



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE



KEEPING THE FAITH

EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP



Keeping the Faith
Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship
© 2019 C.S. Lewis Institute
8001 Braddock Road, Suite 301
Springfield, VA 22151

Phone: (703) 914-5602 · (800) 813-9209
information@cslewisinstitute.org
www.cslewisinstitute.org

Authors: Kerry A. Knott, Aimee Riegert, Joel S. Woodruff

ISBN: 9781796816679

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated,
are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®,
NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™
Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.
www.zondervan.com.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible,
English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001
by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE



KEEPING THE
FAITH

**EQUIPPING
FAMILIES
FOR EFFECTIVE
DISCIPLESHIP**

Contents

Welcome	7
Overview.....	11
The Program Approach.....	15
Get Ready to Launch	18
Theme 1 – The Mission	
Meeting A	24
Article: “The Need for Covering Prayer”	30
Bible Study: “God’s Plan for Parents”	32
Article: “Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?”	35
Article: “Intentional Parenting to Disciple Our Children”	40
Meeting B	46
Theme 2 – Biblical Parenting	
Meeting A	52
Meeting B	60
Theme 3 – Back to the Basics	
Meeting A	66
Article: “Reviewing the Fundamentals”	71
Meeting B	74
Theme 4 – Practical Application of Biblical Truths	
Meeting A	80
Article: “Teaching the Bible to Your Children”	85
Bible Study: “Teaching the Bible to Your Children”	89
Meeting B	92

Contents

Theme 5 – Heart Change

Meeting A	98
Article: “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change”	102
Bible Study: “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change”	106
Meeting B	112

Theme 6 – Developing Character That Lasts

Meeting A	118
Article: “Developing Character and Faith That Lasts”	123
Bible Study: “Developing Character and Faith That Lasts”	128
Meeting B	134

Theme 7 – Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children

Meeting A	140
Article: “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children”	145
Bible Study: “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children”	150
Meeting B	158

Theme 8 – Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith

Meeting A	166
Article: “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith”	171
Bible Study: “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith”	173
Meeting B	178

Notes to Leaders of Aslan Academy

Small Groups.....	184
-------------------	-----





Welcome to *Keeping the Faith:* *Equipping Families for* *Effective Discipleship*

From Dr. Joel S. Woodruff
President, C.S. Lewis Institute

Dear Friends,

From the age of eight, I was raised by a single mother. My godly father passed away from a rare form of cancer, and so my two brothers and I grew up without a dad. Despite that hardship and gap in our lives, we knew the presence of our heavenly Father, as the psalmist writes:

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows
is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families.

(Psalm 68:5–6a)

I'm convinced that one of the primary reasons that my brothers and I have a bedrock faith in Jesus Christ is because of the intentional discipleship of my mom and grandmothers, the prayers of my dad, and the community of faith that came around us boys. We read the Bible regularly in the home, prayed daily, read Christian biographies, and discussed issues of faith and character regularly, and we had fun doing it. I still recall my grandma Esther reading the Bible to us and pronouncing the Hebrew name, *Peleg*, with a long “e” sound for the first syllable. As boys, we couldn't stop laughing. I also recall direct answers to prayer in which God showed up and made Himself known to me personally at a young age. The adults in my life were “keeping the faith” by intentionally articulating, defending, sharing, and living out their faith in personal, family, and public life.

This is why I am so excited about the C.S. Lewis Institute's (CSLI) resource to help families intentionally and effectively disciple the children in the home. It made a world of difference in my life! I just wish that every child had a community of adults focused on the child's spiritual transformation and discipleship. Just imagine if groups of parents met regularly in your



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

church or school for the express purpose of learning together, praying together, and figuring out how to “keep the faith” with our children!

You may be a single mom or dad, a couple, a grandparent, a godparent, an aunt or uncle, a retired person or a young adult. It doesn’t matter your stage of life; all of us have opportunities to disciple children in some way. If we are intentional, and trained to make disciples in the home and in the families in which God has placed us (no matter what the makeup), God can move among us and help us to raise up a generation of young men and women who know, love, and follow Jesus.

C.S. Lewis, in his famous sermon “The Weight of Glory,” says this:

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations [heaven or hell]. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.¹

The intentional discipleship of the children in our lives is a loving task that bears great consequences. Fortunately, God has provided the family with the church, the Word of God, and the power of His Holy Spirit so that we can point people to a loving relationship with Jesus Christ, and ultimately to heaven.

Let me briefly explain how our new resource works. Our Keeping the Faith Program is designed to help parents, grandparents and other caring adults effectively disciple their children. One of the components of the program is Aslan Academy small groups, where caring adults meet together regularly to learn how to intentionally disciple the children in their lives. This *Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook leads participants in Aslan Academy small groups through an eight- or nine-month series of readings, group discussions, and family activities, with an emphasis on a vibrant relationship with Jesus, fellowship with other

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 45–46.



believing families, prayer and Bible study, high quality books, thoughtful discussion and practical application.

I hope that you will jump in and join or start an Aslan Academy small group in your church, home school group, public school, neighborhood, or wherever adults can gather to prayerfully take up the important task in community of discipling the children in our lives.

May our Lord empower you and free you up to make disciples—especially the children whom God has placed in your family, neighborhood, and church.

Finally, I would like to thank Kerry A. Knott, former president of CSLI, and his wife, Michelle, for their leadership in developing this program, and David R. Chesser for his research evaluating the effectiveness of the Aslan Academy small groups with parents at Friends Community Church, Fairbanks, Alaska. I would also like to thank Aimee Riegert, Aslan Academy program coordinator, for creating this revised version of this guidebook.

Keep the Faith,

A Prayer for the Ephesians

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

EPHESIANS 3:14-20





Overview

Because you have opened this book, a few things are likely to be true about you:

- You are an adult who cares deeply about the young people in your life. *So does God.*
- You are either a follower of Jesus looking for wisdom, or perhaps an inquirer just taking a peek. *In either case, welcome.*
- You are increasingly aware of the growing chasm between our culture and God’s biblical design for humanity, and you think that the future of people of faith is uncertain. *Many share your observation.*
- You want to take action on your family’s behalf, but you are not sure where to start. *There is help...lots of help.*

Simply by reading this, you have drifted through the gates of the Aslan Academy community, and we are very glad that you are here.

What is the big picture?

Today the church is facing an alarming rate of attrition among young people. Research by the Barna Group has shown that they are unimpressed, even offended, by the precedent set by their elders in the faith.² Ironically it is up to those very same elders to remedy the problem, and the solution must begin with repentance and humility. Thankfully, nothing can remove us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38–39). He will make a way before us (Isaiah 43:19) as we work to prepare the next generation of believers. In fact, His eyes tirelessly “range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Do not miss this! God Himself is eager to champion our efforts on behalf of our children and teens; He requires only our faithfulness.

² Cited in David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

Why is family discipleship so important?

Your children need you to reveal God to them by your words and actions. God's design for the physical, emotional and spiritual care of children is centered on the nuclear and extended family. It is God's way of giving people a sense of belonging and the reassurance that, no matter what they experience outside, they will receive truth, affirmation, and love from the people at home.

God also blesses children through the family of God, the body of Christ, which includes believing friends, extending the concept of family beyond the walls of our houses, and into our communities and the world. Still, the primary responsibility of discipling children rests with their parents. On the day your child was born, God assigned you the privilege of teaching that child to know and honor Him, and He will hold you accountable for your efforts. Notice the wording here: accountable for your *efforts*. You are *not* accountable for the results.

Remember that only God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can give your child salvation, and each person must make the decision to receive Christ. To put it plainly, you cannot drive your child to heaven, but your actions and daily lifestyle can definitely set up the road signs that point the way. By watching you daily follow Jesus, your child should become very familiar with the Source of your personal transformation, joy, and strength.

What is the Aslan Academy?

The Aslan Academy is a unique study-plus-fellowship experience designed to equip parents, grandparents and other caring adults for intentional discipleship of their children and teens. *The Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook leads participants through an eight- or nine-month series of readings, group discussions, and family activities, with an emphasis on a vibrant relationship with Jesus, fellowship with other believing families, prayer and Bible study, high quality books, thoughtful discussion and practical application.

Come as you are! The meeting agendas and activities are designed with lots of grace for busy parents. They are intended to be a help, not a burden. You should feel free to attend the small group meetings whether



or not you have prepared according to the guidebook suggestions. Bring your Bible, journal, and the theme's assigned book and glean what you can at the meeting. The discussion questions are helpful, even without the information in the books, and the prayer and fellowship will be a blessing to you.

What does the Aslan Academy experience provide?

The Aslan Academy experience offers your family the opportunity to:

- Clarify your priorities of time and other resources.
- Enjoy relationships with other dedicated families from all seasons of life.
- Revive your faith in Jesus.
- Ignite your prayer life.
- Solidify your understanding of the Bible.
- Affirm the fundamentals of historic Christian beliefs.
- Involve your children in what you learn.
- Provide practical advice for instilling good character in your children.
- Engrain spiritual disciplines into your family's lifestyle.
- Enable your entire family to authentically share your faith with others.

What might the Aslan Academy experience look like?

What You Do. Should you choose to start up or join a local Aslan Academy small group, you will need to gather the required materials and make time for the program in your schedule. Once the program kicks off, you will spend approximately eight to nine months actively engaged in study, discussion, and fellowship, as outlined in the *Keeping the Faith* guidebook. During these months, you can expect to:



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

- Read one book and one short article and a Bible study per month, and keep journal entries in preparation for each meeting (~5–7 pages/day).
- Attend two meetings per month, for family fellowship (perhaps including a meal) and discussion on the readings.
- Read the Bible and pray daily with your family and keep a journal.
- Plan occasional family activities specifically related to the discipleship process.

Suggested Calendar. The chart below shows one example of an Aslan Academy schedule that spans a school year, with a break in December for Christmas. This example can be altered to fit your group’s needs.

DATE	EVENT	ACTIVITY / THEME	BOOKS
Late Spring	Info Meeting	Recruit, Q&A, Begin Sign-Ups	
Summer	Prep your home	Pray. Encourage the reading and audiobook habit in everyone. Downplay electronic media. Buy program books.	Bible, optional “fun” books
September	Meeting A	Theme 1: The Mission	<i>Guidebook, Faith Begins at Home: Family Makeover</i>
	Meeting B		
October	Meeting A	Theme 2: Biblical Parenting	<i>Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family</i>
	Meeting B		
November	Meeting A	Theme 3: Back to the Basics	<i>The Big Story</i>
	Meeting B		
December		Christmas Party Fellowship	



DATE	EVENT	ACTIVITY / THEME	BOOKS
January	Meeting A	Theme 4: Practical Application of Biblical Truths	<i>Gospel-Centered Family</i>
	Meeting B		
February	Meeting A	Theme 5: Heart Change	<i>The Prodigal God</i>
	Meeting B		
March	Meeting A	Theme 6: Developing Character That Lasts	<i>Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last</i>
	Meeting B		
April	Meeting A	Theme 7: Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children	<i>Habits of a Child's Heart</i>
	Meeting B		
May	Meeting A	Theme 8: Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith	<i>Sticky Faith Guide</i>
	Meeting B		

The Program Approach

Why Aslan?

Aslan, the great lion, the Christ-figure in C.S. Lewis's children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, never issues a challenge without graciously supplying what is needed to meet that challenge. As families embrace the challenge, and joy, of discipling their children in their homes, it is the goal of the Aslan Academy to equip them for the task by speaking the wisdom, power, and grace of Jesus into their lives.

Who can participate?

No age factor or family situation "disqualifies" anyone from learning how more effectively to disciple the children and teens they love. In fact, the combination of youth and experience rounds out and enriches the dynamics for everyone. Biological parents, adoptive parents, step-parents,



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

grandparents, foster parents, godparents, and caring relatives and friends can all benefit from the Aslan Academy approach.

- For *married couples*, the program will have the greatest effect if both parents “buy in” and participate fully.
- For *single parents* and those spouses who will be carrying the load alone, your Aslan Academy small group will be an invaluable source of support as they come to appreciate your particular challenges.
- *Grandparents* will enjoy the opportunity to bridge the generation gap and share their experience, while learning to cherish the unique qualities of the younger generation.
- *All ages can benefit*. It is easy to see how parents of little children can glean much from parents of older kids. Consider also the value of younger parents’ insight to those more senior, as they themselves were teens not long ago.

Whatever your situation, God loves you and your family and wants you all to know Him better.

What is the purpose of the *Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook, and how does it work?

The purpose of the *Keeping the Faith* guidebook is to provide the framework for the Aslan Academy experience. It organizes the program into sixteen family fellowship Meetings (two per month), where families interact and engage in small group discussions on eight themes related to family discipleship. It provides reading lists for participants to complete in advance of each meeting, Aslan Academy small group agendas and discussion questions, and suggestions for meaningful family interaction and activities for each theme, plus Bible studies and articles. It also includes instructions for small group leaders.

The eight themes of the *Keeping the Faith* guidebook are:

1. *The Mission*. Strive to become a worthy spiritual leader for your children



and to discern God's mission for your family.

2. *Biblical Parenting.* Children are a gift from God. As you interact with them, it is important that you remain grounded in God's love and vision for your family.
3. *Back to the Basics.* Whether you are a new or longtime believer, it is important to review the fundamentals of the Bible and the Christian faith as you begin this new chapter in the process of discipling your child.
4. *Practical Application of Biblical Truths.* Use your knowledge of God's Word to help your children understand and live God's plan in their daily lives.
5. *Heart Change.* Rather than simply seeking behavior modification, it is important to understand that long-term change comes through authentic heart change, stemming from gratitude to our loving Father and driven by the Holy Spirit.
6. *Developing Character That Lasts.* Learning important character traits can assist in deepening faith and will provide a foundation that will help your child persevere through challenges.
7. *Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children.* Paul encouraged Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Engrain healthy spiritual disciplines early in your children's lives.
8. *Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith.* Significant numbers of young people leave their faith when challenged in high school, college, or beyond. Children must be equipped to truly understand what they believe, to be prepared to explain and defend their beliefs, and to be comfortable sharing that faith with others.

Small Group Meeting Agenda

For the discussion time, your group can choose to separate into men's and women's sub-groups or to stay together. The standard structure of an Aslan Academy meeting agenda reflects some basic habits of a healthy Christian walk: prayer, study, and fellowship. It also includes ideas

for further reflection and related family activities for the time between meetings, as well as the details of the readings to be discussed at the next meeting.

At the Meeting

- Prayer. Open and close with group prayer.
- Study. Explore more deeply the concepts found in the readings for that session, which you will have studied at home prior to the meeting.
- Fellowship/Discussion. Mingle with other families (perhaps share a meal), discuss the readings and related Scriptures, and share ideas and insights with other parents.

After the Meeting

- Reflection. As you continue at home to think, pray, and journal about each theme, God will influence your thoughts and attitudes through what you have learned.
- Action. Apply each theme to your life with practical, challenging, and fun family activities, both at home and in your community.

Prepare for the Next Meeting

- The guidebook provides a detailed description of the readings and Bible studies to prepare for the following meeting.

Get Ready to Launch

Aslan Academy Preparation Checklist

*Sign Up or Start Up Your Own Aslan Academy Small Group**

The Friends and Neighbors Model. A formal program is not necessary. Prayerfully identify and invite a few friends and families with whom to share the Aslan Academy opportunity. Your children's ministry or youth program director might be willing to help spread the word. (Remember that you do not have to shoulder the load alone.) Once you have assembled a committed group, gather regularly as families in each other's homes or in a meeting room at church as you work through the material together.



Childcare can be kept simple: families can pitch in together to hire a babysitter, or the older children and/or a rotation of parents can supervise without much overhead. (See Notes to Leaders of Aslan Academy Small Groups at the end of this guidebook.)

The Church Small Group Model. A church or other faith community could host or coordinate Aslan Academy small groups as part of their Christian education or small group ministry. Following an initial information meeting in which the details of the program are explained by your local facilitator, Aslan Academy participants will register for their local group as the facilitator directs.

* You may certainly benefit from the Aslan Academy material on your own, but experience has shown that fellowship is central to effective family discipleship.

□ *Bibles and Books.* Resources for Aslan Academy found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org) contain a detailed list of program-specific and other recommended resources, including study Bibles and children's and youth Bibles.

- *Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook
- A personal journal (for each family member)

Bibles:

- A Bible (preferably a study Bible)
- Age-appropriate children's and youth Bibles (one for each child)

If daily Bible reading is new for you, consider one of the two daily guides offered by Scripture Union, *Discovery* or *Encounter with God* (<https://scriptureunion.org/>).

Books:

- *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, by Mark Holmen
- *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, by Paul David Tripp



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

- *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense out of Life*, by Justin Buzzard
- *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, by Tim Chester and Ed Moll
- *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, by Timothy Keller
- *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates. (Note: This book has also been published under the name *Raising Kids with Character That Lasts*.)
- *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett
- *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*, by Kara E. Powell

The books can be purchased at your local Christian bookstores or through online sources (Amazon, Christianbook.com, Cokesbury.com, etc.). You may either use paper versions or download the books to electronic readers and apps. There is no need to purchase all the books at once to get started, but we recommend that you look ahead at least two meetings, and purchase future resources in time to complete the readings that will be discussed. Keep in mind that bulk orders often qualify for free shipping.

□ *Journal*. If you do not already have one, assemble a binder-style journal. Fill it with notebook paper and use dividers to organize your binder into the following sections:

- “Word” (Note Scripture that has especially touched you.)
- “Praise and Thanksgiving” (Record answers to prayer.)
- “Confession and Forgiveness” (Confess your sin and receive God’s forgiveness.)
- “Prayer and Intercession” (Ask God for what you and others need and desire.)
- “Listen” (How has God spoken to you through the Scriptures, fellowship, and your circumstances?)



You may opt to include a section in the back of the binder for any insights and creative inspiration that have grown out of your time with God. Give it a name that is meaningful to you.

- *Clear That Calendar.* Discipling your child will take time. Few parents look back and say they wish they had spent less time with their children. Making time now, even in the midst of busy work, school, and sports activities, is important. If your children’s spiritual growth is a priority in your family, that priority must be reflected in the time allocated to it.

Your Year. You might have to make some tough decisions on extracurricular commitments to make room for building your new family discipleship habits, but it will be well worth the sacrifice. The program runs well concurrently with the school calendar. If a group meets twice per month for each of the eight themes, reserving December to fellowship together and celebrate Christmas, the program would take nine months from start to finish. For example, a program starting in September would end in May.

Your Daily Routine. While the Aslan Academy program has been designed for busy families, it is important to do some necessary “cleaning out” of schedules before beginning. In addition to the adults’ reading and journaling assignments, the program calls for reading aloud with your children, for related family discussions (short ones in the morning or evening, and longer ones at mealtime or on car rides), and other occasional activities. Also, blocking out time to pray for your children and for your efforts to disciple them is absolutely essential.

Similarly, if you want your children to grow, they, too, must have time in their schedules. Make sure your children are not overburdened with other activities.

- *Embrace the Read-Aloud Habit.* The Aslan Academy program will ask you to read the Bible aloud with all of your children, regardless of their ages; older children and teens are also encouraged to read it on their own. If reading aloud is not a regular part of your family’s routine, start with a few fun books in the evenings at bedtime. Turn off all the screens and pick up a book. See *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org).



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

- ❑ *Establish or Reinforce Family Mealtimes.* Conversation around the breakfast or dinner table helps a family to stay connected and close in spite of very busy lives and provides excellent opportunities for discipleship.
- ❑ *Why wait?* Get reading! Once you receive your *Keeping the Faith* guidebook, familiarize yourself with the format and resources. You can also start reading some of the books well before discussion sessions. It might help prevent time crunches later in the year when things get busy.
- ❑ *Spread the Word and Start Praying.* After the first small group meeting, you will begin to form your own official prayer support team that will be praying for you as you work through the *Keeping the Faith* guidebook. Consider asking friends and family to start praying for you now. First, give thanks! God has already been working on your family's hearts, or you would not be reading this book. Pray for God's guidance and blessing even before the program begins. Pray that He guides you through the entire process, and that your children's hearts will be open. Pray for protection from the enemy, and in praise and thanksgiving for Jesus's victory over sin and death. Invite the Holy Spirit to have His way in your family, in Jesus's name.

Small Group Meeting Packing List

- Bible
- Journal
- Pen, pencil, and highlighter
- *Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook
- Book for the current theme



Theme 1

The Mission

Meeting A

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...
Love your neighbor as yourself.
All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37, 40)



Introduction

Today marks the beginning of a new phase in your family's life. If discipling your children feels like a monumental task, rest in God's calling, and know that He has great plans for your family. Trust in His provision and extend yourselves plenty of grace.

Consider Jesus's words to Martha as she ranted to Him in her kitchen: "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one" (Luke 10:41). Yes, there is work to do; but when you are yoked with Christ, He is doing the heavy lifting:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

It all comes down to love. Everything that God asks of you is crystalized into this: to love Him and to allow His love to flow through you to other people. It is a beautifully simple standard, yet it is impossible to meet without His help.

This lost world seduces us, our own flesh limits us, and the devil mercilessly tempts and accuses. We even needlessly burden ourselves and stagger under weight that God never intended for us to bear. We desperately need grace, and God gives it abundantly.

Remember Jesus's miracle in Matthew 14:13-21. Jesus insists that His disciples find a way to feed the more than five thousand people gathered there. Out of their own inadequacy, the disciples complain, "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," but then Jesus demonstrates how God extravagantly equips those whom He calls. "Bring them here to me," he says simply. Suddenly, at Jesus's touch, their meagre offering is multiplied.

On those frazzled days when you long to give God fifty minutes but the cry of your heart is "Lord, I have here only five," hear Him say to you, "Bring them here to me." Be blessed as Jesus lovingly multiplies your resources and prospers your efforts.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His holiness. We are corruptible; His holiness is absolute. Thank Him for being present with you, where two or more are gathered in His name. Welcome the Holy Spirit into your presence, and ask Him to plant joyful expectation in each heart as you open yourselves and your families to His greater influence. Ask Him specifically to open the hearts of your children.

Study

Today read aloud together “The Need for Covering Prayer” article found on page 30 and complete the “God’s Plan for Parents” Bible study found on page 32 during discussion time. From now on, you will be reading at home in preparation for the next meeting.

Scripture Highlights:

Matthew 22:37, 40 _____

Discussion

1. Gather your families together. Introduce yourselves. Share why you are participating in the Aslan Academy program and what you hope to accomplish during your time together. Let the children share their thoughts, as well. Dismiss the young people.
2. Ask for a volunteer to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of the Scripture passage on the line next to the citation above. Refer to the verses during the discussion.
3. Read together “The Need for Covering Prayer” found on page 30. Begin a list of people to invite to be part of your prayer team.
4. Your spiritual influence over your children will grow only in the context of complete trust and deep relationship with your children. Discuss why these are an important foundation for discipleship.
5. Complete together the “God’s Plan for Parents” Bible study found on page 32.

Closing Prayer

Bring It Home

Reflection

1. Prayerfully commit to spending daily, disciplined time with God, reading His word in the Bible, praying and resting in His presence. If this is new for you, consider one of the two daily guides offered by Scripture Union, *Discovery* or *Encounter with God* (<https://scriptureunion.org/>).
2. Each child in your family has a unique learning style that might or might not match your own. Pray for insight into how each child learns best. Activity 3 below will guide you to some helpful resources.
3. Prayerfully commit to reading an age-appropriate Bible of your choice with your children each day. (See *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website for suggestions.) If older children and teens choose to read on their own, set aside time each day to discuss their reading with them. If your children are very different ages, your family might read the same passages from a variety of Bibles. It is fun to read and discuss the same material on different levels with children of various ages.
4. Commit to praying with each child in the morning or evening, in addition to regular mealtimes. Pray out loud for God's guidance and a willing spirit in our child as you begin this program. Explain to your children that you and the Aslan Academy group will be praying for them each day. Invite them to pray along with you.

Action

1. Contact the people on your prayer team invitation list. Describe to them your goals for family discipleship, explain what you are doing in the Aslan Academy group and tell them that you will update them regularly with praises and prayer requests for your family.
2. Institute a fun read-aloud time ritual. Sitting still can be a challenge to some at first, but a light-hearted read-aloud routine is appealing even to the squirmiest of kids. Designate a special spot in the house (your bed, the family room couch, the carpet), and special pillows and blankets or other comforting props that help to set the mood. Include fun snacks from time to time. Play some classical music by Mozart,



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Vivaldi, or Chopin softly in the background. The effect can be calming and can help everyone to focus. Begin family readings, starting with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis. Look for ways to encourage your children to think and to envision themselves in similar situations. See *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website for suggested reading guides.

3. Experiment with the learning resources in *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org). Note what activities engage each child and incorporate those elements in your overall discipleship plan.
4. Get creative with dinner conversation. Go around the table and give each person a chance to share a highlight and “lowlight” from their day, without any interruptions.
5. Especially for teens and older children: Keep in mind that older kids are under a great deal of social and academic pressure at school. Reassure them that you are mindful of their full plates and that you do not intend to add unnecessary activities to their to-do list. Explain to them that you are praying that God will use, and hopefully transform where needed, their present resources and circumstances to reach them right where they are and to bless them.
6. Read your Bible and pray daily.
7. Read your children’s Bibles and pray daily with them. If older children prefer to read on their own, be sure to talk about their reading with them.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 1: The Mission—Meeting B

1. Read “Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?” article found on page 35.
2. Read the “Intentional Parenting to Disciple Our Children” article found on page 40.
3. Read *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, by Mark Holmen, Introduction (“The Dysfunctional Family”) and chapters 1–3 (~70 pages).
4. Take the “Personal Assessment” at the end of chapter 2, “Parent Makeover.”



5. Pay special attention to the information in the “40 Developmental Assets” (Chart 2) in chapter 3, “Child Makeover.”
6. Note in the “Prayer” section of your journal those “Assets” from the list that your family already enjoys, and those in which you think your family needs to grow. Pray over the list.

Come as you are! The meeting agendas and activities are designed with lots of grace for busy parents. They are intended to be a help, not a burden. Please feel free to attend the small group meetings whether or not you have prepared according to the guidebook suggestions. Bring your Bible, journal, and the theme’s assigned book and glean what you can at the meeting. The discussion questions are helpful, even without the information in the books, and the prayer and fellowship will be a blessing to you.

““Courage, dear heart,”
and the voice, she felt
sure, was Aslan’s, and with
the voice a delicious smell
breathed in her face.”

—C.S. Lewis
The Voyage of the Dawn Treader



The Need for Covering Prayer

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

As you begin the Aslan Academy program, it is important to start praying regularly for your family as a whole and for your children specifically. Find time each morning and each evening for uninterrupted time with God as you commit to discipling your children. You will find more insight into the power of prayer in the assigned reading.

- Praise God for who He is. The Lord inhabits the praises of His people.
- Thank God for blessing you with a child or children.
- Thank God for the work He has already done in your life and in the lives of your children. Spend time meditating on how God has been involved in your lives.
- Ask God to reveal any hindrances to your faith as you begin the process of discipling your children. Confess any hindrances and ask for God's strength to work in you to eliminate those hindrances.
- If you are married, ask God to strengthen your marriage and give both of you a shared, godly vision for discipling your children.
- Offer to God yourself and your children, to be taught by Him and used by Him for His glory.
- Ask God to give you wisdom to fulfill your role as a parent.
- Ask God to work in the hearts of each of your children, to give them a sense of God's character and His power and His glory.



- Ask God to work in the hearts of your children to give them a spirit of obedience to His commands and to your authority as a parent.
- Ask God to remove the obstacles you may be facing regarding your relationship with your children. Ask for a desire to spend time together and to communicate honestly.
- Pray for specific wisdom to better understand the challenges that each child is facing and will face. Pray that God will give you a discerning spirit to guide you day by day in your relationship with your child.
- Pray for perseverance, as the world will seek to distract you from being intentional about discipling your children.
- Pray for protection from Satan, who would love to keep your child from following Jesus.
- Pray for a sense of joyful expectation and assurance that God has been acting on your behalf, even before you knew to ask Him.

Recruit a Prayer Team

Ask spiritually mature people in your church, your family, your neighborhood, or among your friends to pray specifically for you and for each child while you participate in the Aslan Academy program. Share the prayer suggestions above, and add your own list. Send reminders by e-mail and include specific requests as they come up. Your prayer team is very important to keep you from discouragement and to give you regular support. When you are tired or down, your prayer team can lift you up. Let your child know that others are praying for him or her on a daily basis. You may find that as you contact people to pray for your children, they may begin a similar process with their own. Invite members of your prayer team over for dinner or regular celebrations such as birthdays. Let your children be encouraged by their prayer warriors, supporting them as they grow into fully committed disciples of Jesus!





EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

God’s Plan for Parents

Bible Study

God calls each of us to a clear purpose: to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. God made this clear to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Jesus also reiterated this when asked which commandment was the greatest. God, not our children, should be the center of our lives. If our hearts are set on following the Lord, we have taken the first step toward properly raising our children.

As parents, God has given us authority over our children. But we are to exercise that authority with the same love, grace, and discipline that God exercises over us, always recognizing that our children are watching us and are keenly aware of discrepancies between what we teach and what we do. Living out our faith in an authentic, vibrant way is an integral part of teaching our faith to our children.

By participating in the Aslan Academy, you are taking the first step toward following God’s command. Commit to praying for God’s help as you prepare how you will teach and model to your children God’s Word and His commands.

Read the following verses from the Old Testament—Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18—and from the New Testament, Matthew 22:34–40. What two key commands does God make?

According to the above verses, what should be the center of your life? What might that look like in your daily life?

If your children look closely at your life, how do you think they would describe your life’s primary focus? Ask their opinions.



Review how you spend your time and your money. How does that match-up with how God is calling us to live?

Write down specific areas of your life that you believe are hindering your ability to love God and love your neighbor. Commit to praying regularly for God's help to refocus your life.

Read Psalm 127. How does God describe children? How do you see your children as a blessing?

Read Matthew 18:10–14. How important is it to God that each of these “little ones” comes to know Him? How does that change your thinking as a parent?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. After giving His command to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, and strength, what else does God say to do?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Read Deuteronomy 5:16 and Ephesians 6:1–3. What does God command children to do?

Read the next verse in the Ephesians passage (v. 4) and Colossians 3:21. Reflecting on these verses and the passage in Deuteronomy 6:7, what role and responsibility is God giving parents? Why do you think God is giving parents such authority over their children?

How is God making clear that He expects parents to show grace toward their children?

God expects children to submit to parents' authority. Jesus is the perfect example with His obedience to the Father (Philippians 2:5–8). Children must be taught to submit to their parents' authority; this involves discipline, expressed with love. Read the following passages: Proverbs 23:13; Proverbs 29:15; 2 Timothy 4:1–2; and review Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. There are widely divergent views from parenting experts on proper discipline. Based on these verses, how would you describe an appropriate plan and limits for disciplining your children?

God loves us unconditionally and will never leave us (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:4–5; Hebrews 13:5). Read the story of the prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). What does this story tell us about how we are to love our children?



No matter what you teach your children, they will notice your example. Are you living by what you are teaching your children? If not, list below some of the inconsistencies. Repent and commit to seriously addressing these issues.

In what ways are you setting a godly example for your children? List some of them and thank God for His grace and goodness. Pray that He'll continue to strengthen and empower you to disciple your children. After all, He chose you to be their parents, so He will equip you for what you need.



Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?

Article

By Joel S. Woodruff, Ed.D.

Christian parents have one ultimate desire for their children—that they place their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. However,

what does the conversion of a child look like?

In The Chronicles of Narnia book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis illustrates what the true conversion of a child looks like. He begins by describing the preconversion life of a boy. He writes,



There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it... I can't tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none...

Eustace Clarence liked animals, especially beetles, if they were dead and pinned to a card...

[He] disliked his cousins... But he was quite glad when he heard that Edmund and Lucy were coming to stay. For deep down inside him he liked bossing and bullying... he knew that there are dozens of ways to give people a bad time if you are in your own home and they are only visitors.³

This is the picture of a child who doesn't know Jesus. Later in the story, Eustace falls into a dragon's cave with horrifying results. Lewis writes,

[Eustace] had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.

...He realized that he was a monster... He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed.⁴

³ Lewis, C.S. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952: repr., New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 3-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-92.



This is the point at which Eustace becomes aware that he is a sinful person, which of course is the first step in the conversion process. A child must recognize and admit that he or she is a sinner. Fortunately for Eustace, he soon meets the lion Aslan (the Christ figure in Narnia). Eustace allows Aslan to “un-dragon” him by peeling off his dragon skin. Eustace describes the scene, “The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart,”⁵ which of course it had. Eustace’s heart has been changed by Aslan, and he is baptized in a pool of water and comes out a changed boy. In a Christian parallel, the child has repented and confessed his sin, surrendered to Jesus, and the Lord has changed his heart and made him His child.

Lewis then gives us a realistic description of the post-conversion life of a child. He writes of Eustace,

It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.⁶

In other words, while the child wasn’t perfect, there was a marked change in his life now that he had allowed Aslan to “un-dragon” him.

While this illustration can give us an idea about what conversion looks like in a child, how can we know whether or not our child is a Christian?

Fortunately, Jesus gives us some principles to follow in discerning the spiritual state of another person. First, He warns that we must be careful when judging another person; we must hold ourselves to the same standards of holiness with which we critique others (Matthew 7:1–5). In other words, whether we’re trying to discern the conversion of our child or someone else, we must apply the same basic criteria to ourselves.

Second, Jesus says that it is possible to discern the spiritual vitality of other individuals by the “fruit” they produce in their lives. Those who are rooted in Jesus will produce good and healthy “fruit.” Those who have not experienced the spiritual healing that only Jesus can give will bear thorns and thistles (Matthew 7:15–20; John 15:4–6). Paul later elaborates on this idea when he says that the follower of Jesus will exhibit the fruit of the

⁵Ibid., 109.

⁶Ibid., 112.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Spirit in growing measure: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In contrast, the nonbeliever will continue to produce the fruit of the sinful nature: hatred, discord, jealousy, sexual immorality, and anger, to name a few examples (Galatians. 5:16–25). In other words, our actions are evidence of whether our hearts and minds have been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. This doesn't mean that Christians will live sinless lives or that non-Christians will always appear to be bad people. However, there will be a noticeable qualitative difference in the way the Christian lives following true conversion.

Third, Jesus makes it clear that salvation isn't just intellectual assent, merely confessing that Jesus is Lord. He says that on Judgment Day, many will say, "Lord, Lord," and Jesus will say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21–23). Authentic faith in Christ involves a heart that truly believes (Romans 10:9) and is evidenced by changes in thought, word, and deed. So, while the profession of faith, kneeling by a bedside, or responding to an altar call at church is important, it must be accompanied by a transformation of the heart seen in daily life.

What, then, are some reliable signs that someone has experienced true conversion? The great American preacher and theologian of the early eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards, who preached in some of the revivals of the First Great Awakening, examined this question. In his work "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," he found in 1 John 4 that the apostle points out five traits of an authentically converted believer. In modern language, such a person:

- Acknowledges and exalts Jesus as Lord and Savior (1 John 4:2–3).
- Recognizes the evil of sin in his or her life, the world, and the devil and seeks to overcome it (1 John 4:4–5).
- Has a growing understanding and love for God's Word (1 John 4:6).
- Seeks for and discerns the truth in all things (1 John 4:6).
- Loves God and others (1 John 4:8).

These five marks of true conversion will be present in the life of every true believer, although the marks may evidence themselves somewhat differ-



ently in the life of a child compared to an adult. (Immaturity and stages of development must be taken into account.) So how do these translate into the life of your son or daughter? Here are some questions to consider:

Is there a genuine affection and love for Jesus in your child's life, or is your child just parroting your religious language? In other words, is your child in love with Jesus as evidenced by an infectious enthusiasm for the Lord?

“ Oh, Adam's son, how cleverly you defend yourself against all that might do you good! ”

—C.S. Lewis (Aslan)
The Magician's Nephew

Does your child enjoy talking about Jesus and demonstrate sincerity in the worship of Jesus as seen in prayers and corporate worship?

Is your child truly sorry when he or she does something sinful or harms someone else? Does he or she get upset when bad things happen to others and have a desire to do something about it? Is your child's conscience working in a way that leads to repentance—a change in actions and desire to live like Jesus?

Does your child enjoy reading Bible stories and growing in the understanding of Scripture? Does your child seem interested in knowing more about God and ask appropriate questions?

Is your child growing in wisdom and is he or she better able to discern good from evil as evidenced by what he or she enjoys doing and choosing? For instance, does a child turn away from media choices that are offensive,

recognize and make comments about the bad behavior of adults or peers, stand up for a friend being bullied, and confront or walk away from negative peer pressure?

Is your child growing in kindness toward friends and siblings and demonstrating greater obedience toward you as a parent? Is your child respectful toward adults? Does your child play well together with other children—doing kind and thoughtful things for others without being asked?

While the discernment of true conversion isn't an exact science, since only God knows the true state of the human heart, I trust these questions can help you recognize the presence of God's grace in your child. Always keep praying for your child and know that God hears your prayer.



Intentional Parenting to Disciple Our Children

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

Why do young people walk away from their faith when they leave home? Key reasons include their lack of strong faith as a child and their parents' not having lived a vibrant faith. Parents tend to focus, almost by default, on raising kids who will exhibit good behavior, succeed in school and eventually in employment, and become decent citizens. If they accomplish this, most feel they have parented well.



While these are important outcomes, they are not the most important. What do I desire most for my children? I desire them to grow in the knowledge and love of their Savior Jesus Christ and articulate, defend, and joyfully live out their faith in whatever calling God has for them. Helping disciple our children on this journey should be a parent's urgent priority.

Deuteronomy 6:5–8 tells us that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, and commit wholeheartedly to God's commands. We are to repeat these commands again and again to our children when we are home, on the road, when going to bed and getting up.

Proverbs 22:6 notes that we parents are to train our children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not turn from it. The Bible is clear that parents are chiefly responsible for helping their children become effective disciples. The church can help. Youth groups can help. Godly friends can help. But parents are on the front line, and they need help.

Parents deal with so many seemingly urgent and important things, managing their jobs, helping kids with school, taking them to sports, music, or play practices, church activities, hobbies, vacations... At times, just surviving the daily grind can seem like an impossible goal.

But if we fail to intentionally prepare the hearts of our children to fall in love with the Creator of the universe and find joy in following Him, our work as parents will fall dreadfully short of God's plan for us to lead our children. Likewise, as a church, if we neglect the work of equipping parents to disciple their children, we have forfeited a foundational responsibility.

Recent studies from a variety of reputable sources have confirmed that parents, in general, are not properly preparing children to have a solid faith. Here are just a few summary comments:

Not surprisingly, homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children. Homes modeling vibrant faith do. So these young adults are leaving something they never had a good grasp of in the first place. This is not a crisis of faith, per se, but of parenting.⁷

The drop-out problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it's a disciple-making problem.

⁷ Focus on the Family Findings, "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention," at <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/focus-on-the-family-daily-international/talking-as-a-family-about-topics-of-faith>



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.⁸

If parents have a vibrant and strong faith and model that faith for their children, it is much more likely for those children to develop and maintain a similarly vibrant faith.

“ That is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after. ”

— C.S. Lewis
The Magician's Nephew

The culture of a typical middle school, high school, or university seems almost designed to pull children away from their faith. With the plethora of information on the web and through influential messages on TV, movies, music, and other entertainment options, it is more important now than ever for parents to help children fully understand and defend their beliefs. The world is intentional about worldliness. Parents need to be intentional about discipling their children.

⁸ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

Unfortunately, churches are not, and cannot, fulfill the role of discipling our children. Even churches that make this a priority will get a small percentage of a child's time during the year. Without a parent being fully engaged, a child is left to be pulled away in the general cultural tide.

To help address this urgent need for discipling our children, the C.S. Lewis Institute has created the Keeping the Faith Program. An important component of the program is Aslan Academy small groups, which use the *Keeping the Faith: Equipping Families for Effective Discipleship* guidebook. This guidebook is designed to provide parents access to quality resources to begin and sustain the discipleship process with their children.

There are thousands of books and other resources—many helpful, many misguided or even harmful — on the subject of raising godly children. Sorting through the options can be a daunting challenge. The *Keeping the Faith* guidebook identifies a small number of highly effective resources to help parents on this exciting journey of discipleship with their children and leads Aslan Academy small groups through sixteen fellowship and group discussion meetings. Additionally through our *Dawn Treader News* electronic newsletter, we will highlight additional resources and provide helpful ideas for the journey.

The Keeping the Faith Program fills part of our larger vision of developing effective discipleship resources for people at each key stage of life. So much of a person's worldview and so many opinions are set in motion before the teenage years, making it crucial for parents to recognize the urgent importance of shaping their child's spiritual growth. As parents, we can't guarantee our children's salvation, but we can help shape their characters and model a vibrant faith that can capture their imaginations and understanding.

For parents who have not been actively discipling their children, it is never too late to start. The Aslan Academy will help you get started no matter where you are in this process.

C.S. Lewis knew the importance of helping children learn and grow in their faith. Lewis's Narnia series has proven to be one of the most enduring and helpful tools for children to see insights into God's story. These stories are included in the Aslan Academy reading recommendations, as well as discussion guides that will help parents reinforce Lewis's core messages.

Lewis's example helps us extend our reach beyond our own children.⁹ He spent countless hours responding to letters from children, and his care



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

and love for these children—most of whom he never met—can inspire us as we focus on being intentional with our own children and with others in our extended families, our churches, or our neighborhoods. Toward the end of his life he wrote to a child, “If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.”¹⁰

For parents, grandparents, or other caring adults who can play the role, the process of discipling their children should be one of excitement and joy, helping their children come to understand God’s nature, His plan for us, and His power to help us live bold, fruitful lives. To walk with a child and help that child learn to love God and then see that love unfold over many years is something we all want to experience.

⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 1474.





Theme 1
The Mission
Meeting B

Then choose for yourselves this day
whom you will serve... But
as for me and my household,
we will serve the Lord.
(Joshua 24:15)



Introduction

You have made a choice of eternal consequence: to serve the Lord Jesus, to disciple your children and to encourage other families as they do the same. You are engaged in a humble but crucial mission, which is actually the root of the Great Commission itself. Jesus commanded His followers: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). “All nations” includes your own, and your home can be a source of the transformation of many. Simply take one step at a time.

God designed your family as a powerful social and spiritual unit through which He intends to show His love to the world. As with every effective organization, your family needs good teamwork, a focused mission and a long-term strategy for overcoming obstacles and accomplishing your goals, but there is more to consider. Your godly family will face opposition from Satan (1 Peter 5:8) and the world (John 15:18–19). You might even meet resistance from your own children (Proverbs 17:25). Therefore, you must steep your plans in prayer and put on the armor of God daily (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Remember that our trust is not ultimately in our foresight or skill; our trust is in Christ, who invites us to join Him where He is already at work and to rejoice in the victory which He has already won: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Do not miss Jesus’s promise that follows the Great Commission: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

You have already begun to gather your prayer support team; today you will compose your family’s mission statement. The Aslan Academy program will provide you with a strategy to follow; prayer and praise will keep the enemy at bay. But it is your Father, who has called you and has provided for you, who will ensure that you become “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Take comfort in God’s faithfulness; He will never forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6). Stand firm and draw strength from the promises in God’s Word; it will fulfill His purposes (Isaiah 55:11). Praise Him and thank Him in difficulty and ease alike, and the presence of His Holy Spirit will infuse your home with peace (Philippians 4:7).

Mission accomplished.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His eternal existence. We are finite; He is forever. Pray in thanksgiving for Jesus’s victory over evil on the cross and for His protection as you serve Him. Ask God to help you shape your families’ mission statements, and to open your children’s hearts to that mission.

Study

The discussion questions relate to the reading you did in preparation for this meeting: *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, by Mark Holmen, Introduction (“The Dysfunctional Family”) and chapters 1–3.

Scripture Highlights:

Proverbs 29:18 _____

Ephesians 2:10 _____

Joshua 24:15 _____

Discussion

(Question 7 will require 10–15 minutes.)

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each verse on the line next to the citation, and refer to the verses during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. According to the book, how is every family dysfunctional?
4. As you feel comfortable, discuss the Personal Assessment in chapter 2.
5. Which of the “40 Developmental Assets” (Chart 2) in chapter 3 stand out to you. Why?
6. Discuss some steps you can take to include more of the Developmental Assets into your family culture.
7. Take at least 10–15 minutes to compose a draft family mission statement. Married couples will work together on a single statement, and



single parents may choose to collaborate and bounce ideas off of each other as they prepare a statement for their own households. This is just a rough draft. You will take it home for your children’s input and print it for display. If you desire, bring it to the next meeting to share with the group.

Here is one example to help you get started:

We, the _____ family, as followers of Jesus, will try our best every day, with God’s help, to love God with our whole heart, and to love each other and our neighbors as ourselves. We also will strive to _____, which we believe God has called us to do. We will thank God every day for _____, in Jesus’s name.

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home

Reflection

1. Ask God to continue to refine your family’s mission statement, even into the future.
2. Consider how you will allow your mission statement to help you prioritize your family’s time and resources.
3. Imagine how you might refer to it as you disciple, discipline, and encourage your children.

4. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of your family's mission?

Action

1. Discuss your mission statement with your family. Write the final draft and print a copy of it to display prominently in your home. Illustrate or decorate it if you wish. Encourage your children to hang their own copies in their bedrooms.
2. Over dinner at least once each week, ask your children how their activities have helped to support your family mission statement. Encourage them to ask you the same.
3. Choose one text from your children's Bible reading and have your children draw a response. Hang their art work on the refrigerator or send it in a card to a friend or relative.
4. Continue to experiment with the learning resources found in *Resources for Aslan Academy* on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org). Be sure to try things that are out of your norm; something new might resonate.
5. Update your prayer team and share your mission statement with them.
6. Continue to read the Bible and other good books with your children at home. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
7. Continue praying regularly with each of your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 2: Biblical Parenting—Meeting A

1. Read *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, by Paul David Tripp, Introduction and chapters 1–7 (~100 pages).
2. As you read, write down the “principles” in your journal.





Theme 2

Biblical Parenting

Meeting A

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.
(Luke 12:1–3)(Matthew 22:37, 40)





Introduction

Children notice everything, and they form their first assumptions about God’s character by watching your example. Simply put, whatever you said to them in the car or the kitchen today will influence their future concept of God, for better or worse. Let that sink in. Because no other responsibility could possibly hold you to a higher standard, parents and other Christian role models must diligently guard their personal purity.

Just as your good example paves the way for your child’s faith, your hypocrisy could be its undoing. The Pharisees’ double standard had the same effect on the Jews of Jesus’s day, and Jesus rebukes them sternly for it: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Moreover, God tells us that He will eventually hold us accountable for every foolish word we speak (Matthew 12:36), and that everything we do and say will be replayed in living color before the judgment seat of Christ. By human reckoning, that judgment is in the distant future, but the impact that your purity has on your children is a matter of immediate concern.

Look at your choices of video, print, music, and other entertainment. Listen carefully to the language you use, both at home and away. Do your personal choices consistently reflect God’s standards? Do you catch yourself compromising or rationalizing in any way?

Consider the irony of the terms “adult content” or “mature audience.” When our society tries to shield unsavory activities from the eyes of our children, is it for the children’s protection or for the grown-ups’ convenience? Jesus



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). Clearly His idea of adulthood does not include the moral decline that our society touts as the privilege of maturity.

“ As the Lion seemed to have finished, Jill thought she should say something. So she said, “Thank you very much. I see.”

“Child,” said Aslan, in a gentler voice than he had yet used, “perhaps you do not see quite as well as you think. But the first step is to remember.”

— C.S. Lewis
The Silver Chair



Paradoxically, the power of your parenting will grow out of your *humility* and *submission* to God. The Bible says: “The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). That is not a threat; it is a promise. Delve into God’s word with the help of the Holy Spirit, and He will transform you day by day into a worthy example for your children to follow.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His perfect plan of salvation. Thank Him for his gentleness as you make yourselves vulnerable to His leading. Ask God to open up the hearts in the room to His touch. Pray for protection over your discussion today, that what is said in the room remain in confidence among you and that your words to each other be loving and respectful.

Study

The discussion questions relate to the reading you did in preparation for this meeting: *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, by Paul David Tripp, Introduction and chapters 1–7.

Scripture Highlights:

Psalm 51:1–6 _____

Psalm 51:10–13 _____

Psalm 51:15–17 _____

Matthew 18:1–9 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. In what ways would a shift from the “owner” model of parenting to the “ambassador” model change your approach to parenting?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

4. In what way does your parenting reflect your sense of calling? How does your calling as a parent affect other areas of calling on your life?
5. What specific tasks has God given you to do? How has He provided for your needs as you obeyed?
6. Give an example from your life of grace accomplishing what the law cannot.
7. How does recognizing your inabilities bring you freedom?
8. Where are you tempted to look for your identity, aside from Jesus? What helps you return to your true identity in Christ?
9. What would encourage a results-oriented person to have patience in the process of parenting?
10. How does the fact that your children do not yet believe in Jesus, or are immature in their faith help you to have patience with them?
11. When you get upset with a child, what are some things you do to help yourself recover?
12. Discuss some things that can help a family connect emotionally.

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. As you pray about what is going on in your own heart each day, practice speaking frankly with God about your struggles and questions.
2. Pray for over the “principles” (as described in chapters 1–7 of *Parenting*:



14 Gospel Principles.) Ask your team to pray as well.

3. Think, pray, and journal about how those principles can help you to reach the heart of each of your children this week.
4. How can you laugh together more often? “A cheerful heart is good medicine” (Proverbs 17:22).

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. Designate at least three “electronics time-out” evenings per week. Put the screens in your home in “time-out” for an hour or more to eliminate outside distractions as you interact with each other.
3. Make an opportunity to ask your children about their hopes, ambitions, and fears. Share your own with them, as appropriate.
4. Practice positivity grounded in trust in God: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11). Catch any negativity coming from your children and gently offer a constructive, godly alternative perspective.
5. Especially for teens and older children: Fostering a context of trust and deep relationship in which discipleship can thrive requires that you do not react thoughtlessly when your older children share the challenges they are facing. They must know that you are approachable with any concern they have. Because troubling information can take you by surprise, pray consistently over your communication with your teens. Prepare yourself in advance to listen attentively and to react calmly to whatever they tell you. Give your teen the benefit of the doubt and prepare to follow up with nonjudgmental, open-ended questions.
6. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed and praise God for the progress. Ask them to pray over areas for growth.
7. Continue to read the Bible and other good books with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

8. Continue reading Scripture and praying daily with each of your children. Ask your child to pray for you, too.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 2: Biblical Parenting—Meeting B

1. Read *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* by Paul David Tripp, chapters 8–14 (~100 pages).
2. Consider reading the discussion questions at the end of each chapter before you read the chapter itself. This will help focus and speed up your reading.





Theme 2

Biblical Parenting

Meeting B

Create in me a pure heart,
O God, and renew a steadfast spirit
within me.
(Psalm 51:10)





Introduction

In discipling your children, you run headlong into your own shortcomings and might face more of your personal limitations than ever before. It can leave you feeling entirely inadequate and exhausted, but be encouraged: God knows your weakness, He loves you in spite of it, and He is even working His purposes through it. However, He loves you enough not to leave you that way. God promises to give you a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Bible cautions us about every human heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). That is true of you, and it is true of your children. As you strive to parent your children in the same ways that God parents you, remember that only He is a perfect Father, and that He looks on your human frailty with love: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13–14).

On the hard days when you are tempted to throw in the towel, remember that all people are in need of grace, and that the Holy Spirit is with you in your struggle. God will make a way forward for you.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Because your children’s hearts are made of the same stuff as yours, and because they are susceptible to the same weakness as you are, you can teach them with empathy, compassion, and humility. Make Jesus famous in your home for the tender way in which He transforms each one of your hearts.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His omniscience. We are blind; He is all-knowing. Thank God for His patience with you. Ask Him to reveal your blind spots in the weeks to come, and to grant you the grace to receive His forgiveness. Pray for the grace also to forgive others freely, especially your family members.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Study

Book: *Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, by Paul David Tripp, chapters 8–14

Scripture Highlights:

Psalm 19:7–8 _____

Psalm 103:8–14 _____

2 Corinthians 10:5 _____

Proverbs 6:20–21, 23 _____

Ephesians 6:4 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the verses during the discussion.
2. Discuss the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. What situations tend to evoke anger in your child or teen? In you?
4. How did the principle of authority look in our family as you grew up? How does it affect your parenting today?
5. What are some ways in which your reaction to your child's mistakes might hinder reflection and change in that child? What are some ways in which your reaction can encourage reflection and change?
6. What are some ways to address the foolishness in your children without shaming them? What is the cure for foolishness according to the Bible?
7. Describe one thing (positive and/or negative) that you learned in your youth from your parents or guardians.
8. What is something you tend to meditate on? What problems might arise from wrong thinking or meditating on the wrong things?
9. What is the difference between rebellion and a lack of character?
10. Why do children (and adults) blame problems on others? Why is that so dangerous?



11. What characteristics of a worshiper do you see in your children? How can you direct them to worship of God?
12. What are the dangers of simply controlling your children's behavior? What is the difference between behavior control and heart change?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of biblical parenting techniques?
2. What are some roadblocks that stand in the way of your biblical parenting? What steps can you take to remedy them?
3. The first step in repentance is settling down and becoming willing to talk about the problem. In moments of stress, how might you take action to stop escalation in your child so that you can constructively discuss the issue at hand?
4. Identify something you wish your child would learn. What creative ways could you use to teach your child?
5. Pay special attention to what you think throughout the day, especially the thoughts that directly precede feelings of anger or sadness. "Catch" them and write them down in your journal word for word, if possible. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in governing your thoughts.
6. Think about why you sometimes resist correction instead of embracing it.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. Ask your children about a time when they felt angry. Let them tell you the story.
3. Teach your children how to express their anger using “I statements.” For example, instead of accusing someone of wrongdoing, tell them to describe the specific incident, say, “When you did (insert offensive behavior here), I felt (insert the resulting hurt feeling here).” Make this a cornerstone of your family’s communication.
4. Consider asking your children to tell you how you have offended them. Ask them to forgive you for any times when you might have inappropriately expressed anger toward them. Reassure them that, with God’s help, you will exercise better self-control in the future.
5. Music is a very effective teaching tool, especially for Scripture memorization. Explore the recommended resources listed in *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org).
6. Update your prayer team on your recent progress and challenges.
7. Continue daily Bible reading and discussion with your children.
8. Continue praying regularly for your family and your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 3: Back to the Basics—Meeting A

1. Read “Reviewing the Fundamentals” article found on page 71.
2. Read *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense out of Life*, by Justin Buzzard, Introduction and chapters 1–4 (~ 100 pages).
3. *The New City Catechism* is a helpful resource in applying biblical principles to everyday life. Consider purchasing a copy for your family. See the list of recommended resources in *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org).



Theme 3

Back to the Basics

Meeting A

I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of Egypt,
out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other
gods before me.

(Exodus 20:2–3)





Introduction

Are you ever tempted to “armchair quarterback” the people in the Old Testament? God shows up in pillars of fire and cloud, burning bushes and talking donkeys, and still their faith fails and their allegiance strays. We sometimes reassure ourselves that, if we had the benefit of their experience with God, we would never doubt Him. But we all are susceptible to the worship of false gods. The sin of idolatry, which can be defined in part as worshiping what we imagine, or worse, what we would prefer God to be, rather than who God really is.

Just as Jesus asked Peter, He asks us today, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). A.W. Tozer states it plainly: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹¹ Our understanding of who God is, of how He has revealed Himself to the world through the Old and New Testaments, makes an enormous difference to our worldview, our philosophy of life, our daily conduct, and ultimately to our eternal destiny.

There is no armchair quarterback in your family; they are all starting players. You are coaching your children through the greatest event of their lives, meeting their Creator; and the Bible is your playbook. Read it, learn it, and use it.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His self-sufficiency. He is the source of all that we see, all that we have, all that we are. Thank God for sharing His creation with us

¹¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

and for counting us worthy to steward it. Pray for His help as we shepherd our children and care for our earthly home in His name.

Study

Book: *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense out of Life*, by Justin Buzzard, Introduction–chapter 4

Scripture Highlights:

Genesis 1:1 _____

John 1:1–5 _____

Matthew 16:13–16 _____

Job 38–41 (skim) _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Who or what else might stand at the beginning and the center of the stories that some people believe? What impact does that have on their identity and their choices?
4. What assumptions, lies, or errors have you believed about God that have tempted you to lose faith or even to rebel against Him? What are the truths that counter those falsehoods?
5. How might people use shame as a motivator, for themselves or others? What alternatives are more in line with God’s character?
6. Discuss any insights or questions from the “Reviewing the Fundamentals” article.
7. If you have not already done so, draw your life story timeline as you saw it done in the book, *The Big Story*. Use at least ten significant events. What patterns do you notice? Who or what has most significantly shaped your story? Share your stories briefly with the group.



Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. Our good, loving, all powerful God is at the beginning of all stories, including yours. What difference does knowing that make in your life?
2. Using your timeline, prayerfully consider and journal about times when God intervened on your behalf. Thank Him for His faithfulness.
3. Also bring before Him the times when you feel that He did not act. Pray for insight from the Holy Spirit.
4. Ponder your level of submission to God. What percentage would you give it?
5. Aside from open rebellion, are there areas in which you simply withhold obedience from Him? Do you submit to Him in your finances, entertainment choices, healthy physical habits, language, etc.?
6. Consider the impact of your choices and behavior on your children. They observe and internalize any discrepancies between your profession of faith and your actual behavior, in short, your hypocrisy. Venture to ask them what they see, then listen without becoming defensive.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. Consider sharing your life timeline with your children and help them to make one of their own. Identify God's activity in it with them.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

3. Nature bears the fingerprints of God. Explore a state or national park or other natural area within easy reach. Take a long walk with your child and marvel at the beauty of nature. Point out the blessings that you see around you (including your child!). Give God the glory and thank Him together.
4. Look around your home for visible signs of your Christian faith. What images hang on the walls? What magazines are on the coffee table? Would a casual observer see God glorified in a glance around your house? Consider ways in which you can bring God to mind in what you see every day at home.
5. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
6. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
7. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 3: Back to the Basics—Meeting B

1. Read *The Big Story*, by Justin Buzzard, chapters 5–8 (~100 pages).
2. Pay close attention to the material in chapter 6, “Intermission.” Consider the most important question in anyone’s life: Have you accepted what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf through His death on the cross and His resurrection, and have you asked Him to be your Lord and Savior? If you’re not sure about this, we urge you to consider the following resources:
 - “Begin Your Journey to Peace,” from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (<https://peacewithgod.net/>)
 - “Invitation to Follow Jesus: The Invitation C.S. Lewis Accepted and You Can Too,” by Dr. Randy Newman (<http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/FollowJesus>)



Reviewing the Fundamentals

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

It is quite common for people to assume they have a deep understanding of the Bible. We have learned, however, that even those who have been in church their whole lives, been in small groups, and in other learning environments, often have significant gaps in their understanding of basic biblical concepts.

Surveys of self-identified “born again” believers tell us that there are widely divergent views of salvation, the Trinity, Jesus’s incarnation and resurrection, and issues of heaven and hell. Particularly in the West, there is a temptation to pick and choose the doctrines we want to believe and then either set aside or disagree with the more challenging doctrines.

As a parent in charge of discipling your child, you need to understand that it is essential that you take the time to learn biblical truth, and to pass that truth on to your child.

Parents should certainly care about their child’s salvation, but what this means is often difficult to explain to children. For some parents, once the child “prays the sinner’s prayer,” they might consider their job done. But in reality it is more complex than that. We offer guidance on how parents should think about conversion and also how to look for clues that true conversion has taken place. And once a child is truly converted, the discipleship work is just beginning.

God wants each of us to grow in spiritual maturity and to offer our bodies (and our lives) as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1–2) learning what is good



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

and acceptable to God. And we are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be fruitful, living as effective disciples of Jesus. Conversion is the beginning of this exciting journey, not the end.

Although you may be tempted to “jump right in” with the other steps in the Aslan Academy program, please take the time to review the fundamentals and to pray that God will grant you wisdom as you seek to know God’s truth and communicate that truth effectively to your children.





Theme 3

Back to the Basics

Meeting B

[Jesus said,] “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.”

(John 5:39)

“But what about you?” he asked.

“Who do you say I am?”

(Luke 9:20)





Introduction

Life gets busy. As our days fly by, packed with activity, we can lose sight of what matters most. Late for ballet class, we lose patience with the little one dragging her feet on the way out of the door, forgetting that the whole purpose of the class was to bless that child. Sometimes we just need to take a step back and remember what is essential.

Jesus made a point of retreating with His disciples from time to time, to clarify His teaching to them and to center their focus on essential truths:

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.” (Luke 9:18–20)

“What about you?” is the unavoidable question that someday we all will answer, in this life or the next. “What about you?” Your need has moved God’s heart, and He is longing to heal you. He already wears the crown as King of Kings; only you can choose to give Him the title as Lord over your life as well. Who do you say He is?

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His omnipotence. His is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Thank Him that He wields His power in love, and that He shares a measure of it generously with us, as we serve Him.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Pray for His help to stand apart from the world, to resist the temptations of your own flesh, and to resist the devil as you disciple your family.

Study

Book: *The Big Story*, by Justin Buzzard, chapters 5–8

Scripture Highlights:

Proverbs 6:16–19 _____

John 14:6–9 _____

Mark 2:1–12 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. In light of the power of God as shown in Job 38–41, Jesus’s claim to divinity in John 14:6–9, and the shock of the crowd when Jesus forgave sin in Mark 2:1–12, we can conclude that the power required to forgive sins is in a class with the power that was required to create the universe. Discuss the impact that realization might have on your approach to obedience to God’s precepts, your personal purity, and compromise.
4. According to the book *The Big Story*, the two main “pits” of alienation from God are rebellion (“Forget You, God”) and entitlement, (“You owe me, God”). To which of these are you more susceptible? Why?
5. The five life-changing verbs from the parable of the prodigal son that describe the father’s behavior toward his younger son are saw, felt compassion, ran, embraced, and kissed (Luke 15:11–32). What does each tell you about how God’s love for you?
6. Do you see evidence that hope is diminishing in the world? What is the true story?
7. Gravestones are often engraved with the years of the deceased



person's birth and death. The hyphen representing the years of life lived in between those dates has inspired the question, "What do you do with the dash?" How does that question challenge you?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of the Bible?
2. In what ways have you encountered obstacles to living out God's mission for you?
3. We serve an infinite God. Prayerfully discern in what aspects God is challenging you to think bigger in your life.
4. Philippians 2:3 cautions us against selfish ambition. What should characterize a Christian's ambition?
5. The book *The Big Story* speaks of Jesus as a disturbance. How does Jesus want to disturb your life?
6. Consider the parable of the talents/minas (Matthew 25:14–30). The master told the servants to "engage in business" until his return. How are you investing the talents God gave you?

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

God is calling your family.

2. Set a time to meet with your child's Sunday school teachers or youth group leaders. Bring a note of appreciation or a small gift to thank them for their service to your family. Tell them about your participation in the Aslan Academy program. You can ask them for their input or suggestions on methods or resources, if desired. Ask how you can support them.
3. Consider taking your children to a graveyard to read the headstones. Talk about the "dash."
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
6. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 4: Practical Application of Biblical Truths—Meeting A

1. Read the article "Teaching the Bible to Your Children" on page 85.
2. Complete the "Teaching the Bible to Your Children" Bible study found on page 89.
3. Read *The Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, by Tim Chester and Ed Moll, chapters 1–7 (~45 pages).
4. Write down the "Principles" you learn in each chapter.
5. Enter into your journal the Scriptures referenced in the book that impact or interest you.
6. Subscribe to the C.S. Lewis Institute's *The Dawn Treader News*, a monthly e-newsletter with activities and ideas geared to help parents disciple their children from preschool through the teen years.



Theme 4

Practical Application of Biblical Truths

Meeting A

The joy of the Lord
is your strength.
(Nehemiah 8:10)





Introduction

When God’s word hits home, it will transform your heart, but you can put away the sackcloth.

It was a family reunion like no other, 140 years in the making. The Israelites had finally returned to Jerusalem from exile, restored their magnificent temple and, under the leadership of Nehemiah, miraculously rebuilt the city walls in just fifty-two days. It was time to celebrate and give thanks; but instead of rejoicing, we find them, gathered at midday in the square, weeping inconsolably. Why? It comes down to the discrepancy between view and vision.

The decades in exile, a consequence of Israel’s idolatry and rebellion against God, had stripped them of more than just their homeland; they had also lost their center of worship and consequently their connection to God. With no temple, no priests, and no Scriptures to remind them, and after generations of exposure to foreign kings and idols, the beauty of God’s covenantal vision for His people had faded from their memory. Nehemiah knew that unless the people rebuilt their faith as well as the walls, they would soon fail again as a nation (Psalm 127:1); so he kicked off the reunion festivities with a massive family Bible reading.

Since daybreak, at Nehemiah’s instruction, the priests had been reading aloud to the crowd from the Book of the Law of Moses, proclaiming God’s vision for Israel. As they listened, the people of God suddenly realized how far they had fallen from their Father’s will, bent their faces to the ground and wept in repentance. Nehemiah, together with the priest-leader Ezra, assured them of God’s forgiveness and of His great joy over their return, and sent them home to celebrate saying, “This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

An honest look at your own family through a biblical lens invariably reveals discrepancies between how you live and how God wants you to live, but do not allow that view of the challenges in your family to discourage you. Instead, keep your eyes on the cross of Christ and take to heart the promise in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Pray often for the Holy Spirit to help you realize the mission statement that He gave you at the beginning of your Aslan Academy journey. Over time, as you walk in faithfulness to God’s plan for you, your view will more closely resemble that vision. God rejoices over every step you take. Join Him in celebrating the victories, and let “the joy of the Lord” be your strength.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His immutability. No matter how the world shifts, He is unchanging and always good. Thank Him for your children. Ask God to deploy angels to protect them. Pray that they will be a light to their generation, starting now.

Study

Book: *The Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, by Tim Chester and Ed Moll, chapters 1–7

Scripture Highlights:

Mark 1:14–15 _____

Ephesians 6:1–4 _____

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 _____

James 4:1–10 _____

Colossians 2:20–3:10 _____

Mark 7:21–23 _____

Luke 15:11–32 _____

Psalms 127:1 _____



Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the Scriptures during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Think back on what kind of parent you thought you would be before you had your first child. How has your journey as a parent been different from what you imagined it would be?
4. In what ways is God really stretching you now?
5. Review together the “Principles” from the reading.
6. How does following God’s rules make practical sense?
7. Define worldly success. How does God define success?
8. According to Psalm 51:5 and Mark 7:21–23, why do all people, including your children, misbehave?
9. How do your selfish desires distort your parental self-discipline?
10. Discuss the characteristics of good discipline as described in chapter 5: calm, clear, consistent, and concentrated on the heart.
11. Today many Judeo-Christian values are countercultural. Jesus warned His followers that they could not love both God and the world. In what ways have you recently had to choose God over the world?
12. Discuss some changes you might make at home in light of what you have learned.

Closing Prayer





EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Bring It Home

Reflection

1. In what ways does the example of the gracious father in the parable of the prodigal son puzzle you? Encourage you?
2. Have you experienced any spiritual warfare? Pray for protection and update your prayer team.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. Consider the general atmosphere of your home. Does the Holy Spirit rest there as would a lovely fragrance? When people walk in the door, can they somehow sense your joyful reverence for God and your love for each other? Talk with your family about how you can foster a pleasant home atmosphere using the acronym AROMA, which represents specific ways in which a loving, godly family relate to one another:¹²
 - Affection. “Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love” (2 Peter 1:5–7).
 - Respect. “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10).
 - Order. “I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is” (Colossians 2:5).
 - Merriment. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).
 - Affirmation. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

¹² Stephen and Amanda Sorenson, *Following in Your Footsteps: How to Pass on Your Faith to Your Children* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 2002), 51–60.



3. Hospitality is a gift through which God uses your home to bless others. Treat your neighbors or your children’s school friends to a meal or a game night in your home. Receive them warmly, and enjoy their company, regardless of their ethnicity, religious preferences, or lifestyle choices. Practice the unconditional love of Jesus together as a family.
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
6. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 4: Practical Application of Biblical Truths—Meeting B

1. Read *The Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, by Tim Chester and Ed Moll, chapters 8–12 (~45 pages).
2. Write down the “Principles” you learn in each chapter.
3. Take time to read the Scriptures referenced in the book. Enter into your journal the ones that impact or interest you.

Teaching the Bible to Your Children

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

Study the Scriptures diligently...
These are the very scriptures that testify about me.

(John 5:39)

Every historical narrative, every prophecy, every law, every theological argument contained in the Bible is a link in the chain of God’s development of His plan of salvation for humanity. The Bible is the whole story — God’s story and message for humanity.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

In philosophy classes in universities, philosophies are taught, often quite logically and neatly, but they can be pushed into self-contradiction. Not one of these innumerable systems for “living wisely” is in fact livable. The Bible, and Christianity, is. Even non-Christians cannot help admitting that the Golden Rule is infallibly honorable, that forgiveness somehow leads

“ “You see, friends,” he said, “that before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has entered it; waked and brought hither by this Son of Adam...But do not be cast down,” said Aslan... “Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself.” ”

— C.S. Lewis
The Magician's Nephew

to the most perfect exercise of justice, and that the central gospel truth of Christ’s sacrifice has changed the world as nothing else ever has or could. The complexity of human life — the tangle of sins and emotions and



desires and relationships — is only fully explained and dealt with by the Bible. There is nothing more important to teach our children as we prepare them to deal with life in this world.

And the Bible itself is clear that it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children the Scriptures. “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7).



This Biblical mandate also describes the most effective method for fulfilling the duty it commands parents to undertake. The best way to teach children about the Bible is to talk about it. Bring up connections between the passages you have read and the issues the world or your family is currently facing. Answer the questions the children ask and ask them some yourself. You might be surprised by the ready grasp children have of spiritual truths. You might find that they figure out with astonishing understanding the meaning of a passage of Scripture that has puzzled you and many other adults.

It can also be helpful to set aside some time for memorizing Bible verses with your children. Committing scriptural passages to memory is the most certain way to ensure access to their guidance in every crucial experience in life. Often the moments that require us to make the most serious decisions occur at times when we might not have a Bible on hand. So choosing Scriptures for our children to commit to memory is a meaningful and practical task. Requiring our children to put effort into memorizing Scripture as they would into training for a favorite sport or learning a leading part in a play or studying for the SAT, reinforces for them just how important the Bible is and how much a deep and intellectually instructed knowledge of God’s Word is necessary in their life.

But precisely because biblical knowledge is necessary for life—true, genuine, eternal life—we must impress on our children the importance of living it out. Children will not make a connection with past occurrences and moral principles unless they see the import they have for their daily life. When reading the Bible with our children, we must show them not only how all the biblical stories connect to form one cohesive narrative of God’s salvation, but also how this salvation has changed our lives. Children tend to imitate what their parents do rather than merely act on what they have said. To grow in godly grace and provide a genuine example to their children of what a life lived according to the Bible should look like, parents must spend time in the Word themselves, over and above family devotions with their children.



As your children grow in the Word, they will be transformed by it. It is a wonderful thing to be raised in the Word from the time one is very young; one’s habits of thinking and desiring are then shaped in accordance with biblical truths rather than cultural influences. Only the Bible can truly make us realize the way God intended we should live, being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (see Romans 12:2). And this transformation leads to the greatest joy one can possibly have: living a real, godly, fulfilled life. We all want something beyond the false, insufficient realities offered to us in the mundane concerns and aims of worldly societies and functions. And the Bible shows us the way to enjoy life to the fullest, life as God really created it to be. If we desire the best for our children, we can do nothing better for them than to raise them with a full appreciation and ever-increasing understanding of the Bible.



Teaching the Bible to Your Children

Bible Study

The Bible is God’s story that He wants us to know. Understanding how the Bible fits together into one story of God’s plan is important for us individually, but particularly important as we teach the Scripture to our children. Parts of the Bible can seem confusing to children reading on their own, but we can help them understand why Scripture is important, where God’s Word comes from, and how it can be used to help us live our lives.

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Where does Scripture come from?

2. Why is it important for you personally to keep in mind that Scriptures are inspired by God?

3. Describe how the Scriptures can be useful in the following areas:

a. Teaching

b. Rebuking



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

c. Correcting

d. Training

4. How do these uses of Scripture “equip us for every good work”?





Theme 4

Practical Application of Biblical Truths

Meeting B

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

(Hebrews 4:12)





Introduction

Why have Communist tyrants historically tried to crush Christianity? Why do radical religious leaders ruthlessly persecute followers of Jesus in southwest Asia? Why does faith in God meet with such angry resistance in the postmodern, humanist West? The complex reasons include the fact that the truth of God’s Word poses a powerful threat to those who would keep power for themselves. Clearly your family is small in comparison to an entire nation, but as your family actively applies God’s Word to your lives, you pose a real threat to the forces of evil, and Satan has your family in his sights.

When you become aware of opposition to your discipleship efforts, whether through logistics foul-ups, resistance from family members, or sluggishness on your part, or worse, remember that God is in your corner and that His Word will win the day. Christians believe that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The Lord makes this promise in Isaiah 55:11: “My word . . . goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Ultimately, no matter who opposes your efforts to disciple your children, especially if your opponents are the kids themselves, remind them that the gospel is God’s idea, not just yours:

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?...

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:10–12)



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Fight the good fight. Continue to engage with the Holy Spirit to bring the Bible to life for your family. You can give them no greater gift.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His perfect wisdom. Pray together for discernment of any idols in your home. Pray for your children as they face so many ungodly influences outside your home. Pray that your children will trust your judgment as you maintain or set new limits in your household.

Study

Book: *The Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, by Tim Chester and Ed Moll, chapters 8–12

Scripture Highlights:

Deuteronomy 11:16–21 _____

Proverbs 4:1–9 _____

Proverbs 6:20–24 _____

Matthew 6:5–18 _____

Galatians 6:10 _____

Mark 12:28–34 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Review together the “Principles” from the reading.
4. In what productive ways do you use technology in your home? Can any of those tasks be accomplished without electronics or screens?
5. How did you learn to pray?
6. What can we learn from our children about how to pray? Now that you



are a parent, how do your responses to your children’s requests shed light on God’s possible responses to your requests?

7. How can service to your church “family” bless your own family? Did you grow up in a service-oriented home?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of Scripture?
2. What common interests can you foster between you and your children in order to spend time with them?
3. How can you disciple your child using the little pockets of time that might be hidden in your daily routine?
4. What limits does your family have on content and amount of screen time? Are you leading by a healthy example?
5. Consider what obstacles block your family’s service to your community? How can you clear some of them?
6. If your family is overcommitted, pray about setting a limit on activities, even service, in order to spend more quality time together and with God.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

2. Continue to designate a tech-free time each day in your house, but don't leave that time empty. Fill it with fun interaction and conversation. Consider playing a card or board game together.
3. Identify one way to serve your community together as a family this month, and do it. Read Matthew 25:31–46 with your family and emphasize to them that whatever you do to someone else, you do to Jesus.
4. Explore Bible related games to play together to reinforce what you are learning at home and at church. (See *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org) for suggestions.)
5. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
6. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
7. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming next: Theme 5: Heart Change — Meeting A

1. Read the “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change” article found on page 102.
2. Complete the “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change” Bible study found on page 106.
3. Read *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller, Introduction and chapters 1–3 (~90 pages).
4. Highlight or take notes on the concepts that surprise you.



Theme 5

Heart Change

Meeting A

Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often
I have longed to gather your
children together, as a hen
gathers her chicks under her wings,
and you were not willing.
(Matthew 23:37)





Introduction

Independence is the art of getting what you want, when you want it, all by yourself. It can be the driving force behind great accomplishment... and great heartache. As they grow, children naturally tend to push their parents and other grownups away, striving for healthy independence, and then they often need to run back “home” for comfort when they get hurt.

Because you love your children, when one pushes you away, whether in a healthy developmental phase or willful defiance, it hurts, and you, as a parent, must choose from an array of responses to your child’s behavior. Your options include frustration, anger, betrayal, and the like, as well as patience, understanding, humility, longsuffering, and encouragement.

In *The Prodigal God*, Timothy Keller calls our drive for spiritual independence from God a “project of self-salvation,” an ultimate form of childish independence. In the Gospels, we see the impact of our rebellion on the heart of God. Because Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30), Jesus expresses a decidedly paternal sorrow as He grieves over Jerusalem’s alienation from God in Matthew 23:37. He calls out to the city: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Luke 13:34).

God delights in us and hates the destruction that sin causes in our lives. Even so, He patiently waits for us to realize that we cannot survive without Him. If we choose to come home to Him before it is too late, He pulls up the hem of His garment and races out to embrace us.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His faithfulness. We are weak; He is tireless in His care for us. Thank Him for drawing you and your children to Himself through kindness, not shame. Pray for the grace to speak His kindness always to your family and to yourself.

Study

Book: *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller, Introduction and chapters 1–3

Scripture Highlights:

Luke 15:1–3, 11–32 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for a volunteer to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of the Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passage during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger brother was alienated from God by his “wild living” and the older brother by his self-righteousness. In what ways do you see each brother in yourself?
4. As described in chapter 3 of *The Prodigal God*, misplaced moral conformity stems from sin. How can you break God’s rules “by keeping all of them diligently”?
5. How might self-righteousness damage a parent/child relationship?
6. In what ways can excessive self-discovery lead to alienation from God?
From family?
7. How might excesses damage a parent-child relationship?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home

Reflection

1. According to Keller, Jesus “shows us that everyone is dedicated to a project of self-salvation, to using God and others to get power and control for themselves. We are just going about it in different ways.” What steps might you need to take to return “power” and “control” back to God?
2. How do you feel when your children are unappreciative of your provision for them? How do you react?
3. Consider in what ways you are modeling gratitude and/or ingratitude to God by your words or actions.
4. In what ways do you battle with excess?
5. In what ways do you battle with self-righteousness?

Action

1. Choose two or three ideas from the readings that you believe God has put on your heart. Journal about your thoughts.
2. Act out the parable of the prodigal son with your children. Discuss what you have learned and its impact on you, as appropriate.
3. Have fun with movie night. Watch an age-appropriate movie with your family and explore the themes of redemption in the story. Check the Focus on the Family’s Plugged In website for suggestions. (See *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org.)
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
6. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming next: Theme 5: Heart Change – Meeting B

1. Read *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller, chapters 4–7 (~90 pages).



Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

The Bible talks about God removing a person’s heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). In Psalm 51:10, the psalmist writes, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

When we become believers in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us — in our hearts — and through the Holy Spirit we become new creatures. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV). When we become new creatures, our hearts are changed to where our desires are inclined toward the Lord and our desires are less focused on increasingly distant selfish, worldly things.

You have probably seen someone who was transformed so completely that you could scarcely believe he or she was the same person you once

knew. I have a friend who, in his youth, joined a terrorist organization, was filled with hate, and sought to harm and even murder those he considered the “enemy.” This foul-mouthed, fire-breathing hater is now a mild-mannered, soft-spoken, godly discipler of men. God changed him; in particular, God changed his heart. I’d known him for a year or two when someone told me about his past; I simply could not believe it. There is no way, I thought, that the person I knew could act the way he was described. The Bible is full of examples of heart change. Saul (renamed Paul) is a perfect example alongside my friend. Paul went from being filled with zealous hatred toward Christians to becoming the most successful missionary of all time. Jesus changed Paul’s heart, and all of Paul’s natural gifts and skills were combined with God’s anointing to turn him into one of the most important and successful men who ever lived.



For parents, it is easy to lose heart when we watch our children show such selfishness and often anger at any moment they think something is “not fair” toward them. They can hit, bite, and bully other kids and fight against their parents’ authority. Through careful application of discipline, this behavior can often be controlled, but then parents can be surprised at how often it returns in certain circumstances.

There is a difference between compelling a certain behavior through consistent discipline and seeing behavior changed due to a new motivation of the heart. The first may allow a parent accompanying a child to rest easy in public; the second will allow for a lifetime of growth guided by the Holy Spirit.

Our children do need to understand and respect authority—the authority



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

“ Lucy buried her head in his mane to hide from his face. But there must have been some magic in his mane. She could feel lion-strength going into her. Quite suddenly she sat up. “I’m sorry, Aslan,” she said. “I’m ready now.”

“Now you are a lioness,” said Aslan. “And now all Narnia will be renewed.” ”

— C.S. Lewis
Prince Caspian

of God and the authority of their parents. But as parents we are called to use our authority not just to require good behavior, but to point our children to the ultimate authority, God. We are called to nurture their love and understanding of God and His plan for their lives. We are called to help them develop a godly character that will help them become more and more like Jesus as they grow up. We are called to surround our children with godly examples, while we prepare them for challenging situations.



In short, we are called as parents to equip our children for the most important decision they will ever make: will they trust Jesus Christ for their salvation and surrender their lives for God to work through them in whatever role God has planned for them?

Many parents think that if they can lead their child to say “the sinner’s prayer,” their work is done. With children, it is never easy to know how sincere they are or whether they fully understand the implications. Our job is to help our children grow in their understanding and to continue to equip them, encourage them, challenge them, and, in particular, show them by example how to become devoted followers of Jesus.

Every child is different. God has made each child unique, and He has a purpose for each child. As parents, we must be willing to take the time to understand how God has “wired” each child and to help the child develop God-given gifts and become a person of great character. As a child’s heart begins to change, parents will see areas that require deeper engagement to encourage continued growth and learning.

In today’s society, it is common for parents to expend an enormous amount of energy and resources on developing their child’s academic skills, considering the right schools and the best universities. Likewise, many parents of children with athletic ability provide significant opportunities to maximize their potential. Another parent might notice a great musical passion and help that child fully develop that gift.

While these may be worthwhile pursuits, what will be accomplished if our child becomes successful by the world’s standards but has a faulty character or is living outside of God’s desire? A quick look at the entertainment industry or many of our sports “idols” will demonstrate the heartache and devastation that can be caused by worldly success outside of God’s provision.

While it is God who is ultimately responsible for changing the hearts of our children, as parents we can do our part to prepare our children for God’s work to be complete. Another way to say it is that God will light the fire, but we can pile up lots of kindling so the fire can burn bright!

When we see a child whose heart has truly been changed, and we see how that child begins to love God and then live out that love by the way he or she treats family, friends, and those in need, it is a beautiful sight. That child becomes teachable in so many ways and will accept our authority as parents because he or she respects God’s authority personally.

More important, that child will grow up, perhaps go to college, and begin a career with God as guide, able to discern God’s will, and resist the worldly pressures that can lead to destruction.



Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change

Bible Study

The Bible mentions the heart more than 750 times, primarily to describe our will—our ability and desire to do things, to make and carry out choices. The heart, in this context, essentially describes who we are.

This is not the version of ourselves that we show to the world; it is instead the true self that God sees. “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”



(1 Samuel 16:7).

The natural state of our hearts is sinful or “deceitful” (Jeremiah 17:9–10), but God wants to change our hearts, and He is willing to do so for those who seek Him. God will change our hearts in a variety of ways, and for those whose hearts are changed, there will be evidence of such a heart change. For some, change will be immediate. Others will take longer. For all of us, having our hearts conformed to God’s desire will be a lifelong journey. Work through the following Bible study to get a deeper understanding of how God sees the heart and how He wants to change it.

1. What is the natural state of our hearts? (Jeremiah 17:9–10; Mark 7:21–22)

2. Are we able to keep the darker aspects of our hearts to ourselves, or does God know our true hearts? (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:21)

3. Does God want to leave us with deceitful hearts, or does He desire to change our hearts? (Ezekiel 36:25–27; Psalm 51:10; Romans 5:5; Galatians 4:6)

4. Read the following verses and write out some of the ways God involves us in the process of heart change. (Ezekiel 18:30–32; 2 Chronicles 32:25–27)



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

(Psalm 51:10; Psalm 62:8; Psalm 86:11; Psalm 119:36; Psalm 119:145)

(Acts 15:9; Romans 10:9–10; Ephesians 3:17; Psalm 51:10)

(Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:16; Psalm 40:8; Psalm 119:2; Psalm 119:10; Colossians 3:16)

5. Review your answers to question 4. See if you found evidence for the following ways that God works in us for heart change. Describe how God has worked in these areas in your life:

Repentance

Calling out to God

Faith

Obedience



Gratitude

6. In the process of heart change, God works to strengthen and encourage us. Read the following passages and write how you see the Holy Spirit sustaining the process of heart change. (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; Acts 11:23; Acts 14:17)

Of what we think? (Psalm 51:10)

Of what we say? (James 3:1-12; Luke 6:45)

Of what we treasure? (Matthew 6:21; Matthew 13:45-46)

Of whether we forgive? (Matthew 18:35)

Of how we love God and others? (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Peter 1:22)

7. What are some other ways by which evidence would show up in your life?

8. Read Galatians 5. When our hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit, and we cooperate with Him in this change, we will see our thoughts and actions shift from a focus on sinful desires to godly desires. Write out the changes you would like to see in your life through this change. Also



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

write out what your prayer is for the changes you would like to see in your children's lives.

9. Review question 6. Are there any of these key approaches missing in your life? If so, write them down here and pray regularly for God's help to continue the process of changing your heart.





Theme 5

Heart Change

Meeting B

The LORD God called
to the man, “Where are you?”
(Genesis 3:9)





Introduction

Adam and Eve fell for it; we all fall for it at some point. They believed the lie that God could not be trusted. All Satan had to do was to subtly discredit God, and Eve took the bait:

He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?...

“You will not certainly die... For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:1, 4–5)

Until Satan tempted her with the false prospect of her own god-like omniscience, she had been perfectly content in God’s provision. But in that moment, as Eve’s fingertips hesitated a hair’s breadth away from the beautiful forbidden fruit, she wrestled with a fundamental human decision: to trust God or not. There is no middle ground between dependence on the Father and alienation from Him, and we all must choose.

We see a similar struggle in a willful child debating disobedience, and in a little one throwing a fit. As loving parents, we long for them to understand that we love them, that they are safe in our care and that life would be so much easier for them if only they trusted and obeyed us.

We also see it in ourselves. Do we really trust “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28)?

Sadly Adam and Eve chose alienation and immediately regretted it; but their loving Father lost no time in initiating their rescue; the promise of a Savior accompanied the curse (Genesis 3:15). God pursues His wayward children still today, beginning with a gentle question, “Where are you?”



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His unconditional love for you. Thank Jesus for shedding His blood on the cross so that our sin, even the ones we don't yet know we are committing, are washed clean. Ask Him to reveal any blind spots in you and to help you remedy them. Ask the Holy Spirit for humble hearts for yourself and for your children.

Study

Book: *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller, chapters 4–7

Scripture Highlights:

Luke 15:1–3, 11–32 _____

Nehemiah 8:9–12 _____

Zephaniah 3:17 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. What angers you? What angers your child?
4. How can your own experience with disappointment and anger help you to treat your children with compassion? What wisdom can you share with your child about handling anger in a godly way?
5. How is your authority as a parent different from superiority? What is the source of your authority?
6. Read Nehemiah 8:9–12. Why were the people weeping? What reason did Ezra and Nehemiah give that they should rejoice? What encouragement would you, therefore, give to a child who is too hard on himself?
7. Read Zephaniah 3:17. How does God feel about you? How does your perception of God's delight in you lead to heart change?

8. Describe the “feast” of salvation we will enjoy in heaven, as it is outlined in chapter 7.
9. Heaven is our true home. How can you plant in yourself and your children a joyful anticipation of our eventual return home to our Father?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of heart change?
2. When you feel remorse over a mistake, how can you tell if it stems from the “pride of a Pharisee” or a truly repentant heart? How can you tell the difference in your child?
3. In moments of anger, what might you believe is being withheld from you? Is God withholding good things from you?
4. How can joy play a larger part in your interaction with your family?

Action

1. Choose two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family, and do them with your children. Journal about your experience.
2. If you have multiple children, discuss your family’s sibling dynamics. How do the older ones lead and serve the younger? How do the oldest



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

children feel about their role? How do the younger children feel about theirs?

3. If you have one child, discuss the challenges and benefits of being a single child. What dynamics have you observed in friends' or relatives' families?
4. Consider a family foot-washing experience. If resentment or hard feelings of any kind surface, prayerfully discuss them and seek forgiveness. Read or find a video online of Jesus's example in John 13:1–17 and do the same for each other at home.
5. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
6. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
7. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 6: Developing Character That Lasts—Meeting A

1. Read the “Developing Character and Faith that Lasts” article found on page 123.
2. Complete the “Developing Character and Faith that Lasts” Bible study found on page 128.
3. Read *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates, chapters 1–5 (~125 pages).



Theme 6

Developing Character That Lasts

Meeting A

Make ready a people
prepared for the LORD.
(Luke 1:17)





Introduction

John the Baptist had his work cut out for him, and consequently so did his parents. When the angel of the Lord announced John’s future birth, he gave John’s parents their own simple instructions: “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.” (Luke 1:13) Miraculous words, yes, but they are basically straightforward. Then the angel prophesied powerfully about the baby with words that seemed to undo poor Zechariah:

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:14–17)

We see that, even before John’s physical conception, God called him to play a vital role in His kingdom. Likewise, God has a plan and a purpose for your children’s lives. He is calling them to impact His kingdom in their own way, and it is your job to equip them to follow God.

However, notice the Source of power in the angel’s prophecy: the Holy Spirit (v. 15). No amount of effort or vigilance on your part is sufficient to guarantee your children’s faithful walk with God; their salvation comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, your role is clear: to pray for your children and to shape their character.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

In fact, strong godly families are essential to God’s whole plan of salvation, and you are listed by name in the angel’s prophecy over John. Notice in verse 17 the amazingly high priority that God gives to “[turning] the hearts of the parents to their children.” Family discipleship is at the very center of God’s plan “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Although there will ever be only one John the Baptist, your children also are born with a high calling from God (Ephesians 2:10); and just as He did Zachariah and Elizabeth, God promises to equip you uniquely to prepare each child for faithfulness to their calling.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His goodness. Our motives are always flawed; He is perfectly good. Thank Him for all the blessings He has given you. (Pause to speak some of them aloud as a group.) Pray that the Holy Spirit fill you and your children with gratitude.

Study

Book: *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates, chapters 1–5

Scripture Highlights:

Matthew 5:34–37 _____

Colossians 3:1–17 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. List the four character traits that are discussed in this week’s reading.
4. Is “happiness” the ultimate goal in life? If not, what is?
5. In what ways does experiencing difficulty make us stronger?



6. How might worldly success differ from faithfulness to God’s plan for you?
7. Open chapter 1 and review together the traits of an expedient character. A malleable character. A legalistic character.
8. What are the traits of a principled character?
9. In what ways do you model a teachable spirit for your children?
10. Sometimes it is easier to perform a task yourself rather than to hold a child accountable for it. In what ways might you be tempted to compromise while teaching your child self-discipline? Why?
11. Discuss the sources of true, healthy compassion:
 - a. God’s compassion —
 - b. It could be me —
 - c. Righteous indignation —
 - d. It could be Christ —
12. What steps can you take to restore a tender heart and grow compassion in yourself and in your children? See chapter 5 of *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*.

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. Has the pursuit of earthly success hindered your spiritual growth? If so, in what ways can you reprioritize? Refer back to your family mission



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

statement and pray that the Holy Spirit would keep you on track from now on.

2. What character strengths seem to “run in your family”? Thank God for your family members who laid that good foundation.
3. Where do you struggle with any of the character traits that the reading highlights? Journal and confess any sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts you.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the reading to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. Post the character traits from the reading on the wall in your kitchen or family room to keep them fresh in everyone’s mind. Be on the lookout for displays of good character in your children and write them down discreetly. Affirm your children with private “pillow notes” telling them what you saw in them. Remind them that God is pleased with them, too.
3. Refer frequently to your family mission statement as you disciple your kids, using the phrase, “Because we are a family that...” as the God-given standard for behavior in your home.
4. Make a habit of anticipating the need of others. Look for thoughtful ways to serve each other and your neighbors by performing little helpful tasks, such as carrying a friend’s or sibling’s backpack up the stairs without being asked, delivering the neighbors’ newspapers to their doors on the way to the bus stop, or rolling up the neighbors’ trash cans on the way home from the school bus stop.
5. Pray Psalm 86:11–13 over each child, substituting the child’s name for the word me.

Teach ___ your way, LORD,
that (he/she) may rely on your faithfulness;
give (him/her) an undivided heart,
that (he/she) may fear your name.
___ will praise you, Lord my God, with all (his/her) heart;
(he/she) will glorify your name forever.
For great is your love toward (him/her);



you have delivered (him/her) from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.

6. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
7. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
8. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 6: Developing Character That Lasts—Meeting B

1. Read *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates, chapters 6–10 (~120 pages).



Developing Character and Faith That Lasts

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

In our Western society, the daily pressures mount to help our children excel in school, in athletics, in service projects... to build a “résumé” that one day will help them get into the right schools, help them land that first job, and get them started on a productive adult life.

In this age of social media, we see increased opportunities for our children (and ourselves) to self-promote and be compared to others. The pres-



tures in these “social spaces” are usually toward presenting only the most appealing version of our “self” to the world.

If we as parents are not careful, we become accomplices in setting our children on a path toward an inordinate preoccupation with “the self” and worldly accomplishment. But do we want our children’s “identity” to be built on how they perform or on their identity as a child of God? If we start our children on the wrong path, the world is happy to push them in that direction, reinforcing the belief that accomplishment and promotion is what really matters. But is this really how we can best prepare our children for their adult years?

Wouldn’t you rather have a child whose identity is in Christ and who grows into an adult who exhibits the “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23)? When people interact with your child and see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, would you feel that your child is ready to find his or her way in the world?

The Holy Spirit brings the fruit into our lives, but as parents we can help our children’s hearts be attuned to the Spirit as we focus on character formation. As parents, we need to help our children develop the inner qualities that will serve as a foundation as they mature into honorable and godly adults.

If our children develop an honorable and godly character, they will be prepared to face adversity with perseverance; selfishness or rudeness with kindness. When they are attacked in some way, they will be able to restrain their reaction with self-control. At school, in the neighborhood, in group activities, they will become an instrument of God’s kingdom at work.



““ Now, Bree,” [Aslan] said, “you poor, proud frightened Horse, draw near. Nearer still, no son. Do not dare not to dare. Touch me. Smell me. Here are my paws, here is my tail, these are my whiskers. I am a true Beast.”

“Aslan,” said Bree in a shaken voice, “I’m afraid I must be rather a fool.”

[Aslan replied], “Happy the Horse who knows that while he is still young. Or the Human either.” ”

— C.S. Lewis
The Horse and His Boy

Shaping our children’s character is not a check-the-box process. It is an ongoing effort to truly understand the child, discover areas of great potential and concern, and then provide guidance through activities that help mold that character into what God desires.

Each child is different; as parents we need to help each child develop God-given gifts and skills, while helping the child turn away from areas that run counter to God’s desires.

In this section of *Keeping the Faith* guidebook, you will learn about developing character in the following areas:

- Integrity
- A teachable spirit
- Self-discipline
- Compassion
- A servant’s heart
- Courage
- Faith
- Joy

Helping to shape your child’s character is a critical part of your child’s continued spiritual growth. This section of the Aslan Academy builds on the excellent work by John and Susan Yates, as described in their book *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*.

A significant percentage of children raised in church-going homes drift away from faith as they go from high school through the college years. Simply sharing biblical knowledge and “dragging them to church” won’t necessarily instill in them a strong yearning to know God and to follow Him as they become independent young adults. But if children, being led by their parents, have the chance to fully understand the important elements of a godly character and what it means to live an honorable and godly life, they will be more prepared to enter the pressure-cooker world and be able to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ.

A recent study was conducted on Christian students transitioning to college, seeking to understand the most important influences on shaping their faith.¹³ From choices of friends inside their youth group, friends outside of their youth group, youth leaders, parents, and adults in their

¹³ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 19–23.



congregation, the students chose parents as the number-1 influence. In fact, as pointed out in the resource *Sticky Faith* (see later theme), one study concluded that the most important influence in shaping the spiritual life of a child is the spiritual life modeled and taught by his or her parents.¹⁴ So character formation is not just for the children. As you as a parent go through these resources and seek to build a godly character in your children, examine yourself and seek God’s guidance for your own ongoing character development.

This section builds on the earlier discussion of “heart change.” As a child’s



heart begins to change, the child will become more interested in becoming the person God wants him or her to be. Without heart change, children may learn to “follow the rules” or have decency and manners, but they will miss the big picture of God developing them into the individuals He wants them to be. As parents, focusing on character, rather than selfish promotion and worldly accomplishment, will give children the best opportunity to fulfill God’s plan for them. Then, in whatever setting, they will be effective and godly models, maybe even leaders, exhibiting a godly character for others.



¹⁴ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Developing Character and Faith That Lasts

Bible Study

There is a big difference between helping our children be happy and helping them have a godly character that will sustain them through the good and bad periods of life. The foundational elements of character development—integrity, a teachable spirit, self-discipline, compassion, a servant’s heart, courage, faith, and joy—take hard work and intentionality on the part of parents. If we neglect character development, much of our other work as parents will easily fall apart as our child leaves our home. As with heart change, the Holy Spirit does the work of change, but as parents we can prepare our children for when the Holy Spirit does His work.

Character development is integrally connected with heart change. Consider character development as the “living out” of heart change in every aspect of one’s life. With a godly character, based on biblical teaching, we can weather the inevitable storms and flourish no matter our circumstances. As parents, one of the best gifts we can give our children is to properly prepare them for when they are on their own. Teaching and training them in character development is perhaps our most important job.

As you address the questions below, see how God prepares people in each area and how God wants to prepare you and your child’s character.

Integrity

1. Read Colossians 3:1–7. If we are raised with Christ, what are we to set our hearts on?

2. Read verse 5. Why do you think God wants us to “put to death” our earthly nature?



A Teachable Spirit

1. Read Psalm 25:4–15. In verses 8–10, why should we trust God’s teaching?

2. How do you think forgiveness allows us to be guided by God’s teaching?

Self-Discipline

1. Read Luke 9:23 and 2 Timothy 1:7. How does the concept of denying yourself lead to a stronger character? Why is Jesus such a strong example for us?

2. In 2 Timothy, Paul writes about God’s help for us in self-discipline. Why is it essential to have the Holy Spirit give us power to discipline ourselves?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Compassion

1. Read Isaiah 58:6–11. Why do you think God describes those with compassion as a “well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (v. 11)?

2. How does being compassionate not only help others but change ourselves?

3. Read Psalm 103:6–14. In your own words, describe God’s compassion toward us based on these verses.

A Servant’s Heart

1. Read Philippians 2:3–4 and John 13:1–17. Why does God call us to value others more than ourselves?

2. If Jesus can model service as He did in the passage in John, what types of actions could we model in our lives that would demonstrate humility and love for others?



Courage

1. Read Deuteronomy 31:6, Matthew 14:27 and Hebrews 13:5. Why should we not be afraid?

2. Read Ephesians 2:10. If God is with you, and we are created in Christ Jesus to do the work God has already prepared for us, what should our attitude be as we go about this work? How can we expect God to help us carry out His plan for us?

Faith

1. Read Psalm 111. Write five reasons why we should be able to trust God and have faith in Him.

2. Read Ephesians 1:17–21. Describe the power that God describes He will give us as we put our faith and hope in Him.

Joy

1. Read John 15:1–13. How do you think the “pruning” process can lead to joy? Describe an experience in your life where this has happened to you.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

2. Read Psalm 97. Contemplate God's awesome power as described in this psalm. How can God's power and glory help us have joy in our everyday lives?

*The elements covered in this Bible study are based on those identified in the book *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates.





Theme 6

Developing Character That Lasts

Meeting B

Let us not become weary
in doing good, for at the proper time
we will reap a harvest
if we do not give up.
(Galatians 6:9)





Introduction

How wonderful would it be if an angel of the Lord personally delivered a “How to Raise Your Child” manual to your door and then stayed for dinner? That is exactly what God did for Samson’s parents.

After the angel of the Lord’s initial visit to Samson’s mother, Manoah, Samson’s father prayed to God, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I beg you to let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born” (Judges 13:8). God graciously complied. The angel of the Lord visited them a second time with prophesy and instructions for their baby boy, and ultimately accepted their food offering, departing in a blazing tower of flames over the altar, right in their front yard (Judges 13). No parents could be more certain of God’s favor or their son’s success than they.

However, Samson’s path in life was a rocky one, riddled with lust, pride, disobedience and immorality, ultimately ending in captivity and violent death. But Scripture is clear: God’s Spirit was on him in a powerful way (Judges 14:19), and His plan for Samson’s life could not be thwarted. Samson’s sacrificial and courageous death, even though he was in chains at the hands of his enemies, saved his entire nation (Judges 15).

Parents, regardless of your child’s past or current choices, do not underestimate what God can do in your children’s lives. Seek after God, serve Him faithfully, set a good example for your children, pray unceasingly for them, and always, day after day, give them over into God’s capable hands. He is in charge. Keep the faith.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His transcendence. There is none like Him. Thank God for giving you the tools to work such good in your families. Thank Him for the progress you have already made. Commit to Him the future and thank Him for all He is accomplishing. Affirm your trust in Him and rest a moment together in His provision.

Study

Book: *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates, chapters 6–10

Scripture Highlights:

John 13:1–17 _____

1 Peter 4:8 _____

Joshua 24:15 _____

Joshua 1:7 _____

John 15:11 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. List the four character traits that are discussed in this week’s reading.
4. Review the five ingredients for a servant’s heart and the three traps to avoid, presented in chapter 6 of *Character Matters*. Share a few of your favorite ingredients and what steps you could take to promote them in your family.
5. How might you address a child who demonstrates one of the “trap” attitudes, also listed in chapter 6? (Scolding and shaming are not options.) What role could prayer play here?



6. How have you dealt with fear in your life? How do you deal with your children's fear?
7. Where does godly courage come from?
8. How is courage affected by personal security? By clear convictions? By a sense of destiny? What simple things can you do daily to promote these qualities in your home?
9. The text states that the opposite of joy is not unhappiness but unbelief, a lack of trust in God. How might joylessness be due to a lack of faith? Are there any ways in which focusing on God's faithfulness can help to bring you more joy?
10. Review the "Make the Choice" section in chapter 8 on faith. How have you recently grown in your faith?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of character development?
2. How have your children reacted to your efforts to grow in your own faith? Thank God for the progress you have made and pray for the wisdom to overcome the challenges you face.
3. How have your children responded to your growth?
4. How do you plan to employ the five components that can help you turn your children from dependence on you to dependence on God: God's word, prayer, fellowship, vision, and worship?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

5. The three attitudes that lead to joy, according to Yates, are gratitude, worshipfulness, and an eternal perspective. Think and pray about how your own attitudes have impacted your children's joy.

Action

1. Apply two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family.
2. To impress on your children that the body of Christ is diverse, creative, and fun, attend an event sponsored by a local Christian radio station or Bible-believing church other than your own.
3. Explore options for Christian social clubs, outdoors camps, sports camps, arts clubs, and mission trips. Consider registering your children in one that excites them.
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
6. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 7: Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children
— Meeting A

1. Read *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, Introduction and chapters 1–6 (~100 pages).
2. Read the “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children” article found on page 145.
3. Complete the “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children” Bible study found on page 150.



Theme 7

Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children

Meeting A

Whether you turn to the right
or to the left, your ears will hear
a voice behind you, saying,
“This is the way; walk in it.”
(Isaiah 30:21)





Introduction

“Amen!” is a powerful word; it is an agreement, a pledge of allegiance of sorts. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, He has your heart; but the enemy still contends for your attention and energy. With each agreement you make in your mind, you choose sides in that battle: God’s side or the enemy’s. Luke’s account of a Sabbath day miracle puts this discernment and decision process on center stage (Luke 13:10–17).

While teaching in the synagogue, Jesus called forward a woman who was suffering from a crippling spirit. Jesus said to her, “‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.”

Immediately the synagogue leader fired an accusation at the entire crowd, saying, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” Jesus rebuked him sharply for his hypocrisy, publicly humiliating him, “but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things [Jesus] was doing.”

Notice two things. First, the leader does not dare to accuse Jesus; instead he takes aim at Jesus’s followers. Satan, likewise, knows that he cannot attack Jesus—“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19)—but he does try to exploit human beings. “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Second, the crowd makes a free and conscious choice: the grace of Jesus over the shame from the leader. Similarly Christians, saved by faith in Jesus, are free to choose freedom in Christ over bondage to sin: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Consider the agreements you make, your daily “amens.” When faced with your own mistakes, do you shame yourself, or do you receive God’s grace? When others frustrate you with their mistakes, do you condemn them, or do you empathize and forgive? When past sins replay in your mind, do you tune in and despair, or do you silence them with Jesus’s forgiveness? When you are tempted to fear, do you worry or do you trust in God’s promises?

The practice of the spiritual disciplines will sharpen your discernment as you freely choose to do hard things for the sake of growing more attuned to God. Counterfeit voices will continue to compete with God’s for influence over your thoughts, but, with practice and God’s help, you will say, “Amen!” to the truth.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His justice. He has conquered sin and death and paid the price for the evil of the world. Thank Jesus for His death and resurrection. Thank Him for covering sin with His blood. Pray for His help to live a life worthy of His name. Ask God to bless your efforts at incorporating spiritual disciplines into your family culture.

Study

Book: *Habits of a Child’s Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, Introduction and chapters 1–6

Scripture Highlights:

Jeremiah 6:16 _____

Psalms 119:15–16 _____

Matthew 6:16–18 _____

Mark 12:30 _____

Proverbs 30:8–9 _____

Mark 6:31 _____

Luke 18:9–14 _____



Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Discuss the spiritual disciplines as mentioned in the first five Scripture Highlights listed above.
4. What is the purpose of exercising spiritual disciplines? How does each one move a person closer to God?
5. What was your opinion of spiritual disciplines before you read *Habits of a Child's Heart*?
6. Of the disciplines covered in the readings in *Habits of a Child's Heart*, which of them are more difficult for you to practice? Why?
7. Which of those spiritual disciplines come more easily to you? Why?
8. Which one might have surprised you to see it on the list as a “discipline”? Why is it considered a discipline?
9. What happens when you try to exercise a particular spiritual discipline? Why is it so difficult?
10. Discuss Luke 18:9–14. What attitude should a Christian adopt toward people who do not purposefully exercise the spiritual disciplines?
11. Discuss how to explain the concept of spiritual discipline to your children. How can you make it clear that these are not legalistic rules or “works” that are required for salvation?
12. What changes might you make at home in light of what you have learned?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home

Reflection

1. What personal concerns do you have about practicing the disciplines as described in *Habits of a Child's Heart*?
2. Prayerfully check your attitude toward others who do not practice the spiritual disciplines. Confess and judgment you might be feeling toward them.
3. If you are feeling discouraged by the challenge of this exercise, pray for the Holy Spirit's encouragement and help. Remember that God is pleased with your efforts, regardless of the results, and receive His grace.
4. Pray for God's blessing as you explain the details and benefits of each practice to your children.
5. Pray for protection from spiritual warfare as you take these new steps together as a family.

Action

1. Choose two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family, and do them with your children. Journal about your experience.
2. Revisit your family mission statement and discuss how the spiritual disciplines on which you choose to focus apply to your overall family culture.
3. Especially for teens and older children: Discuss with your older children how they might incorporate these spiritual disciplines into their existing routines. Talk about how God can use even the mundane things in life to bless and transform us.
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
6. Continue praying daily with your children.



Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 7: Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children—Meeting B

1. Read *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, Introduction and chapters 7–12 (~100 pages).



Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

What are spiritual disciplines? It's not a phrase we commonly hear today, even at church.

Spiritual disciplines are very straightforward, practical steps toward developing a Christian character and a deeper relationship with God.

Most of us have heard of several of them—prayer, worship, service, fasting, celebration—although we may not have seen how they are all connected. Why do we need these spiritual disciplines? Once we have



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

been saved through Christ, why do we need to do things to discipline our spiritual nature? Well, even though we are redeemed, we are also fallen. Our corrupted human natures constantly fight against our renewed spiritual nature, so we must make the renewed nature strong, putting on “the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13). Furthermore, as C.S. Lewis frequently pointed out, humans are material as well as spiritual beings. What we believe must be expressed in action, or we will soon lose those beliefs. Maria von Trapp, whose family became famous through the musical *The Sound of Music*, put it this way in her autobiography: “As long as we live here on earth, we simply are not pure spirits, but we also have... a very human heart, and that heart needs outward signs of its inward affections.”¹⁵

And it is actually more effective to teach kids about Jesus through spiritual disciplines than it is to try to get them to “feel” converted. We learn truths as children through traditions and habitual practices that we come to identify with what is important in life. Learning and practicing spiritual disciplines will help children to ground their faith more firmly and live it out intelligently and with purpose.

It is essential to teach children spiritual disciplines before they go out into the world and find themselves in situations where their faith will be tested. They cannot be expected to exercise righteous judgment in the world unless they have previously learned and assimilated the virtues that will enable them to make the right decisions when faced with an attack on their faith.

Below is a brief description of twelve spiritual disciplines and brief guidance for incorporating their practice into your children’s lives.

Meditation on the Word of God is an essential foundation for forming godly character in your children. When you read the Bible with your children, spend time discussing what you have read. The article on “Teaching the Bible to Children” found at the beginning of Theme 4 adds more detail on this cornerstone of our faith.

Prayer is probably the first spiritual discipline most Christian parents teach their kids. Even so, it is important to make prayer a meaningful part of life for our children. One of the best ways to help your children understand the importance of prayer is to ask them to pray for you, about issues that

¹⁵ Maria Augusta Trapp, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* (1949; repr., New York: Doubleday/Image, 1990), 73.



“ Once in a hotel dining room I said, rather too loudly, “I loathe prunes.” “So do I,” came an unexpected six-year-old voice from another table. Sympathy was instantaneous. Neither of us thought it funny. We both knew that prunes are far too nasty to be funny. That is the proper meeting between man and child as independent personalities. ”

— C.S. Lewis

concern your family or the world. This will help children to understand that prayer is one of the most wonderful ways through which God enables us to take part in caring for His creation; that when we pray, we are actually participating in addressing the concerns we are bringing to God to solve.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline less often undertaken today. However, fasting is an important way to prepare ourselves to depend on God rather than material objects for security, which will then enable us to resist more seductive temptations. Fasting from meat, in the early church, would have

been a direct stand against the wasteful extravagance of Roman banqueting. Today, perhaps it is better to fast from the junk or “comfort foods” we turn to instead of God, or from the information devices that take up our time—time that might otherwise be dedicated to Him.

Study is different from meditation in that it is more active. Meditating on the Word begins to instill a godly character and a natural bent toward and desire for making godly decisions. But it is also necessary to learn how to apply these Christian principles in the situations of daily life. The more we study the Bible and how the church has applied its teachings throughout the centuries, the better we and our children are equipped to carry them out today.

Simplicity is all about giving and humility. C.S. Lewis pointed out that the desire for more “luxuries [than] any man can really enjoy”¹⁶ is rooted in



pride and enmity, exhibiting the desire to be better than others. Demanding more than we need is a sin deeply rooted in our fallen nature. We are called to set our children the example of generosity, teaching them “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Solitude is time alone with God—an addition to prayer. Encourage your children to take the time each day to silently notice and appreciate God’s goodness—outside, looking at His creation, is often the best way. Learning to “be still, and know” (Psalm 46:10), in awe of God’s greatness, is the beginning of reverence and obedience to His will.

Submission is this obedience to God’s will. But God has created the parent-child relationship to teach obedience to Him through learning obedience

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2002), 123.



to parents. Our modern society pushes the idea of self-realization. But this rebellious attempt to “make our own decisions” ironically leads to slavery to social fads and sinful impulses. Only God knows what is truly best for us, and obedience to Him and His chosen ministers for our care is the only way to be truly free. Don’t feel guilty about imposing Christian rules of behavior on your children; if you don’t teach them God’s ways, the world will force its ways on them.

Service is putting into practice the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Give your children opportunities to serve others. Operation Christmas Child is a wonderful way to start. Teach them that doing God’s work and helping others comes first, before taking care of their own personal goals—and that even their talents are God’s gifts to be used for serving others, not our own glory. When you ask your children to help out, remind them that this is an opportunity to be a “good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21), the highest commendation that can be given us by God.

Confession of our sins is not a one-time conversion event. It is connected with our remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice for us; the more often we confess our sins, the more closely we are drawn into the renewal of our lives through His death and resurrection. It is best to have our children ask for forgiveness from God, as well as the people they have hurt, every time they misbehave, and talk to them afterward about the joy of being forgiven.

Worship is honoring God for His greatness. It is easiest to start with gratitude, perhaps by making a list of all you and your children have to be thankful for. Praise and reverence, reminders of His sovereignty, are connected to our joyful confidence of intimate communion with Him. God is King as well as Father, and our worship should contain awe as well as trust. The Chronicles of Narnia, with their depiction of Aslan, teach this very well.

Guidance is dependence on God, rather than us, to make the right decisions. It is active faith; when we—and our children—follow God’s guidance in His Word, we demonstrate our trust in Him.

Celebration! This last spiritual discipline underscores all the others. Being a follower of Jesus is fun; it is a life of joy. Even times of hardship can become times of celebration, if we seek to understand how God works through those difficult times in order to shape us. And every celebratory

achievement in our lives, even those not directly connected with worship, can and should be to us opportunities for thanking God for His blessing.

As your children learn that these spiritual disciplines were intended by God for us to rejoice in and grow closer to Him, they will begin to astonish you with their joy and zeal.



Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children Bible Study

Having quiet time alone with God is a difficult exercise for many people. For others, it is the time of day when they joyfully come before the Creator of the universe and have fellowship with Him. Jesus needed time alone with the Father. We are commanded to do the same.

In today's world, distractions come at us at a feverish pace. Unless we are intentional about time with God, time in the Scripture, worship, celebration, and other disciplines, the world will gladly fill our time with urgent but less-important tasks. As parents, we should not only refocus on these disciplines ourselves, but also begin cultivating these habits in our chil-



dren. When these habits start early, they will prepare children to continue them as they grow older. That said, these disciplines are outlined to grow your child’s relationship with Jesus, not simply to be done legalistically.

As parents in an age-appropriate manner support their child’s heart change and encourage a godly character, these disciplines can be a part of that development. The following study questions are designed to give you a small taste of why spiritual disciplines are important.

Meditation

1. Read 2 Timothy 2:7. Why do you think it is important to “think” or meditate over all that God says?

2. In this verse, God says He will “give you insight” in all things. How does “thinking” also include listening to God’s voice?

Prayer

1. Read Matthew 6:5–13 and Romans 8:26. From these passages, how would you describe the importance of prayer?

2. How is the Holy Spirit involved in our prayers?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Study

1. Read Romans 12:2. What is the purpose of studying and learning the will of God?

2. How can the exercise of our mind be used by God in transforming us?

Fasting

1. Why do you think depriving oneself of food, a pleasurable activity, or a habit would cause you to focus more on God?

2. Read Acts 13:2–3 and Acts 14:23. Luke describes prayer, worship, and fasting. How would you describe how these three things work together?

Simplicity

1. Read Luke 12:15 and Matthew 6:19–21, 24. How would avoiding greed and not storing up treasures on earth help someone lead a simpler lifestyle?



2. What are some of the pitfalls one would avoid by living a simpler and more modest lifestyle? What are some advantages to this type of lifestyle?

Solitude

1. Read Psalm 62:5–8 and Psalm 46:10–11. The author talks about “finding rest” and says to “be still” before God. How can being quiet before God lead to greater understanding of His goodness, His faithfulness, and His trustworthiness?

Submission

1. Read James 4:1–10 and Ephesians 5:21–33. Why do you think God wants us to have a humble spirit? Why is He calling us to submit to Him and to each other?

2. If you are married, how are you modeling God’s command to love and to submit to and respect one another? How would you describe your children’s willingness to submit—to God or to their parents?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Service

1. Read 1 Peter 4:8–10 and James 2:14–26. How does God use grace to prepare us for service?

2. How would you describe how grace and service can work together to help us grow in maturity?

Confession

1. Read 1 John 1:8–9. If we claim we have no sin, what does the author say we are doing and what state would we be in?

2. What is the connection between confession and forgiveness?

Worship

1. Read Revelation 4:6–11. Name some additional reasons why you see God as being worthy of worship.



Guidance

1. Read Psalm 139:23–24 and John 16:13. In Psalm 139, David is asking for God to search him and lead him. Why?

In John 16:13, through what power does God promise to guide you?



Celebration

1. Read Exodus 23:14–17 and Luke 15:32. Why do you think God was calling His people to celebrate three times each year?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

2. Why was the father celebrating the return of his lost son?

3. Read Psalm 35:27 and John 10:10. How can celebrating lead us to have joy in God and to have joy in the life God has given us?





Theme 7

Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children

Meeting B

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is
weak. (Matthew 26:41)

A cheerful heart is good medicine.
(Proverbs 17:22)





Introduction

If your attempts at practicing the spiritual disciplines with your children seem to be more of a comedy of errors than a path to peace, remember to take the missteps with a healthy sense of humor. A good laugh, especially at ourselves, is good medicine (Proverbs 17:22).

Our flesh fights any limits that we try to set on its appetites; we immediately crave the very thing of which we are deprived. But without limits, even good things can distract, sour, and, if left unchecked, ultimately lead to idolatry and bondage.

How can such a serious thing be a cause for laughter? What is the source of our joy despite our failings? The answer is the cross of Jesus Christ:

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13–15)

God knows our weakness and loves us in spite of it:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13–14)

He even uses our weakness to show His glory:

And [the Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will rather



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

“ Jack was the exact opposite of all the “stepmothers” in the fairytales; he was kind, jolly, and generous... He bought me a kayak. He even let me paddle him across the lake in it. We explored the woods together and went for walks. Sometimes Jack would give me some pages of things he was writing and ask if I liked them. I usually did, but if I didn't, he was the kind of man who would listen to what I said. ”

— Douglas Gresham
(talking about his stepfather, C.S. Lewis)



Remember that your Father delights in your efforts to obey Him. Far from setting us up for the fall, God lovingly uses the spiritual disciplines to free us from idolatry by shattering our illusion of self-reliance. God intends for us to recognize our vulnerabilities, to confess our pride, to accept our need for Him and to rejoice in His provision for us.

Therefore apply yourself diligently and do your best in practicing the spiritual disciplines, but do not be ashamed of your weakness before God. Renounce frustration; it is from the devil. Take a deep breath, thank Jesus for the gift of forgiveness, enthusiastically welcome the help of the Holy Spirit, enjoy a good belly laugh at yourself and try, try again.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His Mercy. We are guilty; He grants us pardon through Jesus Christ. Thank God for the undeserved access you enjoy, through Jesus, to the throne room of heaven. Ask Him to help you lead your children with gentleness and mercy, as He leads you.

Study

Book: Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines, by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, Introduction and chapters 7–12

Scripture Highlights:

Ephesians 5:21 _____

John 13:2–5 _____

James 5:16 _____

Psalms 100:2 _____

Psalms 48:14 _____

Philippians 4:4 _____

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passages during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Discuss the spiritual disciplines as mentioned in each of the Scripture Highlights listed above.
4. Of the disciplines covered in the readings in *Habits of a Child's Heart*, which of them are more difficult for you to practice? Why?
5. Which of those spiritual disciplines come more easily to you? Why?
6. Which one might have surprised you to see it on the list as a “discipline?” Why is it considered a discipline?
7. What happens when you try to exercise a particular spiritual discipline? Why is it so difficult?
8. Is there any other biblically sound habit other than the spiritual disciplines listed in the reading that you would add to the list? What other practices do you believe draw you closer to God?
9. As you gain experience in practicing the spiritual disciplines, what blessings are you experiencing? What challenges?
10. What have your children noticed about your new habits? If you have introduced them to your children, what was their response?

Closing Prayer





Bring It Home

Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of the spiritual disciplines?
2. Prayerfully reflect on the dynamic of submission in your home. Does it conform to the biblical standard?
3. Are you leading by example in the areas of worship and confession?
4. Do your children see you ask for and then follow guidance from God?
5. Do you celebrate well in your home? How can celebration bring your children closer to God?

Action

1. Choose two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family, and do them with your children. Journal about your experience.
2. Explain to your children that the spiritual disciplines should lead to greater fruitfulness in our Christian walk. Ask your children why they think God might have put your family in the neighborhood where you live. Have they seen Him working through your family in the lives of your neighbors? Take prayer walks around your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors. Ask God to bless them through your family.
3. Invite a new family to church and pray that they experience the love of Jesus through the family of God.
4. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
5. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 8: Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith—Meeting A

1. Read the “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith” article found on page 171.
2. Complete the “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith” Bible study found on page 173.
3. Reread “Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?” article found on page 35.
4. Choose an age-appropriate book(s) from the apologetics resources section of *Resources for Aslan Academy* found on the C.S. Lewis Institute website (www.cslewisinstitute.org) and begin reading it with your children.
5. Begin to explore some of the activities in *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*, by Kara E. Powell, chapters 1–7 (~100 pages).



Theme 8

Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith

Meeting A

As the heavens are higher than
the earth, so are my ways higher
than your ways and my thoughts
than your thoughts.

(Isaiah 55:9)





Introduction

Faith begins at home, your home; but it is not meant to stay there. God created you for the great adventure of loving and serving Him, and He wants you to dream big, but not only for yourselves. He wants you to join Him in showing people all over the world how much He loves them. In Philippians 2:15–16, Paul speaks of the grand vision he cherishes for the Christians in Philippi: “...so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.”

Keep in mind, however, that the world does not always receive the Gospel joyfully. Remember that many throughout the history of the Christian faith have suffered imprisonment and even death for their witness to Jesus and their activism on behalf of God’s people. Be in prayer for the current believers in the persecuted church in restricted countries around the world. As they disciple their children, they know that their faith in Jesus and their godly character is likely to land their children *in jail* instead of keeping them out of it. Praise God for the safety and peace you enjoy in your Christian community and home.

Do your aspirations for your children’s life and faith match the plans that God Himself has for them, or are you hoping just to survive these eighteen years with your child without any major disasters? Are you living in the fullness of life promised by Jesus, or are you settling for a pale counterfeit? C.S. Lewis challenges our anemic ambition for the Christian walk in his sermon, “The Weight of Glory”:



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹⁷

God has intentionally assembled your family with a beautiful purpose that transcends anything you have yet seen, and He has put you in the driver's seat. Your mission is to teach your children about God's love; their mission is to respond to it and we all share the mission of taking it to the world.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His unconditional love. Thank Him that, even though we are finite beings, He wants us to know Him, to enjoy Him and to experience His love. Ask Him to guide you as you teach your children to own, articulate, and explain their faith to others, and that their witness will bear fruit. Pray for the grace to release them into God's hands day by day.

Study

Book: *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Test-ed Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*, by Kara E. Powell, chapters 1–7

Scripture Highlights:

Ephesians 5:8–16 _____

1 Timothy 1:15 _____

Titus 2:1–8 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of each Scripture on the line next to the citation and refer to the passages during the discussion.

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1980), p. 26.



2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. Powell confirms that, when it comes to Christian kids, “You get what you are.” How has that truth impacted your own walk with Jesus?
4. How would you encourage a young person not to run from God when he or she has made mistakes?
5. What examples of warmth in other families have inspired you? What are some of your favorite family memory-makers?
6. Discuss the importance of parents entering into their teen’s world. What ways recommended in the text appealed to you? What, if anything, did your parents do when you were a teen to stay connected with you? What, if anything, would you have wanted them to do instead?
7. How did other adults impact your faith journey when you were young?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home

Reflection

1. If someone asked you to explain what you believe about God, how comfortable and clear could you be in answering?
2. If you wrestle with any doubts about God, prayerfully face them and seek counsel from your fellowship, your pastor, and from the Holy Spirit.
3. How would your child react if a teacher or another student ridiculed his or her faith? Would your child be prepared to give a clear response?

Action

1. Choose two or three suggestions from the readings to which you believe God is calling your family, and try them with your children. Journal about your experience.
2. View the Voice of the Martyrs website at <https://www.persecution.com/>. Consider what to share with your children about the issues facing the persecuted church today.
3. Ask your children how they would answer if someone asked them what they believe and why. Write down their responses and, with their permission, plan to share them at the next meeting.
4. Reach out to a new family in your church whom you think might benefit from the Aslan Academy program. Offer to share your experience with them, or invite them to an information meeting to plan for next year.
5. Update your prayer team on what you have learned and observed so far. Praise God for the progress and ask the team to pray over your concerns.
6. Continue to read the Bible with your children daily. Encourage your older children and teens in their own devotional reading and discuss it with them.
7. Continue praying daily with your children.

Prepare for Next Meeting

Coming Next: Theme 8: Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith — Meeting B

1. Continue to read with your children your choice of age-appropriate books from the apologetics resources section of *Resources for Aslan Academy*.
2. Read *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*, by Kara E. Powell, chapters 8–13 (~100 pages).
3. Complete the “Sticky Findings” exercises with your children. Journal the results.



Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith

Article

By Kerry A. Knott

Many believers, especially those who are young, can relate to this experience of a recent college graduate:

I clearly remember the day, during my first semester in college, when I first fully realized how important it is to have learned how to defend your faith as a young person. I was sitting in my Latin class, right before my professor arrived, listening with unbelieving ears to the easy, light-hearted manner in which my fellow classmates—intelligent, cultured young people, most of whom I liked very much—were discussing, and actually laughing about, issues whose sinfulness I had up to that moment sincerely believed no one could underestimate. All at once I realized how different the culture of the world is from the core beliefs of the Christian faith, and how much intelligent effort is necessary in order to explain to others, not only what is truth (John 18:38), but why the truth matters.

Why does it matter? Being able to defend and explain the Truth of our faith to others is an essential part of our mission to share the gospel with all nations and all cultures. When a person's perspective on life is completely contrary to the Word of God, that person will not understand why he or she needs the gospel, until it is explained and his or her own perspective is challenged. Prepare how you will teach and model God's Word and His commands to your children.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

First Peter 3:15 reads: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” This is the chief reason why we, as followers of Jesus, must be able, and train our children to be able, to give a defense for our faith: God has commanded us to do so, but we are to do it with gentleness and respect.

Apologetics, this “giving an answer for your faith,” is a part of mission that has been greatly neglected in recent generations. It is easy to see why. Many people are afraid they will not be “smart” enough to undertake properly this great responsibility, forgetting that God’s grace is as sufficient for this as for any other task. But in recent years things have become even more challenging. Until recently, Western culture has been predominantly Christian in its norms and customs. Few felt it necessary to explain why Christianity was the best route to follow. Even the most un-Christian members of society knew they had to behave in accordance with at least a superficially Christian moral and philosophical code, even if no one could explain what the reasons were that such moral and religious standards were demanded.

But this has changed. Step into any university across the United States—and indeed Canada and Europe as well—and you will find young people, not unreasonably, refusing to associate themselves with a faith that they do not understand and do not see many people around them purposefully living out. New religions and atheistic philosophies have replaced our nominally Christian culture with a religiously pluralistic culture, and young people see no reason why the faith of their parents and grandparents should be considered more valuable or true than any other.

And this is not happening only on college campuses. In high school and even before, kids are bombarded with questions about and challenges to their faith, whether from friends or through topics raised in our media culture. At such a young age, they cannot be expected to respond from experience; believing adults may well be able to argue against non-Christian worldviews because they tried them previously and found them failures. Children lack the moral experiences of adults.

However, when it comes to the fundamental questions of reality, children often have a deeper insight than adults. With fewer life complications and responsibilities than adults, young people are more focused on “big picture” issues, trying to figure out what it’s all about as they take



on the distractions of career, serious relationships, and the business of running their own lives and households. They are the ones who are asking the trickiest questions about faith, the ones who most deeply demand an answer.

But how do we teach children how to explain their faith and defend their beliefs when challenged? First of all, it is necessary to recognize that the questions children ask are important; they need an intelligent response. If you as a parent don't have a good answer, say so, but then follow up and do some research. Take time to discuss matters of faith with them. If you demonstrate that you think following Jesus is worth exploring, they will follow your lead in an astonishing way. With fewer culturally induced inhibitions or embarrassment than adults have, children tend to give their all to any effort they think is significant in their lives. If they feel that way about their faith, they will likely have a great influence on their friends and classmates and continue to have an influence in God's kingdom work.



Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith

Bible Study

As followers of Jesus, we are commanded to share our faith with others. But most churchgoers are reluctant to do so. Part of that reluctance is that



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

most believers are not prepared—they have not studied or planned—to be able to give an answer for why they believe.

The Bible not only commands us to share our faith, but it also gives us wonderful guidance on how to do so. Through the Bible study below and the other Aslan Academy resources in this section, you and your children can be prepared to share faith in a winsome, joy-filled way. With the cultural backdrop of today’s world, it is more important than ever for believers to give an answer for their hope.

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What do you think it means to “be prepared to give an answer” for the hope you have? In what way are we to give our answer?

Read John 3:16–19. When describing your faith in Jesus, how can this passage be an encouragement to nonbelievers?

In verse 19, how does this explain how some people are not interested in hearing about Jesus?

Read Matthew 28:18–20. What does Jesus mean by “making disciples”? Does this seem broader to you than simply seeking “conversions”?



Read Colossians 3:12–14. What should our attitude and actions be toward those with whom we are discussing our faith?

In verse 14, what is the most important thing we must have as we live out our faith?

Think of the people with whom you regularly come in contact. What are some cultural barriers or difficulties you could expect if you have a conversation about faith?

List some possible ways you can prepare to overcome these difficulties.

Are there questions you could ask that would lead you into an opportunity for a deeper discussion?



KEEPING THE
FAITH

EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Prepare a three-minute and a five-minute explanation of how you came to a saving faith in Jesus. Commit to being prepared to share that testimony when the opportunity arises. A simple outline to consider is “I was once [fill in the blank], but Jesus changed me by [explain].”





Theme 8

Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith

Meeting B

I thank my God
every time I remember you.
In all my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy because of your
partnership in the gospel from the first
day until now, being confident of this, that
he who began a good work in you will carry
it on to completion until the day
of Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 1:3–6)





Introduction

You might have heard it said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. Over these months that you have spent intentionally discipling your children, you have searched the Scriptures together, sought the will of God together, served the community side by side, laughed, cried, and we hope grown closer to God and to each other. If they have not already done so, your children will someday make their own independent decision on whether or not follow Jesus. If they are already walking with the Lord, their path might not always look as you want it to.

Even Jesus had to explain His calling to His family. When His parents lost track of Him on the way home from Jerusalem when He was twelve years old, they were mystified at His answer:

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them. (Luke 2:48–50)

Later during His public ministry Jesus responded to His family’s request that He return home:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:46–50)

As children mature, a parent’s job transitions from vigilant shepherd to vested observer. Perhaps there is no time in a parent’s career that requires more faith than the season of letting go, but the reward is rich. What a joy it is to walk side by side with them in adult fellowship.

There are no guarantees in parenting, but one thing is certain: your children know how much you care... and God loves them even more than you do.

Opening Prayer

Praise God for His sovereignty. No matter how our reality looks to us, He is in charge. Thank Him for His care for you and your family, especially in challenging times. Ask Him to make you strong and to sustain your efforts over the long haul as you continue to disciple your children.

Study

Book: *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*, by Kara E. Powell, chapters 8–13

Scripture Highlights:

Psalm 1 _____

Discussion

1. Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture Highlights. Write a short description of the Scripture on the line next to the citation, and refer to the passage during the discussion.
2. Share the results of your efforts to apply the action steps from the last meeting.
3. List a few topics that might be difficult to discuss with your children.



What are some constructive ways to handle your child’s resistance to “sticky conversations?”

4. If you have permission from them, share what your children said when you asked them to describe what they believe and why.
5. How can a sense of humor pave the way forward in your communication with your children?
6. What characteristics of a “sticky-faith home” appeal to you most? Why?
7. Share some service experiences your family has enjoyed or found particularly ineffective. Why did that experience have that effect? What recommendations does the author make for making family service more effective in discipling your kids?
8. Did your family purposefully prepare you to leave home well? How? What happened when you finally left?

Closing Prayer



Bring It Home

Reflection

1. How is the context of trust and relationship growing in your family through your study and application of apologetics, or the art of explaining your faith?
2. Has there been someone in your family or a close friend who has stepped away from his or her faith because of something bad happening? What are the misconceptions about faith that would cause someone to blame God when trials come?



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

3. Have you ever used an example from the Bible to illustrate a dilemma or decision that your family has been involved in? How might you do more of this going forward?

Action

1. Have a party to celebrate a wonderful year together!
2. Make plans to host a future Aslan Academy small group in your community.
3. Send your feedback to the C.S. Lewis Institute. We would love to hear from you. Email us at aslanacademy@cslewisinstitute.org.



Notes to Leaders of Aslan Academy Small Groups





Introduction

Why lead an Aslan Academy small group?

Would you like to be part of a Christian community of parents and other caring adults who are committed to intentionally discipling their children and teens, and to see other parents become more effective in helping their children to know and trust Christ?

Or, if you are a church children's director, would you like to help parents and other caring adults form such a community within your church?

If your answer is yes, we at the C.S. Lewis Institute encourage you to organize and lead an Aslan Academy small group.

We believe you will be thrilled at the results in your life, the lives of your children and teens, and the lives of others. The dynamics will only partially depend on the thoughtful reading, Bible studies, and group discussion offered through the program. In large part, the growth in your spiritual life and others' will be due to your leadership as you cooperate with the Wonderful Counselor Himself, the Holy Spirit.

This program could be used in a variety of contexts, including a home group, your church's small group program, or your church's education program.

What are the roles and responsibilities of an Aslan Academy small group leader?

There are two primary areas of responsibility for Aslan Academy small group leaders:



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

- (1) Organizing an Aslan Academy small group, including recruiting parents and other caring adults to participate, and
- (2) Serving as the leader/facilitator of small group meetings (generally consisting of no more than 12 parents/other caring adults).

If an Aslan Academy small group is organized by an individual, the person establishing the small group may serve both leadership roles.

Alternatively, a church children's director, youth director, or other church leader might organize a larger Aslan Academy program, where the participants are divided into several small groups, each with its own leader/facilitator.

These notes address both leadership roles, which may or may not be filled by the same person.

1. Pray.

Throughout the process of planning and leading an Aslan Academy small group, it is essential that leaders pray for God's leading and direction. Pray that God would use you for His purposes in planning and/or leading an Aslan Academy small group. Pray regularly for each parent and other caring adult who is part of a group, and for each family and each child and teen. Pray that all participants would grow spiritually as a result of the group and grow in their ability to effectively disciple their children to know and trust Jesus Christ.

2. Plan.

Before you begin, take time to plan by reading this *Keeping the Faith* guidebook. Then begin the steps of planning:

Purpose. Know the purpose of an Aslan Academy small group: that you and your fellow parents and other caring adults will experience authentic spiritual growth as you seek to learn how to more effectively disciple your children and teens to know and trust Jesus Christ. Determine how you can best communicate the purpose of this program to people.

Logistics. Determine:

When: When will you meet (date, time, for how long)?



“ The child as reader is neither to be patronized nor idolized: we talk to him as man to man.... We must of course try to do [children] no harm: we may, under the Omnipotence, sometimes dare to hope that we may do them good. But only such good as involves treating them with respect. ”

— C.S. Lewis



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Where: Where will you meet (home, church)?

What: What will you need to do to prepare the place for the weekly meetings (seating, lighting, room temperature, beverages, meals or snacks, childcare, removal of distractions)?

Who: Who will take care of the various planning pieces? Don't be afraid to delegate. People like to contribute and actually become more committed when they play a role in the group, even if it's just preparing refreshments or setting up chairs. Some possible roles include:

Leader

Assistant Leader

Hospitality Coordinator

Childcare Coordinator

Facilities Coordinator

Group Size. It is recommended that discussion groups be small. It is hard to have interactive discussions with groups larger than thirteen, including the discussion facilitator.

Childcare. The options for childcare will vary with the nature of the small group. If a church is sponsoring an Aslan Academy program, perhaps the group could be scheduled at a time when childcare is already available; otherwise, make arrangements to provide it for the Aslan Academy program. In the case of a home group, families can pitch in together to hire a babysitter to watch the children in another room or at a different house nearby, or the older children and/or a rotation of parents can supervise without much overhead.

Aslan Academy Calendar. We recommend that Aslan Academy small groups meet on a twice-a-month basis. This will, among other things, provide sufficient time for participants to complete the specified book and other readings and Bible studies before the next meeting.

Once a new Aslan Academy small group commences, it takes eight months to go through the program; the program includes two meetings a month for eight months. While a new small group could begin at any time, we recommend considering a schedule that follows the school year. You will find a suggested calendar, which can be adjusted to meet the needs



NOTES TO LEADERS OF ASLAN ACADEMY SMALL GROUPS

DATE	EVENT	ACTIVITY / THEME	BOOKS
Late Spring	Info Meeting	Recruit, Q&A, Begin Sign-Ups	
Summer	Prep your home	Pray. Encourage the reading and audiobook habit in everyone. Downplay electronic media. Buy program books.	Bible, optional "fun" books
September	Meeting A	Theme 1: The Mission	<i>Guidebook, Faith Begins at Home: Family Makeover</i>
	Meeting B		
October	Meeting A	Theme 2: Biblical Parenting	<i>Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family</i>
	Meeting B		
November	Meeting A	Theme 3: Back to the Basics	<i>The Big Story</i>
	Meeting B		
December		Christmas Party Fellowship	
January	Meeting A	Theme 4: Practical Application of Biblical Truths	<i>Gospel-Centered Family</i>
	Meeting B		
February	Meeting A	Theme 5: Heart Change	<i>The Prodigal God</i>
	Meeting B		
March	Meeting A	Theme 6: Developing Character That Lasts	<i>Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last</i>
	Meeting B		
April	Meeting A	Theme 7: Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children	<i>Habits of a Child's Heart</i>
	Meeting B		
May	Meeting A	Theme 8: Teaching Your Children How to Explain Their Faith	<i>Sticky Faith Guide</i>
	Meeting B		



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

of the group, below.

Christmas Break. The suggested calendar includes taking December off as a Christmas break. While there would be no regular small group meetings, we suggest that groups following this approach have a Christmas party for fellowship.

Also, while there would be a Christmas break in terms of the regular twice-a-month group meetings and the readings to prepare for those meetings, parents and other caring adults would, of course, continue with their ongoing discipleship activities with their children. This would include continuing to read the Bible with your children daily; encouraging your teens in their own devotional reading and discussing it with them; and praying daily with your children. Parents may want to consider special devotional activities related to Christmas.

Participants would also need to remember to have the specified readings and other activities completed in time for the first regular meeting in January.

Aslan Academy Meetings. The agenda for Aslan Academy meetings can vary depending on the needs of the group. If your group has time to meet for a meal or even dessert, the fellowship over food can help build relationships and thus enhance the overall experience.

While you can vary the length of meetings depending on the needs of the group, here are two suggested agendas, one for 90 minutes and the other for 120 minutes.

Sample Aslan Academy Small Group Meeting Agenda (Total: 90 Minutes)

15 Minutes	Social time
5 Minutes	Introduction (read aloud) and Opening Prayer
50 Minutes	Discussion of assigned reading (using questions included in the <i>Keeping the Faith</i> guidebook)
10 Minutes	Share prayer requests
10 Minutes	Closing Prayer (Allow time for anyone who wants to pray.)



Sample Aslan Academy Small Group Meeting Agenda (Total: 120 minutes including a simple meal)

45 Minutes	Simple meal and social time (pizza, salad, drinks, and desserts, or a potluck)
5 Minutes	Introduction (read aloud) and Opening Prayer
50 Minutes	Discussion of assigned reading (using questions included in the <i>Keeping the Faith</i> guidebook)
10 Minutes	Share prayer requests
10 Minutes	Closing Prayer (Allow time for anyone who wants to pray.)

Take some time in advance to plan out the activities for the meeting so that things flow smoothly. Always start and end on time. People will get discouraged if the meetings go overtime or start late. If you desire, you can end the formal meeting on time and give people the option to stay later to fellowship or pray more. But always give people the opportunity to end at the prescheduled time.

Needs. Be on the alert to the needs of the people who are either in the group or may join the group. As you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your planning process, He will give you guidance and help you determine the needs of your group and your responsibilities in meeting those needs.

Rick Howerton, in his book *Destination Community*, suggests some key questions to ask the Lord on an ongoing basis to prepare for small group leadership:

Is there:

- Someone to pray with?
- Someone needing counsel?
- Someone to encourage?
- Someone to hold accountable?
- Something to celebrate with someone?
- Something to learn?
- A need to be met?

A call to be made?

A conflict to be resolved?

3. Prayerfully recruit participants.

After initial planning, the next task of the leader is to pray and recruit the participants. Take some time to pray and ask the Lord to lead and point you to the right people to be in the group. Then begin inviting. Don't be disappointed if some say, "No, thank you." Persevere and keep on inviting until you get a committed Aslan Academy small group together.

Jim Collins, author of the leadership bestseller *Good to Great*, writes, "Great endeavors are accomplished best when the right people are in the right place doing the right thing." As you pray and ask the Lord to put together the right group, have faith that He can arrange the right people in the right place doing the right thing.

A personal invitation or a phone call is the preferred method of communication, as an impersonal email might be overlooked and does not provide immediate conversational answers to questions. Email is great for follow-up.

Bobb Biehl gives the following advice in his book *Mentoring*: "Don't hesitate—initiate."

You should be prepared to answer the following questions when recruiting a potential group member:

1. How much time will it take for me to prepare for and do the assigned reading/study for a meeting?
2. How long will the Aslan Academy small group last?
3. What kind of homework is involved?
4. Does it cost anything?
5. Do you have to know a lot of Bible or be able to pray out loud to be in the group?
6. How many people will be in the group?
7. What are we going to do in the meetings?
8. Who else is coming?
9. Do you provide childcare?
10. Would it be a problem for me to leave the group after a month or two if I find it's just not for me?



4. Consider a group covenant.

Covenants provide a means of providing purpose, balance, and accountability within small group relationships. If people have knowingly signed a covenant, they are more likely to follow through on their commitment. What's more, the covenant makes it easier for people to give grace and/or lovingly confront someone who is not living up to the covenant.

For example, if someone is regularly missing the group's meetings, the leader of the group can say, "Hey, we've missed you recently. Your contribution is important and necessary for our group to function and grow. What can we do to help you make it to the group next week and fulfill your covenant?"

One of the first things a group can do to assure success is to agree upon a covenant. A covenant needs to take into consideration both the principles and logistics needed to achieve the group's goal. It would be wise to write up your covenant and then distribute copies to everyone in the group. Have the group discuss it and express any concerns or reservations about it. It can be adapted to meet the needs of the group as long as it doesn't compromise the mission of the program.

Some of the key components might include the following:

Attendance. A commitment to regularly attend the twice-a-month meetings for the Aslan Academy program barring an unexpected emergency.

Preparation. A commitment to do the homework and to come prepared to the meetings. However, if participants haven't finished the homework, they should be encouraged to come anyway so they can benefit from the group's discussion and get back on track.

Prayer. A commitment to pray for the group and that the Holy Spirit would help everyone grow spiritually through the program.

Confidentiality. Anything shared in the group must stay in the group and not be shared with others. This is an important part of the covenant as it builds trust when maintained and allows people to be more open.

Openness. A willingness to share and participate in the discussions.

Honesty. A commitment to being honest and forthright in all relationships within the group.

Sensitivity. A commitment to being sensitive to the needs of others in the group.

Love. A commitment to love those in the group as commanded by Christ Himself.

5. Encourage, encourage, encourage.

Raising children is a full-time job, and the days can be long and chaotic. Keep in mind that people might feel ashamed of not having completed the reading, despite their best efforts. Encourage them to attend the small group meetings anyway.

They will benefit greatly from the small group interaction and fellowship, even if they did not complete the reading. The discussion questions are not a quiz; they are designed to recap some of the information and to apply Scripture to the topics.

Verbally appreciate the effort required to get a family geared up and out the door.

6. Facilitate discussion.

A great thing about the Aslan Academy is that you don't have to be a theologian or biblical scholar to lead a small group. All you need is to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ who wants to be part of a community of parents or other caring adults who are intentionally teaching and equipping their children or teens to become effective disciples of Jesus.

The Aslan Academy's *Keeping the Faith* guidebook leads participants through a series of readings, group discussions, and family activities, with an emphasis on a vibrant relationship with Jesus, fellowship with other believing families, prayer and Bible study, high-quality books, thoughtful discussion, and practical application. Most of the programming is already done for you. Having said that, you will be asked to facilitate the group discussion.

Discussion questions are provided to help you. These questions can be modified, adapted, or you can use some questions of your own to get people talking. The key is to get others talking rather than doing the talking yourself.



Consider separating the discussion group by gender. Some participants have felt more comfortable speaking in front of members of their own sex.

An “ask, don’t tell” policy is a good approach when leading the thematic discussion. Usually people should be ready to talk after completing the assigned reading in preparation for the small group meeting.

Some things to remember:

- Remember the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Give people time to answer. Don’t answer your own question. Rephrase it if you would like to, but don’t be afraid of “pregnant pauses.” Someone might be ready to birth an amazing response, but it takes time sometimes.
- Be affirming by using expressions such as “great insight”; “you’re on the right track; can you expand on that?” or “wow!”
- Repeat responses as a way to get people to continue talking.
- Don’t ask yes/no questions. If you do, have people expand their answers.
- Redirect people if they start to get off track. It’s alright to politely interrupt and ask them to get back to the question or the main idea of the conversation.
- Don’t go off on rabbit trails—topics outside of the focus of the meeting.
- Don’t let one person dominate the conversation. Politely ask to hear from others in the group.

7. Start and end on time.

Be trustworthy in the little things, such as timing, and people will begin to trust you on more important matters. This point was stated earlier but is crucial to maintaining the morale of your group. People live busy lives and need to know that they will be dismissed on time. If you allow the meetings to run late, you may lose people in future meetings.

Also starting promptly will clue people in to the importance of arriving on time. If you are in the habit of starting late, people will begin to arrive late; it’s just human nature.



EQUIPPING FAMILIES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

8. Model what it takes to grow as a result of Aslan Academy by preparing yourself for the small group meeting.

In other words, practice what you preach and complete the specified readings, Bible studies and other assignments before each small group meeting.

9. Use the *Keeping the Faith* guidebook.

As part of this, occasionally review these “Notes to Leaders of Aslan Academy Small Groups.”

10. Pray and enjoy!

God will bless you as you serve. Because you have prayed, He will guide the discussion, and He will remove distractions during the meeting. Do the work. Show up to the group. Facilitate the discussion. Get to know the people in your group. Enjoy the program.

11. Follow up.

Send an email after each meeting with a highlight or two from the meeting and a reminder of the next meeting date and time.

