

# Discipleship At Home

**Encouraging parents to thoughtfully and intentionally disciple the children God has entrusted to them.**

A recent article citing research from Timothy Paul Jones reports that 90% of Christian parents surveyed understood their responsibility to disciple their children, yet only 55% read the Bible twice or less per week with their kids.<sup>1</sup> Churches in Australia report similar statistics.<sup>2</sup>

If the statistics are to be believed, thoughtful, invested and intentional discipleship hasn't been happening regularly in our homes, and it's easy to see why: parenting is difficult. Forming new patterns in an already tight schedule is hard. Weighing and balancing the competing expectations of others is exhausting. Navigating the shoals of adolescent hormones and particular sub-cultures is complex. It can leave parents feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped.

Against that backdrop, many of our local churches here in Sydney are equipped with well-trained staff and keen leaders serving together in contextualised ministries that are often successful in reaching and engaging our kids and youth. In this sense, they are a wonderful blessing and they meet the expectations of a culture that typically outsources specialist tasks. However, the ministry staff and leaders who facilitate these ministries aren't ultimately responsible for raising children as followers of Jesus - parents are.

Scripture makes it plain that the children of believers belong to God. The expected pattern is for children of believers to grow up strong and faithful in the Lord (Proverbs 22:6), because God promises that they are his 'little ones', his saints (1 Corinthians 7:14). It is the responsibility of Christian parents is to bring their children up as followers of Jesus. The potential for parents to stumble in this regard is clear in Scripture too (1 Samuel 3:13). And while the responsibility also rests with the child (Ephesians 6:1), there is a significant responsibility resting upon the parents of those to whom God has entrusted his children.<sup>3</sup> It is a weighty responsibility, and for many, one that was a struggle before terms like "Coronavirus" and "COVID-19" became part of our collective lexicon.

Clearly most Christian parents recognise that their responsibility for their children's spiritual wellbeing extends beyond facilitating church attendance

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, T.P., Family Ministry Field Guide (Wesleyan Publishing House: Indiana, 2011), page 99.

<sup>2</sup> Springer, E., <https://youthworks.net/articles/3-ideas-to-help-your-church-unlock-discipleship-at-home>

<sup>3</sup> Davies, G.N., [https://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/mindful/children\\_and\\_salvation](https://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/mindful/children_and_salvation)

and engagement. However many have simply dropped the ball for one reason or another (often when their children are still very young) and have struggled to re-establish healthy patterns. The purpose of this brief paper is to encourage parents to recognise their God-given responsibility to intentionally disciple the children God has entrusted to them, and to embrace the opportunity that this Coronavirus situation has afforded them to engage in this responsibility.

One area where Christian parents tend to struggle in their responsibility is spending time in the Scriptures with their children. Reading the Bible and praying together as a family teaches children to value God's word, and it shows them that their parents do too. If this discipline has never been a part of family DNA, it too can feel like an overwhelming and impossible pattern to establish.

It would be a remarkable gift to our children (and a transformative legacy for the church) if we used this time of isolation to commit ourselves to thoughtfully and intentionally discipling our children at home - reading the Bible and praying with our 5-year-olds, 10-year-olds, 12-year-olds and 17-year-olds.

If you are a parent and want to take your God-given responsibility seriously, can I encourage you to do 3 things: repent, resist the urge to outsource, and recognise that there's still time to create new habits for your family.

### **Some Tips:**

- Recovering from a failure means acknowledging that you've made one. Apologise. Acknowledging that models a humility that we're called to as Christians.
- Start a dialogue with your kids about what's next, giving them a context to ask questions and inviting them to brainstorm together about how you might address it is a great place to start.
- Commit together to thoughtfully and intentionally stick with this new discipline - remembering that new habits take time and work to establish.
- Starting can be as simple as reading a bit of the Bible and working through a few generic questions together, giving all members of the family (parents included!) a chance to answer:
  - *What do you think is cool or interesting about this story/passage?*
  - *What questions do you have?*

- *What does it teach us about God?*
- *What does it teach us about people?*
- *What do we learn about relating to God?*
- *What do we learn about relating to people?*
- *Who could you tell about this story/passage?*

The simplicity of these questions means that they're accessible at any age, and remain applicable whether you're reading a simple Bible storybook or a complete translation.

- Whatever your plan looks like, work together to identify regular time that will suit you (breakfast, after work, dinner, before bed). What daily activity or event can you incorporate it into?
- Start slowly. One of the best examples I've seen was a father who became a Christian much later than the rest of his family. He began by acknowledging his responsibility, then simply started to do his own Bible reading regularly in the presence of his teen. He exercised patience, and in time invited her to join him.
- Be flexible. There will be times that you will need to adapt what you're doing to accommodate family pressures, but don't compromise and cut it out completely. Remember, regular and brief is much better than not at all.
- Remember to pray, modelling dependence on God in all things.