

**The Biblical Model for Family Integrated Worship and
Biblical Mandate for Daily Home Discipleship**

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Throughout the Bible the model for corporate worship is one that includes all generations of life. Parents, children, youth, singles, and seniors all unite in corporate worship of the Lord. Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 5-6 give a biblical mandate concerning the need for heads of households, specifically fathers, to disciple their families on a daily basis. Ephesians 4:11-12 indicates that it is the purpose of church leadership to equip the saints for the work of the ministry which includes this critical task. This paper asserts that a church that unites families through family integrated worship and equips them for and holds them accountable to home discipleship is biblical and will make disciples that are strong in their faith and doctrine in this generation and in generations to come.

You do not have to look far today to find statistics that indicate the church in America is in decline. While the U.S. population continues to grow, church attendance continues to decline even in the most evangelical denominations. A recent report from the Lifeway organization of the Southern Baptist Convention indicates that greater than 75% of high school students that attend youth ministries leave the church within two years of graduation.¹ Recently the Raleigh Baptist Association published its annual report concerning church growth statistics. The report indicated that over 146,000 people moved into Wake county North Carolina from 2003 – 2007. The report compared numbers from 2003 and 2007 and showed that church attendance, membership, and baptisms all declined in an area of the country that is hot with population growth and located in the “Bible Belt.”² Something is seriously wrong with this picture. The conclusion from those who conducted the LifeWay study was this: "There is no easy way to say

¹ The article indicates that 30% of those that leave the church return later in life. Their primary reason they return is the influence of family members. Staff, "Lifeway Research Uncovers Reasons 18 To 22 Year Olds Drop Out Of Church," *Lifeway*, July, 2007, http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%25253D165949%252526M%25253D200906%2C00.html. (accessed 1/8/2008).

² Roger Nix, "RBA 2007 Congregational Profile Report," *Raleigh Baptist Association Newsletter*, December 2007.

it, but it must be said. Parents and churches are not passing on a robust Christian faith and an accompanying commitment to the church. We can take some solace in the fact that many do eventually return. But, Christian parents and churches need to ask the hard question, ‘What is it about our faith commitment that does not find root in the lives of our children?’” Parents must do a better job of passing their faith on to their children.

The statistics above demonstrate that parents in churches all over America are failing to pass their faith on to their children. This is largely due to the church’s failure to equip and hold parents accountable to the discipleship of their children. Eric Wallace states that “Our current understanding of the church’s identity is limiting full-range, effective ministry. Instead of a living, loving and integrated organism, the church has become an organization that divides its people and fosters competition among ministries. These factors do not allow for regular, meaningful interaction that unites church and home.”³ Henry Reyenga states well that “the many programs created by churches have fragmented families in an attempt to reach individuals.”⁴ Reyenga asserts that as the family in America has weakened the church has worked to compensate for it by becoming a “spiritual foster care provider for children.” He states

“It is understandable that the role of the church would increase as the family weakened. The leaders of the church see the weakness of the family. The leaders see that the family is having trouble discipling their children to walk with God. The church’s answer is to create specific programs for different ages and interests. We make these programs entertaining and very relevant. We develop curriculum tailored for different age groups. We treat the children as individuals, apart from their siblings or parents. In a sense, the church becomes the spiritual foster care provider for the children.”⁵

³ Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home* (Lorton, VA: Solutions for Integrating Church and Home, 1999), 42.

⁴ Henry Reyenga Jr, *The Spontaneous Spread of Home-Discipleship Christianity* (Monee, IL: Home Discipleship Press, 2006), 42.

⁵ *ibid*, 158.

Reyenga's comments seem harsh, but he raises a serious point that must be addressed. If parents are depending on Pastors and church ministry programs to disciple their children, then they are effectively turning them over to a spiritual foster care system. Reyenga articulates the results of the spiritual foster care system with the following:

“Spiritual foster care alleviates the immediate problem (that children are not being mentored) but does little to address the root cause of the weakness of the family. In fact it actually makes the family weaker by: 1) eliminating the expectation that parents should train their own children in the Lord, 2) giving each member of the family his or her own leaders to look up to, topics of study, favorite songs, and developing memories, none of which are shared by the family as a whole, and 3) tapping the family for the money and often the time and skill to pay for and organize a spiritual foster care system. The expense associated with hiring more paid staff to plan, organize, and implement the programs makes it such that only the larger churches have the necessary resources to do spiritual foster care well...Despite good intentions by all involved, families continue to get weaker.”⁶

The systematized age-segregation of families in the local church implies that church Pastors and staff are primarily responsible for the discipleship of children and wives during the scheduled church programs rather than household leaders discipling their families in the home. Wallace states well that:

“if our “church” experience is relegated to the formality of Sunday mornings, evenings, and Wednesday nights, we miss the real life aspect of what it means to be a community. If our members are all scattered into their little individualized cubby-hole programs, we miss the household atmosphere that God intended. And consequently, the church loses its impact upon the world. When homes and families are divided—as a matter of course—the church loses...What has happened in many cases is programs have become the life of the church taking the place of relationships. We must remember that if relationships were strong to begin with, many programs would be unnecessary.”⁷

The age-segregated model is indicative of corporate “outsourcing” paradigms prevalent in our business and big government culture today. We have effectively “outsourced” discipleship of our families to trained ministry professionals. When this happens, the congregation is in

⁶ *ibid*, 159.

⁷ Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home* (Lorton, VA: Solutions for Integrating Church and Home, 1999), 47.

direct opposition to the biblical mandate for husbands and fathers to disciple their wives and children. Dr. Voddie Baucham states well that:

“While I believe the vast majority of those who shepherd segregated portions of congregations are well meaning and would never presume to replace parents in their biblical role, I believe the modern American practice of systematic age segregation goes beyond the biblical mandate. I believe it is a product of the American educational system, and in some instances it actually works against families as opposed to helping them pursue multigenerational faithfulness. The church’s emphasis ought to be on equipping parents to disciple their children instead of doing it on their behalf...there is no biblical mandate for the current approach.”⁸

These statements are not intended to “villainize” the traditional church in America. The point is to critique the traditional model and stimulate thinking toward reform to a more biblical approach. I believe following a biblical model for worship and obeying the biblical mandate for home discipleship will ensure our faith commitment finds root in the lives of the next generation and generations to come.

Several passages of Scripture indicate the biblical model for corporate worship is one of age integration and for families to be together. Noah led his family in worship in a culture that rejected the gospel (Genesis 6-9; 2 Peter 2:5). Abraham led his family in worship (Genesis 22). Job also led his family in worship (Job 1:5). The Israelites worshipped together as families (Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 12:43).

Families worshipped together in the New Testament church as well. Both Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20 address children, who were present in the worship service, to obey their parents in the Lord. ***There is no text of Scripture which describes or prescribes age segregated corporate worship.*** When families are together for corporate worship they have a common spiritual vision to walk in, grow in, and be held accountable to. All members of the household

⁸ Voddie Baucham Jr, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 178.

can discuss the worship time together and benefit from each other's experience in a way that is difficult if each family member has been to their own age-graded worship service. Household leaders can then continue the study and application of the text that was preached throughout the week within their family, enabling the family to better learn and apply what they learned in the corporate worship experience together. The family integrated model of corporate worship best supports and encourages household leaders to fulfill the biblical mandate for home discipleship.

The biblical model for home discipleship begins with the families in Genesis and is mandated by the Lord in Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Verse 7 states that parents are to teach the commandments of the Lord to their children diligently "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." This is not a Sunday morning only endeavor. Parents are to "diligently" disciple their children throughout the day, every day of the week. Ephesians 5:25-26 states that husbands are to teach the Word to their wives. This is how a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Ephesians 6:4 places the responsibility of the discipleship of children on fathers in that fathers are to bring up children "in the training and admonition of the Lord." For a household with no father, the mother must assume this role and the church should come alongside her to equip and assist in the discipleship of her children. This is best accomplished family-to-family in day-to-day life when families use their gifts to serve and love one another.

Eric Wallace lists several benefits to the home discipleship model.⁹ Benefit 1: *A household approach helps to heal the hurting, to clear up the confused, and to rebuild broken lives for victory.* He states that by opening up our hearts, homes, and lives to others we provide a

⁹ The benefits and most of their commentary in this section are quoted from Wallace. Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home* (Lorton, VA: Solutions for Integrating Church and Home, 1999), 198.

haven for healing. This benefit results when families are active in opening their homes to others in fellowship and discipleship.

Benefit 2: *A household approach offers a natural outreach into the community.* As we practice discipleship in the home our discussion of spiritual things becomes more natural in our lives. As we reach out to our neighbors in love they will see the Word of God modeled in our family. As they see the love of Christ in our households extend to the community we have an excellent platform by which to share the gospel and begin to disciple our neighbors.

Benefit 3: *A household approach encourages hospitality as a means of serving one another in love.* Hospitality involves seeing the daily activities of the home as expressions of God's sovereign rule in our lives. Sharing meals, activities, and just visiting each other enables life to rub life and provides opportunities to share the love of Christ with others. Hospitality provides a practical way to live out loving our neighbor and a strong platform for sharing the gospel.

Benefit 4: *A household approach is well suited for listening to others and meeting their needs.* When you practice hospitality you have the one-on-one time with others to get to know them and to most effectively minister to them. Relationships are essential to spiritual growth. Making the household the primary place of ministry enables families to build relationships and meet the needs of others in practical ways in day-to-day life, not only in the times when the church meets for its regular schedule and programs.

Benefit 5: *A household approach enables household members to grow together, to hold each other accountable, and to develop and live out a common vision.* When households learn and serve together, members achieve a greater level of encouragement and accountability because they can more easily apply what they are learning to life situations. When households

learn and serve together, God often develops ongoing household ministries through shared vision.

Benefit 6: *A household approach provides the means for guiding new and young Christians through the struggles of Christian growth.* The apostle Peter describes new Christians as spiritual babes. A household approach allows for the continuous and consistent nurture of young Christians.

Benefit 7: *A household approach helps us draw upon the wisdom of those who have gone before us.* Titus 2 instructs the older in the church to teach the younger in spiritual and practical ways. The church is best able to live Titus 2 when families are integrated in worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.

Benefit 8: *A household approach builds upon relationships that are long lasting and involve bearing with people through the seasons and trials of life.* Families that exercise hospitality and discipleship in the home will build deep spiritual relationships with others. These relationships will be stronger to stand in the trials of life. People are more open to correction, reproof, and training in righteousness when it comes from someone who has a history of loving and serving them. No level of involvement in a church program can replace this.

Benefit 9: *A household approach spreads leadership out over households instead of relying on a small team of overworked people.* In most churches, eighty percent of the work is done by twenty percent of the people. When Pastors work with household leaders who in turn work with the members of their own households, this spreads leadership out. Doing this helps us build relationships, which in turn helps us keep our focus on Christ as the source of growth rather than our own works.

Benefit 10: *A household approach allows more people to use their gifts in home settings where they can offer practical life guidance.* There are many whose spiritual gifts don't fit the programs and opportunities to serve that the church offers. A household approach provides the relationship basis for people to use their spiritual gifts for edification of the body outside the church's schedule and programs.

Benefit 11: *A household approach better prepares people for marriage.* A household approach to ministry enables young people to evaluate the characteristics of a potential marriage partner in the confines of safe, real-life relationships. You best see the true character of a person in how they act in their home environment. You can see how a person practically lives out their faith in the way they interact with their family. My wife Katie and I experienced this growing up. We met when we were fourteen years old and saw first-hand how each of our families interacted with each other and what their priorities were. We knew the obstacles we were facing as we walked toward marriage and prayed together for the Lord to see us through them. He has blessed us with fourteen wonderful years of marriage and five beautiful children.

Psalm 78:1-7 gives a beautiful picture of the results of home discipleship:

“Give ear, O my people, *to my law*; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide *them* from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know *them*, The children *who* would be born, *that* they may arise and declare *them* to their children, That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments”

Henry Reyenga states well concerning this Psalm that “this powerful dream for the future is grounded in the reality you practice today. It matters how you lead your family in home discipleship. It matters how you help each of your children thrive in a reproducible walk. It

matters that what you do when your children are young will stay with them and that they will pass these practices on to the next generation.”¹⁰ The head of the household must intentionally make time to lead his/her family in Bible study and prayer on a daily basis. The leadership of the church must equip heads of households for this work.

A biblical mandate for church leadership is to equip household leaders to disciple their households. Ephesians 4:11 states that Pastors are to equip the saints “for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” When the church works to equip household leaders to disciple their families, and household leaders are diligent to disciple their families, then there will no longer be a perceived need for age-segregated discipleship by trained ministry professionals within the church.

The puritan writers understood this well. Richard Baxter in “The Reformed Pastor” states:

“We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us? If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is like to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on, what abundance of good might be done! I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion.”

George Whitefield also knew of the importance of household discipleship. In his sermon called “The Great Duty of Family Religion” he writes:

“and, if it was ever seasonable for ministers to preach up, or people to put in practice family-religion, it was never more so than in the present age; since it is greatly to be feared, that out of those many households that call themselves Christians, there are but few that serve God in their respective families as they ought.”

¹⁰ Henry Reyenga Jr, *The Spontaneous Spread of Home Discipleship Christianity* (Monee, IL: Home Discipleship Press, 2006), 134.

Whitefield and Baxter understood well that the responsibility of fathers to disciple their family was critical to the preservation of the faith in their society. Church leadership needs to turn its eye to the spiritual health of families in order to equip and encourage fathers to be the prophets, priests, and providers of the home that God has called them to be.

Many church leaders object to a church that promotes family integrated worship and home discipleship for several reasons. These objections and their rebuttals are listed below.

Objection 1¹¹: *Household leaders are not equipped to disciple their families and simply will not do it.* The answer to this objection is that the church must practice Ephesians 4:11 and equip them to do so rather than assuming the responsibility through a church program. When church members don't give financially the church leadership does not give on their behalf, they teach on giving. So also, the church must not develop a spiritual foster care system to disciple spiritually orphaned children rather than equipping parents for and encouraging them to practice home discipleship.

Objection 2: *This model will not reach teens and children with unbelieving parents.* This objection assumes that the responsibility to reach them is on the Youth or Children's Pastor and not the families of the church. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples applies to all the saints of God, not only the clergy. Please understand that I have no personal vendetta against children and youth ministries. My personal testimony involves attending VBS as a child and salvation and discipleship as a teen while involved in a youth ministry. I simply believe that the biblical household approach to worship and discipleship is a stronger model for making disciples of children and youth.

¹¹ The objections and portions of the responses listed below were given by Dr. Baucham at the Uniting Church and Family conference in Wake Forest, NC on 11/30 - 12/1 2007. Voddie Baucham Jr, *Objections to the Family Integrated Church*, (Wake Forest, NC: National Center for Uniting Church and Home, December, 2007), CD.

Objection 3: *This model will not reach singles and single parents.* They will feel awkward and isolated in an environment that fosters home discipleship and family integration. This objection assumes that singles don't want to be with families and that the sermon each week is a family oriented topical sermon. The systematic exposition of Scripture in the preaching ministry of the church feeds all the saints of God and convicts the lost unto repentance and salvation. There is no better place for a single parent's child to see that his/her life is not the "norm" and not to settle for less. My wife and I have led a family integrated Sunday School class for over two years. Singles and single parents are involved in the class and have been adopted by other families in the class. The fathers in the class serve as Godly role models for the children of single parents in the class.

Objection 4: *This model will not reach senior adults.* This objection assumes that senior adults do not want to be with the younger generation and that the sermon each week is oriented to young families with children. This is addressed by the systematic exposition of Scripture in the preaching ministry of the church. Seniors united in worship and fellowship with the rest of the body also enables the church to live the Titus 2 model of the older teaching the younger.

Objection 5: *This model has an inward focus and will not be active in evangelism and missions.* This objection assumes that the work of evangelism is primarily the responsibility of the Evangelism Pastor and visitation team and not the entire body. Evangelism and discipleship should happen on a day-to-day basis through being salt and light in the world and through hospitality in the home. As households practice home discipleship, household leaders are well equipped to live and share their faith with the people in their circles of influence. When a church member hosts neighbors and co-workers in their homes people will see the difference home discipleship makes in a family. This provides a strong platform to share the gospel. Households

are more equipped and able to evangelize when discipleship is viewed as a household activity rather than the responsibility of a church program.

The Bible clearly establishes a model of family integrated worship and gives a mandate for home discipleship. It is imperative that the saints of God live the Word of God by worshiping together as families and practicing home discipleship. The church must equip the saints for the work of the ministry and encourage and hold them accountable to daily discipleship in their homes for the sake of the Bride of Christ and to pass on the faith once for all delivered to the saints to the next generation. A church that unites families through family integrated worship and equips families for and holds them accountable to home discipleship is biblical and will make disciples that are strong in their faith and doctrine in this generation and in generations to come.

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