has a role and a part to play in each other’s lives.

**The familial church equips**

There is clearly a need for the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ, which is also the family of God, not simply a group of believers.

(Eph 4:11-16) “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.”

Paul’s mixed use of analogies and metaphors in the passage to present different images can sometimes be confusing to his readers. Here the body of Christ is a useful analogy to depict unity and a common purpose despite different roles of organs and limbs in a more literal
sense. The familial terms used here are less of an analogy but more of a metaphor on how a mature person compares with that of a child in the way they think. These are the clear takeaways from the passage, but the confusion that arises in these analogies is what the role of the family unit is in the church. Is the church to take over teaching, evangelism, and caring for all its members or does the head of the family units?

The church today has taken on the task of discipling all its members, whether children or adults, in its midst. But as was discussed earlier, it is a task the church struggles with, not only because the learning approach using the schooling and instruction paradigm does not teach faith but also because the Christian ecosystem (homogeneous community, extended family, neighborhood church, parochial schools and pro-religious media) around the existing teaching system has diminished significantly, according to Westerhoff. Thom Rainer concurs, “To be blunt, God has converted our children, but we have failed to disciple them. Our children grow up in the church and experience all the programs and fellowship, but they do not engage the truths of Scripture.” Since the mandate to the natural family from creation stands until the end of the age, so the parents’ responsibilities to the children, particularly of the father, to train up his descendants in the ways of God must continue to be paramount as seen in the Jewish traditions through the covenants. In a familial church setting this core responsibility is not diminished but crucial in providing the primary community of faith for the children. Paul makes this clear in his exhortation to fathers in Eph 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

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70 Ibid., 11-13.
It is clear that the onus is on the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The saints are the heads of the household whose ministries are their children. They need to be equipped as prophets, teachers, shepherd and evangelists for their ministries. What ministry is closer to the church than the families within it, and to their children who are spiritually young or being caught up with the things of the world to which they are exposed to for far longer periods of their life than their time in Sunday school or youth ministry? Unfortunately, most parents admit that they are ill-equipped and depend on the church to reach and disciple their children. However, according to Timothy Jones, 81% of church-going parents claim that no leader had approached them to equip them in this matter. This unaddressed need is a gap that results in many Christian kids falling through the cracks or find themselves disconnected from matters of the faith and the church.

In a familial church, there is a strong focus on equipping parents to minister to their children. The equipping for the parents could begin at marriage preparation classes to which further training such as leadership training for the men on fatherhood, and child nurturing sessions for the mother with mature sisters can be added. Timothy’s faith did not just come from Paul but through that which was demonstrated by his mother and grandmother over time. 2 Tim 1:5, “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.” Parent training for Sunday school and youth ministry involvement as teachers and opportunities in the teaching of the Word at the various meeting can fill up a church’s family equipping programs easily. As in the biblical model of teaching discussed earlier, there needs to be the demonstration of obedience and

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compliance to the precepts taught by the teacher and clear instruction to teach and build faith. Hypocrisy and double standards will surely “provoke the children to anger” and harden their hearts against the Lord. Teachers supplying purely informational instruction will result in a dead faith. Education is only effective in a setting where the spiritual truths taught are also lived out in action. John Boojamra, a prominent Christian educator in the American Orthodox Church, sees education in the church as a nurturing, communal and holistic development,

One hundred and twenty years ago Horace Bushnell, one of the pioneers of American religious education, noted in his *Christian Nurture* (1847) that the child learns by what he sees happening around him; "no truth is really taught by words, or interpreted by intellectual and logical method; truth must be lived into meaning, before it can be truly known." Does this conclusion not find a theological parallel when, *mutatis mutandi*, Meyendorff writes: "The role of the Church is not, therefore, to impose upon man's mind some truth which otherwise he is unable to perceive, but to make him live and grow in the Spirit, so that he himself may see and experience the truth." The family for the person, like the Church for its members, is the matrix of faith development. This parallel cannot be ignored any more than the implications of Ephesians 5.25 for marriage.73

A good point to engage in teaching children spiritual matters is through the family home worship. However since the institutionalized church came into being since Constantine, worship at the homes had been an optional task for the parents. The Reformation had begun to bring this back into normal practice. Paul Wilson in his dissertation on training fathers to lead in family worship describes the contributions of Martin Luther, John Calvin and the Puritans in bringing back the practice of Family worship in homes because they recognized that family worship is vital for spiritually healthy and growing families. Charles Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards in

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later times echo the reformers’ calls for it to be the basis of making the faith visible and tangible in the family. 74

Family worship in the contemporary Christian is a challenge because it is perceived as a duplication of the Sunday worship. Another factor too is the busyness of every member of the family, at work, at school, at church and sports activities whether for entertainment or when a member of the family is involved. Parents need to be fully convinced and committed to keeping the family engaged. Leadership in a familial church need to streamline the activities at church to help and equip families conduct their own family worship. There are many ideas and resources online, in books and gleaned from church friends on how to make family worship in an engaging, interesting and meaningful. Jerry Pipes and Victor Lee who wrote *Family to Family* suggests that the key elements of family worship are: sharing of Scripture (keep it simple, make it interesting, promote self-discovery), prayer for one another, and the participation of all. 75

Family worship is a crucial element of teaching faith to children as it puts faith into practice, demonstrating worship, prayer, Scripture and care for others. The spiritual leader of the home needs to be equipped to lead the family not only in worship but service, evangelism, and discipleship as well. Conducting spiritual functions in the family brings the corresponding spiritual concepts alive in the eyes of the children who are involved.

**The familial church has patriarchal families**

In the discussion on the household codes in Eph 5:22 - 6:4, the roles of those in the family are clearly spelled out. These roles are tied to the church as Paul draws strong parallels in

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the husband-wife relationship to the newly formed church. The leader of the household is the father, as his wife (Eph 5:23) and children (Eph 6:1) are subject to him. The Greek word for family, πατρία (Eph 3:15), implies that the family originates from the father. The headship of the family belongs to the father and it is not one which allows for the lording over of the members but one that calls for a sacrificial love for his wife and patient discipleship of the children. Paul’s household codes say little of the natural role of the father providing and protecting the family and focus more on spiritual leadership, in sanctifying the wife with the Word and teaching the children the discipline to follow all that God had instructed. The comparisons to Christ and his church sets very high standards for the husband. The role of the Jewish father is recast in the light the Gospel and the new family that is the church. The mandate to teach the descendants remain a top priority for the father.

The exhortations to the wife are somewhat brief, there are only two points which bracket Paul’s chiastic instructions pertaining the husband and wife relationship, one at the start exhorts her to submit to the husband (Eph 5:22) and the other at the end of the instructions to respect him (Eph 5:33). Although the mother has the strongest nurturing role as the one who gave birth to and nursed the children (1 Tim 2:14-15), not much was said about it here in Paul’s instructions for the household. As this code of behavior is being given to the family in the light of the gospel and new family of Christ, there is little change to the wife’s traditional role in childbirth and nurturing the children. Her submission to her husband, however, is now seen in the light of the sacrificial love of Christ as the head and savior of the church. The respect commanded of her no longer comes from a position of inferiority and subjugation but comes from a position of being elevated to one loved by the husband in the same way he loves himself, to be one flesh and being full and equal members of the body of Christ.
As for the children-parent relationship, it is noteworthy that it follows along the lines of the fifth OT commandment and its promises. Paul asks for children more specifically to obey their parents rather than just giving honor to them. (Eph 6:1). Paul also points to the need to continue teaching the commandments of the God as was practiced in the Shema (Eph 6:4). Paul’s use of the Lord instead of God points to Christ, for he is both. The new commandments introduced by Christ and the gospel would now be included in the discipline and instruction of God. Discipline, παιδεία, (used in 2 Tim 3:16, Heb 12:5,7,8,11) involves active training and correction, whilst instruction, νουθεσία, (used in 1 Cor 10:11; Tit 3:10) involves warning concerning future action. Here, the father is specially charged to provide not only instruction, νουθεσία (education, teaching) but correction as well to ensure that the children remain obedient to the νουθεσία of the Lord. There will be relational tension that will arise from providing correction, so Paul adds the extra clause not to provoke the children to anger or discouragement (Col 3:21). This will alleviate the harshness in a correction that may cause a rift in the parent-relationship, threatening all that has been taught to the child as he rebels. This clause is particularly apt for today’s young adults that have fallen out of the faith. Vern Bengtson in his longitudinal studies on the passing of religion across generations points out that many prodigals return to the faith of their upbringing when they mature if there are openness and acceptance in their parents. Biblical discipline is effective because it is conducted in a context where there are tenderness and love. In his book on Parenting by God’s Promises, Joel Beeke says, “Such loving rule of the home involves discipline—both preventive discipline, which is akin to training and nurture, and corrective discipline, or punishment. If we fail to discipline our children by both

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methods in a loving, fair, and firm way, we damage the entire parent-child relationship." The father is singled out for the Eph 6:4 reproach as there is a lack of tenderness and love in his relationship with his children, especially when viewed from the sacrificial love displayed by Christ for his church. The crucial change over all these instructions is from the perspective of the future Kingdom of God, where all members of the family will exist as equals, as brothers and sisters in Christ. The vision for children to grow and mature as co-heirs in Christ to the Kingdom of Heaven is surely a much grander than merely seeing them grow and live successful adult lives in the earthly community. This gospel-centric vision needs to drive the discipleship and spiritual formation of children in the family.

The passage not only offers correctives to the order in the household in the light of the gospel and Christ’s teachings, but it also affirms the patriarchal family structure. The specific roles assigned to the members of the family respectively argues for a complementarian structure. Egalitarians argue that the submission in Eph 5:21, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” is mutual and an overarching principle which implies equality in status and role in the marriage. However, it is difficult to see how that conclusion from a single verse can over-rule the lucidity and strength of specific roles voiced in the remaining passage of the household codes. That understanding would also be at odds with teachings on male leadership in the home and church found elsewhere in other passages as well (1 Cor 11:3, 14:34; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11-12; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5-6). Eph 5:21 needs to be seen as one of the five results of being filled with the Holy Spirit in Eph 5:19-21. The five are all participles, so it makes grammatical sense to keep them together in one sentence. The chiastic structure of Eph 5:22-33 also excludes verse twenty-one. The “one another” is not being used in a mutual sense but in general sense where

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submission is practiced amongst the believers who are filled with the spirit without any specificity on who is in submission to who. As in Rev 6:4, when the second rider removes peace from the earth, “the people slay one another” does not mean the one slain will rise up to return the favor or that no one will be left alive. The complementarian structure for the family was established at the beginning in the creation narrative where the woman is created from man, for man as a helper. As a consequence of the fall, the submission of the wife to her husband is restated in clearer and stronger terms (Gen 3:16). Most evangelical families do not outwardly subscribe to these egalitarian ideas but in practice do not know what headship in the family entails. Russell Moore speaks of this practical egalitarianism that prevails amongst evangelicals in the church today.

“Likewise, in her Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life Oregon State University sociologist Sally Gallagher interviews evangelical men and women across the country and across the denominational spectrum and concludes that most evangelicals are "pragmatically egalitarian." Evangelicals maintain headship in the sphere of ideas, but practical decisions are made in most evangelical homes through a process of negotiation, mutual submission, and consensus. That’s what our forefathers would have called "feminism"— and our foremothers, too.” 78

The family needs to rediscover what headship and submission mean as this impacts the authority structure in the church as well.

This patriarchal structure is reflected in the church leadership as well. The head of the church is Christ, church leadership is male, as is in the family. The leadership qualifications are described in 1 Tim 3: 1-16. It is not surprising that the main qualifications for the leaders pertain to their marriage, spouses, children and household since the familial church is modeled after the family. The roles of the leader are expanded to provide care (pastoral), leadership and instruction

from the Word for the church but not overlooking their role in their families. From their qualifications in 1 Tim 3:5, “for if someone does not know how to manage his household, how will he care for God's church? “it would appear that the church leader also needs to have a model family for all the other families in the church as they labor to lead and care for the church as well as his family. This double role may be the reason leaders receive a double honor (1 Tim 5:17) and conversely, they are judged more strictly (Jam 3:1).
Chapter 3: A study of family ministries and their impact

The research focuses on young adults and the church’s family ministries. For the youth who has reached the ages of eighteen and beyond, it is crucial to this research to understand the main spiritual influences had been significant in their lives. Most of the respondents are Christians who are college students, undergraduate or postgraduate. The anonymous survey was conducted through an online survey service and invitations with the links to the survey were sent out on social media and email.

The study on church ministries is subjective, but a longitudinal study is beyond the scope of the duration of this research. The majority of churches surveyed are Baptist Churches in Virginia which were selected from the Southern Baptist Convention Virginia website, those which show some focus on family ministries in their programs. The pastors were asked to identify and rate some of the ministries for families. The surveys sent out as an email and the forms included in an attachment.

Spiritual formation in the young adult

The first part of the study focuses on the spiritual formation of young adults in the church and the Christian family. The first observation that is obvious is the high level of influence from parents in the spiritual formation of Christian children who grew up in Christian homes. More than half the respondents list their parents or guardians as the highest influence, over other sources. This observation is not a surprising because faith is not taught as much as it is caught through observation and experience. This affirms the primary thesis for this paper that the Christian parents have the greatest influence on their children’s faith. This result is consistent across all age groups, from those who just left high school to those who are in their thirties. I had expected that there is a diminishing influence of the parents for those who had left home longer
even though I had expressly phrased the question to focus on spiritual development as they were growing up. However, the influence of parents on spiritual formation is clearly foundational and lingers in the lives of the respondents as adults. This is an encouraging and hopeful sign that the teaching function in the family is still robust.

Chart 1. Rating the importance of various spiritual influences.

For the 14% who did not find parents high or the highest source of influence, attributed their spiritual formation to all the other sources listed in the survey, notably to Christian friends, the second strongest source of spiritual influence in the survey. So although these results were derived solely from the respondents who indicated that their parents were active Christians, some had indicated that their parents were not the primary source of spiritual influence. I did not capture the reasons why each source was significant in the survey, so it is not easy to explain
why some had cited a different source of influence. However, none of the 14% had indicated that the parental influence was negative, 3% had indicated no influence and 11% low influence. As such, it was not likely to be caused by doctrinal issues or divisive theology but the relative strength of the other influences that diminished the parents’ impact in those instances.

Of the other significant sources of influence: Christian friends, pastors, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders and self-study, the emergence of Christian friends as a strong second source of influence with 25% of the respondents placing it as the highest and 55% rating it as high influence was not expected. While the category “Christian friends” is somewhat broad, some respondents provided some details in the “other” category of the survey question six that point to cell-based Bible study groups and Christian fellowship structures that young adults grew up with. These groups can be formally set up in church youth fellowships, school clubs or as an informal bible study group. These accountability groups and peer-led fellowship groups seem to play an important role in providing a context and community for the development and the practice of faith in young people today. It is easy to see why these groups of Christian friends are influential in the spiritual formation of young adults as they not only provide support for its members, they provide leadership training, spiritual growth, direction and the cultivation of spiritual fruits for those who are actively involved.

In many ways, this phenomenon has strong parallels to the secular learning process and environment that most young adults had grown up with, which is peer influenced and increasingly facilitator driven as they progressed through the grades. The secular school provides a community and the facility for self-discovery, creativity, critical thinking and knowledge acquisition foundational to the development of personal interests and interpersonal skills for self-actualization, a fundamental goal of education. The main difference between the secular group
based learning and the spiritual one is in the diversity of the community and the formal structures in the school groups.

The strength of these Bible study or fellowship groups is their focus on the study of the Word and how it applies to life. The discovery-driven and critical thinking approaches used in secular schooling when applied to spiritual matters may help to make the studies personally transformational. The weakness in this approach is a lack of structure and the insidious application of relativism of post-modernist thinking in the study of truths. A mentor-driven or teacher-led study group can help alleviate some of the problems associated with peer-driven study groups. In this area, church leaders need to reach out to assimilate and disciple transitional Christian youth studying in schools and colleges in the vicinity of their church. They have the opportunity to provide leadership and continuity for the spiritual development of transitional Christian youth from outside their congregations.

**Church connection for the young adult**

The survey also attempts to ascertain how connected to the church the young people who responded are. It is great to note that 35% (see Table 1) of the young adults actively serve in the churches that they attend as being connected to a church should include serving in that community of believers. The church, after all, is described as a body (Eph 4:15,16) where each member has a function. The family metaphor goes even further to support the need for all able-bodied members of the church family to contribute to the family, in the case of the church family, to exercise one's spiritual gifts in ministering and serving one another. This is especially true for the young adults who have reached the maturity and attained the capability to contribute in return for the care and nurturing poured into their lives as they grew up.
Yes, currently active and serving in the church. | 35.42%
---|---
Yes, attending a church but not serving | 47.92%
Yes, but not affiliated with any church at this time | 16.67%

Table 1. Responses of those who profess to be Christians.

However, it is not a great surprise that a large percentage of the respondents who attend church (65% in this survey) do not serve in the church. This response is consistent with the prevailing situation in most churches today where many believers of all ages attend church but do not get involved in the church community. The Pareto principle, a 20/80 rule of thumb that applies to natural distributions apparently applies to many church activities such as giving, serving, fellowshipping, attending and inviting others. This principle is especially true in well-structured large churches, as a well-compartmentalized business or non-profit organization. In the church, services from the members are voluntary, and little training is provided in most cases even though a high standard of work is expected. As such, members with the relevant skills fit in naturally and are sought by the church to serve, leaving others to be contented in the pews.

A familial church sees its members as stakeholders and sees the need to involve everyone in its activities. In the traditional biological family, children are given chores even as they grow to become contributing members of the home. Every member has a role to play in the home, the younger ones who are more capable eventually take a larger share of the workload in the family. However, cultural shifts have resulted in people becoming increasingly individualistic in outlook, even for the members of the biological family, children and parents alike. It has become a social norm that children do not to grow up to contribute to their families but instead they are

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expected to be independent as early as possible after the completion of their formal education to start their families. Such changes in the natural family seem to pervade the church as well, many of its maturing members do not see a need to contribute back to their church. Furthermore, many relocate to different towns for work and to set up their families. In joining new churches elsewhere, they also face obstacles in adapting and getting to know the new community.

Change, in this case, is required on both sides, for the church to be more missional in its discipleship and equipping roles, and for the young adults to be more invested in the church family, even if it is in a new and different community. These changes are counter-cultural, requiring a return to a more communal outlook and inter-dependence between the generations along with more dialog and openness to change.

**Passing a spiritual legacy to the young adult**

Spiritual legacy is passed down family lines; blessings flow through down genealogies, and promises are fulfilled in faithful descendants. Faith flowing down generations is a consistent theme in the Bible where faith is passed from those who are faithful, usually the parent or guardian. Spiritual legacies are by no means guaranteed, many families in the Bible fail to pass it down to all their children because of inadequate teaching/training or rejection/rebellion on the part of the child. Parents are given the responsibility to train up a child in the way he should go so that he will not depart from it when he is old (Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4) but the outcome sometimes does not turn out as expected. It can be seen in the survey that a substantial 25% of the Christian parents who are active in their faith have children who did not remain in the faith (Results summarized in Table 2. below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian Parents with more than 1 child (32 respondents)</th>
<th>All children Christians</th>
<th>1 or more children not Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are active Christians (28 respondents)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are not-active Christians (4 respondents)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Christian Parents and their children’s faith.

Christian parents who are active in their faith frequently face some of the problems that full-time ministers have with their kids in the church, aka PKs (Pastor’s Kids) whose issues deal with living in “glass house” conditions, high expectations, ministry conflicts and conservative lifestyles. Many of these issues can be mitigated with good communications, developing a God-centered home environment and practicing good parenting skills that will ensure that child inherits his spiritual legacy. The skills to allocate sufficient time together, set and manage expectations, motivate and discipline their children combined with the parents living out their faith actively greatly reduces the risk of failure. Unforeseen circumstances, uncontrollable factors, and external influences can still play an important role in whether the faith is successfully passed on but they can be alleviated with support from the extended family or a loving and familial church community.

The church community is essential to the development of spirituality in the children in its midst because the community of faith provides a context for how faith is practiced and lived out. Before a child becomes a brother or sister in Christ in the larger family of God, the church, the child needs to be nurtured and trained in the ways of the Lord. While the parents have primary ownership of this, the church maintains a strong vested interest in the development of the child as one of her members. Many churches today provide direct teaching to the young through its Sunday school programs and youth groups. This can cause some confusion and blur the
ownership of the child’s training process, resulting in conflicts and gaps in the spiritual
development of the child and hence problems at a later stage in life as an adult Christian, even to
the point of finding it hard to make faith relevant to life.

On the other hand, if the parents were not active Christians in the church, the rate of failure in passing down a spiritual legacy indicated in the survey (even though the sample of parents who are not active is small) is much worse at 75% (refer to Table 2.). This outcome makes sense because both the parents and the church have important roles to play in the spiritual development of the child. Without parents who are active in their faith, a child is left to discover faith without a role model. The truth of the Gospel is left to shine in from the outside, amidst the flashy but short-lived distractions of a culture that espouses relativity and promotes self-fulfillment.

**Church as an influence on spiritual formation**

The church recognizes that it must disciple and provide a context for developing spiritual gifts for its members. To that end, the church invests much of its resources into programs for the spiritual formation of children. In the survey three main sources of influence from the church were ranked by the respondents. In the first source, younger children are enrolled in age segregated Sunday schools where their teachers provide biblical education and application. High schoolers and young adults would usually have a separate program for themselves for further training in the Word and in the formation of Christian perspectives on life choices that they face at that transitional phase in their lives. The youth leaders are the second source of influence. Youth ministry takes place at a particularly formative time in the lives of the young people in the church, so it is not surprising to find the youth leader receiving a higher rating over Sunday school teachers who had spent a much more time with the children growing up in the church.
Finally, the teaching from the pulpit and the interaction with the pastor is the remaining key influence, and it is the strongest one, more the Sunday school and youth programs. (Refer to Chart 2)

![Influence of the church on spiritual formation](chart2.png)

Chart 2. Rating the influence of the church

While these three are all substantial influences to the respondents, it was noted earlier in Chart 1 that they all rated lower than the influence from the parents and Christian friends (larger church community). It is somewhat surprising since most parents or friends do not provide systematic teaching and a consistent theological framework in their bible discussions, prayer sessions, and devotions. The two weaknesses in these formal teaching and discipleship programs are that they are mainly focused on an intellectual basis for faith and that there is only a short time for these sessions for any role modeling to take place. Faith is not only learned through knowledge based training but from the practical demonstration of it as well.

Since the Sunday school teachers change as the children grow up, the opportunity for relationship development which is essential for role modeling is limited and discontinuous. Although the interaction in the classes is helpful in demonstrating aspects of faith, time spent together is a more significant factor in influencing the children. The impact of the duration of
time together is evident in the higher ranking of the pastor as an influence since they are exposed
to his teachings from the pulpit every week (from the time the children are old enough to join the
congregation for the full length of the service). The pastor is also the persistent role model for the
whole church (parents and friends as well).

The youth leader enjoys more time with his charges because they meet separately on a
weekday or Saturdays when they are not restricted to forty minutes or an hour of teaching time
as they do in Sunday school. There is also additional opportunities to interact more while play
games after their meetings. The additional time provides an informal setting to demonstrate faith
in practical ways. Apart from the longer duration, the place in the time of the child’s life is also
an important factor, as in the case of the youth leader who teaches spiritual truths at a time when
life decisions are being made. In all cases, the time and settings are limited in comparison to that
which is available for the parents and the intimate circle of Christian friends. The time constraint
is probably the reason why the teaching and training impact of the church are ranked lower in the
eyes of the respondents. Youth leaders have long since seen the difficulties in their ministry
which has limited face time or diffused interaction due to classroom settings. Their ministry has
to deal with teaching and entertaining youth who are less interested in growing spiritually than
having fun, socializing and having a good time. Some churches still see the youth ministry as a
specialized outreach program to connect with youth in the congregation, neighborhood or at the
nearby high schools, much like the parachurch youth ministries of the 70s. Having multiple
purposes defocuses and confuses the objective of the youth ministry as a discipling and
mentoring ministry. Youth leaders with effective and impactful ministries stay focused on
building relationships and mentoring their charges. One good practice cited by successful youth
pastors is to remain connected to the youth even if they leave town for college or work to
continue to minister to them and to ensure that none fall out of the faith during the transition to another faith community.

Regardless of the survey and the challenges with the ministry to the young in the congregation, the influence of the church is important and vital for systematic teaching and the community. A strong intellectual basis for the faith is vital when faith is tested in life. In a culture that cherishes diversity, faith is often challenged at an intellectual level by other religious systems, scientific theories, and contending philosophical ideas. These challenges mount as the child grows to be more independent and begin to interact more with the community outside the church so spiritual maturity must include fuller knowledge of spiritual things. Youth ministries must remain focused on equipping the youth for these challenges.

The church has a clear mandate to equip all the saints for the work of ministry. Although children and youth receive direct teaching from the church as they mature in life, the church’s equipping role is secondary to the parent or guardian. The church is gifted to equip adults (no longer children) to have them attain the knowledge and faith that match their physical age and stature. Paul points out the objectives and roles of the officers of the church in Eph 4:11-16,

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (ESV).

The youth is in a transitory position between the parents and the church while the young adult is the main target of the equipping for ministry in the church. It is not surprising that the successful youth ministry works together with the parents in training the youth. The church is sometimes
thwarted by internal conflicts, lack of focus, immature parents or bad adult role models that destroy the loving environment needed to systematically disciple its children, youth, and young adults. In the survey, a significant 26% of the responses indicated a negative or zero influence in their experiences with their Sunday school teachers and youth pastors. The negative report is likely to be attributed to one or more problems faced by the church that was mentioned earlier. The church needs to move toward being more familial in developing mature, loving relationships that can resolve differences and conflicts without division, and allow love to temper discipline or corrective teaching.

**Christian parents as an influence on spiritual formation**

Christian parents who are active in their faith usually recognize that it is a priority that their children be taught and brought up in the faith. It is the deepest desire of every Christian parent that their children know Christ and joins them in eternity. When the children are at an early age, Christian parents or guardians read them Bible stories and pray with them regularly, even before they can read and write. This training usually continues till the child is old enough to begin school, both secular and Sunday school. Then the child’s education and religious training are separately relegated to the public school teachers and Sunday school teachers respectively. While it has become a cultural norm for religious education to be relegated outside of the home, most Christian parents continue to pray with their children and have devotions to share what God is saying to them as a family even as formal Bible study is often deemed to be a church activity. Few parents devote time to teaching their children Scriptures systematically not only because they may lack time to do so but because they do not see any need to duplicate or supplement the teaching received from the church. Active Christian parents ensure that faith matters in the life of the family, make church activities and participation a priority, and engage in Christian service
and ministries in their church. As the actively serving parents build connections with the church community, it naturally expands the scope of the child’s learning experience as other adult Christians join the family in demonstrating Christ’s love and care for them. Children in active Christian homes understand and experience what a Christ-centric life is in a close and personal way.

![Chart 3. Rating the influence of the active Christian parents](image)

As a result of these interactions, it is easy to see why despite the lack of systematic religious teaching, parental influence has the strongest impact on young Christians. In the survey, 84.4% of the respondents indicated that parents have high or the highest influence on them (see survey results in Chart 3). The level of interaction and demonstration of faith in the family is far beyond that in any other source of influence, making it the most influential factor for young Christians. For the 15.6% of the respondents with active Christian parents who rate their influence as low or none, sometimes the parents lose their leadership role as the primary spiritual influence because they have relegated it to the church or chose to let their children will discover spirituality for themselves. For active Christian parents, there is the danger that demands and conflicts in ministry may inadvertently subvert attention from the family, as attested to by some
PK (Pastor’s kids). Nevertheless, in the OT sections considered earlier, formal religious teaching for the children is a priority and a key responsibility of the head of the Jewish household in Israel (Deut 6:4-9), and it remained so in the NT times. Moses held the matter to be of critical importance to the faithfulness of future generations. The absence of parents as a primary spiritual influence is one of the main reasons why some young people fall away from the faith in this age as well. Other sources of Christian influence are likely to lose out to counter-Christian influences of the increasingly pluralistic and secular culture in the West at present. Because of this emphasis on the importance of religious teaching at home and the increasingly liberal secular education in public schools, some Christian parents have decided to bring all formal education back to the home, both secular and religious. The homeschooling movement has also brought about family-focused churches. A good example is the Family Driven Faith church pastored by Voddie Baucham. Voddie firmly believes that Deut 6:7 and Eph 6:4 mandate to train and teach children is for all Christian families to own, so his church is focused on equipping families and coming alongside them to build a supportive faith community.\textsuperscript{80}

A church that has strong family focus strives to become extended family to all the families and members in the congregation. Besides equipping and building healthy families, the church needs to extend help many struggling families within the church and in the community. Families that are run by single parents, financially insolvent, maritally unstable and dealing with severe emotional and health issues need practical help, counsel, and support. The parents in these families have a difficult time training their children as most of their resources are limited and committed elsewhere. Relational time and emotional wellbeing, the primary ingredients the

\textsuperscript{80} Voddie Baucham Jr., \textit{Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes To Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk With God}. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 95. Baucham believes that parents must not abdicate their primary education role to the church even as they seek the best trainers for their child.
parents need for a healthy family, are simply depleted and exhausted. The family ministries in
the church that are geared to help these families need to include provisions for their children’s
spiritual development as well. The 15.6% of the respondents who indicate that the influence of
their active Christian parents is low or not available increases to 75% if neither parent is an
active Christian in the church. That is an obvious result since parents active in their faith would
be making an effort to influence their child. In the group of non-active parents, the source of
highest influence for these respondents (children) is somewhat varied, but the top three are the
youth leader, followed by the Christian friends and self-study. The youth leaders and members of
the faith community who rise to take up the role of being a positive influence for Christ are not
incidental but intentional because much effort is needed of them who endeavor to help and
influence another in significant ways. The church and the faith community needs to be a strong
spiritual influence so that the young do not fall away if the parents struggle or fail to provide the
positive influence needed.

Friends as an influence on spiritual formation

Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that Christian friends were a high or highest
spiritual influence for them (see chart 4 below). The role of Christian friends as a significant
influence on spiritual formation may seem surprising at first, but the reason for it becomes
apparent when one looks at what friendships are. Friendships are mutually beneficial
interpersonal relationships that are built with respect, care, and honesty. Friends share common
goals and work together to achieve them. For Christian friends, a natural common goal would be
to become more Christlike and hence both parties will challenge and support each other in
getting to their goals even as each has a separate and different journey to make. Close and
supportive friendships help to strengthen resolve and overcome obstacles to reach their common
goals. Friendships like this are formative as each one learns from the other to avoid pitfalls and to emulate each other’s the successes and victories. Friendships can expand to be a group of like-minded people, and in many cases, the group helps define a member’s identity.

![Influence of Christian friends on spiritual formation chart](chart.png)

Chart 4. Rating the influence of Christian friends

Fellowship is a key characteristic of all Christian communities. While *κοινωνία* means to come together, share, participate and to have communion, its purpose is articulated in Heb 10:24-25, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” It is to actively and positively influence one another to love and good works. It is within the context of the fellowship that practical faith is lived out. Modern day churches usually comprise of a large community of believers which makes it difficult to develop relationships with others. As such, contemporary fellowship takes place in small groups or cell groups which can be organized by geography, age group, interests or season in life so that deeper relationships can be fostered. These fellowship groups are reminiscent of the house churches of the first century where fellowship usually takes place in small groups of 20-30 people that can fit into a home. Typically these groups meet to worship, study and apply the Word, serve, and pray
for one another. In such groups, the active fellowship can truly be transformational as there is intimacy, truth, and accountability needed for discipleship.\textsuperscript{81} Many of the respondents in the survey grew up in groups like these.

Friendships can also be a channel for mentoring when a more seasoned and mature Christian befriends a younger Christian to provide counsel, dialog and to be a sounding board. Mentoring relationships in most churches are not part of a structured program and are ad hoc, as a follow up for a new believer, orientating a visitor or helping someone going through a difficult time. In some church communities, in a more systematic and inclusive manner, families “adopt” younger members whose parents are not part of the church. The adopted could be a neighbor’s child, teenager or college student from the nearby school or young single adults who are new to the church. That way, everyone is part of a family in the church, and there is greater multigenerational interaction in the community to facilitate mentoring relationships.

**Grandparents and Relatives as an influence on spiritual formation**

The role of extended family (grandparents and relatives in the survey) in influencing spiritual formation is low in the survey (See Chart 5). The extended family had played a more influential role in the past, not only in the Bible but throughout the history of the church as large households offered security and protection from poverty. At the turn of the twentieth century in the West, urbanization and the shift from a labor-intensive agrarian society to an industrialized one brought about the breakup of households that composed of multiple generations. Children would often have to leave home to seek further education or find jobs more suited to their training that are in the larger towns and cities. They would start their families there, far away from extended family. The diversification of skills due to the broad modern education received

\textsuperscript{81} Greg Oden. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a few at a time.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 171.
by the members of a household meant that there is no longer a common trade or a business that binds siblings together in many families. Many would have to leave for jobs elsewhere from their homes. The new age of mechanization also brought about much more mobility to the people who were constrained to walking and using horse-drawn carriages. Even as people grew accustomed to being separated by long distances they became isolated as the pace of their lives quickened and a multitude of other things crowded in from their new environments.

![Chart 5. Rating the influence of extended family](image)

There is a strong role from extended family, especially the Christian grandparents in influencing their children and grandchildren to be faithful followers of Christ. That is evident in Timothy’s life as his grandmother was featured along with his mother in bringing him up with a knowledge of Scriptures even though his father was Greek (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). They can certainly be a great help with their grandchildren and build strong relationships with them even the parents start to build their home and life together. They can provide love and guidance to their grandchildren without undermining the love and the authority of the parents since they are a natural part of the family hierarchy. Multigenerational relationships in the life of the
grandchildren help to prepare them to be more open to interacting and being influenced from those who are older, particularly those from the faith community who are vested in showing love and care to them. It sets the church community up to be a supportive extended family for the children as well. Other members of the extended family can have a stake in the lives of their relative’s children as well because they already have a natural connection that allows for them to invest time and care in their relatives.

**Self-study as an influence on spiritual formation**

In the information age, there has never been so much information available to children than that which is available at present; the volume information is ever growing. As such, the main premise of today’s secular education is inquiry and self-discovery. Teachers are not only tasked with imparting knowledge and information but also instilling analytical and critical thinking skills. The latter aptitudes enable students to sift through the vast amounts of information on any subject readily available to them and develop theories of their own to test out. So it is not surprising that self-study turns out to be a significant influence in spiritual formation (see Chart 6 below). About 60% of respondents found that self-study was an important influence on their spiritual formation.
Chart 6. Rating the influence of other external sources

Investing time in reading and studying the Word is transformational. Developing this habit in itself is a mark of spiritual growth since the Word of God speaks powerfully into the life of the reader. It is not surprising that 92% of the respondents who selected high impact for self-study have been Christians for more than six years. Self-study is for the more mature and better-trained students who already have the basics of the faith taught to them. For the young in the faith, instruction on the fundamentals and demonstration of faith is a better influence on spiritual growth.

The pitfall in this approach is that the student may end up wasting much time in reinventing the wheel rather than applying lessons to make things better. Taking the inquiry and self-discovery approach to developing rigorous systematic theology would be exceedingly time-consuming, and one can easily become distracted by the tensions that exist in Scripture and become ensnared by controversy. While one needs to be careful to focus on gaining a deeper
understanding and application of God’s Word, one must not end up attempting to construct a box to constrain God. Barring that, there are many study Bibles and centuries of Christian resources which are helpful in illuminating the Word and helping one in finding its application in life. With some due diligence, one can grow one’s faith by applying the deeper Bible truths and also learn from the lives and teachings of Saints who had made the journey before.

While self-study can be truly formative, the selection of the supplementary materials to the Bible study can be another pitfall. Close to 15% of the respondents find self-study to have a negative impact on spiritual growth. As such, many find that internet sources such as discipleship websites, blogs, and sermon downloads were not effective as a significant influence in spiritual formation (see Chart 6 above). Perhaps the approach in these sites is too nuanced or too narrow to be a systematic and comprehensive spiritual growth program for younger Christians. Like the self-study group, using internet resources is beneficial for the more mature Christians because of the deep and narrow scope of the discussions in them. For the 20% of the respondents found internet resources a significant influence in their lives and 90% of them have been Christians for more than six years.

**Summary of the first survey**

The survey captured responses from fifty Christian students; most are in college and others still in High School. The key finding is that parents are the most significant influence in the spiritual formation of the child. Friends come in as a close second to parents. Friends make up the more intimate faith community in the life a believer and close friends share common goals. They provide the crucial feedback, accountability, encouragement and support towards the common goal of being more Christlike.
Church ministries for the family

Part two of the survey assesses the ministries that equip families in churches. Of the 150 surveys sent out to the churches, only 15 churches responded to the family ministry survey (see Appendix B for details of the survey) sent to the senior pastor/elder requesting information on family ministries. The churches were selected after visiting 250 church websites listed in the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia to narrow the field down the churches to those that had ministries for families publicized in their websites. The number of churches which responded was disappointing for sure, but perhaps the response was indicative of the importance of the topic to the churches being surveyed. The lack of responses notwithstanding, the ones who responded provided a good indication of how important the equipping families is as the mission of the church. One of the survey questions that helps to ascertain how important the task of equipping families is to the church’s mission garnered the responses below:

![Chart 7. Family Ministries as the church’s mission](image)

Only 27% of the churches who responded saw that it was important to include the family in its vision or mission statement. Even with as many resources channeled to support the families in
their church, with programs such as youth ministry and Sunday school, the remaining 73% of respondents either has mission statements that only indirectly reference equipping families as a purpose or do not mention the family at all. These programs may be purposed for equipping certain members of the family (the children), but they are not envisioned to do much for the family as a whole. The selective program is an issue that was raised by Timothy Paul Jones concerning traditional program-driven churches,

” When this programmatic model dominates a church’s ministries, students’ and children’s ministers may see parents in passing, but they do little to transform parents’ relationships with their offspring. (After all, don’t Sunday school, children’s church, and youth group provide the principal contexts for the discipleship of the church’s students?) “Success” is defined in terms of high-energy events that students experience in virtual isolation from other generations. Such youth and children’s ministries seem to expect students to become integrated with their families at home even as they model the dis-integration of their families at church.” 82

The traditional programmatic approach to ministry sets up many activities and programs that are often siloed, and each focused on a specific set of problems or desired outcomes. Although they may have a common underlying goal initially, each ministry eventually develops its objectives and finds itself in competition for resources with the other ministries. There is a common notion in many of the churches that ministering to parts of the family is a family ministry. Family equipping programs should minister to the family as a whole, not as standalone programs for the benefit of certain members of the family only. There needs to be a clearly articulated goal or an overarching mission statement that governs and links all family equipping activities and ministries.

In any case, of the six activities for equipping families that are listed in the survey, youth ministry was rated as the one with the highest impact family-equipping ministry (see Chart 8).

82 (Jones, Renfro, et al. 2009), 12.
This outcome is not surprising since that is the area in a family that is in need of the most help, in bringing up their children as Christians even as they transition into independent adults. A close second to that is the Sunday school programs that provide discipleship and community for the children in the church in age-segregated classes. The main difference between the two ministries is that the teachers in the Sunday school classes are usually the parents themselves or more mature lay members of the church whereas the youth pastor is usually a seminary trained staff member who specializes in teaching and working with youth. The youth ministry and Sunday school programs are seen to be the most important church contributions in equipping families. There is no question that making disciples is clearly an important charter for the church, but it may be a mistake for the church to view children as disciples independently of their families in its disciple-making programs.

Other family equipping activities such as parenting or marriage classes and home cell groups are directed at the parents. These activities received a lower rating regarding their impact on the family even though the spiritual strength and health of the family lie in the parents’ relationship with each other and with God. The ratings are low because not all churches have
them in their programs. Although the larger congregations have more activities and programs than smaller churches, the selection of a ministry is an intentional decision by the leaders of the congregations based on their vision and mission for the church. There also seems to be a lack of a consensus regarding the impact of home fellowships and parenting/marriage classes, although, from most Christian parents’ viewpoint, teaching and workshop classes that help with their relationships and parenting skills are always useful. However, many would not seek help in their family affairs until a crisis is upon them. No one disagrees that are enormous pressures on the role of a parent and relationships in the family today, but it falls on the leadership to be proactive and sensitive to the needs of families in the congregation so that some of the crises that inevitably befall families can be averted.

Activities that impact the entire family such as serving together in a ministry or attending outings and camps are rated moderate to high in its impact. However, not all churches are proactive in creating opportunities and events that bring the family together because of the effort and resources required. On the other hand, the targeted participants find it hard to clear their calendars for these events even if the church needs to promote them and aggressively. Though these activities have a strong impact on families, both the leaders and the parents could be more committed to them. This paper will assess each of these ministries individually in greater detail.

**Church focus on the young adult – youth ministry**

Youth ministry is common to all the churches surveyed. It represents the hope of church in overcoming the alarming loss of youth members from the church and the faith mentioned at the start of this paper. Not surprisingly, 93% ranked it from medium to high for its impact on equipping families (See chart 9 below).
Most churches invest in full-time staff, a budget for retreats and outings, and in larger churches, sports facilities such as a basketball court or a multipurpose hall. Youth ministry is obviously a high priority and well-resourced ministry for the church. It is a response to the grim statistics that show many young adults who despite being churched all their lives, find themselves leading an unchurched life as soon as they leave home. Church leaders and parents recognize the need for more serious discipleship and effective spiritual training programs for their teenagers even as they prepare to leave the home to ensure that they do not get caught up in the things of the world later. It is the last chance to make an impact in the lives of these young adults. As critical as the issue is, there is some confusion though about who is ultimately responsible for the discipleship of children in the church.

To the question in the survey regarding the primary owner of a child’s discipleship (Question 8), there were only two responses selected out of the four offered. It is great that the majority, 79% of the church pastors surveyed pointed to the parents (see Chart 10).
The remaining pastors, however, do not see that they are usurping the Christian parent’s role in their family when relegating the primary role of discipleship of their child to Sunday school teachers and youth pastors, who are arguably more objective, well-trained and better equipped.

The problem with that idea is that the youth pastor has very little time in the children’s life to be a significant influence on them. The primary caretaker of the child who has much more time with the child must have the responsibility to ensure that the child does what is right and provide intervention when something is not right.

**Church focus on the children – Sunday school ministry**

Sunday school is another major investment of the church’s resources, hence its high level of importance to the church. Just like youth ministry, 93% of the churches surveyed indicated a medium or high ranking for the ministry (See chart 11). The churches make the mandate to make disciples one of its key purposes, and as such it organizes Sunday school classes for all ages. It is set up in similar ways to the classroom-based education model in public schools. It is organized for efficiency and deploys effective teaching curriculum to teach the fundamentals of the faith systematically and correctly. The teachers are usually the parents and some mature older
Christians on a volunteer basis. In larger churches, the Sunday school ministry is so large that full-time paid staff are needed to organize and run the school. Notably, the one church that did not have Sunday school ministries (see Chart 11) had indicated that parents are primarily responsible for their children’s discipleship and places a high priority on the home cell (intergenerational) and youth ministry. Parenting classes and serving together are also considered high-impact in that church.

![Chart 11. Impact of the Sunday school ministry](image)

As discussed earlier, the effective transference of faith must include a practical demonstration of faith as seen practiced in an established and trusted relationship. The involvement of Christian parents in Sunday school is clearly a good thing since the kids will find them easier to relate to as parents for other kids as well. In the survey, 73% of the churches take advantage of this natural relationship, especially the larger congregations who have many parents and children in their congregations (see chart 12). Parents are a natural resource for staffing Sunday school in churches of all sizes although other mature Christians may have to continue in
that role even after their kids have grown up if suitably new qualified parents are not available.

All four of the churches had indicated that parents are rarely or sometimes involved were small churches with less than 200. This response contradicts their responses in the same survey indicating that parents have primary responsibility for the discipleship of the children. There may be a lack of intentional equipping of parents to be involved and teach Sunday school in these churches.

![Chart 12](image)

**Chart 12. Parents as teachers in Sunday school**

**Church focus on the parents – marriage/parenting classes**

In the overlapping sets of data presented in chart 13, 20% of all churches who responded do not conduct marriage or parenting classes while 33% rate these classes as high impact and 19% go as far as running marriage and parenting classes every week. Most churches, 55%, run such classes on a quarterly basis. There is obviously some reservation in the mind of some churches regarding the usefulness and importance of such classes for the parents and parents to be.
The purpose of the skills and gifts to the church has always been to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11). However, direct ministry to equip families emerged only in the 70’s responding to the marriage struggles and brokenness found in families in modern times. While teaching on the family and parenting has traditionally only been from the pulpit and dealt mostly with the permanency of biblical marriage, manifestation of love, faithfulness, and obedience, the emerging ministries had to deal with many more marital and parenting problems. The church was facing a crisis in the increasing number of Christian families facing financial difficulties, failing in their relationships, struggling with physical and mental health issues and becoming drained fully from juggling careers and child raising. Much of the stress is the result of a modern urban living, an increasingly liberal lifestyle and a continuous barrage of worldly distractions and temptations. Some churches launched ministries that can help to prevent marriage failures or help those who are broken to recover. Marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, financial stewardship classes, programs on being
godly men and women of faith, and parenting workshops/Bible studies are some of the proactive equipping programs to strengthen families and to help them in building God-centered families. Two major parachurch organizations, Focus on the Family and Family Life began their ministries in the 70s to become a resource for churches who were in need of family and parenting material for use in equipping programs. Due to the varied needs and broad subject area, there is a lack of a systematic equipping program for parents. Churches also struggle in developing programs and channeling resources to them. This struggle is reflected in the survey with the lower priority and less importance assigned to such programs by the leadership. Only two churches surveyed run parenting programs regularly on a weekly basis, and it was not surprising that they have equipping families in implied in their mission statements. What is evident is that proactive ministry to strengthen families requires missional intentionality and preparation on the part of the church leadership.

**Church focus on the parents – home fellowships (cell groups)**

In the survey, the churches are almost equally divided concerning the impact of home cell or small group ministry as a family-equipping ministry. Chart 14 shows that almost 40% of churches in the survey designated a low or no impact versus 60% who find it of medium or high impact on equipping families. Most of the churches which assign a low or none to the impact do not practice small group ministry (indicated by zero frequency of meetings). They were not necessarily limited to small congregations either because one of them had an attendance of 1500. Most of these churches are not convinced that home cell groups will be able to add anything significant to their Sunday school classes (adult groups) where fellowship takes place, and biblical life lessons are discussed every week. The adult Sunday school classes which are usually grouped according to age, interests and live stage, meet either before or after the main services
for about an hour. Churches who do not have home cell groups would invest most of the discipleship effort in these Sunday school classes.

Home fellowships in equipping families

Home fellowship groups are different from these Sunday school classes in several aspects, they meet at homes, spend more time together, include meals or snacks to extend the time of fellowship, and frequently include children (in most cases). The home fellowship groups in many churches are organized geographically for outreach and logistic reasons, although there is a lot of flexibility in how the groups are formed and where they meet. Since the home is the central meeting place, the host family is usually intimately involved in these meetings. The home fellowship groups provide a very different atmosphere for worship than the church, the study of God’s word, prayer and fellowshipping because of the intimacy of the home and the deeper relationships that develop there. Home fellowships provide a great opportunity for equipping families through service, study and application of God’s word, wisdom, and counsel of older Christians, and prayer.

Church focus on the family – serving opportunities
Serving in ministry is almost universally seen by churches as a great way to equip families (see chart 15). It is a display of faith made real and an excellent teaching opportunity if the family is serving together with their kids.

Service is an outpouring of God’s love manifesting in the lives of his people. When the church provides and promotes service opportunities, members who participate and invest their time in them can develop spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22) in their lives and exercise their faith in practical matters (Jam 2:26). It also demonstrates the love of God in one’s life and to others. Ultimately service in God’s name glorifies Him in a real and tangible way. Children being involved early not only learns how to serve but acquires a heart and ears for others who are in need. Many parents recognize that it is critical to demonstrate their faith in front of the kids so that faith becomes a relevant and tangible thing in their lives. So spending time and doing ministry together is vital to families who want to ensure the spiritual legacy is passed on from generation to generation.
There are some ministries in the church which are only open to adults where it is inappropriate for minors to serve such as prison ministry or disaster relief but the visible act of the parents in serving provides a demonstration of faith in action for the children. The parents must explain or show the child what serving God entails and how it is helping someone because the child may not understand why the parents had prioritized the needs of others in his or her life. Resentment may mount if there is a lack of understanding why service is being rendered. Perhaps the church may need to be more careful about serving drawing the parent away from the family. It needs to help explain the reasons for serving, whether it involves the kids or not, otherwise, it can turn out to be a negative lesson about religion and God at the end.

**Church focus on the family – camps, outings, and family events**

Organizing camps, outings, and family events provide the church a great opportunity to invest and minister directly to its families in a fun and informal way. At these events, church leaders can teach specifically on biblical family values and encourage parents through the Word. Gathering of families helps strengthen relations with the extended church family and foster more intergenerational interaction. In the survey, 40% of churches agree that such events are of high impact in the equipping families. However, not all churches are willing to invest in such activities, as seen in the survey where 50% of the churches have family events only once a year or none at all. Many churches (42%) run such events on a quarterly basis, and only one church have gatherings of families once a month.
There are many factors that deter the implementation of such events. Firstly, such events require much church resources to organize and to run, especially whole family retreats and camps. Furthermore, they can be a burden to families who cannot afford to pay or contribute to the event even when they are heavily subsidized by the church and members who can afford. Secondly, the timing of such events is often a problem for families whose schedules are already full with vacation plans, school activities and holiday events. The church which organizes monthly events would probably have to run them on Sundays after the service as a picnic luncheon or a potluck in the evenings to ensure good participation. Special retreats and camps need to be promoted early to ensure stronger participation. Participation is going to be 50% to 60% for such events. If the church is large, with 200 or more in attendance, the logistics for a church-wide camp or retreat would be daunting. Lastly, family events tend to exclude the singles and seniors who do not have a family with them anymore. Leaders must take care to be more inclusive in organizing these events, but that would necessarily mean downplaying the event as a
family gathering. Balancing the needs of the participants is more challenging if the church has not intentionally cultivated an inclusive familial atmosphere.

**Ministries for the young adult**

In the survey, an attempt was made to see where mentoring and intergenerational interactions take place in the church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 17. Mentoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do mature Christians provide one-on-one mentoring to younger members, particularly the children whose parents do not attend the church?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a formal program is in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but on an ad hoc basis when a request is received or a special need is observed (new believers’ class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, all teaching relationships are class or group based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses in Chart 17 indicate that while mentoring is no longer a standard practice for discipleship of young adults, although it still takes place as ad hoc arrangements made only to meet a particular need at the time. A few churches have even done away with mentoring altogether for classroom teaching programs. Classroom teaching is much more efficient and consistent. However, it can be argued that mentoring is the best form of intergenerational discipleship, as seen in the practices by the prophets in the OT (Elijah and Elisha, Eli and Samuel) and the apostles in the NT (Barnabas and Paul, and then subsequently, Paul and Timothy). Jesus himself mentored the 12 disciples as they accompanied him in his ministry although he taught the other followers and multitudes in groups. Mentoring takes more time than
classroom teaching, but it allows for a greater degree of interaction and a more personalized teaching plan in accordance to the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee.

Intergenerational interaction greatly helps in closing the gap because it fosters communication and an interest in each other’s lives. From the results of the survey, it is heartening to note that there are still many points of interaction between the generations in the church today (see chart 18).

![How do young adults (singles) interact with families?](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do young adults (singles) interact with families?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational cell group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole congregation events (Meals, outings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve together (Ministry/Service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0.00% 20.00% 40.00% 60.00% 80.00% 100.00%

Chart 18. Intergenerational interaction

Churches need to be intentional in its fight against the drifting apart of the generations by implementing intergenerational ministries, activities, and worship. Openness to change, dialog, and a willingness to serve one another will help overcome any differences that may emerge when working together. Generational ties in families are also strengthened through these intergenerational activities in the church. One area that is in need of improvement is in home cell fellowships, but as previously discussed, the churches are still divided on whether the ministry is worthwhile implementing. The intimate fellowship in intergenerational home cells is a powerful tool in closing the generation gap in the family and between young adults and the older members of the church at large. The fellowship in home cell groups in churches that run them do not
normally include young children, a babysitter or a parent minds them during the meetings but the older children are welcome to join in the worship, Bible study, and prayers. Their presence does not detract from the meetings core activities, but their interaction with the adults is often a great learning experience for all.

The home – a family altar

The family altar is not a concept taught to families by churches, and in some cases, it is not expected of Christian families to practice it. The survey results reflect this in chart 19.

Do families worship, read Scripture and pray (family altar) together in their homes?

- Yes, all parents are taught and expected to practice that regularly
- Yes, some families do it on their own accord
- Not known, it is a personal matter
- Not expected to do so

Chart 19. Family Altar

It is disappointing that only 13% of churches surveyed teach parents about having a family altar and holding them accountable to do so. Families are left on their own regarding this in 80% of the churches surveyed. This ambivalence is disconcerting as this powerful family equipping tool is sorely missed in the modern Christian family which is often so overwhelmed with work, church activities, school, sports, recreation activities, and planned vacations that there is simply no time to do a family altar that fits everyone’s schedules. Ironically, it is this activity that can help them unshackle themselves from their incessant interruptions, chronic busyness, and overloaded schedules. It is mystifying that Christians today are all taught by the church to have
personal worship and prayer times with God but rarely taught or encouraged to worship God and pray together as a family. It would seem that Christian families who continue the practice are somewhat archaic or cultic, as family worship has been superseded by the corporate worship and teaching at the church, along with personal devotions and prayer at home as the modern expression of the faith. Nonetheless, this is a departure from the biblical practices seen in the OT and the NT where households are the centers of worship and religious education.

Summary of the second survey

The church survey reveals that there is much more evangelical churches could do to equip and build strong families in the faith. Firstly, there needs to be a clear vision or mission articulated for the church regarding its ministries to the family. This overarching mission weighs all ministries the church carries out to see how the families in its congregation are impacted. Programs such as Sunday school and youth ministry are set up to minister to the children in the families, but the parents are often not targeted for training in the church. Equipping parents to be the discipler of their children needs have a higher priority in the church. Parents must own the discipleship of the children. The church plays the role of the extended family, providing support, training, and opportunities for the intact Christian family to grow in their faith.

For broken families, the church needs to intervene as members of the extended family would, to help repair and heal the brokenness. To encompass the needs of the family today, equipping ministries in the church needs to include triage and recovery ministries as well. As for the interaction with children, it is ultimately the strength of the relational connection between parent, teacher or older adult with the child that will determine how successful one is regarding passing on spiritual truths and matters of the faith. Ministries that encourage interaction between the generations such as serving together in ministry, social gatherings, home cell and mission
trips helps to close the generation gap. In the home, the family altar can be the best equipping tool for the family to draw every member closer to God. Church leadership should revive this practice in every Christian family by equipping and teaching families about the family altar.
Chapter 4: Effective ministries to equip family

The surveys have provided a better understanding of how young adults connect and become influenced regarding spiritual matters and what the current ministries in the church to families are. The theological study of the family and the church earlier provides a biblical perspective on the role of the family and the framework it uses to pass on the faith and preserve the covenantal promises/blessings for future generations. In integrating all the information, this chapter will offer a critique of the family-equipping ministries and describe how they can be effective in equipping families.

Sunday school

The Sunday school ministry is a good discipleship and equipping tool for the children who participate in it. It provides a biblical foundation for their faith and a context to begin building that faith in an efficient and effective manner. One adverse effect of this efficient and effective ministry is that some parents begin to absolve themselves of any responsibility in systematically teaching their children important matters of the faith, thinking that they cannot add to or do any better than the job that’s being done. Their responsibility is to ensure that their children participate in the classes. It does not help that, as with the situation with the youth ministry, some church leaders truly believe that the ministry assumes full responsibility for the discipleship of the children. Much of this thinking is derived from the secular education model in public schools where the state takes full responsibility all basic education necessary to make children functional members of society.

The error in that thinking that the Sunday school teaching ministry can be the primary and sufficient discipleship tool can be seen when one considers the two hours or less of teaching and interaction in Sunday school in comparison the 33 hours (average) spent in public school.
Public schools teach basic life skills like reading, writing, arithmetic, societal norms and history, stopping short at the vocational skills needed to earn a living, whereas Sunday school to youth ministry covers similar basic life skills plus the skills to live an independent life of faith by the time the child becomes an adult. In addition, the two educational entities are also in competition with one another to develop the child’s worldview. Being diametrically opposed in an increasing number of areas, each tries to obliterate the other or entrench itself in separate compartments in the child’s mind leaving behind many unresolved ideas.

Sunday school should be seen as a supplementary discipleship tool, aiding the parents by providing a systematic and efficient teaching syllabus on important aspects of the faith for the children. The church plays a vital role in providing parents with such a tool, as long as it does not assume to take up the primary discipleship role for children from their Christian parents. Sunday school ministry must acknowledge and live with the limited time it has with the children. Even for those from broken or non-Christian homes, the role of the spiritual parents needs to be assumed by mature Christians (adoptive spiritual parents) who are willing to invest much more time in building a strong relationship rather than an educational system or process that is time-limited.

Some churches have allowed for the Sunday school teachers to be attached to the group of children they teach so that they can follow the children through the years they spend in Sunday school in order that a longer term relationship can be established with their students. This practice makes it harder for the teachers and the administrators to teach and evenly load classes but the long term connection and relationship enables faith to be taught more effectively. When a church is focused on equipping the family they will see themselves in partnership and in a supportive role with the parents in providing a solid religious education for their children. Some
familial churches such as the one pastored by Voddie Baucham (as well as the singular church in this survey) rejects age segregated Sunday school completely because the classroom environment would limit inter-generational relationships, isolate the child from real-life situations and in addition, they would lose the blessings of the fifth commandment (Deut 5:16). Baucham would advocate that the parents themselves provide the systematic teaching on religious matters and when they go on to demonstrate how those principles are applied in life, the discipleship of the child is much more comprehensive and palpable.  

Youth Ministry

Youth ministry is so critical to church’s discipleship program, yet today it is a frustratingly multitasked ministry, burning out its leaders and failing to deliver the high expectations of parents and church leaders alike. The origin of youth ministry in the church is a good example of the traditional programmatic approach to ministries as it was started in response to the special discipleship needs of youth that could not be met by the Sunday school programs which have limited time, more constrained activities and limited attention of part-time lay teachers. It began in the 70’s and the new program was not responding to the grim statistics of the youth leaving the church today, rather it was in response to the success of the parachurch youth-centric outreach efforts. The initial goal of youth ministry was to reach out to unchurched youth (and their families) and get them to the church by incorporating a vibrant youth group ministry in the church. The enterprise took off with a life of its own, and in keeping pace with popular culture, the MTV era, the entertainment portion of the meetings was ratcheted up a notch.


84 Mark DeVries. Family-Based Youth Ministry (Revised and Expanded Edition). (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 44.
to draw in crowds. Youth ministry held much promise, but Dave Wright of the Gospel Coalition sums up the four frustrating fruits of the four decades of youth ministry that has now become an institutionalized ministry in every church: isolated youth groups with little or no intergenerational relationships, an ineffective “edutainment” obscured gospel, harvesting converts but not making disciples, and a youth culture today that does not expect to be challenged.85 Mark DeVries has this to add, “The crisis in youth ministry is, simply put, that the ways we have been doing youth ministry have not been effective in leading our young people to mature Christian adulthood.”86 The sad statistics of church youth today leaving to live outside the church attests to the veracity of the lamentations of the leading youth leaders cited above. The pressing question that arises is: How then is this ministry the one that churches hope to have the greatest impact on equipping families?

It is the past that has led to the reforms in youth ministry today. The problems with youth ministry mentioned earlier have set DeVries in a ten-year quest of experiments to reform the ministry. He sought to mend the generational isolation and reassert the Great Commission’s call to make disciples back into the program. In the process, he rediscovers the nugget that was tossed aside by the youth ministry leaders of the past. In the original parachurch youth outreach programs, older, more mature Christians like Jim Rayburn (who was 32 and just out of DTS when he founded Young Life) built relationships with the youth of their day to earn a right to speak into their lives, albeit that the older Christians reached out to the youth in their culture.87 It


was through the inter-generational relationships that the truth of the gospel was communicated and not the shows or the youthful antics. Mark DeVries shares the nugget in his book, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, “One of the secrets you will learn about in these pages is the strategic priority of undergirding nuclear families with the rich support of the extended Christian family of the church. When these two formative families work in concert, we are most likely to see youth growing into a faith that lasts for the long haul.”

He calls for the parents and the church, as an extended family, to work in concert to disciple the youth. He reverts the primary task of discipling a youth to the parents and has the church community rallying beside them in support. He proposes intergenerational interaction; that parents and adults volunteer to teach and interact with the youth and at the same time, the youth volunteer in the ministries that the adults organize. Youth ministry done in that manner is focused on equipping the family to be an effective disciple-making family and engaging the church community as the extended family.

**Home cell groups**

The home becomes a microcosm of the church when home cells meet, not unlike the way the church was primarily in the home when the first disciples met. As a result of the fellowship in the home, there is an outward expression of God’s love emanating from it, as members minister in the form of service to the community, outreach to the neighborhood and care for the extended families of those who meet there. The church with a strong home cell ministry sees that the intimacy of home environment and familial fellowship of all that meet there to do life together as the best environment to disciple and equip its members for ministry. It provides leadership training, oversight, and teaching material to facilitate the discipleship process. Larger, better-resourced churches can provide pastoral staff to lead these fellowship groups. In the home

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cell ministry, outreach to the neighborhood and relatives happen naturally, so growth is also a natural outcome. Home cell fellowships are not static, they grow and mature, sending some out to birth other groups and renews itself with new members from within (children) and without (neighbors). It models the family even as it equips and supports the families within it.

Historically, the home cell has its roots in the NT, in the first-century church and throughout the church age it has been reinvented when the church became too institutionalized and dogmatic. It has become popular again as the modern day evangelical churches that grew into large churches realized they were basically turning into large organizations. They were service providers of religious teaching through its pulpit and Sunday school programs, of ecstatic worship through its professional worship teams, and of extensive and effective service to the community through its professional ministry teams. The large churches were becoming more efficient and effective, but they were concerned that their size was isolating the believers who needed relationships in a faith community to grow and thrive in. There is also a repulsive thought that they might be drifting back to the institutionalized mainline and Catholic Church structures. Reconnecting the people in a large church in home-based fellowships turns the organization back into an organism. There is the unavoidable connection with the family as the home cell in the church is a mirror of the natural family in God’s family.

The home cell movement is revitalizing the large churches because there was no practical way to build relationships with all the members that came to one of the many services and sat with equally relationally distant strangers. The small groups put them into an environment that is more conducive to relationship building, learning and interaction such as the home. In doing so, it revitalizes the home and the relationships between members of the family as well. Since vocation, friendships, careers, education, spirituality, food services and basic utilities have been
outsourced, the modern home which has been turning into just a comfortable place to eat, sleep and then pursue one’s own thing. Home cell not only brings a sense of community back to the church, but it also strengthens the spiritual community in families as well by bringing worship, service, the Word of God, and prayer back into the home. It repurposes the home and the lives of the members living and meeting there. Home cell ministry is not just another discipleship program; it is clearly an immensely powerful equipping tool to transform homes and families.

Home cell or small group meetings are an excellent avenue to practice familial attributes (love, care, and discipline), the intergenerational study of Scripture, exploring life applications, and solving problems. Participants stand to gain much wisdom from a diversity of perspectives, overcome generational gaps, and learn from the experience of those who have gone before. It provides the context to live out the faith and a community that is supportive and hold its members accountable to live a holy and purposeful life.

**Family serving projects**

Serving together as a family in ministry is an invaluable experience that deepens the relations in the family and draws the family to God for his anointing and strength in all things. Everyone involved grows in his or her faith, but as a family, it also fosters greater unity in purpose and religious outlook. When faith is made real in the family, there is greater transparency, deeper accountability and increased zeal in serving God. As such, church leaders need to promote and provide more opportunities for families to serve together in ministry because it helps to develop strong and faithful families in the church.

Embarking on a mission trip together as a family may require much deeper sacrifice from a family unit but it builds stronger family bonds and lasting common memories that will endure. Serving at the local soup kitchen or ministering to the homeless provides many opportunities for
powerful object lessons about God’s love, grace, salvation, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Serving together in church helps in the building of stronger relationships with other saints, their families, and the larger faith community as a family. Obstacles and problems that inevitably arise in the midst of serving together that will test the unity of the family and the strength of everyone’s faith, but in working through them and persevering to the end, serving together produces a more mature faith and deeper commitment to God and to one another.

Family equipping events

The marriage preparation and parenting classes, family camps, retreats and family events can be practically grouped together as family equipping events. They are all intended to build up and strengthen various components and aspects of the family but they do not occur regularly or systematically in the church. Family equipping ministries are diverse because there are many different components and systems that come together to make a family whole. On top of that, families are fairly diverse too, culturally, economically, educationally, and where they are in their journey as a family. The needs of families can therefore be very complex, dynamic and difficult to assess. Equipping ministries sometimes overlap, such as the discipleship classes of the youth ministry and the equipping ministries that teach parents to raise godly children. This underscores the need and the importance of an overarching vision or mission for the family with which the leadership can evaluate and prioritize all the ministries to the family as a whole.

A whole family vacation camp or retreat is a common family equipping event where teaching, workshops and activities in the camp can be focused on the family as a whole. However, it is on a decline even in the smaller churches because of logistical issues, cost, and conflicts in scheduling. Many churches are still able to organize separate training events for the members of the family by addressing the children, men and women separately, making these
events easier to organize and schedule. The subject matter covered, interaction and workshops can be more focused and thus be more effective in equipping the various family members to grow in their faith and role in their families. Topics like spiritual headship and being present in the family for men, helping your husband and nurturing children for women, discovering spiritual gifts and developing a spiritual vision for youth can scheduled over the church’s calendar. Although some of the interaction between families is diminished without the whole families being together, the men’s retreat and women retreats usually include the sons and daughters respectively so that intergenerational interaction can still occur. Even with such trade-offs these events are still highly impactful and go a long way to foster stronger family ties and turn the family towards a God-centric way of life. Camp and retreat facilities, teaching resources, and organizational help are readily available outside the church so the burden on the church is considerably lessened.

Marriage enrichment classes or getaways target the parent’s relationships with God and one another. These are helpful in keeping the marital relationship healthy, communicative, and centered on God’s Word. The changes within the marriage and the external pressures on the marital relationship sometimes result in breakdown in communications and an escalation of conflicts and a buildup of resentment. These classes proactively help couples identify where the issues are and provide steps to work on dealing with them before they reach a critical stage and turns into a crisis. Marriage preparation, financial management, parenting teens, and discipling children are common classes proactively taught to help build strong marriage and parenting foundations and avert crises in the future.

There are family ministries that help families in crisis and facing failure, programs that were set up for divorce care, addiction recovery, bereavement, marriage counseling, financial
crisis and teenage pregnancy. Being reactive however requires constantly keeping an ear close to the ground and establishing a relationally robust environment for intrusive interventions to be effective. These conditions need to be built up over time through the cultivation of deep trusting relationships and strong relational networks in the congregation. Ample training for the help-givers is a must. Family crisis response ministries, like the proactive ones, also need prior purposeful planning from the leaders. The resources in smaller congregations may be too constrained to enable them to provide ministries like these at a professional level although wiser and more mature members of the faith community can be tapped and trained for various potential crises that may arise in the church. Lay care givers need to know how and when to designate their cases to licensed professional counselors in order to protect the clients and the church.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring is the natural religious teaching approach in the family too, where the father is charged in Deut 6:7 to teach and train his children at all times, as they eat, sleep, and walk as they together under the same roof. There is also a sense that the mentor is to impart a vision for those that are being trained in Prov 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Mentoring is not just a general education about basics and practical techniques but development that sets the child up on a clear path to his God-given destiny. Mentoring requires for the mentor to prophesize or speak into the life of the mentee. The training relationship is much deeper in a mentor-mentee than a classroom teacher-student. The mentor is invested in the success of the mentee and would strive to challenge his or her charge to excel in where the strengths are seen, provide feedback on weaknesses, and relates personal experiences for a deeper learning experience. Again, this is not unlike parents investing, supporting, and driving their children to be successful in their lives.
However, a mentor-mentee relationship like the parent-child relationship has been weakened due to the generation gap that is ever present due to today’s fast changing cultural and social contexts, technological advances, and an increasingly individualistic outlook in life. The gap widens when there is a lack of interest in each other’s lives. Nevertheless, it is not unbridgeable as seen earlier in how the Young Life youth ministry was successful in connecting with the youth of their day in the 40s when the generation gap was perhaps one of the widest, brought about by post-war disruption and social transformations that followed. Good mentors and parents alike close the gap by keeping abreast of these changes, stepping out of their comfort zones to be involved in the lives of their charges, and developing skills in applying the timeless truths of the Bible in new contexts.

**Family as a little Church**

The concept of a household of believers appears to be lost in the modern church. In the NT times, the entire household comes to faith in Christ when the head of the household is convicted by the Holy Spirit in household baptisms. In the fulfillment of the God-given vision to Peter of the gospel going to the Gentiles in Acts 11:14, the first Gentile conversion involved not only Cornelius but his entire household as well. As discussed earlier in the section on the theology of the family, there is a special responsibility for the spiritual leader of the home regarding the household practicing and being trained in the faith. The family altar fulfills that obligation as an expression of the family’s faith and as an invaluable tool in training the young regarding spiritual matters. The spiritual leader of the home is designated to the man, the husband and the father of the children in the household. As such he needs to lead the family in

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worship, share the word and disciple the children. Home devotions need not be a dreaded and stressful time for all in the family if the practice is implemented at the onset of marriage as a means of centering the family on God. That practice can evolve with children as they grow and mature, giving everyone the opportunity to participate, and eventually lead in worship, the Word and prayer as well. There are resources available to help parents get into the practice and keep it interesting and vibrant. In one such book, Jerry Pipes and Victor Lee in *Family to Family* stresses the importance of family worship, “Family worship can be a great blessing or a great downer, depending on how it is handled. But it must be handled. Born-again parents cannot have an on-mission family without regular time together reviewing the Word and relating its principles to everyday life.”

Christian men with families need to be taught by the church to fulfill his duties as the spiritual leader of the home if they did not grow up in a home that had one. The family equipping church needs to hold the men in their midst accountable for leading their families spiritually. Family worship needs to be every Christian home; it is the central expression of a family’s faith and where their child will meet Christ for the first time.

**Conclusion**

What had started out as a reaction to the grim statistics concerning youth leaving the faith and the worldly attacks on the marriage institution has brought this study to crux of the problem: a spiritually weakened Christian family unit. The saints are ill-equipped for the work of ministry at their homes and had left the expression of their faith in the church when they returned home. The reasons for the predicament comes from two parts, on the part of the family: external socio-economic changes, public education, busyness of the home, poor understanding of the marriage covenant, and the lack of spiritual leadership. The church was the other part: lack of family

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equipping ministries, weaknesses in the Sunday school and youth ministries, and the lack of a vision for families.

Sociological and economic changes have made many Christian families move from their hometowns to find work, isolating them from immediate relatives and extended family. The Christian family build strong relational ties with their home church but when the children grow up, the process repeats itself with their kids. Although families maintained strong ties with the church, the manner has changed from investing to own the church to investing to gain better services from the church. The public education system pandered to this service mindset. John Dewey’s vision for a better society was to teach everything better. If you want better children, he can teach them, better citizens, better scientists, better farmers, better poets, the solution is always in education. With that, the public education system interjected itself into every family with an education service that will teach every child to be the best he or she can be in twelve out of the first eighteen years of every child’s life. The family was contented with the arrangement, it freed parents to pursue their careers and economic advancement.

The thesis was that the Christian family is under attack from the world and families are breaking up and kids are lured away from God, so the solution was to get the church to revive the marriage institution and fix the kids’ relationships with God. But things got complicated because the church was undergoing the same attack although at a different level, and is suffering brokenness and rebellion too. It became apparent then that the church is part of the family structure and was setup as a family as well. The relational isolation in the Christian family resulted in relational isolation amongst its members in the church as well. Disconnection from extended family in the family translated to the church reinventing itself as an efficient and self-reliant organization. Breakdown in the relationships within the family, between spouses and
between parent and children is reflected internal conflicts and divisiveness in the church, and very starkly mirrored in the intergenerational divide in the church on how to do things in the church. To fix problems in the family, the church needs fix its own problems as well. The church has to rediscover its familial roots and become a family once again in order to be able to teach natural families how families ought to live. From interaction with the prevailing literature and the Bible on the subject of the family, four problematic areas in the church that is related to being a family became apparent: relational, intergenerational, patriarchal leadership and equipping.

The church has morphed into an organization that has set number of members as measure of success rather than disciples on mission for God. The church must refocus on making disciples and not attracting followers; discipleship requires the church to be relational. Discipleship happens in an intergenerational community. Discipleship of a child happens in a spiritually led home. The church is the extended family for the households within it. It equips adults, the parents, to prepare them for the work of ministry, right in their homes first and then to their neighbors. It equips the families to be a church where worship, Word, and good works are practiced. Families in their homes are essentially mini-church plants. Then the church becomes organic, made up of many self-replicating parts.

As I started to put together the survey to collect information on family ministries, my thoughts were already framed in by the weaknesses in the four areas gleaned from readings and Bible study. The survey form was actually an assessment tool to assess how much the church thinks like a family and what it is doing to build families up. So rather than ask how family-minded a church is, it was easier to approach the question by looking at the mission/vision that the church has set up to guide itself, to see if there are any thoughts pertaining to the family. Instead of asking the church what ministries they have set up to equip families, the question was
turned around to have the pastor think about the impact of his existing ministries on equipping families. I only chose six common ones to start the pastor thinking and evaluating ministries to families. As such, the survey form in Appendix B, can easily be reverted into a tool to evaluate how familial the church is by reframing it as an assessment, from the question on the mission/vision statement (Q4) onwards. It is a great starting point for the church to begin becoming a family again. The response to question four may help generate a vision for the Christian families in the church.

This paper has already completed the assessment of some of the six common ministries in churches today from a family equipping standpoint. The critiques should be helpful in when considering adding a similar activity/ministry, or reviewing one for changes to become more effective as an impactful family equipping ministry. The path towards being a church family will be different for every church, but it starts with a conviction that the journey is necessary. The theological discussion and the resources referenced in this paper will undoubtedly help the reader to cast aside any ambivalence or doubt about what the church ought to be and where it ought to go.

In closing, let us heed the Shema. It puts everything we are and do into perspective with its opening verse, which can be addressed to every Christian, “

Deut 6:4-9 (ESV) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 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. 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."
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Appendix A

Family Ministry and its Impact
Survey Questions for Young Adults

1. Are you a born-again believer in a church at this time in your life?
   a. Yes, currently active and serving in the church.
   b. Yes, attending a church but not serving
   c. Yes, but not affiliated with any church at this time
   d. Unsure, but I go to church with friends
   e. No, used to attend church
   f. No, never Answer Choose an item.

2. Please select your age category:
   a. 18-22
   b. 23-30
   c. 31-40 Answer Choose an item.

3. How long have you been a Christian?
   a. 1-5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. More than 10 years Answer Choose an item.

4. Did you grow up in a Christian family? (Select which best describes your situation in the past 5 years.)
   a. Yes, my parent/guardians are active Christians (in community and church)
   b. Yes, but my parent/guardians are not active in church
   c. Yes, one of my parent/guardian is a Christian
   d. No Answer Choose an item.

5. Are your siblings Christians?
   a. Yes, all are active believers
   b. Yes, but one or more are not
   c. No, I am the only Christian amongst my siblings
   d. No. I have no siblings Answer Choose an item.
6. Sources of discipleship and spiritual influence as you were growing up. Please indicate the extent of the influence of the corresponding source on your spiritual growth. Indicate the most significant (highest) influence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Impact on your spiritual life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Pastor</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Youth Leader</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Sunday School teacher</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Christian friend/s</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Parent/s</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Grandparent/s</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Relative/s</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Self-study</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Internet sites/groups</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. ............................. (other)</td>
<td>Choose an item.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Family Ministry and its Impact
Survey Questions for Pastor

1. How long has your church been in existence?
   a. 1-2 years
   b. 3-5 years
   c. 5-10 years
   d. 10-15 years
   e. 15+ years  Answer Choose an item.

2. What is your average Sunday attendance?
   a. Less than 100
   b. 100-200
   c. 201-500
   d. 501-1500
   e. More than 1500  Answer Choose an item.

3. What percentage (estimate) of the congregation is presently comprised of families with pre-college age children?
   a. 20%
   b. 50%
   c. More than 80%  Answer Choose an item.

4. Is the equipping of families part of the church’s vision or mission statement?
   a. Clearly stated
   b. Somewhat connected or implied
   c. Not included  Answer Choose an item.

5. Activities or ministries that equip families in the church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Freq*</th>
<th>Impact**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Marriage/parenting classes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>H/M/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Sunday school classes up to youth</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Youth ministry (AWANA)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Home Fellowships (Cell)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Family camps, outings, events</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Ministry/Service opportunity (open to family members)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. .............................................(other)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. .............................................(other)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Frequency: (W)weekly, (#)number per year, (NA) not applicable
** Impact on family: (H)high, (M)medium, (L)low

6. Does the Sunday School/Youth Ministry involve the parents (who are Christians) in the discipling process?
   a. Never
   b. Rarely
   c. Sometimes
   d. Often
   e. Always  Answer Choose an item.

7. Who is primarily responsible for the children’s discipleship?
   a. Sunday School teachers/Youth Pastor
   b. Senior Pastor
   c. Parents (who are Christians)
   d. The children themselves
   e. No one in particular  Answer Choose an item.

8. Do mature Christians provide one-on-one mentoring to younger members, particularly the children whose parents do not attend the church?
   a. Yes, a formal program is in place
   b. Yes, but on an ad hoc basis when a request is received or a special need is observed (new believers’ class)
   c. No, all teaching relationships are class or group based  Answer Choose an item.

9. How do young adults (singles) interact with families? (Select any that apply)
   - Worship together
   - Serve together (Ministry/Service)
   - Whole congregation events (Meals, outings)
   - Intergenerational cell group

10. Do families worship, read Scripture and pray (family altar) together in their homes?
    a. Yes, all parents are taught and expected to practice that regularly
    b. Yes, some families do it on their own accord
    c. Not known, it is a personal matter
    d. Not expected to do so  Answer Choose an item.
CONSENT FORM
Family Ministry and Its Influence

Yat Por Lau
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on family ministries and the discipleship of children.
For the Pastor: As a pastor, your input regarding any support or equipping ministries for families in your congregation will provide a valuable data point in the study.
For the young adult: As a young adult, your personal experience and spiritual journey will provide a valuable data point in the study.
Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Yat Por Lau, D. Min. a candidate at Liberty University’s School of Divinity.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current practices pertaining to equipping families and the discipleship of children.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Complete an anonymous survey. The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks of participating in this study are minimal (no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life).

Participants will not receive any personal benefits. The researcher is hoping that the findings of this research may serve to enhance the fellowship experience for church members.

Compensation:
Participants will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The records will be shredded three years after the study is complete.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Yat Por Lau. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 434-546-4080 or ylau@liberty.edu. Mr. Lau’s faculty mentor is Dr. Rod Dempsey. Dr. Dempsey can be contacted at 434-592-4159 or rwdempsey@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.