

September/October 2008, Volume 5, Issue 5

Editor's Note

Does your theology of children extend beyond whether or not they belong to the covenant and should be baptized as infants? That's Andrew Nichols' leading question in part 2 of his paradigm-shifting (for me personally) 3-part theological vision for families. We think that the topics of family & parenting are important enough to the shape and scope of discipleship in the local church that we decided to devote an issue of the eJournal to them.

The Cline family's opening challenge on whether our families are kingdom-minded should be read by every Christian parent on the planet. Period.

Matt Schmucker gives bite-sized practical advice on parenting. Personally knowing his five children, let me commend him to you as a genuine authority on the topic, even if he is named after jelly. Tim Cantrell looks at you, then he looks at the Bible, then he looks at you,

and then he says, "Have you considered having more babies?"

Justin Taylor points to resources neither pastors nor parents want to miss. And Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence each examine another commendable resource.

Bottom line: How do the older men in your church define "success" for the younger men? What do the younger women learn from the older women about femininity? In response, Nichols' articles ask us to stop and consider the fact that God has revealed himself as "Father" and "Son." That he has "adopted" his people as "children." That he has made us in the church "brothers" and "sisters." Presumably all this means something for what it means to be the church. Even more practically, it means something for our discipleship, and the vision of godliness that the older saints should impart to the younger.

—Jonathan Leeman

Family & Parenting

Kingdom Families

What does it mean to be a Kingdom-minded family? Is yours?

By the Cline Family

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Embedded Portraits: A Theological Vision for Families

Part 1: Why Families Matter to God

Part 2: How Families Minister to the Church and the World

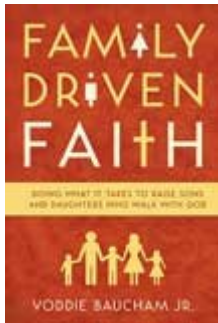
Part 3: Raising Boys vs. Raising Girls

By Andrew Nichols

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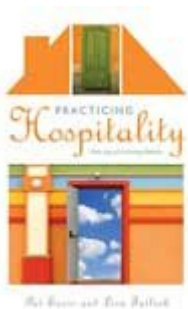


Book Review: *Family Driven Faith*, by Voddie Baucham, Jr.

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Reviewed by Michael Lawrence

9Marks has received a lot of questions about the family-driven ministry movement. We asked Pastor Lawrence to begin addressing these questions by looking at one family-driven advocate's proposal.



Book Review: *Practicing Hospitality*, by Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock

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Reviewed by Adrienne Lawrence



Learning to Multiply

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The Bible promises that children are a "blessing." Why don't evangelicals take this promise more seriously?

By Tim Cantrell



39 Lessons, 20 Tips and 10 "Don'ts" For Parents

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Add the ages of their five children (3, 9, 13, 18, 19) and multiply the sum by two, and you get 124 years of combined parenting experience. Now, factor in over two decades each of reading their Bibles, and you have an equation for wisdom.

By Matt & Elizabeth Schmucker



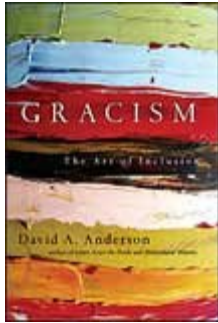
Favorite Children's Bibles

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Here's the lowdown on three commendable children's story Bibles.

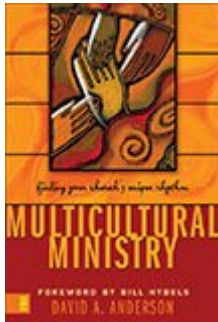
By Justin Taylor

MISCELLANEOUS BOOK REVIEWS



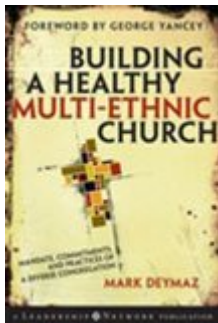
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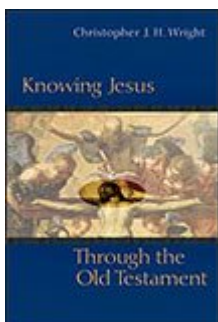
Book Review: *Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm*, by David A. Anderson
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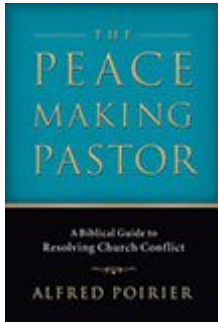
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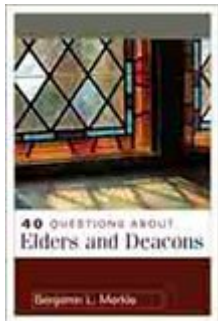
Book Review: *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, by Christopher J.H. Wright
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Book Review: *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, by Benjamin L. Merkle
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AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS



Life & Ministry with Os Guinness

Posted August 25, 2008 at 9marks.org/audio

Mark Dever asks author Os Guinness about life at L'Abri, Frank Schaeffer, American exceptionalism, the state of the church, and more.

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Wanted: Kingdom Families

By the Cline Family



About eight years ago, a young man handed me (father) an article in a Christian magazine dedicated to world evangelization. One paragraph in particular caught my eye. The author suggested that any family choosing to take their children to "dangerous" out of the way places for the sake of Kingdom witness might be guilty of sacrificing their children to Molech. After all, why take children to difficult locations when we can reach internationals in major Western cities?

And this was in a magazine dedicated to reaching the nations for Christ!

At the time I was living in such a "dangerous" place. Apparently, I was also offering my four children to Molech.

The funny thing is, during a decade of living in such a place, three of those children made credible professions of faith in Jesus Christ. To this day they are growing spiritually and embracing Kingdom values. Our family made sacrifices of a sort, but not to Molech! Our Heavenly Father has taken good care of those children (and still does not matter where we locate as a family).

For various reasons, few families today choose to go overseas, and the leaders of these families (the fathers) will often say that "the family" is what keeps them from doing so. They regard their families as burdens in missions work rather than as valuable assets, so they hesitate to commit to full-time cross-cultural disciple-making. Meanwhile, the single man or woman is treated as the prime candidates because he or she is unhampered and available.

Singlehood is indeed a good time to pursue missions without the added cares of family. But having a family should not prevent overseas work. When it does, the family may have become an idol.

FAMILIES CAN GO, TOO

In Matthew 28, Jesus commands *all* of his followers to make disciples of all nations. This command applies to whole families as well as to unattached singles. Families professing to follow Christ should be Kingdom families—families focused on the spread of the gospel to all nations. Different families will play different roles in the kingdom, but almost no family should shrink from the possibility of overseas ministry.

Disciple-making is not limited to single men or women. Families are extremely important in missions. Each member of the family has a responsibility in his or her role: women disciple women, men disciple men, parents train their children, children honor the Lord through obedience to their parents (Eph. 5, 6; Titus 2).

When a whole family goes overseas, it offers a team of witnesses that can have a wide impact and that can present an incomplete but effective example (or analogy) of what it means to be the body of Christ. A single family is usually not the local church, but the Puritans were right to say a family can be "a kind of little church" in the home. In pioneer settings, this little church of the household can initially be a helpful model for first-generation followers of Jesus.

KINGDOM FAMILIES ARE CHURCH FAMILIES

In a sense, Christian families that go overseas take with them the DNA of a disciple-making, reproducible church. In restricted access countries, Christian families make disciples of local husbands and wives and their extended families. These new disciples become a "starter" church within the Christian family's household, and this household starter church is the family's center for worship, prayer, and teaching of the Word. Throughout the process, the kingdom family acts as an example for new believers.

Whole families overseas also assimilate single workers, enabling younger, single Christians to be more acceptable and effective witnesses. This is particularly important in Muslim cultures that value families highly and do not understand singleness. Further, it's typically heads of households that can reach other heads of households in most foreign contexts.

The Bible offers examples of families who labor together to seek first God's kingdom. Abraham left his country and his people, moving with his entire family to an unknown land. He went in faith, trusting God with whatever lay ahead. God had promised that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). It was this kind of eternal perspective that compelled Abraham to leave everything familiar and embark on a journey to a foreign land.

Abraham's journey demonstrated faith. He trusted God enough to go wherever God called, whatever the cost. Of course, God was faithful to Abraham, making his descendants into a great nation through whom all peoples were eventually blessed by the Savior, Jesus Christ.

WHY DON'T FAMILIES GO?

Sometimes, Christian families can be hesitant to go overseas. Biblically, parents should take the training of their children very seriously. But couples often idolize their children, focusing on worldly success and accomplishments for their children, rather than on disciple-making.

Abraham's story demonstrates what a Kingdom attitude should be toward the blessing of children. In Genesis 12:3, God blesses Abraham so that he might be a blessing; prospering him with children and a good name—not for Abraham's personal benefit or his children's worldly success, but so that Abraham and his offspring could bless all peoples on earth.

Overseas work may seem like too much of a risk to take with children, but God's blessing of us with families should motivate us to look for ways to make those families a blessing to others. This is true in well developed nations as well; even Christian families in countries like the United States should strive to build families and raise children that will be a blessing to the nations.

Children are not the only reason families hesitate to become cross cultural witnesses overseas. Couples may be unwilling to give up careers, their beloved church family, or the ease and comfort of life in the West. These blessings become distractions, keeping families from having Kingdom perspectives and faith in God.

Overseas work can also seem frightening. Families may be paralyzed by the idea of moving away from extended family, retirement plans, and medical care. They might be afraid of new languages, new cultures, cooking from scratch, learning to use public transportation with a stroller in tote, and trans-ocean flights. These are understandable concerns, and some fears may remain long-term battles. In a fallen world, families will always have to deal with some fears no matter where they live. Nonetheless, these fears should not keep families from kingdom work, lest we be like Jonah. Like Abraham, instead, families can trust God's protection and faithfulness with the unknowns.

WHAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO LOSE

The West and America in particular is a comfortable and familiar place to live. It's easy to think about what we might lose by moving to an out-of-the-way place.

But we should also consider what might be *worth losing* for the sake of advancing the Kingdom among previously unreached people groups. Western preoccupations with stuff, techno-posessions, and the latest fashions can be just as dangerous—if not more—than the unknowns or lack of creature comforts of a foreign culture. Many Christian families would benefit greatly from giving up cable TV, ubiquitous entertainment, a preoccupation with comfort and convenience, the dizzying (spiritually numbing?) pace of life, and a centeredness on just one culture and language. Children could easily do without power toys, video games, year round extra-curricular sports, junk food, and the teen Hollywood or Nashville (Contemporary Christian Music) obsession.

In fact, those of us with Christian families might grow closer together and stronger in character by distancing ourselves from the corrosive influences of American culture, preparing our families to be an even greater blessing to the nations. All Christian families should commit to be a blessing to the nations.

Now, we're not saying that all Christian families should leave the West for the overseas mission field. Disciple-making needs to happen all over the world, at home as well as abroad. Families that go need support from strong churches at home.

For that reason, even before asking whether your family should stay or go, it may be worth asking whether or not you have a Kingdom perspective at all. Do you?

HOW SHOULD YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION?

Jesus' charge in Matthew 28 calls all followers—even families—to make disciples. Nonparticipation is not an option. It is impossible to be followers of Jesus and understand the Bible but not participate in the spread of the gospel. The Bible is about God's plan for the nations! Families should work to push aside their worries and go. As they become willing to go, churches should be willing to send out their best families for the sake of the Kingdom. They can also send out singles in tandem with families for working together on teams overseas.

God never guarantees that all things will work out well in the world. The history of missions has some tragic stories of families overseas. However, God does promise that his Kingdom is worth giving whatever he asks and going wherever he calls, whatever the cost. Following Jesus means surrendering to his greater plans and purposes, giving our lives to further his kingdom on earth. Consider Jesus' words:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it (Matt. 13:44-46).

"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:20-22).

Finally, here are some practical steps that you can take:

- Pray, plan, and train your family/children to be a blessing to the nations. Make this one of your family goals/missions!
- Use *Operation World* with your children; there is even a children's version.
- Consider taking a short term trip as a family!
- Embrace the major story line of the gospel—God's plan to bring glory to himself by redeeming a people from all the peoples of the world for himself.
- As a family, schedule weekly or monthly ministry opportunities to internationals in your metro area.
- Pray about whether God might be calling you to move your family to a different place so that you can be a blessing to peoples who have no access to the gospel. You might consider going for a year or two, or for five years, or for ten to fifteen years!
- Ask God to strengthen your Kingdom perspective and to show you how your family might increasingly be more fruitful in blessing others among the nations. Ask him to make you willing to do whatever he asks your family, wherever he asks you to do it, whatever the cost.

The Cline family has done church planting in central Asia since the early 1990s.

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Embedded Portraits: A Theological Vision for Families Part 1: Why Families Matter to God

By Andrew Nichols

Is Satan more concerned about the families in your church than you are?

From the beginning, Satan has tried to destroy the biblically-ordered family. Adam abdicated his headship. Eve usurped her husband's position. Cain killed his brother. Satan's first attacks were against God-given family roles.

The assault continues today, and it may be more ferocious than ever before. If you doubt this, just consider today's remarkable headlines—or the temptations at work in your own home. In this article and the next two, I'd like to help uncover what may be a treasure that's hidden in plain view within your church, and a treasure that Satan is after: the families in your congregation.

As the father of four and as the principal teacher of Capitol Hill Baptist Church's class on parenting, I have many opportunities to speak with young parents about raising children. And how desperately we all need practical wisdom! At the same time, I've become convinced that we also need something more: we need a sharper biblical vision for the purpose of the family. Why has God created the family? Why does Satan spend his time attacking it? What vision for the family should fathers present to their wives and children? And what should pastors teach their churches?

I will not attempt here a complete theology of the family, but I think we can establish this much: *Scripture teaches that a primary purpose of the family is nothing less presenting the whole world with a series of three images—God's triune nature, the gospel, and the church.* In the family, God has embedded pictures of himself, his plan of salvation, and his redeemed people.

Which means the family is precious! It's not just precious to young couples with children, it's precious to the entire church. To Satan. To God. And to you, pastor?

GOD'S FIRST COMMAND

How important is the family? Well, notice one of the first things that God does for Adam. He creates a helper suitable for him, Eve. Then notice the first command that God gives to this brand new family unit: be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Have children! And this was not just a pre-Fall ordinance. God tells Noah the same thing after the flood: "be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth and increase upon it (Gen. 9:7).

So make no mistake: For those of us not blessed with the gift of singleness (1 Cor. 7:7), or who in God's mysterious providence are unable to have children, families are not optional. They are commanded.

Why is God so insistent that humans multiply? The answer is found when we consider that he created Adam and Eve in his image (Gen. 1:26-27). He wants his image-bearers to multiply because he wants more of his image spread throughout the world. And he decided to graciously share the privilege of creating humans made in his image with us. Bruce Ware writes,

It is as if God said, 'I created the first and original pair of human beings in my very image, and I could continue creating them unilaterally so that you would have no part to play. But instead, you are now to bring about human beings; you are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with my greatest of all creations, humans made in my very image' (*Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*, p. 58).

This is remarkable. God commanded Adam and Eve and us to bear and multiply his image in part "by procreation" (A. Kostenberger, *God, Marriage & Family*, p. 34). That's a lot of mileage to get out of a single command.

But God was not finished—not even close. He also gave the multiplying family massive significance in the history of redemption. We see this most immediately in the family of Abraham, whose family God used to point to his plan of salvation for the nations (Gen. 26:4; cf. Gal. 3:29; 4:6-7). We also see it in the New Testament, especially as Paul shows how in marriage husbands and wives resemble Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33).

But there are still more portraits embedded in the family—portraits that display, as we've said, God's triune self, the gospel, and the church.

BUT WHAT ABOUT SIN?

We will consider these portraits one-by-one. But before we do, let me say a quick word about how we're to view these beautiful portraits in light of sin's effects on the family.

After all, both Satan and our culture conspire with our flesh to mar our families and distort their ability to image God. Both you and certainly members of your church might hear teaching like this and think, "My family might be a portrait of something, but it's not God, the gospel, or the church!"

Well, exactly. The very fact that we know that something is wrong is telling. Our bad experience, combined with glimpses of the good in other homes, is working like a photo-negative to reveal the outlines of God's design. As J.I. Packer puts it, we naturally form a positive vision of the family "by contrast" (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 203).

So the key here, pastor, is to not let the members of your church become discouraged by the fact that their families do not live up to God's creation purposes for the family. Rather, hold up God's creation purposes as the embodiment of what they know, deep down, they are missing. And then hold out God's promises of redemption for them and their families!

THE FAMILY PRESENTS A PORTRAIT OF GOD HIMSELF

Turning to these family portraits, then, we see first that the family provides us with a portrait of the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity. This is why Paul could write, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:14-15). The relationship between heavenly Father and Son is the *ultimate reality*. The relationship between earthly fathers and sons, and parents and children generally, are small but meaningful pictures of this ultimate reality.

Now, the relationship of the heavenly Father to the Son is unique. For instance, the Son was eternally begotten, *not* temporally created, like human children.

But for all the differences, the divinely given analogy remains. We cannot get around the fact that the "essential" relationship between these two members of the Godhead is as "Father" and "Son," "and [it] could not be otherwise" (W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 251).

God the Father, twice from heaven, spoke audibly and declared Jesus as his beloved son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

Jesus, at age twelve, referred to his "Father's house" (Luke 2:49). Later, to his disciples, he explained his relationship with the Father in the terms of a human son copying his dad: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (see John 5:17, 19-20). He positively urged them to recognize this relationship: "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). The Jewish leaders, of course, were shocked that he called God his own Father (John 5:18).

Paul, in his first post-conversion sermon series, preached "in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Later, he described himself as an apostle "by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal. 1:1, 3; see also 1 Thes. 1:1, 2 Thes. 1:1). Many other examples could be given.

In short, it is difficult to speak of the Trinity accurately without speaking of God the Father and God the Son. There is almost no other language to use. True, the Bible refers to Jesus as the "Word" of the Father, and as the "image" of the Father (John 1; Col. 1:15), but note even here the persistence of the word "Father." And Paul once describes the Father as "the head" of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). But when Jesus commands his disciples to baptize new believers, he does not tell them to baptize in the name of the "Head, the Body, and the Holy Spirit." Instead, he uses familial names—"Father" and "Son." This is by far the biblically favored formulation.

From these passages we learn an important lesson: Our love for, unity with, and likeness to our children bears witness to God's very nature. What an immense privilege to have children! No wonder he commanded us to "be fruitful and multiply."

Now of course, this does not mean that we learn about God primarily by being parents—any more than that we learn about the relationship of Christ and the church primarily by being married. The divine image is stamped on our families as a clue to the divine treasure; it is not the divine treasure itself.

But still, consider some of the enormous implications for our churches and families in understanding that God intends to project His image in part through parent-child relationships:

- **It keeps us from viewing children as *obstacles*.** Some evangelicals seem to think that having children is not that important, and can even be a barrier to godly ambition and valuable Christian service. But if parent-child relationships are commanded and bear witness to God's very nature, then nothing could be further from the truth. Children are not obstacles to ministry; their very presence and our relationships with them are a kind of ministry.
- **It keeps us from viewing children as *idols*.** Others in the church seem close to worshipping their children. Fathers and mothers—and pastors—who put children on pedestals need to be reminded that God did not imbue families with the divine image so that we can worship them, but so that we can worship Him. By all means build up the homes in your church—but as a means to building the family of God to the glory of God!
- **It keeps us from viewing children as *tools*.** Still others argue that children and families are important because they are the building blocks of society and the church. They mean this as a compliment. And it is true—families do, in a sense, keep the world and the church from flying apart. But that's just not the whole story. Families are not mere social glue; they bear the very image of our triune God.
- **It keeps us from viewing children as mere *targets for evangelism*.** Without a theological understanding for the role of children, many busy parents and pastors view them as still more people to tell the gospel. And I don't just mean Baptists. Frank James, the president of Reformed Theological Seminary has written, "I am quite convinced most Presbyterians, whether in the pulpit or the pew, do not clearly understand why they baptized their infants" (F. A. James, "Introduction: The Covenantal Convictions of a Compassionate Calvinist," in L. B. Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant*, 1940; reprint, P&R, 2003, xvi). My friend, wherever you stand on infant baptism, don't let it be said that you overlooked the theological role of children in your home or church. God hasn't.

Why is it so easy for pastors and parents to develop a distorted view of children? There are probably many reasons, but let me suggest one: we have allowed our experience and cultural preferences to shape our view of children and then looked to the Scriptures to reinforce what we've already decided.

Love the family and its traditional place in your culture? Have I got a verse for you: "Let the little children come to me . . . for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14). Been burned by the family and think it's been overplayed in your culture? I've got a verse for you, too: "Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk. 3:35).

Pastor, take a fresh look at these texts. Do you see how in both of them Jesus points to the family as a valuable picture of greater realities? How, for him, the family plays a significant but not ultimate theological role? Let's approach our heavenly Father humbly with these texts in hand (along with the many more we'll discuss below) and ask him to show us whether we've made too much or too little of our churches' families.

THE FAMILY PRESENTS A PORTRAIT OF THE GOSPEL

The family provides a profoundly personal picture of our salvation. In salvation, God adopts us. He makes us his sons and daughters.

God referred to Israel as his firstborn son (Ex. 4:22-23), and the people of Israel were encouraged to sing of God's fatherly compassion (Ps. 103:13). But Israel merely pointed to Christ, the true Son. The good news for us is that Christ came to see to our adoption and to make us fellow heirs.

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Gal. 4:4-7)

And the perfect Son was not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11)!

So he taught his disciples to pray to "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9) and reminded them not to be anxious about food and clothes because "your heavenly Father knows that you need them" (Matt. 6:32). He also promised them that his Father would not abandon them as orphans (John 14:18, 23).

In response to this good news, the apostle John couldn't help but bubble over with wonder: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

And we should share John's wonder and excitement. For parent-child relationships are no accident or small part of God's plan; they are designed to teach us by analogy of our precious relationship to God—our true Father—in Christ. J.I. Packer puts the point even more strongly:

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (*Knowing God*, p. 201)

Wayne Grudem similarly writes, "This relationship to God as our Father is the foundation of many other blessings of the Christian life, and it becomes the primary way in which we relate to God" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 739).

Consider, after all, how often Scripture points to this analogy to help us understand our lives and the circumstances that we encounter. When trials come, for instance, the author of Hebrews tells us not to forget "that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." The author continues, giving us even more insight into God's tender, fatherly ways with us:

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-11)

And God awards us a share in the Son's inheritance. We "giv[e] thanks to the Father," Paul writes, "who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light" (Col. 1:12; see also 1 Pet. 1:4).

Here again, this truth has practical applications.

- We can "learn from God, the Father, what true fatherhood is like" (Ware, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, p. 60-63). For instance, God fathers us as Christians "by being lavish, generous, even extravagant in his care, love, provision, and protection" (Ibid., p. 60, 61). Should we as parents not do the same? Since my children were very small (around two years old), some of my favorite times have been talking with each of them individually when they get up in the morning and before they go to bed at night. Especially at night, I have them set the agenda by asking, "What do you want to talk about?" or "Tell me about your day." Oh, the insights I've gotten into their hearts in those times! And what friendships have grown! My eyes tear as I write these lines. My fervent hope is that, as year follows year, they will learn just the slightest bit of what it means to have a *heavenly* Father who loves them individually, knows about their "going out" and "lying down," and is "familiar with all [their] ways" (Ps. 139:3).
- At the same time, we should remember that the Father "insists on our respect and obedience" (ibid, p. 61). He is not satisfied with our current state, but actively works to conform us to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29). God's purpose is that, like Jesus, we would imitate him: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1). By this token, God calls us to instruct and disciple our children. We are to call them to conform to righteous and wise living (see Proverbs!).
- But in this, we must be patient, as God is patient: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13). And he happily, generously—amazingly—gives his Spirit to those who ask: "If you, then, though . . . evil, . . . give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk. 11:13).

Oh the blessings of adoption! What a marvel that God has made us his children—that Jesus may, in a very real sense, be our older brother. Let's praise the Father for the insights into his plan of salvation he gives us through our families.

THE FAMILY PRESENTS A PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH

Finally, the family draws an equally stunning portrait of the church. Peter calls the church the "family of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Paul calls the church "God's household" (1 Tim. 3:15).

How is it that we belong to the same household? Because being united to Christ (Eph. 2:1-10) means that we have been united to one another (Eph. 2:11-20), as we have seen, like adopted brothers and sisters.

Some of the applications for us in the church are immediate. Paul tells us that men with children must prove themselves able managers in their own homes before they can be elders in the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5). It's not surprising that he would then tell an elder like Timothy to "encourage an older man as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

Likewise, Paul tells all Christians to love our fellow church members as siblings. He routinely refers to members of the churches under his care as "brothers" (Rom. 15:30, 2 Cor. 13:11, Gal 5:13, Eph. 6:23, Phil. 4:1, 1 Thes. 1:4). (The word for brothers here is gender neutral—it means "siblings.") He also writes to the Thessalonians, "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more" (1 Thes. 4:9-10). And he commands the Romans to "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Rom. 16:1).

Peter also writes, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

Wayne Grudem sums the matter up: "The designation 'brother' is so common in the epistles that it seems to be the predominant way in which the New Testament authors refer to the other Christians to whom they are writing. This indicates the strong consciousness they had of the nature of the church as the family of God" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 741).

God ordained families to be ubiquitous so that we can understand how to love one another as siblings in the church. At the same time, all the "one another" passages in the New Testament that apply directly to the church should teach us something about the kind of relationships we want to cultivate among our children, that they might better understand what kind of relationships he intends to see among his people.

Unlike our earthly families, our heavenly family will not end in heaven. While marriage will pass away, we will forever be the bride of Christ (Rev. 22) and children in our Father's house. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

CONCLUSION

Are you beginning to see how the family is precious wisdom, strangely hidden like a treasure in plain view? Do you see why Satan would want to attack it?

God evidently gave his first command to humans—"be fruitful and multiply"—because children and families are a central part of his plan to communicate what he is like, how he plans to relate to us, and how we are to relate to each other—forever.

So we don't want a diminished view of families, seeing them as obstacles or tools. Nor do we want an idolatrous view of families, seeing them as an end in themselves. Nor should we view them as mere targets for evangelism, or let Satan be more interested in them than we are. Instead, we should build up and treasure and guard them.

In part 2 of this series, I will consider in more detail the profound implications of these truths for our churches and our evangelism.

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Embedded Portraits: A Theological Vision for Families Part 2: How Families Minister to the Church and the World By Andrew Nichols

In his theology of baptism, the covenant, and children entitled *Children of Abraham*, David Kingdon argues that it's not enough for Baptists to theologize about children only in the negative by denying that children should be baptized. Rather, Baptists should work harder at understanding positively how God intends for Christians to regard their children.

I both disagree and agree with Kingdon. I disagree with Kingdon because, in my estimation, denying that children should be baptized is not just negative, it's positively affirming God's unique calling on the church to be his ultimate means of evangelism and kingdom proclamation on earth (e.g., Mark 3:34-35). At least since Christ's ascension, session, and giving of the Spirit, the church has been uppermost in God's plan for blessing the nations, more than the biological family or anything else.

Still, Kingdon makes an important point that both paedobaptists and baptists need to hear, because the church does not perform its mighty work apart from the family. As we discussed in the first article, the church's very vocabulary—the vocabulary of the Bible about the nature of God, the gospel, and the church itself—is inherently familial. Thus, in the Mark passage I just noted, Jesus depends on his listeners' knowledge of the human family to explain the nature of the church. The same is true for us. There is a sense in which we in the church depend on the family.

So there's more to say about children and families than to simply affirm or deny the continuity of the covenants! In this series of articles, I am trying to say that bit more. It's not a complete theology of children or the family, but I hope we can consider some basic principles that both baptists and paedobaptists will agree upon.

Given that God has made the family a portrait of precious biblical truths, something all Christians can and should affirm is that God intends for families to *minister* both to the church and to the world. We'll consider each ministry in turn.

THE FAMILY MINISTERS TO THE CHURCH

If God has embedded the biological family into creation to present the world a picture of the church, as we considered in the last article, it must be the case that building families is a vital ministry to the church.

Sometimes 9Marks encourages churches to consider the example that they are setting for other churches by saying that "every Timothy needs a Paul, and every church needs a model." But this raises the question of where the model church should look. Amidst the many metaphors God gives us to describe the church, one of the central metaphors—and one important place for churches to look for a model—is the family. A well-ordered family is a powerful, God-ordained, universal witness to the church of what it ought to be.

"God's Household" in 1 Timothy

This is a key theme of Paul's entire first letter to Timothy. "I am writing you these instructions," Paul told Timothy, "so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in *God's household*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). He then instructs the young pastor to call upon his experience in a family to show him how to treat the members of his congregation: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

As we noted in part 1, Paul tells Timothy to recognize elders for the church family by looking for good spiritual *and* earthly father figures. As Vern Poythress puts it, "Paul in effect presents an argument: good family leadership must be one of the criteria for appointment to the position of overseer because the very same skills and competencies are required for overseeing 'one's own house' and the Christian 'house'" ("The Church as Family," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 236). (This does not mean that single men cannot be elders. Paul himself was single, and he commends singleness as a blessing to the church.)

Poythress beautifully describes the process by which the church family develops. Notice specifically how a growing church family presupposes some understanding of a healthy human family:

Since God is our Father, we really are in a fundamental sense one family. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Family gives us yearnings toward our fellow family members. In the long run, Christians cannot be satisfied with nothing more than a large, anonymous meeting once or twice a week. The ties of love demand more frequent and more intimate relations. . . .

As Christians meet with one another and know one another more intimately, their sense of being one family grows. They begin to treat one another in the way Paul counsels: the older men as fathers, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters (I Tim. 5:10). People are no longer faceless masks, but real people, bound together by family ties. The same logic operative in natural families begins then to play itself out in the church as God's household. In the intimacy of this spiritual family, people find that they are treating one another in a manner that respects differences of age, sex, and personality.

This is not to say that only people from healthy families can be healthy Christians and church members, or even that the family is more important in God's plan of redemption than the church. Still, it's worth noting that the very language we use to describe a healthy, growing church comes from what people know—from creation—about the family.

A Beautiful Symbiosis

In all of this, there is a beautiful symbiosis: the family blesses the church and the church blesses the family. Poythress again: "Because of the close relation between family and church, godly family life stimulates appreciation of God as our heavenly Father, and appreciation of God stimulates godly family life. Both are enhanced by the example of mature, fatherly [and motherly] leaders within the church" (*ibid.*, 245). The reverse is also true: "[the] disintegration of household order within the church adversely affects both our consciousness of being in God's family and the quality of love within Christian families" (*ibid.*).

Are you beginning to see the importance of the corporate witness of the family to the church, and the church to the family? The two bodies should aid one another. "The life of the church never overthrows but rather *enhances* the life of the family based on God's design from creation" (*ibid.*, 239) (emphasis added).

Practical Applications for Your Church

So be honest. Would you describe the relationship of families and your church as a beautiful symbiosis? Specifically, does the life of your church overthrow or enhance the life of its families? And does the life of your church's families overthrow or enhance the life of your church?

Let's talk practically, then, about how we can encourage healthy, mutually beneficial relationships between our churches and their families. The job is accomplished by teaching—by both word and example.

Family to Church. On the one hand, *we need to teach our congregations about the profound ministry of human families*. It is difficult to overstate the urgency of this task, particularly in the West, where the value of a biblically ordered family is rapidly being lost. Powerful cultural currents are sweeping through our churches, hitting married couples, singles, and children, and leaving them bewildered about some of the most basic life questions. Is parenthood important to God? Why? What is the role and purpose of children? What is the role and purpose of sibling relationships? What is the role and purpose of gender? Many of our people simply do not know. Many of us do not know.

Pastor, teach your people God's truth about the ministry of the family to your church. Teach them that parenthood is important to God because it provides the church with a picture of certain aspects of the Trinity. Teach them that having children is important to God because it provides the church with a picture of our adoption through Christ. Teach them that sibling relationships are important to God because they provide the church with a picture of the relationships between its members. Teach them, as we'll discuss in the next article, that gender is important to God because it provides the church with a picture of certain aspects of the Godhead.

- Consider how you can encourage that young couple struggling with the Bible's command to have children. In exchange for the sacrifice involved in having children, they will provide the church with a picture that reflects aspects of the relationship between the First and Second persons of the Trinity.
- Consider how you would encourage that lonely single. By spending time with one of your church's families and watching how the parents treat the children, he or she can grow in the knowledge of God's tender fatherly care.
- Consider how you can encourage that mother in your church who often second-guesses her career sacrifice to stay home with children. She is providing the church with a picture of God's sacrificial, constant, minute care for his children and cultivating sibling relationships that provide a model for brothers and sisters in the church. Help her see that she has gone into full-time ministry!
- Consider how you can encourage those two men in your church who "just can't get along." They can make headway in their relationship by praying over how they teach their children to get along, and then applying those lessons to themselves.

And these are just a few examples. As you preach through Scripture week by week, don't let the drumbeat of family language pass by without commenting on the significance it lends to their most familiar relationships. Of course, this will often be the passage's secondary application, which is the reason why we so often miss it. And one will need to take care not to over-employ these analogies by forcing them into exact parallels. But we should also take care not to under-employ the analogies either, give the ministry of the family its due, and watch how it enhances the life of the church.

We should also teach our congregations about the ministry of families by showing them. "Most people learn far better from example," Vern Poythress writes, "than they do from teaching in the abstract. So how do they properly assimilate teaching about family life? Ideally they imitate the family lives of their church leaders. But this imitation is most effective if they can actually see something of the family life of their leaders" (*RBMW*, 246). Pastor, encourage the leaders in your church, along with their wives, to open their homes, particularly for family worship. Open your doors and your hearts, and let your people learn the ministry of the family by personal experience.

Church to Family. On the other hand, we *need to teach our congregations' families how the church profoundly ministers to them as families.*

First, *teach* congregations to listen to what is said at church about God, the gospel, and the church in order to learn how their homes should function. We want our families to understand that the Bible's chief concern is not what we learn about God from our families, but what we learn *for* our families *from* God, given that we were created to image *him*, and not he us. For our families to serve as proper images of divine realities, we need to hear from him what he is like.

Yes, the church is a special grace body and the family is a common grace body. But this is precisely what enables the church family to instruct the human family—without special grace the church would not resemble a family at all! And the more our human families heed instruction from the church, the more they can provide visible pictures for the church itself to imitate and summon to illustrate divine realities. Conversely, if the church crowds out or ignores the family, then it only diminishes its own message by failing to uphold these precious, God-given, living pictures.

Second, urge your congregations to look to the *example* of the gospel-grounded church family as an instructive picture for individual families. Remind them that love and submission between a church member and an elder, for instance, sets a pattern for the relationship between the parent and the child. Or the gospel harmony between a

white brother and a black brother, to use another example, has lessons for the teenage brother and sister who have difficulty appreciating one another's differences. (Of course, much of this effect will likely be lost if you have multiple services tailored to various demographics.)

The church's "picturing" ministry to the family can also occur by bringing children to the meetings of the church. This lets the children see the church family interacting with order and reverence for God and, if it's a worship service, worshipping together our heavenly Father. (For an excellent discussion of the benefits of taking children to worship services, see John & Noel Piper, *The Family: Together in God's Presence*.) Here too the children will see a helpful *contrast* with their family, as they see that, unlike the human family, the family of God is diverse in age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and myriad other ways.

By what we teach and how we live, let's pray that our families would better minister to our churches, and our churches to minister to our families. May they never overthrow one another, but enhance one another to the glory of God.

THE FAMILY MINISTERS TO THE WORLD

Building families is not only vital to the church, it's vital to the world. God designed the family to be a universal model of some of the most precious truths about himself and his plan of salvation so that everyone is prepared—to some degree—to hear the gospel.

Why Satan Attacks

Yet have you noticed that the concept of a family in Western culture is becoming more and more distinctly Christian? When we tell people the amazing news of a Father who "so loved" the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that we could become his adopted children, we hope we can assume that they know, on a human level, about these basic types of relationships. But this assumption is becoming increasingly difficult to make because the cultural tide that has swept through the church has ripped with even greater force through the culture. And Satan has clear reasons for only making things worse.

Many people increasingly come from homes that will have chilled their hearts to the idea of a wise and loving father; the idea of faithful, tender love from brothers and sisters; or the idea of the blessing of living under authority. Why does Satan attack the family? He wants to disintegrate and distort the family beyond recognition precisely so that the gospel is as inaccessible as possible. And by all accounts he's having great success of late in Western culture.

Under this fierce assault, Christians cannot afford to be neutral or worldly. My point here is not to call for political activism (though there may be a place for that), but for personal and corporate faithfulness. The church should view building strong vibrant families as gospel work. Opening our homes to non-Christian friends is an increasingly valuable evangelistic opportunity.

The Family as an Outpost

Indeed, since Satan has so successfully attacked the family—and thus distorted the very conceptual categories we have for conveying gospel truths—Christian homes are a vital base of evangelism. Dawson Trotman, founder of the evangelistic group Navigators, said, "I believe with all my heart that one of the greatest soul saving stations in the world is the home" (in Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal*, 100).

Dawson's point is especially poignant since our homes are "in the world." They sit on streets with non-Christians. They are "outposts." It's a different kind of outpost than the church, since our children may or may not be Christians and so may or may not proclaim the gospel. But as we live out our God-given familial roles in God-ordained ways, we soften the ground for non-Christians to make sense of good news about a God who sent his Son to die so that we could be made part of his family.

We can also reach out from our homes in mercy ministry. Through our children's involvement in neighborhood activities, for example, we can look for opportunities to get to know non-Christians by caring for their needs. Remember, the Proverbs 31 woman used her home as a base of operations to care for the poor.

Home—A Pejorative Term?

If we're honest, though, we must admit that "home" in many circles is a dirty word. Radical feminism in particular has wreaked havoc on the concept of home. How sad that even within many evangelical churches the "stay-at-home mom" is a pejorative term!

But in Scripture home is a place of blessing. We see this in Proverbs 31, as the "wife of noble character" centers her amazing industriousness on her home. We also see it as Jesus assures his fearful disciples with the promise that one day they would be with him at home: "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you....I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-4).

In other words, God appears to regard the job of preparing a home as suitable for women of "noble character" and the Son of God himself!

A Small Picture of Heaven

In her excellent little book *Feminine Appeal*, Carolyn Mahaney encourages women to build homes in which it's "impossible to keep from thinking about God" (100). Does this seem farfetched? Consider what a faithful father, a godly mother, obedient children, and perhaps even a holy grandparent or two pictures. Is it not a small picture of heaven?

By God's grace, I have known many families in my church whose homes presented deeply attractive havens to children with difficult homes of their own. One woman in our church developed a friendship with neighbor kids who would arrive for cookies at around 4 p.m. every day. Another couple found that their teenage children's non-Christian friends increasingly preferred spending an evening with that Christian family rather than the mall. Those teenagers experienced something different in that Christian house!

Another example that comes to mind is that of missionaries our church supports in a Muslim country. The couple has several daughters, and they have testified that the greatest tool of evangelism is their home life. Their Muslim friends are amazed to see the love and respect the father has for his wife and daughters, and their neighbors love to spend time in that Christian home.

In other words, Christian churches in both Muslim countries and the secular West should help to expand Christian families' understanding of themselves: they can be an evangelistic base of operations.

The Gospel Work of Having Children

These days, even having children can help the work of evangelism. Having children too early, having too many, or having them for the wrong reasons, can raise eyebrows. Sometimes it's even looked down upon, as one woman with six children discovered when her friends referred to her as a "breeder," according to a recent *Christianity Today* article.

But notice how such language conveys a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be made in God's image. Humans don't "breed," says Al Mohler, they *procreate*. In light of God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28); in light of God's promise that the man whose home is full of children is blessed (Ps. 127:3-5); in light of God's assurance that childbearing is God's ordained place of safety for the married woman (1 Tim. 2:15), surely Christians should be wholly unsympathetic to any reference to childbearing as "breeding."

If God intends for our families to teach humanity *something* about himself, his gospel, and his church—as we considered in part 1 of this series—then having children provides an opportunity for Christians to teach about

such things through their homes. Having children *can* also show that Christians have kingdom priorities, rather than selfish and worldly ones.

Finally, having children provides an opportunity to evangelize future generations. Have you ever noticed that God repeatedly promises to bless generations of families? In the Law, God promises to show love to a "thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Deut. 7:9). The Psalmist says that "from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children" (Ps. 103:17). And we see great examples of this in the New Testament, as with Timothy, who learned the gospel from his mother and grandmother. God loves to bless families.

CONCLUSION

Do churches have anything to say about children beyond whether or not they should be baptized? Certainly. Building families is critical Christian ministry. It's critical for the church and for the world, which see in the family a picture of God himself and a redeemed community.

In part 3 of this series, we will consider how men and women image God differently, and what that means for raising boys and girls differently.

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Embedded Portraits: A Theological Vision for Families Part 3: Raising Boys vs. Raising Girls

By Andrew Nichols

What's the question that expecting parents most often hear? My vote: "Do you know what you're having?"

The anticipated answer, of course, is not "a baby" but "a boy" or "a girl." And the balloons for the girl will be pink, and for the boy they will be blue.

The question we want to ask in part three of this series on the family is, Does the fact that we're having a boy or a girl make any difference in parenting beyond the color of their balloons? The answer according to Scripture is emphatically, Yes! And pastors should know why so that they can better equip the men and the sons, the women and the daughters, in their congregations.

Biblically, boys and girls are not interchangeable. In one sense, this is not a surprise for most parents. Genetic differences express themselves in striking ways, like the little girl I read about whose mother gave her a train to socialize her as gender neutral. The girl took the train, carefully wrapped it in a blanket, and put it in her stroller to go to sleep. But, in another sense, there are fundamental differences in God's *purposes* in making boys and girls, and this may come as a surprise to some parents, even Christian ones.

In the previous articles of this 3-part series, we have considered how the Trinity, the gospel, and the church are reflected in our relationships with our children. In this article, we will consider what God teaches us about himself through the gender differences of our children. We'll also talk about the roles God intends for men and women to play and how we can train our children for those roles.

WHY ARE MEN FROM MARS AND WOMEN FROM VENUS?

The most fundamental biblical teaching on gender is this: God intends to project his image differently through men and women, who are created equally in his image.

So men and women are equal in dignity and value to God (see Gen. 1:27). This is because, as Wayne Grudem puts it, *both men and women* are "more like God than anything else in the universe" (*Building Strong Families*, Dennis Rainey ed., 29). But we are different in our design and in our roles. We are not interchangeable; rather, we complement one another. In God's design, the "weaknesses of the man are not weaknesses and the weaknesses of the woman are not weaknesses. They are the complements that call forth different strengths in each other" (John Piper in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, 49) ("*RBMW*").

Often this complementary design is discussed in terms of headship and submission. We see this in marriage, where the husband is described as the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23), and in the church, where only men are authorized to teach (1 Tim. 2:12). And this complementary design is fleshed out in different activities or roles, a differentiation that "is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships. Differentiated roles were corrupted, not created, by the fall" (John Piper in *RBMW*, 35).

This is not surprising, because differentiated roles exist in the Godhead itself. The Father and the Son are not the same person; they have different roles; but they are both fully God. "Just as the Father and Son are equal in deity and equal in all their attributes, but different in role, the husband and wife [and men and women generally] are equal in personhood but different in the roles that God has given them" (Wayne Grudem in *Building Strong Families*, Dennis Rainey ed., 60).

So here we see yet another portrait of divine truth embedded in the family—the portrait of the roles of the trinity displayed in our very genders. Praise God for the marvelous witness he has left himself in our homes!

Well, then, if God has indeed created men and women to be different, how then should we raise our boys and girls? The short answer is that we should raise our boys to be biblically masculine and our girls to be biblically feminine.

TEACHING BIBLICAL MANHOOD TO OUR BOYS

Beginning with boys, the natural question to ask is what biblical masculinity looks like. John Piper usefully answers it this way: "at the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships" (*RBMW*, 35).

Teach Them Mature Masculinity

Note that Piper's definition starts with the idea of *mature* masculinity. It's not just any masculinity for our boys that Christians want. There is plenty of immature masculinity in this world. It helped to create, or at least to foster, radical feminism. We are *not* shooting for domineering, insensitive, authoritarian, condescending men.

When a son uses his strength to take advantage of a younger brother or sister, the parent has an excellent opportunity not to yell at him but, after taking him privately aside, to point out that God has given him strength to do good to others. Parents should teach boys that their strength and courage should be harnessed to protect others and to take risks for Christ.

Teach Them a Sense of Benevolent Responsibility

This leads to the next part of Piper's definition of biblical masculinity: Christians want to raise boys to have a *sense* of benevolent responsibility. Even if boys cannot live out their benevolent responsibility towards women (as when they attend an all-boys school, are single, or become injured), parents should teach them to sense, at a deep level, their responsibility and to look for ways to express it towards women. "For example," Piper writes, "such a man's sense of responsibility will affect how he talks about women and the way he relates to pornography and the kind of concern he shows for the marriages of the men around him" (*RBMW*, 36).

One of the men in my life who has shown the most sincere, sustained, intelligent interest in my marriage, and who has helped me the most, is a 31-year-old single man. He is a fine example of a man with a sense of benevolent responsibility toward women, even though he has few occasions to practice it directly.

Teach Them a Sense of Benevolent Responsibility

And what is this a sense of? It's a sense of *benevolent responsibility*. Benevolence, as I have already suggested, is using one's strength to do good to others. And the word responsibility, Piper writes, shows that masculinity is a "God-given trust . . . not a right" (*RBMW*, 37). It's not so much a prerogative, but a calling, a duty, an obligation, and a charge, says Piper. The man "will be uniquely called to account for his leadership, provision and protection in relation to women" (*ibid*). We see this pictured in Genesis 3:9. Eve had initiated the first couple's sin, but God came looking for Adam. *He* was called to account. So too in our families.

Not only should fathers feel this sense of responsibility, they should explain it to their sons (and daughters). Fathers should teach their children about the trust—the calling—that they have been given as fathers. In fact, they should talk to their children about how they are unable to handle this calling, and how Christ is able. They should ask their children to go to God on their behalf. As young boys and girls learn to ask God to make their dad's better husbands and fathers, they will learn more about this mature sense of benevolent responsibility that men have.

And what an instructive, clarifying, precious moment for children—when they hear their fathers acknowledging before God their weaknesses and asking God for help!

Teach Them to Lead

What should boys learn it's their responsibility to do? *To lead*. As Piper notes, the word "lead" can mean many things to different people—"Does it mean I need to drive the car?" So let's clarify it with a few statements:

Leadership involves *service and sacrifice*. According to Piper, leadership is not a "demanding demeanor," it's "moving things forward to a goal." Specifically, it's moving things forward to "holiness and heaven" (*RBMW*, 38).

Jesus led his bride to holiness and heaven on the Calvary road. He looked weak, but he was infinitely strong in saying NO to the way of the world. So it will be again and again for mature men. . . . (ibid.)

Christian parents should train their boys to move others forward, through their own self-sacrifice, toward a goal of holiness and heaven. Sons should be able to watch their fathers treat their mothers in this fashion. If they have younger siblings, they should be given opportunities to do this now.

Leadership does not presume superiority, but *cultivates and mobilizes the strengths of others*. Christian parents should teach their boys not to demean or ignore girls (ultimately women), but to nurture them in the service of Christ. As Michael Lawrence, a pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, has put it, parents should teach their boys to *lead through nurturing*. This usually does not come naturally to boys, who are interested in serving themselves. They have to be trained to be attentive to others and to foster the growth of others, especially among those who are weaker.

Leadership does not have to initiate every action, but it *feels the responsibility to provide a general pattern of initiative*. This sounds very nice—and very theoretical. So Piper puts the point practically:

[T]he leadership pattern would be less than biblical if the wife in general was having to take the initiative in prayer at mealtime, and get the family out of bed . . . on Sunday morning, and gather the family for devotions, and discuss what moral standards will be required of the children, and confer about financial priorities. . . . A wife may initiate the discussion and planning of any one of these, but if she becomes the one who senses the general responsibility for this pattern of initiative while her husband is passive, something contrary to biblical masculinity and femininity is in the offing. (*RBMW*, 39)

Boys should not see Christian parents living this way! Passive fathers raise passive sons. If a father doesn't know whether he's too passive, he should ask his kids, "Who seems to lead our home, mommy or daddy?"

Teach Them to Provide

A mature man also has a sense of benevolent responsibility *to provide*. What does this mean? We do not mean that a woman cannot help support the family financially. We do mean, in Piper's words, that "when there is no bread on the table it is the man who should feel the main pressure to do something to get it there" (*RBMW*, 42).

This is implied in Genesis 3 where the curse touches man and woman in their natural places of life. It is not a curse that man must work in the field to get bread for the family or that woman bears children. The curse is that these spheres of life are made difficult and frustrating. In appointing the curse for his rebellious creatures God aims at the natural sphere of life peculiar to each. Evidently God had in mind from the beginning that the man would take special responsibility for sustaining the family through bread-winning labor, while the wife would take special responsibility for sustaining the family through childbearing and nurturing labor. Both are life-sustaining and essential.

. . . .

Again I stress that the point here is not to dictate the details of any particular pattern of labor in the home. [For example, who does the laundry? In my house, for example, my wife does the laundry, but I do most of the ironing; I earn the income, but she handles the finances.] The point is that mature manhood senses a benevolent responsibility before God to be the primary provider for his family. And the same is true for a social group of men and women who are not married. Mature men sense that it is primarily (not solely) their responsibility to see to it that there is provision and protection. (*BMW*, 43, n.15; citing Deut. 10:18; Jer. 31:32; Eph. 5:23; Col. 2:19).

In order to promote this responsibility to provide in their sons, mothers can encourage their children to observe their father's hard work. They can also set a good example by expressing gratitude for that work whenever they spend money. Fathers, on the other hand, should ask themselves the question, Does my job serve my family, or does my family serve my job? I ask myself this question in order to ensure that I'm not putting more weight on my job than my family was meant to bear.

Teach Them to Protect

Finally, a mature man has a sense of benevolent responsibility *to protect*. We see this in Ephesians 5:25, which instructs husbands to "love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." As Piper puts it,

Christ is here sacrificing himself to protect his wife, the church, from the ravages of sin and hell. This is not an arbitrary assignment. It is fitting because men were created for this. . . . The sense of responsibility to protect is there in man by virtue of this design in creation, not by virtue of the marriage covenant. (*BMW*, 44 n.16)

We also see this in the Old Testament, as the men, not the women, had the duty of going to war.

In my own marriage, one of the primary ways my wife wants me to care for her is to give her my protection. Now, we have two-year-old twins; her biceps are impressive. And I can remember jogging with her in a mountainous area just after law school. She pushed two large children in a jogging stroller up a nauseating incline 40-yards ahead of me—cruising and suffering no real shortness of breath. In between heavens, I remember thinking, "Who's the weaker vessel here?" But in her candid (non-trash-talking) moments, my wife is fond of saying, "I'm a delicate flower." And she means it. She wants my protection—of her heart, her mind, and her body, including her physical health. Though it doesn't happen often, she hates it when I travel. And this is also why I have to be especially careful not to speak with even a hint of harshness.

By God's grace, the men at my church are being taught to offer this kind of protection. There are the single men who look out for their sisters by walking them home at night. There are many who have embraced the courtship model of preparing for marriage in order to protect their sisters. And there are men who confront a brother who isn't being careful in his relationships with women.

Again, mothers should be reminded of their opportunity to teach this to their sons. Boys should be taught to be sensitive to their mothers and their sisters—to look out for them, to protect them, and to speak kindly to them.

And fathers should model this kind of sensitive, protective care to their boys, and challenge them to do the same. Here's an assignment to give to fathers. Ask their son(s), "Do you think I am harsh with your mom?"

TEACHING BIBLICAL FEMININITY TO OUR GIRLS

If mature biblical masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, to provide, and to protect, what is mature biblical femininity? (I want to know because I have three daughters!) Here again John Piper's answer is useful: "At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to women's differing relationships" (*BMW*, 46).

Teach Them True Maturity and Beauty

As with his definition of masculinity, Piper's definition of femininity starts with the word "mature." We don't want just any femininity for our girls.

The world offers many versions. A popular version right now looks much like masculinity—it is independent, assertive, and vocal. But we do not want to raise girls to become women who are simply interchangeable with men. They are not the same! Remember, the Bible presents a picture of gender in which men and women *complement* one another.

Another version looks like the harlot in Proverbs. This hyper-sexualized version of femininity is very popular, too. Just ask any mother of a girl in her teens (or even "tweens") how easy it is to find—not just modest clothes; those are essentially impossible for teenager girls today to find—but clothes that are not out-and-out racy. My culturally astute wife pointed out that the optimal woman today seems to be a hybrid of this masculinized and hyper-sexualized version of femininity. She calls this "Alias" femininity, after the television show—both aggressive *and* sultry. "Women love Elizabeth Bennett," she says, "but they want to *be* Angelina Jolie."

What should mothers teach their daughters instead? They should talk with their daughters about inner beauty—the beauty of the heart, the beauty of a "gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." Even at young ages (5, 6, 7), we can see the spirit of a girl who, if not lovingly and firmly corrected, will grow up to be a bossy, critical, spiteful wife and who will attempt to usurp her husband's authority and lord it over him. Mothers should also talk with their daughters about their eating habits. Girls should learn not to make an idol out of the perfect body or to find their solace in food.

Teach Them True Liberation

Next, mature femininity is a "freeing disposition." In 1963, Betty Friedan helped launch a movement to liberate women from what she viewed as an enslaving stereotype. She argued that a "feminine mystique" trapped women in their homes, which she called "comfortable concentration camps" (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1983 ed., 307). As we have said, the feminist movement was in many respects a reaction to male abdication, and there is no excuse for *that*. But only the truth can set us free—can *liberate* us.

As we are convinced that God's Word is truth, we are convinced that it alone will liberate us. Elizabeth Elliot puts the point beautifully:

We must and do deplore the stereotypes that caricature the divine distinctions [between men and women]. We deplore the abuses perpetrated by men against women . . . but have we forgotten the archetypes? *Stereotype* is a word generally used disparagingly to denote a fixed or conventional notion or pattern. An archetype is the original pattern or model . . . I am not here to defend stereotypes of femininity, but to try to focus on the Original Pattern.

The first woman was made specifically for the first man, a helper, to meet, respond to, surrender to, and complement him. God made her from the man, out of his very bone, and then He brought her to the man. When Adam named Eve, he accepted responsibility to "husband" her—to provide for her, to cherish her, to protect her. . . But Eve, in her refusal to accept the will of God, refused her femininity. Adam, in his capitulation to her suggestion, abdicated his masculine responsibility for her. It was the first instance of what we would recognize now as "role reversal." This definite disobedience ruined the original pattern and things have been in an awful mess ever since. (*BMW*, 397).

And then, as if in direct response to Friedan, Elliot closes with this:

The world looks for happiness through self-assertion. The Christian knows that joy is found in self-abandonment. "If a man will let himself be lost for My sake," Jesus said, "he will find his true self." A Christian woman's true freedom lies on the other side of a very small gate—humble obedience—but that gate leads out into a largeness of life undreamed of by the liberators of the world, to a place where the God-given differentiation between the sexes is not obfuscated but celebrated . . . for it is in male and female, in male as male and female as female, not as two identical and interchangeable halves, that the image is manifested.

To gloss over these profundities is to deprive women of the central answer to the cry of their hearts, "Who am I?" No one but the Author of the Story can answer that cry. (*BMW*, 398).

I've spent extra time with these quotes because the battle between the Friedans and the Elliots of the world—call it the "battle of the Bettys"—may well be the defining issue for Christian parents trying to raise daughters. We cannot afford to be neutral.

As Mark Dever has written, the issues of biblical masculinity and femininity is "increasingly acting as the watershed" issue within the church, "distinguishing those who will accommodate Scripture to culture, and those who will attempt to shape culture by Scripture."

Pastors should take a sober look at the culture. It's intensely interested in answering the cry of women's and daughters' hearts, "Who am I?" But it's giving them the wrong answer—the same one that tripped up Eve. Pastors are therefore charged with helping husbands and wives to see the "largeness of life undreamed of by the liberators of the world" that is found in celebrating the differences between the sexes. Women and their daughters in the church should learn that true freedom is being what they were made to be—female.

Teach Them to Affirm and Receive Male Leadership

What does a mature woman have a "freeing disposition" to do? She has the Christ-given freedom *to affirm* strength and leadership in worthy men. And this applies not just to married women. Even an unmarried woman can express her femininity by affirming the godly leadership of her father, for example, or her elders. Daughters should therefore be encouraged to affirm, not buck, their father's leadership. Though there's not an exact parallel, affirming a father's leadership will be good practice for life in the church and, if the Lord wills, in marriage.

A mature woman also has the freedom *to receive* strength and leadership from worthy men. Piper writes,

A mature woman is glad when a respectful, caring, upright man offers sensitive strength and provides a pattern of appropriate initiatives in their relationship. She does not want to reverse these roles. She is glad when he is not passive. She feels herself enhanced and honored and freed by his caring strength and servant-leadership" (*BMW*, 48).

Women and daughters should be taught to delight in being led and protected and provided for—and daughters will learn to delight in such things as they watch their mothers do so.

Teach Them to Nurture Male Leadership

Finally, daughters should be taught that biblical femininity is a freeing disposition *to nurture* strength and leadership in worthy men. In fact, this might be described as a woman's core calling. God said it was "not good" for man to be alone, so he provided "a helper suitable" for the man (Gen. 2:18). As Pastor Michael Lawrence has put it, Adam's problem was not *loneliness*—he had perfect fellowship with God. His problem was *incompetence*. He needed help.

Teach Them to Be Helpers...

What does "helper" mean? In the original Hebrew it means "helper." One of the women in our church once said that her original reaction to this word was to cringe, which is probably true for many women. We have the image of "mommy's little helper"—an unnecessary person, maybe even a hindrance; someone you let "help" you for their benefit, but not for yours. But "helper" in Scripture is a strong word. The vast majority of times it's used of God himself. Women do not fundamentally help men from a point of weakness; the reason they *can* help is that they have tremendous strengths.

...To Their Husbands

Women are helpers to their husbands. This starts with a woman's very orientation. They help their husbands by being oriented to them, and not primarily to themselves. (As we saw earlier, this is *not* to say that a husband should be oriented to himself; he should be oriented to God and leading his family to serve God.)

One former member of my church presents a good example of this husband-ward orientation. When she was unmarried and had no immediate prospect of getting married, she got a law degree without going into debt. Now that she is married with children, her investment in a law degree has served as a major asset to her husband, who is a United States Attorney.

Women also help their husbands by having and raising children. As we considered in part 1 of this series, God created humans to spread his image throughout the world in part by procreation. So it's not surprising that the New Testament admonished married women to have children (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:9; cf. Titus 2:4) and to help their husbands by being "busy at home" (Titus 2:5; see also 1 Tim. 5:14).

Interpreting these New Testament texts, Andreas Kostenberger writes that "women are to be devoted first and foremost to the home, supervising their households with discretion and industry" (*God, Marriage, & the Family*, 122). First and foremost? This is *not* how the culture tells women to think of homemaking. But it is how Scripture says to think of it. If a pastor is concerned these words will discourage the wives and daughters in his congregation, he might consider John Piper's challenge to women. I pray, Piper says to women,

That you not only pose the question: career or full-time homemaker?, but that you ask just as seriously: full-time career or *freedom for ministry*? Which would be greater for the Kingdom—to work for someone who tells you what to do to make his or her business prosper, or to be God's free agent dreaming your own dream about how your time and your home and your creativity could make God's business prosper? And that in all this you make your choice not on the basis of secular trends or upward lifestyle expectations, but on the basis of what will strengthen the faith of the family and advance the cause of Christ. (*BMW*, 56)

Does a mother want to set high goals for her daughters? She should catch this vision and pass it on to them. She should teach them the joy of being "God's free agent," dreaming their own dreams about how they can use their time, home, and creativity to "make God's business prosper." She should teach them not to follow secular trends or lifestyle expectations, but to pursue whatever will strengthen their families and advance the cause of Christ.

Please don't miss the word "teach." Biblical femininity is caught, true enough; but it is also taught. Many are the women whose mothers were "busy at home" and practiced the biblical virtues, but who allowed their daughters to grow up with almost no practical or theological instruction. And their daughters today are paying the price. They have to train themselves to do practical tasks and retrain their minds to think about homemaking on biblical terms.

Pastors, encourage the women in your congregation to be *deliberate* in teaching biblical femininity. Otherwise, rest assured the culture will fill the calendars of the daughters in your congregations, and they will grow up to be interchangeable with men.

...To Their Churches

Women are helpers to their churches. Even while women are unmarried, they can employ their talents in the church. A single woman can consider how she can be more "devot[ed] . . . to doing what is good" (Titus 3:14) by pouring herself into helping God's people.

What does this mean for mothers? They should prepare their daughters for a life of service in "God's household," the church, by giving them opportunities to serve from an early age, and holding up for them women who make serving in the church part-and-parcel of their lives.

CONCLUSION

The home is full of embedded portraits of redeemed relationships. Parent-child relationships model something of the relationship between the Father and the Son as well as our relationship with God as Father. Brother-sister relationships model our relationships with each other in the church. Children are therefore no afterthought in God's plan, but one of his key means for preparing humans to grasp the basic truths of the gospel. Nor is gender an afterthought in God's plan, especially as it's expressed in families. It, too, is one of his central means for preparing us to grasp basic gospel truth—the truth of the very different roles of the co-equal persons of the Godhead.

Pastor, are you starting to see the portrait of God's purpose for families and parenting? Is the focus sharpening? Is it turning from black-and-white to color? May God give us wisdom and determination to raise masculine sons and feminine daughters, that his image may be clearly and beautifully shown to the world.

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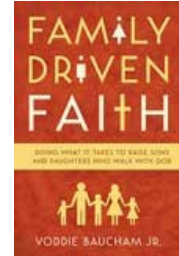
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Book Review: Family Driven Faith, By Voddie Baucham Jr

Reviewed by Michael Lawrence

Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God

Crossway, 2007, \$19.99, 224 pages



I'm a product of Sunday school. Growing up in three different Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, the pastors changed, but the "Sunday School Board" quarterly lessons remained the same. At the time, I was bored. It wasn't until I had a profound and personal reformation freshman year of college that I discovered I knew the Bible, inside and out.

That reformation resulted from encountering Christian peers through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Duke University. These guys not only knew their Bibles, they demonstrated for me the radical call of truly Christian discipleship.

The experience left me feeling ticked off at the church. All it had taught me, I thought, was facts and Bible trivia. So began a decade long journey in the parachurch. I was discipled in the Reformed faith by guys a few years older than me, and I discipled men a couple years behind me, first as a student and then as a parachurch staff worker.

Somewhere along the way, I came back to the local church. My wife and I led a small group of other young professionals and graduate students. I taught and encouraged local church membership. And I eventually helped lead our Grad & Career Class.

There's a lot of change and development in the autobiography above. But did you catch what remained constant? If you guessed age-segregation, you're right! From birth to age 27, the majority of my religious experience was spent with and defined by my peers.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From a pedagogical perspective, age-segregation was very effective. Lessons were always age appropriate, and I was usually happy to be with people my age, even if the lesson was boring. It's no wonder I knew the Bible by the time I went off to college. But it's also no wonder that I knew little of what it meant to be a disciple of the Bible's Lord. Things improved in college, but I was still in an age-graded setting, which left huge gaps in my discipleship of which I was utterly unaware.

It never occurred to me that there was anything amiss until my wife and I moved to Boston to attend seminary at Gordon-Conwell. Two things happened that challenged my thinking. First, there weren't any churches in our area large enough to have age-graded adult Sunday school. We were all lumped in together, and the experience was enriching.

What really challenged me was a paper I wrote for a Christian Education class. I'd heard of catechisms and wanted to find out what happened to them. I was surprised to learn that they were killed off by Sunday school. That wasn't Sunday School's intent; it was developed as an evangelistic outreach to unchurched children in urban settings. But that was its effect. Even more surprising, however, I discovered that Sunday school wasn't invented to teach church kids like me the Bible. That was the parents' job at home. In fact, before Sunday schools, youth pastors, and the discovery of the "homogenous unit principle," parents were understood to be the primary evangelists and disciplers of their children.

At that time, I hadn't yet worked out all the details, but I knew I would never go back to an age and life-stage approach to ministry. I realized that my earlier anger at the church had been misplaced. It wasn't that Sunday school and youth group had failed to teach me biblical truths. It was that these age segregated programs had largely separated me from the community of people who were responsible not only for teaching me those truths, but discipling me in them.

WHAT EARLIER GENERATIONS UNDERSTOOD

Simply put, it seems earlier generations of God's people understood that parents, not children's and youth ministry professionals, are primarily responsible before God for evangelizing and discipling their children. And these earlier generations learned this responsibility from the Bible.

On the edge of the Promised Land, Moses instructed a new generation that they were to "impress [these commandments] upon 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" (Deut. 6:7). In other words, parents, teach your children about the Lord everywhere and all the time. Eli, the priest, was judged by God for failing to discipline his sons in the Lord (1 Samuel 2:27-36). The book of Proverbs begins with an extended lesson from father to son on the nature and value of wisdom (Prov. 1-9).

The New Testament is no less straightforward. Paul commands fathers to "bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). One of the qualifications for serving as an elder in a local church is that a man has managed his family well, including raising children who are "faithful" and "not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient" (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). In contrast to Eli, Timothy's mother and grandmother, Lois and Eunice, are commended as models of a sincere faith "that now lives in [Timothy] also" (2 Tim. 1:5).

It's this biblical burden, responsibility, and privilege that is at the heart of Voddie Baucham Jr.'s recent book, *Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God*. Baucham's concern, and the motivation for his book, is numerous statistical reports indicating that the overwhelming majority of children raised within the church abandon the faith within a year of leaving home. While many have blamed irrelevant programming or under-sourced church staff, Baucham places the responsibility where it belongs: on mom and dad, and especially dad.

OVERVIEW

In chapter 1, "The Lay of the Land," he places the modern American church-going family in the context of a culture obsessed with material success, the academic and sporting achievement of our youth, and the convenience of our fast-paced lifestyles. At the same time, he notes that the culture inside and outside of churches is increasingly anti-marriage and anti-child in its fundamental orientation toward self-fulfillment and success (p. 24). In contrast to these priorities, Baucham notes that most Christian parents seem content "for just getting by" when it comes to training their children in godliness and faithfulness (p. 22).

Having set the context and documented the problem, Baucham doesn't spend the rest of the book scolding parents for what a poor job they've done. Instead, like the faithful pastor he is, he sets about teaching us. Using Deuteronomy 6:4-15 as his guide, but drawing from the breadth of Scripture, his own experience, and the lessons of church history (especially the Puritans), Baucham identifies seven key areas that parents must address if they are to fulfill their biblical calling:

- The priority of our own transparent discipleship and personal repentance from the idols of our age (Chapter 2, "A God With No Rivals").
- The priority of cultivating a marriage that models a biblical (rather than 'romantic') definition of love, which in turn demonstrates what it means to love and be loved by God (Chapter 3, "Learn to Love").
- The priority of teaching our children a biblical worldview (Chapter 4, "Give Him Your Heart").
- The priority of reading and teaching the Scriptures at home (Chapter 5, "Teach the Word at Home").
- The priority of biblical discipline that leads to discipleship (Chapter 6, "Live the Word at Home").
- The priority of regular family worship (Chapter 7, "Mark the Home as God's Territory").
- The priority of time together as a family (including mom being at home) even if it means having less stuff (Chapter 8, "Enjoy the Gifts without Forgetting the Giver").

In each of these chapters, Baucham displays both an intimate knowledge of American church-going families and a firm grasp of the biblical vision for faithful parenting. He also has the heart of a coach, who knows how to alternate between setting challenging goals and giving the necessary pep talks when discouragement sets in. The book is peppered with memorable lines and compelling stories from his own family and others. These will simply give you a taste:

- "God is not against your having things. He is, however, against things having you" (p. 150).
- "My mother could have been anything she wanted to be. And she was. She was my mother" (p. 165).
- "If I teach my son to keep his eye on the ball, but fail to teach him to keep his eyes on Christ, I have failed as a father" (p. 20).

He's also not shy with his opinions of modern evangelical culture:

- "When did we begin to hate children?" (p. 24).
- "The size of our families has become a matter of income and convenience" (p. 26).
- "In our age of professionalism we tend to hire out every parental responsibility" (p. 93).

THE GOAL

But whether challenging or encouraging, Baucham never loses sight of his goal: convincing parents that it's worth getting into the game and fighting for the souls of their children. And he's convinced, I think rightly, that this is no fools' errand, but rather God's design:

This is the linchpin in every argument I have made or will make in this book. God has designed your family—not the youth group, not the children's ministry, not the Christian school, but your family—as the principal discipling agent in your children's lives. The most important job you have as a parent is to train and disciple your children. (p. 118)

I couldn't agree more. Parents are responsible to evangelize and disciple their children and God has uniquely designed the family to this end. I also think he's right that too many of us have sought to outsource this responsibility to the "professionals" at church, and our churches have been only too happy to meet that demand.

In fact, it comes naturally to most churches these days, since the church growth movement has taught us to view the congregation as consumers of spiritual products and the church as a market-driven delivery system designed to meet their needs. But I digress.

FROM THE FAMILY TO THE CHURCH

Or do I? The heart of Baucham's book, aimed at parents and their responsibility, is about family discipleship, what it looks like and how to do it. I have nothing but praise for it. But in the final two chapters, Baucham turns from the family to the church. Much of this is on target as well, especially as he summarizes his thorough and excellent critique of a consumer church culture that has produced passive parents and pagan kids.

However, I couldn't help but feel that his ultimate prescription for the church—as opposed to the family—operates on the same market-driven assumption that he critiques. He's simply called for the church to respond to a different *customer*: the family rather than the individual.

The remainder of this review is going to explore this criticism, which, it must be stressed, responds to a matter of secondary significance in Baucham's book.

The Proposed Problem

Baucham has formulated the problem of the modern church as one of membership retention. "American Christianity," we're told, "has a failure rate somewhere around eight (almost nine) out of ten when it comes to raising children who continue in the faith" (pp. 10-11). As a result, he concludes, "if things do not change, the church in America will continue to decline precipitously over the next few generations" (p. 175).

The Proposed Solution

The programmatic solution which Baucham prescribes is a radical abandonment of age-segregation. Baucham champions the "family-integrated church" which "is easily distinguishable in its insistence on [age] integration as

an ecclesiological principle" (p. 194). Stated negatively, "there is no systematic age segregation in the family-integrated church!" (p. 195). This doesn't just mean no youth group. This means no nursery, no children's Sunday school, and Sunday services in which families sit together.

But Creating Another Problem

As I said at the outset, I'm no fan of age-segregated ministry and largely agree with Baucham's critique of its ill-effects on the church. And certainly I'm no fan of parental failure in evangelizing and discipling their children. What I don't agree with is how Baucham links these two matters and tries to fix both, namely, by redefining the church as "a family of families."

In other words, Baucham moves from examining parents' responsibility to prescribing a new role, and even culture, of the church. This new ministry paradigm is "family driven" in which "the family is the evangelism and discipleship arm of the family-integrated church" (p. 195). Baucham insists that if we are to be faithful to what the Scriptures teach, "churches must facilitate this commitment" (p. 190). At precisely this point it seems to me that he has ironically placed the church at the service of a newly defined set of consumers.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS AND IS NOT

The church is not a family of families. The church is the family of God (1 Pet. 4:17; 1 Tim. 3:15). This means it's a family of **believers** who have been grafted into Christ and so adopted into God's family (see John 15; Eph. 1:4-6; 2:19; Gal. 4:1-7). It may seem like a small point, but the shift in emphasis makes a difference.

For one thing, it means that the focus of the church is on God, not on the biological families of church members, as such. Fundamentally, the church is not called to aid families; the church is called to be a display of God's glory and wisdom (Eph 3:7-13). We do this as we are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ and live both individually and corporately in such a way that sets us apart from the world (Col. 3). Our marriages and families are one way we will demonstrate that we belong to God. But surely they are not the only way. To systematically and holistically define and organize the church around biological families is to put the church at the service of yet another customer and to insist that it provide what that customer needs. We've simply traded the individual religious consumer for a collective.

It is also reductionist, at the least, to say that "the family is the evangelism and discipleship arm of the family-integrated church" (p. 195). Parents should evangelize and disciple their children, and perhaps that's all Baucham meant. But in the context, it doesn't come across that way. The family isn't God's evangelism plan for the world. The local church is (John 13:34-35; 2 Cor. 5:16-21). The family isn't God's discipleship program. The local church is (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-13). Families have a role to play, and it's an incredibly important one. But the Scriptures will not allow us to reduce the church and its mission to a family driven program.

TOO MUCH CONTINUITY?

Perhaps most importantly, Baucham's definition of the church flies in the face of one of the most significant discontinuities between the old and new covenants. Baucham builds his ecclesiological principle from Deuteronomy 6. On the edge of the Promised Land, Moses made it clear that Israel's continued enjoyment of God's blessing depended upon parents owning and faithfully executing their responsibility to teach the next generation. The promises to Israel were given, not merely to individuals, but to a family of families. Membership in the visible people of God in the Old Testament was a matter of physical birth into one of those families.

As Southern Baptist pastors, Baucham and I agree that with the coming of Christ and the new covenant in his blood, all of that has changed. The promises given to ethnic Israel are now fulfilled in the True Israel, Christ. Those promises are now shared, not with those who claim physical descent from Abraham, but with those who demonstrate spiritual descent from Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ. Christians are not born into Christian families. They are born again. It is through union with Christ that we participate in the promises of the gospel.

Jesus shocked his hearers when he answered his own question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" by saying "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:33-35). John the Baptist outraged the Pharisees when he said, "Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you

that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Mat. 3:9); and Jesus made a similar point in John 8:39. Jeremiah prophesied the shift from a covenant defined by biological generations to a covenant defined by spiritual generations when he said of the new covenant, "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:34).

In fact, it turns out that the biological family of Abraham, the family of families that was ethnic Israel, was a type of the spiritual family of Abraham—a family composed of those elect from every tongue, tribe and nation redeemed by the blood of Christ and adopted into his Father's household, the Israel of God (Rev. 7:1-9). One implication of this: Deuteronomy 6 is rightly understood in the New Covenant to be an evangelism and discipleship plan, not just for the nuclear family, but also for the spiritual family—the local church. In fact, we might consider the Great Commission of Matthew to be the New Testament fulfillment of that Old Testament mandate.

FAMILY MATTERS, CHURCH MATTERS

This is not to say that biological families no longer matter. They do. Our marriages are to picture the gospel (Eph. 5:22-33). Our families are to display the gospel and be a training ground in the truth (Eph 6:1-4). And if Old Covenant fathers were responsible to teach and train their children in spiritual truth, then New Covenant fathers are all the more responsible.

But no matter how faithful we are in our marriages and parenting, Jesus assures us that the church will cut across our families; the gospel will divide father and child (Mark 13:12-13). The reason for this painful discontinuity is not a failure of programming or purpose or definition. The reason is that the church, the children of God, are "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13).

Any formulation of the church, however well-meaning, that obscures this truth will bear ill-fruit in the generations to come. Ironically, a true insight on the importance of families and parents may very well lead to the unintentional spiritual harm of those it was intended to protect. It will do this by producing in our children a sense of belonging to God's family, and a duty of behaving like his children, without the prior necessity of believing in Christ. This isn't the goal or intention of the family-integrated church movement. In fact, just the opposite. But I fear it may be the result nonetheless.

READ THIS BOOK!

Bottom line: you should read this book. Baucham has done a real service to the church by calling us back from a wrong-headed trust in programs and professionals to a biblical responsibility to raise our children in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

He reminds us that, as elders, we should both be evaluated and evaluate ourselves in view of the spiritual management we've demonstrated in our families.

He reminds us that our culture is constantly teaching our children that worldliness is normal and faith is unreasonable; so we better get in the game and teach and live otherwise.

He also challenges us to think about the local church, what her purpose is, how she organizes herself, evaluates herself, and perpetuates herself. I may disagree with Baucham on some of these matters. And, though I have spent a disproportionate amount of time in this review on a couple of those things that we disagree about, I understand that we are on the same team, that we agree on more than we disagree, and that the questions he's raised get at the heart of what it means to be the faithful pastor of a healthy, faithful local church.

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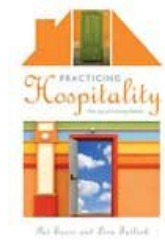
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Book Review: Practicing Hospitality, by Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock

Reviewed by Adrienne Lawrence

Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others

[Crossway, 2008, \\$14.99, 256 pages](#)



As a young bride, I accompanied my husband to the airport late one night to pick up a friend. While waiting for the luggage we noticed a distraught woman speaking in broken English to an airport security guard. She was an international student, her contact could not be located, and the airport was getting ready to shut down for the evening. My husband and I quickly offered her our spare bedroom for the night. This unplanned invitation launched my husband and I into a ministry of hospitality that has spanned 18 years and been exercised in several states and a foreign country.

We have practiced hospitality in small apartments and in a large home, at times when our furniture was boxes and at times when steaks were on the grill. We've done it when the event was anticipated and when we were weary and needing the Lord's strength. As a hostess I have had moments when the food was delicious and the kids said just the right thing and times when the meat was overcooked and the children were ill behaved. We've also had all sorts of people into our home: families, singles, internationals, non-Christians, missionaries, and those in need. Through all these experiences we have known the Lord's provision and blessing, as he has used us to be a blessing to others. Sometimes the blessing has been palpable, and at other times we have trusted that the Lord has used our service for good.

Over the years I have sometimes wondered if hospitality is just something my husband and I enjoy or if it is a biblical mandate for all Christians. It is clear that in biblical times hospitality was at the very least a cultural necessity. There were no hotels or restaurants in the ancient Near East, so the traveler was dependent upon the hospitality of strangers. If the traveler was not received into someone's home, he would have gone hungry and temporarily homeless. But we live in an age where hotels and restaurants are ubiquitous. We also live in a time when more women are working and working hours are longer for everyone. Single women come home at the end of the day tired and families are struggling to all sit down at the dinner table at the same time. We all understand the encouragement of providing an occasional baby meal or food for a grieving family. But should we be calling Christians to a deeper commitment to hospitality? Should we be encouraging Christians to intentionally invite over those they don't know, those who are different from them, those who are in need? Or, in doing so, are we placing an unnecessary burden on our church members?

THE THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY

As I have studied Scripture I have noticed that hospitality is not just cultural but theological as well. When God gave the Israelites his law, he told them that they were not only to welcome but to love the alien (Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19). This was not merely for the purpose of taking care of practical needs. The purpose was to display God's character. As the Israelites welcomed the alien into their homes they had the opportunity to show the surrounding nations what a great God they served. They had the chance to tell others and remind themselves about a God who had welcomed them when they were once aliens in a foreign land. In this way they were supposed to be a blessing to the surrounding nations as God had promised Abraham they would be (Gen. 12:3).

As Christians we have that same opportunity. As we exercise hospitality we are reminding ourselves that we were once in our sin and strangers to God, but through Christ's work on the cross we have been welcomed into his family.

THE MINISTRY OF HOSPITALITY

Furthermore, God often used hospitality as the context for specific ministry. After Abraham offered the three visitors hospitality he found out that Sarah would give birth to a son. The spies came to Rahab's Inn but were offered shelter in her home after she discovered their identity and their peril. God used this act of kindness to

bring Rahab into his family. It was through the hospitality of Priscilla and Aquilla that Apollos was instructed (Acts 18:24-26). The list could go on.

THE COMMANDS OF HOSPITALITY

If this were not enough evidence for us to continue the practice of hospitality, we have the direct commands in the New Testament. In Romans 12, at the end of a long list of exhortations, Paul commands the believers to practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13). Hospitality is one of the marks of a church leader, whether he is a paid staff member or a layman (1 Tim. 3:2). Paul tells Timothy that a widow may only be put on the list if she is "well known for her good deeds such as . . . showing hospitality" (1 Tim. 5:10). We are exhorted to show hospitality to missionaries and encouraged that if we do so we are working "together for the truth" (3 John 8). What does Peter tell the Christians to focus on after he tells them that the end is near? He encourages them to "offer hospitality to one another" (1 Peter 4:9).

So the next time you see your wife or sister in Christ inviting someone into her home, let her know that she is not just nourishing the stomach but God is using her to nourish souls.

HOSPITALITY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Offering hospitality as an individual Christian is a great blessing, but an even greater blessing is to offer hospitality in the context of a local church. During the last six years we have had the privilege to minister in a church in which hospitality is cultivated. This is a unique pleasure because we are ministering to and alongside those who are co-laborers in the field of hospitality.

The most recent evidence of this fact: a group of international students will be coming to Washington, D.C. at the time of this writing and will be scattered amongst the homes of our congregation. This event was not organized by the staff but by a member of the church, and it will be a success because the members of our church are eager to practice hospitality. My husband and I would have liked to participate but can't—our home is already full.

OVERVIEW OF PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

Having practiced hospitality for years, but not having read many books on the subject, I was very interested in reading *Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others* co-authored by Drs. Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock, professors of home economics at the Master's College. I was a bit hesitant when I realized that each woman wrote distinct and interspersed chapters, but it is clear they have worked together before as the book reads seamlessly.

The real strength of the book is its practicality. From the recipes at the end of each chapter to the many ideas on how to practice hospitality, this book exudes the fruit of years of experience. Several chapters stand out in this regard. In "Hospitality and Management" (ch. 4), Lisa gives tips even a busy woman can use to prepare her home for hospitality. In "Hospitality and Others" (ch. 6), Pat provides examples of how we can reach out to others regardless of our season in life. She also gives practical wisdom for reaching others who are hurting or are in different seasons of life from us. In her chapter on "Hospitality and Culture" (ch. 7), Lisa has many practical ideas on how we can make Internationals feel comfortable in our homes.

Although it may seem odd to include a chapter on the family in a book on hospitality, I found this section relevant and helpful. Lisa has several principles on how to practice hospitality as a family. She also encourages her readers to love their families well and not to overextend hospitality to their detriment. I wish she had discussed more fully how those we bring into our homes can be a blessing to our children. We have certainly seen how missionaries have expanded our children's vision of God's work in the world and how young Christian men have provided a model of discipleship. Even difficult guests have been an opportunity for our children to grow in love and have provided a living, negative example of some of the Proverbs.

MARTHA STEWART vs. BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY

Another strength of the book is that it is not captured by "Martha Stewart" notions of hospitality. At the beginning of the book, the authors tell us that *entertaining* focuses on food and décor while *biblical hospitality* is a demonstration of love. Throughout the book the authors remind us that the point of our hospitality is to bless those to whom we are ministering.

Indeed, I find it most challenging—and I expect this is true for many women—to love others in my home when a sick child prevents me from cleaning the house or when my husband arrives home at dinner time with unexpected company. Therefore, I would have appreciated more testimonies of what they did in those situations and how God used them to minister to others.

BUT GOD'S POWER TO CHANGE?

My main criticism of the book is this: I came away with a lot of ideas and a "to do" list a mile long; but I didn't find a sufficient focus on God and his ability to change me into a faithful woman who naturally pursues hospitality out of my strengths and present life circumstances. As a result, the biblical references were almost entirely devoted to the imperatives in Scripture with almost no mention of the indicatives of grace. The unfortunate irony of this book is that its promotion of hospitality, which is supposed to be a picture of the gospel, is not grounded in an explicit theology of the gospel, but rather in sheer command. Yet isn't it the power of the gospel applied to the heart that will induce the heart to want to give hospitality? Even something as simple as taking a moment to explain what it means to be a Christian and how to become one would have helped to add the "aroma of the gospel" to an otherwise helpful book.

Finally, I hope the authors will make a few changes if they ever have the opportunity to produce a revised edition of the book. In her chapter on character Dr. Ennis discusses character attributes based on the acronym H-O-S-P-I-T-A-L-I-T-Y. Personally, I found this distracting rather than helpful. Also, I would have benefited if the authors had edited the results of their survey more fully. For example, I did not need to read almost 20 definitions of hospitality which were essentially the same.

A USEFUL INTRODUCTION

Criticisms aside, I think many people will benefit from this book. It will help those who are unfamiliar with the biblical idea of hospitality. It provides a useful introduction to the concept. It will also help the eager but clueless—those women (and men! see 1 Tim. 3:2) who want to practice hospitality but have no idea of how to get started. It would also be suitable for a Bible study since, along with the recipes at the end of each chapter, there are discussion questions and activities.

All in all it is a useful book which leaves the field open for another book on this topic. I long to see a book which addresses the criticism I mentioned above and provides a fuller biblical-theological treatment of the topic while at the same time offering practical ideas and testimonies of real life experiences.

Adrienne Lawrence (MDiv, Gordon Conwell) has been married for eighteen years to Michael Lawrence, Capitol Hill Baptist Church associate pastor. They have four children with a fifth on the way.

Other resources on hospitality:

- See Jonathan Leeman's theology of hospitality, [A Meal Says More than You Think](#).
- See Brent Thomas' review of Alexander Strauch's, [The Hospitality Commands](#).

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Learning to Multiply

By Tim Cantrell

Did you know that some countries will now *pay you* to have another child? Countries like France, South Korea, Canada, and Singapore offer a third-child bonus to families. That's because more and more countries are beginning to fear extinction rather than overpopulation.

The evidence speaks for itself: global fertility rates have fallen by half since 1972. Not a single industrialized nation today has a high enough fertility rate to replace itself. Two of the most graphic examples are Japan and Italy, where the United Nations estimates that by 2050, 42 percent of their population will be age 60 or older. When a third of your population is in a nursing home, it tends to affect public life. You can imagine how this shrinks a country's labor force and expands its welfare and healthcare demands for the aging. (Go [here](#) to see sources on this trend.)

In our consumer-oriented world, childbearing is regarded as a costly obstacle to personal fulfillment. Pets are far more affordable and convenient. A recent study showed that in the city of Seattle there are 45 percent more dogs being raised than children! Other trends that contribute to collapsing fertility rates could also be examined, such as people getting married later in life, and the rise in gay marriages.

MIMICKING THE WORLD?

But that is the world, so Christians should not be shocked. We expect the world to reject the Creator's good design and replace it with selfish pursuits. We expect the world to go against the grain of God's universe and to ignore the laws that He has built in, at least until the consequences are unbearable.

What should disturb us most is not when the world acts like the world, but when the church acts like the world. This was God's constant warning to Israel—to not become like the nations around them. And this is no less God's concern in the New Testament—that his people would "not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Yet in vital areas, such as our views on the family, the church often appears no different from the world.

My wife, Michelle, and I are blessed with two boys and two girls between the ages of two and eight. Whenever we meet new people, whether Christians or non-Christians, they usually say, "Boy, you are brave," or, "Haven't you figured out what's causing this yet?" My wife notices that at baby showers the comments usually revolve around how much sleep a mother will lose and how many nappies she'll change. But what is the dominant note sounded in Scripture—that children are a burden or a blessing?

The other day, we asked our eight-year old, Evan, what he read that morning in Deuteronomy. He said he read about God's blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (7:13). Then he added, "God would bless the fruit of their womb and their animals and their crops." We probed, "What is the fruit of their womb?" "Their babies!" he cheerfully replied.

We can only have God's perspective on children when we are saturated more with God's mindset in Scripture than with society's mindset. For the record, I do not believe the Bible teaches you must have as many children as physically possible. Nor do I believe the Bible forbids all forms of contraception. And surely the number of children any family has falls into the realm of Christian liberty (Rom. 14). But my wife and I are convinced that, amidst the challenges of raising four young children, having children is far more about blessing than bravery!

Pastors, teach your churches that they too can share more of God's joyful perspective on children, no matter how many children they have. So let's take a jet tour of what the Bible says about the blessings of multiplication.

MULTIPLYING IN THE OT

The Garden

One of God's first instructions to mankind was for us to "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Yet, the Bible treats this more as a blessing than a command—something that would be a joy to fulfill. In fact, producing children is one of the privileges of being made in God's image, as we share in his work of creating a living, eternal soul (Gen. 1:26-28).

But instead of subduing the earth, Adam and Eve were subdued by it. Enticed by a piece of fruit and tricked by a snake, they sinned and deserved to die before ever having children. God could have immediately wiped out the human race; but he still wanted to fulfill His blessing. He graciously tells them that with the consequences of their sin, including death and pain and hard work, he would also give Eve a seed, a son who would crush the serpent's head and conquer sin and death. So as Eve went through the pain and labor of her first childbirth, she must have strengthened herself by knowing this was an undeserved blessing of God, and that this child might even be her deliverer.

When Cain was born, Eve joyfully declared, "I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord!" (4:1). Unfortunately, Cain revealed that he was not the promised deliverer. But Eve knew that God would keep his promise, and she soon gave birth to Seth. God later preserved the line of Seth by saving Noah and his family from the great flood that destroyed all flesh. After they came out of the ark, God blessed them again: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1). Again, this was more a blessing than a duty.

Abraham & Israel

Then the blessing carried on to Abraham. God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the sea shore, and that all nations would be blessed through them. Few people today understand this blessing of innumerable offspring. But recently I talked to a 93-year-old African grandmother who boasted to me about her "many" grandchildren. When I asked her how many, she gave me a huge one-toothed smile, threw up her hands, and laughed—too many to keep count! She may be living in a little township home, but, according to God, she is a rich lady. Abraham was even richer because he knew that his descendants would love God and be a blessing to the world.

We too can be assured that God still loves to multiply godly descendants by blessing faithful parenting (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 102:25-28; 103:17-18; 128:1-4; Prov. 20:7; 31:28; Luke 1:50; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14). As Psalm 112 says, "Praise the Lord! How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed."

Abraham's children eventually became slaves in Egypt where God was blessing them with so many children that Pharaoh became worried and tried to destroy them. But God delivered them. He brought them into the Promised Land where he said he would again bless the fruit of their wombs if they would love and serve him.

David & Sons

King David, who was a man after God's own heart said, "Let our sons in their youth be as grown-up plants, and our daughters as corner pillars fashioned as for a palace... How blessed are the people who are so situated; how blessed are the people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:12, 15).

In Psalm 127, David's son Solomon called children a heritage from the Lord, a reward, like arrows in the hands of a warrior, especially when you have them "in your youth" (v. 4). Most Christian young couples today are shocked to hear that the Bible actually *recommends having children while they are still young*. Too often we miss these truths if we are shaped more by the culture than by Scripture. In Psalm 128 the greatest evidence of the happiness of a God-fearing man is that his wife will be like a fruitful vine and his children like olive shoots around his table.

Michelle and I have already been immensely blessed by our young children. I remember when I first held each of them. It was so amazing to finally see that little person who had been formed in secret for nine months. Each was a complete surprise: dark hair, light hair, red hair; brown eyes, hazel eyes, blue eyes. Each one looked like us but in a different way. Each one has a soul that will live forever! What an unspeakable privilege to work with God to create.

Malachi

The Christian Old Testament concludes in Malachi with another huge statement about multiplication. Malachi 2:15 tells us why God joins us together in marriage: "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring." God did not design marriage only for companionship; he also designed it for reproduction—so that we will fill the earth with godly disciples in the faith. As one of my mentors, Wayne Mack, has written, "Scripture seems to indicate that unless there are good physical and spiritual reasons for not having children, God wants Christian couples to produce and raise godly offspring" (*Your Family God's Way*, 38).

I get strange looks from couples during premarital counseling when I smile and say to the couple, "You are planning on having children, right?" Western culture today wants to shift childbearing into the purely optional "if-it-suits-my-lifestyle" category. Society separates sex from procreation and reduces pregnancy to a disease. But we must let God's Word shape and govern us instead of the culture.

For those families unable to bear their own children, the AIDS orphan crisis in Africa presents us with a crucial opportunity to adopt and raise up godly offspring. May God cause an "adoption revival" in our churches (cf. Jam. 1:27; can also apply to families who have biological children)! And may every kingdom-minded Christian home multiply soldiers to fill the ranks in Christ's army, to be salt and light in this decaying and dark world, and to continue a legacy of magnifying the true and living God.

MULTIPLYING IN THE NT

Mary

Mary, the mother of Jesus, experienced the joy of childbearing to the full. She got to bear the deliverer that every mother in the line of Seth had been hoping for. She sang, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has had regard for the humble state of his bond slave; for behold from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:46-48). Her body got to be the home of the God of the universe. She got to cradle the man who would save his people from their sins.

Timothy and Titus

In the New Testament we see that every Christian woman now has the opportunity, like Mary in a sense, to help reverse the curse. In a puzzling phrase, 1 Timothy 2:14-15 says, "it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." It was through a woman that mankind was led into sin, but it was also through a woman that God graciously sent a Savior. So I believe 1 Timothy 2:15 means that God has uniquely given mothers the chance to free women from that original stigma by raising a generation of godly children in a way that only a mother can do.

This is why the New Testament, over and over again, holds up motherhood as such a high calling. It was for this reason that a Christian widow was to be honored in 1 Timothy 5:10, if she has brought up children. Then, in verses 11 to 15, Paul counsels younger widows to remarry and to multiply ("to have children"), as a safeguard against temptation. And God's way is always best, no matter how "politically incorrect" it may sound at times.

Titus 2:4-5 says that the older women should teach the younger women to be godly homemakers who love their husbands and their children, *for the purpose* of advertising God's Word to a watching world. I try to never ask a married woman (especially if I know she has kids), "Do you work?" How insulting. Rather, I try to say, "Do you work *outside the home*?" This question acknowledges that a homemaker also works a full-time job, and then some! I remind my wife often of her God-given high calling as a wife and mother. Through her devotion to that

calling, God multiplies godly offspring. I don't know where I would be today if my own mother had not been committed to these same priorities.

CLOSING CHALLENGE

So we've seen from the Old Testament that children are a great blessing, not just because they increased wealth in an agrarian society, but because they were a gift from God and the means by which the deliverer would come and the nations would be blessed. In the New Testament we have seen that God is still passionate about multiplying godly offspring in his world and that the role of mothers are central to this great cause.

Sadly, the world religion that most believes in multiplication today is Islam, as witnessed by the massively shifting demographics in Europe. Not that Christians should ever act out of competitive fear with another religion, but we should feel rebuked when followers of a lie are more zealous to fill the earth with disciples than those who have the truth. We must remember that God designed childbearing not merely for personal fulfillment, but to advance his kingdom and glory in this world.

In today's church we must rediscover God's passion for the home and for relaying his blessing for generations to come (e.g., Ps. 78:1-8!). May the nations be blessed as we learn to multiply!

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39 Lessons, 20 Tips and 10 "Don'ts" For Parenting

By Matt & Elizabeth Schmucker

39 LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED

Lessons About Ourselves

1. To be a faithful steward of your children you must abide in Christ (John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man *remains* in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.").
2. "Trickle down theory" – Mom's daily devotion naturally trickles down to encouragement and instruction in the Lord for the children.
3. Not listening to your children causes you to misjudge them (James 1:19-20: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires").
4. Our task list is not as important as our children's thought life.
5. Preach the gospel of grace, not self-discipline.
6. Being parented is defining; Parenting is refining.
7. You will parent the way you were parented *unless* you think things through.
8. Parents should become "smaller" as their children become bigger. In other words, a parent should become more transparent in confessing one's sin and in sharing past struggles as children mature. Your children should hear more about your fight for faith as they grow older. Don't be a plastic Christian!
9. Ordinary times make for extraordinary memories.
10. To have children is to need margin in your life.
11. A disreputable life will undermine the gospel. An exemplary life will commend it.

Lessons About Children

12. Little kids need the strength of your youth; older kids need your wisdom (i.e. have children while you're young!).
13. Pack in truth while your children are little and trust the Lord to unpack it in his time.
14. Study your children. Know their "love language."
15. Consistent, loving, faithful discipline brings peace to the home. Inconsistency brings chaos.
16. Do not let your child see their value in light of the world's standards. The world rewards the 3 R's. God delights in the heart that is tuned toward his (Deuteronomy 30:8-10: "You will again obey the Lord and follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again *delight* in you and make you prosperous, just as he *delighted* in your fathers, if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul*").
17. God hands out "talents" to our children. The child with two talents who exercises both may in fact be more pleasing in the eyes of God than the one with five talents who exercises three (Matt. 25). Faithful stewardship is the goal!
18. On some days, it's just fine to accomplish nothing more than keeping your kids fed and safe.
19. Older children need to learn how to care for the weaker among them; doing so smells like Jesus. Matthew 18 reads, "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." By contrast, Psalm 10:2 reads, "In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises."
20. Do not presume you will be able to speak into the lives of your older children if you do not live in their world when they are younger. Play with your children. There is a reap/sow principle at work here (2 Cor. 9:6: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously").
21. There's nothing wrong with boredom for your children. It causes them to be creative.
22. Send your kids to bed well (and school!) (Eph. 4:26: "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry").

23. Make sure your kids keep short accounts with each other. Create a culture of care and forgiveness in your home (1 Cor. 13:5: "Love...keeps no record of wrongs").
24. Teach your kids to be shock absorbers, not wave makers (Matt. 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God").
25. Kids can memorize scripture very quickly.
26. Teach your children to notice needs. Teach them to ask, "What can I do to help?" (Phil. 2:3: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves").
27. Teach your children to look adults in the eyes. It shows respect and recognizes authority.
28. Fight materialism by teaching your children to have a thankful heart (1 Thes. 5:18: "...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus").
29. Teach your children to receive reproof, correction, and instruction (Prov. 12:15 "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man *listens to advice*").
30. Let kids be kids. Let them dabble in various areas of extra-curricular activities (sports, art, drama, etc) rather than build a resume.

Lessons About Satan

31. It seems Satan comes into our homes on Sunday mornings in order to make the Lord's Day one of struggle.
32. Do not feel outside pressure to baptize your children. Look for and test for a credible profession of faith in your child (Prov 22:15 "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child...").
33. Satan is a divider and always attacks authority: husband/wife and parent/child. In your home fight for unity around the gospel.
34. For mothers, the "I-can-do-it-all-superwoman" mindset is at best a myth and at worst a lie from hell (Matt. 6:24 "*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money*"; Luke 10:40 "But Martha was *distracted* by all the preparations that had to be made; verse 41: "Martha, Martha, you are *worried and upset about many things*, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her").
35. Beware of sports...on Sundays! Decide while your children are young that you will not allow the growing all-weekend sports phenomenon to usurp your worship (Ex. 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God").
36. Arm your children for the world, not (necessarily) shield them from it. Consider getting your high-school-aged children out of the Christian bubble.

Lessons About God

37. Prayer is a mighty weapon to use in the life of your children:
 - a. It changes the parent's approach to the child
 - b. It softens the hard-hearted child
38. God uses children as a mirror to your own heart to expose your sin and hypocrisy.
39. God elects. God saves. Parents cannot do this heart-changing work. At best we can pray and point to the One who can cause our children to be born again.

20 MORE TIPS FOR RAISING GOD-HONORING CHILDREN

1. The saying goes, "When mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." We believe daddy is actually the problem. From a complementarian's viewpoint one needs to conclude the above saying with, "And if daddy ain't happy in the Lord, ain't nobody happy."
2. In a stay-at-home-mom scenario, dad tends to back away from discipline when mom has been with the children all day. In one sense this is wise as he has not observed the rhythm and rhyme of the day. However, dad needs to catch up and jump in.
3. Talk to both good and not-so-good parents; you'll learn lessons from both.
4. Talking to really old parents may not prove to be fruitful as their memories fade and they'll remember raising kids as either a nightmare or a glorious experience. Talking to parents 5-10 years ahead of where you are seems most fruitful (Prov. 15:22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed").

5. Though you may think this premature, have a vision for being involved spiritually with your grandchildren. This will shape even your parenting.
 - Positive example: Paul writing to Timothy said, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in your also" (2 Tim. 1:5).
 - Negative example: "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10).
6. Let your children see you practicing hospitality and let them participate. This breaks down the selfish tendencies all kids have (Rom. 12:13: "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality").
7. Unbelievers set up their home for the benefit of themselves. Christians should set up and use their homes for the benefit of their family, the church community, and outsiders (notice the order of this list).

Supporting verses:

- "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).
 - "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10).
8. If we could do it again, we would not have a television in our home. The television competes with more important things going on in the home. It competes for right thinking in the mind of the child. If you have a television, then watch it with your children (when you can) and play "catch the lies."
 9. Our generation of parents encourages children to express themselves and vent all that's on their minds. My parents' generation grew up under the instruction that "Children are to be seen and not heard." Both appear to be out of balance. Proverbs 10:8 says, "The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin." Ephesians 4:29 suggests that the purpose of speech is to the benefit of the listener.
 10. You cannot expect younger children to obey if their older siblings do not. Proverbs 10:17 says, "He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray."
 11. One's conscience is *not* the same as the Law of the Lord. If conscience is defined as "That inner-voice that acts as a guide as to the rightness or wrongness of a behavior," then your conscience is only as good as your knowledge of God's Word. An informed conscience can be a trustworthy thing *if* it is drawing from God's Word, God's Law. An uninformed conscience is incredibly dangerous. Inform your child's conscience by pouring in God's Word.
 12. We often speak of a home with the aroma of Christ (peace, hope, forgiveness and love—all for God's glory). Alternatives are homes with the aroma of
 - a bus station—people just passing through
 - a war zone—people fighting all the time

What does your home smell like?

13. "Moral children" does not equal "Christian children."
14. Do a "sermon review" with your children sometime on Sunday. Have each child recap what he or she learned in Sunday School or "big church" and then help them apply it to their own hearts and trials. Then spend time praying for each other's coming week.
15. Martin Luther said he had the responsibility to be the worship leading pastor in his own home. His home was to be both a school and a church. Fathers, do you have this mindset?
16. The unstated implication of Luther's charge (above) is that fathers need to be present to lead in worship. Being in the house with a Blackberry in hands doesn't count!
17. Don Whitney encourages "brevity, regularity and flexibility" in family worship.
18. Build in your children a global vision of God's work in the world and thereby build a Great commission Mindset. We have found that having a map near to where we eat most of our meals is helpful. Reading from *Operation World* can inform the entire family of God's work in the world.
19. When children ask for permission to do something, their request can fall into one of several categories:

Not Wise / Permissible E.g. out with friends on Sat night	Not Wise / Not Permissible E.g. underage drinking and driving
Wise / Permissible E.g. excused from family chores to prepare for next day's test	Wise / Not Permissible This problem rarely presents itself. Wants to save money for college but is not working age.

The Not Wise / Permissible category is the hardest to deal with. Try to break down the request and sort out in your own mind why you think the request is unwise. Is it your own preference or is it truly unwise? Then encourage them to think through the wisdom of the matter, so that, even if you permit them to do it, they will remember the lesson when things go poorly.

20. Build Godward children.

TOP 10 WAYS TO (WRONGLY) PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN

- Colossians 3:21: "Fathers [and mothers], do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."
 - Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers [and mothers], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."
1. Make it a habit to discipline your child while angry.
 2. Make it a point to scold your child – especially in public. Mockery and ridicule work well.
 3. Deliberately embarrass your child in front of his/her friends. Name calling really gets their attention.
 4. Create double standards so that the child never knows who or what to follow.
 5. Preach and hold the child to a gospel of self-discipline instead of a gospel of grace. (Note: the Bible presents Pharisees as very unhappy people.)
 6. Never admit you're wrong and never ask your children for forgiveness.
 7. Inspect your child until you find something wrong. Holding them to an unreachable standard makes this task easier.
 8. Judge a fight between your children before you've listened to them.
 9. Compare your child to others.
 10. Promise your children things early in the day and then don't fulfill the promise.

Parents should provoke their children...in good ways: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on [provoke!] toward love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24).

Matt & Elizabeth Schmucker are the parents of five children who presently range in ages from 3 to 19. Matt is the executive director of 9Marks and an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

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Favorite Children's Bibles

By Justin Taylor

- **The Children's Story Bible**, by Catherine F. Vos
- **The Big Picture Story Book Bible**, by David Helm
- **The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name**, by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Each of these storybook Bibles has its own strength, and we should thank God that all three are available. If one can afford it, the path of wisdom is probably to use all three as tools to help prepare our younger ones to grow in grace and knowledge and to begin to explore for themselves the Bible itself.

The Children's Story Bible by Catherine F. Vos (382 pages; Eerdmans, \$27.50)

In 1892 Geerhardus Vos became the first Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton University and is today widely considered the father of Reformed Biblical Theology. While seminarians still study (or at least, *should* study) Dr. Vos's work, it is undoubtedly the case that it was his wife who had more readers and more comprehensible prose! Mrs. Vos published her Story Bible in three volumes toward the end of her life, in the 1930s, and in so doing has influenced countless young readers (and their parents).

The main goal of the book appears to be to retell the biblical stories within the biblical storyline in a faithful and understandable manner. The OT portion contains 110 stories over 260 pages, divided into seven parts: Creation, Wandering, Laws, Settlement, Kings, Prophets, and Exile. The NT portion has 92 sections in 114 pages, with just two divisions: Saviour and Early Church. The result is significant amount of information. Her rendition does not merely recount the familiar stories the way most story Bibles do (Noah, Joseph, Daniel, Jonah), but it provides information on Israel's sacrifices, feasts, kings, prophets, and so on.

Of the three books reviewed here, Mrs. Vos's is far and away the most comprehensive and least interpretive. That means that, despite the fact that it's the oldest, it may also be the least read. With shorter attention spans (for both kids and parents!), and with greater and greater emphasis on cool graphics, there's a certain sense in which this book doesn't seem to "fit" in the 21st century. But if Christian families neglect this modern-day classic, it will be to our own shame and detriment. This is a book to buy, to treasure, and, most importantly, to read as we seek to convey to our children "the whole counsel of God."

The Big Picture Story Book Bible, by David Helm and illustrated by Gail Schoonmaker (456 pages; Crossway; \$22.99)

David Helm is Senior Pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Chicago and Executive Director of the Simeon Trust—and author of this book, which (as the title indicates) focuses on the big picture of the Bible. Of the three books reviewed here, this one has the least amount of words, the most interpretive drawings, and the most focus on the Story of the Bible (instead of on the individual stories that make up the Story).

With regard to the illustrations, they are engaging, instructive, and—like the biblical stories themselves—repay close attention and multiple viewings. For example, look closely at [this sample](#) (after clicking the link, scroll down to page 32). Not only are Adam and Eve shown with arms extended upward in worship, but if you look again, you'll see that the shadow from their hands is reaching back toward the forbidden tree—foreshadowing the Fall that is about to come.

With eleven chapters for the Old Testament, and fifteen for the New, Helm uses simple language to teach children Graeme Goldsworthy's paradigm for understanding the importance of the kingdom of God for biblical theology. Virtually every chapter subjects its stage of redemptive history to the scheme of people, place, and rule. God's goal is for God's people to be living in God's place under God's rule—and each chapter asks if this is the time when God will send his "forever king."

This one won't help your kids learn all of the individual stories (for that turn to the other two), but this is the most effective resource I know for conveying a simple Goldsworthian perspective on how to understand the big picture of God's story.

The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name, by Sally Lloyd-Jones and illustrated by Jago (352 pages; Zondervan; \$16.99)

Of the three books being reviewed here, this one by Sally Lloyd-Jones (no relation to *Dr.* Lloyd-Jones, except through Adam and in Christ) has the most amount of narrative and artistic flair in retelling the biblical stories about God's loving "Rescue Plan" for God's children. Of the three authors, she's clearly the best "storyteller." God is consistently viewed through the lens of a Father yearning in pain and love for his wayward, broken, hurting children (which at first seems to mean all mankind). One cannot cover all of the bases—especially in writing for children—but by focusing almost exclusively on this aspect of God's character in the OT stories, one wonders if children are adequately prepared to understand Christ absorbing God's "fierce anger" (her words) at the cross on behalf of law-breaking rebels. Despite numerous strengths, I think this may be one place where her retelling of the pre-cross storyline could be improved.

With 21 OT stories and 23 NT stories, Mrs. Lloyd-Jones has a way of insightfully getting to the heart of the matter in a memorable way. For example, here's her description of Namaan: "All Namman needed was nothing. It was the one thing Namaan didn't have. God knew that Namaan was even sicker on the inside than he was on the outside. Namaan was proud. He thought he didn't need God. His heart didn't work properly—it couldn't feel anything. You see, Namaan had leprosy of his heart. God was not only going to heal Namaan's skin, he was going to heal his pride." As they say, *that'll preach!*

Mrs. Lloyd-Jones's unique contribution is seen in the subtitle of the book: "Every Story Whispers His Name." Her pastor Tim Keller has written of the book: "I would urge not just families with young children to get this book, but every Christian—from pew warmers, to ministry leaders, seminarians and even theologians! Sally Lloyd-Jones has captured the heart of what it means to find Christ in all the scriptures, and has made clear even to little children that all God's revelation has been about Jesus from the beginning—a truth not all that commonly recognized even among the very learned." In a blog comment Keller reiterated: "I'd urge ministers to buy it and read it for themselves. It will improve their preaching." Keller is right—Mrs. Lloyd-Jones sees how the OT stories point to Christ in powerful ways.

Justin Taylor, [blogger](#) extraordinaire, is the managing editor of the forthcoming [ESV Study Bible](#) (Crossway).

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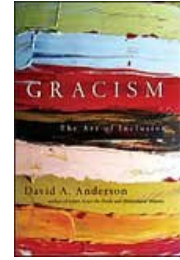
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Book Review: *Gracism*, by David A. Anderson

Reviewed by Ken Jones

Gracism: The Art of Inclusion

Intervarsity Press, 2007, 167 pages, \$17.00



Racism has a long, sad history in the United States. The stain of two centuries of race-based slavery and the Jim Crow segregation laws of the twentieth century both bear witness to Americans' deeply troubled history in regard to race.

With the 2008 presidential election upon us, Americans are confronted once again with the question of race. This year, the nominee of one of the two major political parties is an African-American (of bi-racial descent to be precise). Whatever one thinks of the policy positions and ideology of Barack Obama, it is obvious that we have indeed reached a monumental moment in our national history. Even a generation ago, it would have been unthinkable for one of the two final candidates for president to be a Black man. Clearly, the national mindset has changed, and many of the assumptions, prejudices, and even hatreds that would have made such a scenario impossible in the past have now been blunted.

Even so, racial prejudice and ignorance still exist in America, and the national coming-to-grips with the fact that we are a multicultural and diverse society is not complete. That conversation is a continuing one, and it is one which the Christian church ought to be at the very center of. After all, surely the people who are longing for the day when they will stand before God's throne with ones from every tribe, tongue, people, and language will have something useful to say about how those tribes should relate to one another today.

David A. Anderson is an Oxford grad and pastor of Bridgeway Community Church in Maryland. In addition to pastoring a multicultural church, Anderson hosts a radio talk show called "Reconciliation Live", is CEO of an organization committed to the same end, and also teaches a college course on cultural diversity.

In his book *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion*, Anderson gives a Christian perspective on racial reconciliation and cultural diversity. Notwithstanding Anderson's obvious zeal and commitment, the book left me with mixed feelings. There were a number of things I truly appreciated, such as the acknowledgement that while great progress has been made on race issues, there is still more work to be done. "Even in my own multicultural church," Anderson admits, "we have to disciple people out of racist mindsets." This is helpful because we often tend to be extremists on the subject of race. Some look at the obvious signs of progress and assume we have arrived. Others see the remaining residue of racism and bigotry and declare that things have not changed at all. *Gracism* artfully balances the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of social change.

I also appreciate some of the simple and practical suggestions Anderson offers to facilitate that kind of change. Legislation is a major reason for much of the change we have seen, but Anderson argues that it is ultimately individuals' mindsets and actions that will bring about positive change in the future. The suggestions in *Gracism* make the task of changing those mindsets less daunting.

One of the most powerful statements in the book is, "There must be a theological response to racism in the culture and racial segregation in the church." I couldn't agree more. However, *Gracism* is not that theological response. To be fair, giving a theological response does not seem to be the author's intent. At best the book offers helpful, biblically-based principles for dealing with racism in the church and the culture. But here is where I had my difficulties. For one thing, the anecdotes were far too personal and self-serving. David Anderson seems like a very nice guy, but his personal references were too frequent.

The greater issue is the title-term "Gracism". Anderson combines racism—defined as "speaking, acting or thinking negatively about someone else solely based on that person's color, class or culture"—with grace—"the unmerited favor of God on humankind." The result is "gracism," "the positive extension of favor on other humans based on color, class or culture."

This cute and catchy term is used to great effect throughout the book. But Christians do not need a new term or standard for dealing with people of different races and cultures. We already have a term and a standard. The term is sanctification and the standard is the second table of The Law, summed up in the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." When Christians are racist in their actions and attitudes towards their fellow humans—whether in society at large or in their dealings with brothers and sisters in the faith—that is sin, and the solution is repentance.

In "Reflection Question #4" at the end of chapter 1, Anderson says that racism is sin, which is correct. It is here that *Gracism* could become more theological in its analysis, but it does not. Perhaps the biblical principles are intended to be the author's theological analysis, but these principles are in fact closer to therapeutic formulas than theological discussion.

If *Gracism* were more theological, perhaps the emphasis would not be so much on ways to show more favor towards people because of color, culture and class. Instead, the charge to Christians would be that all men are created in the image of God, and although that image is marred because of The Fall, we are to respect and grant to every human being the dignity warranted by the divine image they bear. This is the biblical basis for our acts of mercy and compassion.

Anderson's use of the term "gracism" sounds a great deal like affirmative action with a biblical twist. I think the tried and proven biblical standard and terms are sufficient for the task. The church's shortcomings in the area of racial reconciliation in the past were due largely to a failure to call racism a sin against the 2nd table of The Law. As I said above, there is much that I appreciate about *Gracism*, and I do consider it a step in the right direction. But I also think a more theological reflection on the issue would be of greater benefit to the body.

Ken Jones is the pastor of Greater Union Baptist Church in Compton, California.

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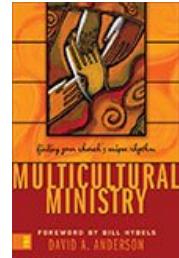
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Book Review: Multicultural Ministry, by David A. Anderson

Reviewed by Juan Sanchez

Multicultural Ministry: *Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm*

Willow Creek Resources/Zondervan, 2004, 208 pages, \$14.99



Painting, music, and dance are important to most cultures. In his book *Multicultural Ministry*, David Anderson does it all as he seeks to "paint a picture and give practical insights on how to bring the sections of God's orchestra together so that the world can hear" the sound of multiculturalism and observe the dance of racial reconciliation (14). The picture Anderson hopes to paint is a church which already exhibits the multiculturalism that Christians look forward to in the new creation (Rev. 5:9, 10). This picture will emerge when Christians, churches, and ministries learn the dance of multiculturalism here on earth as it will be danced in heaven (chapter 1).

SUMMARY

Regardless of how one feels about issues of ethnicity, Anderson says that rapidly changing demographics are forcing Christians, churches, and ministries to respond. Either they will "move" (relocate) in order to continue ministering to the culture with which they are most comfortable, or they will "groove" to the sounds God is creating in his multicultural assembly (chapter 2). Anderson invites us to groove with the other churches already on the dance floor, no matter how difficult it may be (chapter 3).

If we decide to join the dance, first we must be sure our dance floor is safe (chapter 4). That means we must be willing to listen carefully to one another, limit the use of words that have loaded meanings, and be willing to embrace all who are created in God's image. Admittedly, joining the dance requires taking a risk, and being willing to overcome whatever frustrations may arise in the process (chapter 5). Yet, as Anderson rightly notes, "reconciliation in any form, no matter the style of dance, requires a spiritually transformed mind with transformed members of one's body. To relate at high levels of acceptance and grace with people who are different than you takes a heart fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit" (75).

Even with transformed minds and hearts, however, reconciliation is still hard. Thus Anderson provides help with a "racial reconciliation matrix" based on Colossians 3, which leads one to ground their view of self and others in light of the gospel (chapter 6). Further, he provides a six-session small-group curriculum (appendix two) based on that matrix and recounts how it impacted the small groups he has facilitated (chapter 7). In order to help one assess one's personal views toward race, Anderson also provides a racial reconciliation continuum by which one may diagnose whether one is a racist or a reconciler (chapter 8). On a more corporate level, Anderson provides some suggestions for facilitating racial reconciliation in the gathered assembly (chapter 9). Such "groove strategies" allow one to practice what Anderson calls "gracism" (chapter 10). If racism is "speaking, acting or thinking negatively about someone based solely on his or her race" (113), and if grace is "the unmerited favor of God" (113), then "gracism" is "the positive extension of favor toward others based on race" (113).

Anderson does not argue for multiculturalism simply for the sake of diversity; he grounds his entire proposal on the trajectory of redemptive history (chapter 11). He rightly rejects the wrong interpretations of the mark of Cain and the curse of Ham as bigoted interpretations that were used to advance and defend slavery (128-129) and sees the work of Christ redeeming a multicultural humanity. "Because of Christ's work on the cross," says Anderson, "and because of the power of the Holy Spirit in believers, you and I can experience God-honoring worship and work, and oneness with God and other believers" (133). When one understands and embraces this multicultural redemptive work of Christ, it will lead to multicultural evangelism (chapter 12) and to congregations that practice gracism and express love and unity toward one another, what Anderson calls "lunity" (chapter 14). Such "lunity" happens when Christians willingly yield to one another in the dance of racial reconciliation.

STRENGTHS

I pastor a multicultural congregation, and reading *Multicultural Ministry* reminded me just what a privilege I have. It also challenged my complacency and forced me to think of ways to be even more deliberate in leading my church to pursue ethnic diversity to the glory of God. Though more could have been said regarding the testimony of redemptive history (chapter 11), Anderson rightly points to the storyline of Scripture as the basis for multicultural ministry. Such a biblical understanding of ethnicity will have tremendous implications for how we do ministry (chapters 12-14).

A biblical understanding of ethnicity not only gives us a clearer view of ministry, but it also permits us to have a clearer view of self. Perhaps the strongest feature of the book is the racial reconciliation matrix in chapter six in which Anderson reminds us of our identity in Christ. If our identity is in Christ and we remember that all who are Christ's share that identity with us, then we will be more willing to yield to one another and think more highly of others than of ourselves. "We are reminded by this passage (Colossians 3)," says Anderson, "that we are first and foremost children of God. Race, class, culture, social status, denomination, and so on, are all secondary to this one truth" (82).

Armed with an understanding of the biblical storyline and our identity in Christ, the question remains, "what now?" After all, right theology should lead to right practice. Anderson does not leave us in the realm of theory; he leads us to consider how we should practice multicultural ministry on the basis of the gospel (chapters 12-14). First, we must examine ourselves. The racial reconciliation survey provided in appendix one is a helpful place to begin. We must be willing to come to terms with racism in our own lives and repent if necessary. Second, we must be willing to ask honest questions of one another, and his suggestion for a small group setting is most appropriate. Third, we must be sure to address issues at a corporate level, i.e., leadership, preaching, etc.

ONE WEAKNESS & TWO CONCERNS

Though the author correctly bases his proposal on the biblical storyline and the truth of the gospel, his biblical theology of ethnicity was incomplete. The biblical storyline reminds us that God's redemptive plan always included the nations and not just Israel, as the author seems to imply (138). Israel was simply the chosen vehicle through which the nations would be blessed (Gen. 12). As J. Daniel Hays notes in *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, "the inclusion of all peoples of all ethnic groups into the people of God was part of God's overarching plan from the beginning" (203). Thus, the New Testament's multicultural emphasis is, well, not new. The multicultural ministry of Jesus and Paul fulfilled old covenant promises and were a sign that the new covenant era had arrived, an era that would one day culminate in the innumerable multi-ethnic congregation from every nation, tribe, peoples and languages (Rev. 7:9).

Though clearly not the author's intention, I am concerned over the temptation to make multiculturalism an idol. For example, I am uncomfortable by Anderson's definition of "gracism" and how he has worked it out in particular situations. Anderson suggests that, "a gracist will go to any length and work as diligently as possible to insure that such beauty (of diversity) is seen and celebrated. Gracists refuse to settle for unicultural segregation without doing all he or she can to include diversity at all levels of the church" (114). Such a statement leaves the impression that diversity trumps calling and giftedness. Should we change the worship team because it has too many African-Americans or too few? Should we deny someone gifted in a particular area from serving because she is white and we need someone who isn't? Though we should be intentional in seeking to reflect the diversity of our ministry context and even seek diverse leadership, we must reject the temptation to compromise biblical instruction for the sake of diversity.

Finally, I am concerned over the temptation to think that if we simply do certain things, then our congregation will be diverse. In our attempt to create a safe dance floor, we will be tempted to shape our ministries in such a way that exalts multiculturalism as the ultimate goal. If we truly believe that multiculturalism is a result of God's redeeming work in Christ, then it will emerge from a proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation, not a merging of "black" and "white" preaching or music styles (106-108). True love and unity, true multicultural ministry can happen only when the truth of God's reconciling work in Christ is embraced and we begin to deal with one another on the basis of who we are in Christ because of that reconciling work on the cross.

CONCLUSION

I appreciate David Anderson's candid admission of how difficult racial reconciliation is and his willingness to push toward open, honest dialogue. Ethnic harmony and reconciliation are hard because of our own sinfulness. Anderson has done us all a favor by not only reminding us that the basis of multicultural ministry is God's reconciling work, but also by providing a map by which we may begin to chart a course toward multicultural ministry. As a result of reading *Multicultural Ministry*, I will pray more, read more Scripture, and consider ways in which I can be a more deliberate reconciler. I hope that we will all be willing to do the same.

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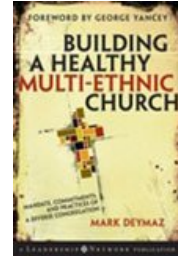
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Book Review: *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, by Mark DeYmaz Reviewed by Benjamin Wright

Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandates, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation

Leadership Network/Jossey-Bass, 2007, 240 pages, \$23.95



Readers of the 9Marks eJournal who are familiar with Mark Dever's books may notice some striking similarities between a couple of his more well-known titles and DeYmaz' *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*. In fact, a perfectly reasonable title might well have been "Seven Marks of a Healthy and Deliberate Multi-Ethnic Church." The two authors share much of the same vision for the church. They would agree on the centrality of the gospel and the idea that the church as a body is a means to display that gospel. The most obvious difference is a matter of emphasis—DeYmaz is most interested in how one particular aspect of life together as a church displays the power and objectives the gospel.

OVERVIEW

DeYmaz organizes his examination of multi-ethnic churches into three distinct parts. First, he develops a biblical-theological apologetic for the priority of pursuing multi-ethnicity in a church. Next, he discusses seven specific strategies that a church pursuing healthy multi-ethnicity should employ. Finally, he examines each of those seven strategies in three different contexts: new church plants, unhealthy church revitalizations, and healthy church transformations.

This structure approaches the issues in a logical, natural way. His conversational style is interwoven with concrete illustrations, not all of which are the typical triumphalistic success stories. And this creates a pleasant read.

Biblical Foundation

Part one examines the biblical mandate for multi-ethnicity within the church. DeYmaz devotes one chapter to Christ's prayer in John 17, one to the pattern of the church of Antioch in Acts, and one to the multi-ethnic component of the mystery of the church in Ephesians. The strength of grounding his discussion in these three passages is that it combines the biblical-theological themes of Christ's high priestly prayer, a live example in the young church, and an explanation of the theological foundation for these developments. Also, by placing his theological arguments for diversity in the universal church next to a specific example of diversity in one local church, DeYmaz bridges the gap from theory to practice quite effectively.

On the other hand, DeYmaz might justly be criticized for employing a "hermeneutic of diversity" from time to time. He tends to see multi-ethnicity in texts where the evidence is suspect. When Jesus confronted the Ephesian church about abandoning its "first love" (Rev. 2:4-5), was he really talking about a passion for multi-ethnicity (pp. 36-37)?

Specific Strategies

In part two, DeYmaz offers strategies for pursuing multi-ethnicity in the church. These strategies are sometimes accompanied by biblical arguments, but primarily he gives practical advice. His presupposition is that multi-ethnicity doesn't happen by accident. Given the anecdotal success he documents in the book, this advice seems generally wise and insightful. He says that a church should pursue these seven commitments:

- Embrace dependence: only God can bring the goal to fruition.
- Take intentional steps: don't expect to stumble into multi-ethnicity.
- Empower diverse leadership: don't establish quotas or recognize unqualified leaders, but recognize that a component of biblical qualification is a leadership team that reflects the ethnic diversity of God's kingdom.
- Develop cross-cultural relationships: take steps to get outside the box of what is most natural and convenient.

- Pursue cross-cultural competence: get to know the cultures you're ministering to in order to make the message clear and avoid unnecessary miscommunication.
- Promote a spirit of inclusion: promote a spirit of inclusion by surrendering personal preferences in order to serve others.
- Mobilize for impact: leverage multi-ethnicity to effect transformation both culturally and spiritually, both locally and globally.

These strategies broadly demonstrate a healthy balance between dependence on God and an awareness of the role of the church in presenting an accurate picture of the glory of God.

Testimony & Questions

DeYmaz argues--rightly, I think--that the "missionary endeavor in a multi-ethnic church is not programmatic but flows from the congregation's very nature and being" (127). In the context of the chapter, DeYmaz is arguing that the multi-ethnicity of the corporate body of Christ is in itself a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel as it displays the transformational power of the gospel in a living organism.

On the other hand, DeYmaz' strategies will also raise questions with readers and churches whose answers are not immediately obvious. For example, to what degree should a prospective pastor or staff member's ethnicity contribute to his qualifications? What might be the ecclesiological implications of particular strategies? Should churches translate sermons on the fly for people within the congregation, or should congregations consist of people who speak the same language? Should churches *not* translate prayers because those prayers are "intended for God and God alone" (104)? Should they display a diversity of national flags? Should a church integrate musical forms representing a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the same service or rotates styles week by week? In other words, these commitments are generally sound when stated abstractly. But as they say, the devil is in the details.

The concluding three chapters consider multi-ethnic church plants, revitalizations, and transformations. They don't answer all these questions, but they do lead the reader to apply the seven strategies from three distinct perspectives.

ARE ALL CULTURAL FORMS CREATED EQUAL?

One weakness of the book is that, in the Philippians 2 exhortation to relinquish our own comforts in order to serve others, DeYmaz seems to assume that diverse cultural forms are equally equipped to communicate biblical truth.

I'm not suggesting that a diversity of ethnicities in a local church cannot serve as a witness to and vehicle for the gospel. I am suggesting that the forms of a culture that has been shaped over centuries by a biblical worldview might be more capable of serving as the vehicle for that gospel message than the forms of a culture shaped by pagan idolatry.

The vehicle for a message inevitably shapes the message, and perhaps distorts it. Church leaders need to think deeply about how the forms and styles they adopt affect the message they intend to communicate. Attempts to accommodate different styles in the proclamation of biblical truth are counterproductive if they undermine that truth.

DeYmaz seems to assume that all forms are equally capable of communicating biblical truth, but I'm not convinced that's a valid or healthy assumption.

WHAT YOU MIGHT TAKE AWAY

If you're pastoring or church planting in a context in which your church is less ethnically diverse than your community, or if you hope that God will raise within your congregation people who will pursue ministry in a multi-ethnic setting, DeYmaz' book is a worthwhile read. But absorb its biblical-theological argumentation with a discerning eye. That is, read DeYmaz' Scripture citations in their biblical context to confirm that the emphasis of the text is consistent with his argument. Consider the ecclesiological implications of prioritizing multi-ethnicity. The

church is a body. It shouldn't be surprising if increased attention to one aspect of the body's life has effects, whether positive or negative, on the rest of the body

Also, read its methodology as description, not prescription. In other words, DeYmaz offers us one account of what worked well in one church in one context. But what worked in that context may not apply equally well in differing situations.

DeYmaz seems to recognize this, and he speaks of general principles as well as specific strategies. These general principles constitute a broad framework for the kinds of questions churches will need to consider as they pursue healthy multi-ethnicity. Whether those churches reach all DeYmaz's conclusions is probably not that important.

WHAT YOU SHOULD TAKE AWAY

But two priorities are essential for every church that hopes to grow towards healthy multi-ethnicity. First, these churches should draw on DeYmaz' practical insight. Don't discard his advice lightly without a clear, biblical argument to the contrary.

Even more importantly, they should recognize that the power of the gospel is creating an eternal, universal, multi-ethnic community. No church that desires to reflect an accurate picture of how Christ's kingdom has broken into this age should be satisfied to display merely a monochromatic image.

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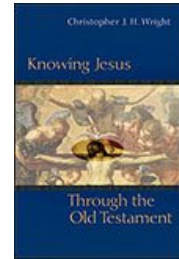
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Book Review: Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament, by Christopher J.H. Wright

Reviewed by Paul Alexander

Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 256 pages. \$16.00



As well-known as Jesus' name seems to be today, there certainly is a lot of confusion about who he is. From the quest for the historical Jesus to self-professed evangelicals who see no problem in locking arms with Muslims to teach love for God and neighbor, Jesus is famously misunderstood. How do we know who Jesus is?

Christopher Wright's answer is that we know him in a profound way through the Old Testament. Wright presents his case that the Old Testament is where Jesus "found the shape of His own identity and the goal of His own mission" (ix). He works out his thesis in five stages, neatly summarized in five points about the Old Testament:

We have seen that the Old Testament tells the story which Jesus completed. It declares the promise which he fulfilled. It provides the pictures and models which shaped his identity. It programmes a mission which he accepted and passed on. It teaches a moral orientation to God and the world which he endorsed, sharpened, and laid as the foundation for obedient discipleship. (p. 252)

Wright takes Matthew 1 to 4 as his touchstone text, methodically working his way from Jesus' genealogy to his wilderness testing. Broadly speaking, Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1 proves him to be the completion of the OT story (pp. 1-54); his infancy as recorded in Matthew 2 proves him to be the fulfillment of the OT promise (pp. 55-102); his baptism in Matthew 3 proves that he understood his identity in terms of OT pictures and models (pp. 103-135); his understanding of himself as Isaiah's Servant of the Lord and Daniel's Son of Man proves that he lived and taught an OT mission (136-180); and his wilderness testing in Matthew 4 proves him to be the obedient Son of God who modeled God-centered morality in a way that OT Israel failed to do (pp. 181-252).

It's not difficult to see why this book has stayed in print for so long. For starters, it's very readable. Wright's sentences are short and powerful, and the way he organizes and frames his material is pretty intuitive.

From the title, you might wonder if you're about to see an exegetical magic show that produces really exciting Christology but leaves you asking how he pulled the rabbit from the hat. Actually, Wright is careful to affirm the historical reality and significance of OT events in their historical context. He then uses this historical significance, guided by the New Testament interpretation of the text, as the starting point in his search for Jesus in the OT text. "What it meant for Israel," he writes, "does not just evaporate in a haze of spiritualization when we reach the New Testament. . . ."

There is a tendency among Christians to say something like, "the OT is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ." Carefully explained, this is true. But it can lead to the prejudice that dispenses with the Old Testament itself as little more than shadows, or a kind of children's picture book. (pp. 28, 30)

Instead of fronting as a magician who refuses to share his secrets, Wright explains how Scripture not only *lets* him know Jesus through the Old Testament, but *leads* him to do so. He has an especially helpful section on typology (pp. 110-116), which is to understand Jesus' person and work "by way of analogy or correspondence" with events, people, practices, offices and institutions in the Old Testament (p. 116). In other words, the whole Bible encourages us to look for patterns or models of how God works in history, and then to see how those patterns are fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. No hocus-pocus, just close attention paid to God's pattern of working in history.

At the same time, Wright helps us understand that the OT promise involves ongoing levels of fulfillment (pp. 70-77). This, I think, is one of the most helpful sections in the book because it again reveals something of Wright's method. Crucially, he distinguishes between prediction and promise:

Because [a promise] involves personal relationship and commitment, it has a dynamic quality that goes beyond the external details involved....Because it is the relationship behind [the promise] that really matters, the material form in which it is fulfilled may be quite different from the literal form in which it was originally made, and yet it is no less a valid fulfillment of the promise. (pp. 70, 71)

God made promises to Israel in forms they could understand, yet their fulfillment will transcend those forms so that God's faithfulness is confirmed rather than called into question. Thus, Wright concludes that "to hanker after the original forms of the promise would be like preferring shadows to real objects.... To insist on literal fulfillment of prophecies can be to overlook their actual nature within the category of promise, with the potential of different and progressively superior levels of fulfillment" (pp. 76-77).

Wright is so solid with text and context that once he's done teaching us how to know Jesus through the Old Testament, we're left identifying with him when he says

Jesus was not just an identikit figure pasted together from bits of the Old Testament. He transcended and transformed the ancient models...so that for His followers, what began as a shaft of recognition and understanding of *Jesus* in light of their Scriptures, ended up as a deepening and surprising new understanding of their *Scriptures* in light of Jesus. (p. 117, emph. orig.)

Fellow pastor, this is an important book for you not only to have on your shelf, but to read carefully. It's a great example of using biblical theology to enrich our preaching without impoverishing our exegesis. It can help us avoid becoming practical Marcionites, only ever preaching from the New Testament because we think the Old is an optional introduction at best. If you find yourself hesitant to preach Christ from the Old Testament, Wright will not only show you *how* to do it – he'll make you *want* to do it.

Addendum: While I am happy to recommend this book without reservation, I cannot say the same for the author's signing of the evangelical response to *A Common Word* in 2007 (the response of 300 evangelical leaders, along with the list of signatories, can be found at <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/fullpageadbold18.pdf>). For the sake of gospel clarity, I pray that Wright would see the inconsistency between the Second Person of the Trinity he wrote of in 1992 and the non-Trinitarian "All Merciful" Divinity he endorsed with our Muslim friends in 2007. This is a disappointing lapse in judgment from one whose Trinitarian Christology as championed in this book has proven so enriching to so many for so long.

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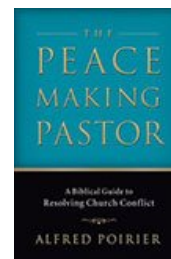
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Book Review: The Peacemaking Pastor, by Alfred Poirier

Reviewed by Bob Johnson

The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict

Baker Books, 2006, 298 pages, \$14.99



A few years ago, the church whom I serve as pastor hosted a conference on the "9 Marks of a Healthy Church." The sessions were well attended by pastors and also well received. The following year we decided to focus on only one of the marks of a healthy church, offering a conference on "Developing a Culture of Peace," designed to focus on the nuts and bolts of church discipline. We invited Ken Sande and some of the staff from Peacemaker Ministries to present. While the conference was wonderful in terms of content and format, it was miserable in terms of attendance. Who wants to actually practice peace-making? It sounds too much like, well...being a pastor, I guess.

This gap between preaching the gospel and practicing the gospel characterizes much of evangelical church-life today. Alfred Poirier's *The Peacemaking Pastor* seeks to close it.

AS A PASTOR FOR PASTORS

Poirier writes *as a pastor for* pastors. As senior pastor of Rocky Mountain Community Church in Billings, Montana, he also serves as chairman of the board for Peacemaker Ministries.

The primary objective of his book is "to ground peacemaking on a solid biblical and theological foundation as well as to place it within its ecclesiastical context," and Poirier accomplishes that goal. *The Peacemaking Pastor* is filled with the gospel. Poirier demonstrates that "the gospel is the engine that drives the train of reconciliation. Unresolved conflicts between Christians have less to do with people being skillful than with them being sinful" (11-12).

Poirier frankly acknowledges the tendency we all have to avoid conflict, and he builds a convincing case from Scripture that calls us to incarnate the gospel of Christ, rolling up our sleeves and getting involved in the messy details of the lives of our people. The book is clear in its call, convicting in its challenge, and convincing in its argument. I agree with the back cover which describes it as "thoroughly exploring the theology of reconciliation." My only bit of criticism is that I was left hoping for more examples of application.

SUMMARY

The book begins with the author confessing his own reluctance to minister to people at a personal level. He calls himself a "heretic at heart" because he tends to be a practical Docetist—one who fails to show the true incarnation of Christ. "When our words are disconnected from the hardships of life, from the conflicts of heart and home, we become mere purveyors of knowledge, not pastors." (21) This humble confession on the part of the writer actually characterizes much of the book. Poirier consistently models a Matthew 7:1-5 approach, admitting his own failures as a critical first step in bringing about reconciliation (see, e.g., 70, 114, 125-126, 138, 245, 246).

Chapter 2 summarizes the usual ways in which people deal with conflict, and chapter 3 presents an excellent treatment of getting to the heart of conflict. Throughout this section, we are reminded again and again of the gospel. "People in conflict must begin with God, for at the heart of broken relationships is a broken relationship with the Lord. If our marriages are breaking, it is because our first marriage is broken" (66).

The entire book is worth reading just for chapter 4, "God's Glory in Conflict." Looking for God's glory is generally not our first reaction to conflict, but having that understanding will change our entire attitude as we see that the same God who ordains conflict loves to be glorified in peacemaking. Chapter 5 is a call to the church to act like the family she is. Poirier's treatment of how we turn people into "impersonal objects" and forget that they are true

brothers and sisters is particularly insightful. I also appreciated his observation that when people are in conflict, it is easy to stop calling each other by first names because we have forgotten that we are family.

Chapters 6 to 13 are the more practical section of the book. Poirier covers critical subjects such as: How should we (and should we not) confess sins to each other? What does true forgiveness look like? What is biblical negotiation, and how can the pastor function as a mediator? If you have read Ken Sande's book, *The Peacemaker*, you will find much of the same material reviewed in these chapters. Poirier helps us understand the difference between mediation and arbitration; and, of course, he addresses the formal role of the church in all of this. His treatment of church discipline and church membership is excellent, and the practical and messy example he shares in chapter 13—helping his church know how to respond to a convicted child molester who desires to be a member—is very helpful as well.

READER, BEWARE!

Now that you really want to read the book, I must warn you. This book is sort of like progressive revelation. The more you read, the greater your accountability. For this reason, it may not receive the readership it deserves. More than once while reading, I had to put the book down, confess my sin, and pick up the phone to get involved again in a situation I was conveniently ignoring.

At one point in my reading I was even sitting in a courtroom where two professing believers, each represented by an attorney who also professed Christ, were locked in a legal process that had the potential to do great harm to the gospel. God graciously allowed me the opportunity to negotiate a peace between the parties, and the case never went to trial. For that reason alone, I am grateful to Alfred Poirier for his book.

My only suggestion is that an appendix of case studies be included, or perhaps a website maintained where more examples of the process can be given. While Poirier gives examples throughout the book, messy, real life stories are always beneficial and strangely encouraging since they remind us that we are not alone in our struggles. Yes, Ecclesiology really is Christology!

Robert "Bob" Johnson is the pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Roseville, Michigan.

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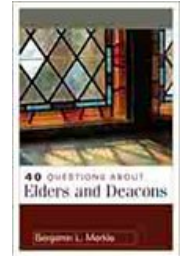
Book Review: 40 Questions About Elders and Deacons, by Benjamin L. Merkle

Reviewed by Will Kynes

40 Questions About Elders and Deacons

Kregel, 2007. 272 pages. \$17.99

Here are 11 questions about Ben Merkle's *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*.



1. What qualifies Benjamin Merkle to write this book?

Merkle wrote his dissertation on elders and overseers at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and is now a professor of New Testament at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary. His grasp of the many issues associated with church leadership, together with his desire to address them with sound exegesis, are evident in the book and is one of its great strengths. In addition, Merkle's personal experience in an elder-led church and his conviction that "a return to a biblical model of government is desperately needed in the church today" (13) add edification to exegesis.

2. Broadly speaking, what topics are covered in the book?

Merkle divides the book into three parts: Offices in General, The Office of Elder, and The Office of Deacon. The second section is by far the heart of the book, containing 27 of the 40 questions. Those questions are divided into four subsections dealing with a) background issues, b) qualifications, c) the plurality of elders, and d) the selecting, ordaining, paying, and removing of elders.

3. How does the question-and-answer format work?

The individual question chapters follow a fairly consistent outline. Take question 16, "What does it mean that an elder must be the husband of one wife?" as an example. First, Merkle identifies the relevant texts, in this case 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. Second, he presents the strengths and weaknesses of the primary interpretations of those texts before concluding with his view that "an elder must be faithful to his wife in a monogamous relationship" (128). Finally, he closes with a quick summary and a series of "reflection questions."

4. What role does Scripture play?

Scripture is foundational to Merkle's understanding of church polity. His approach "is not to answer the questions primarily from the perspective of what is practical, but from what is biblical," though he quickly adds that "biblical leadership is extremely practical because God's way is always the best way" (14-15). To this end, exegesis of the relevant biblical texts directs his responses to each question.

5. Who is the book's intended audience?

Merkle does not give a direct answer to this question, and different aspects of the book give conflicting signals. Merkle's simple and accessible style along with the "reflection questions" suggest that he had busy pastors and laypeople in mind. However, at times his dissertation research appears in lengthy footnotes and extended discussion of only tangentially-relevant issues. This is most evident in his chapters on the background of the term "elder." Few pastors or church members have either the need or the desire to know whether the Christian *episkopos* is modeled after the *mebaqqar* of the Qumran community (73).

6. What specific church polity does Merkle endorse?

Merkle believes each church should have a plurality of elders, each having equal authority even though one may act as a "first among equals." Both the elders and the congregation should have authority in the church, but as a congregationalist Merkle argues that the congregation has the final authority under Christ, though the elders

“should be given freedom to lead” (99). All elders are given the responsibility of ruling and teaching in the church (those are not two separate offices), and the deacons are to aid them in these pursuits by handling the details of the church.

7. What does he say about women?

The role of women is one of the most controversial issues surrounding church leadership, and Merkle spends a number of chapters on this topic. After spending one chapter outlining the reasons often given for allowing women to be elders, Merkle dedicates the next two chapters to refuting them. He does the same for the office of deacon, though he spends only one chapter on the refutation, possibly because, as he admits, “the grounds for not allowing women to become deacons is not as strong as those for not allowing women to be elders” (257).

8. What are the book’s strengths?

The book is designed to be easy to use both in its style and format. Aside from a few pedantic distractions, it fulfills this aim admirably. Though the chapters are short, generally about five pages, Merkle packs them with clearly presented information, and footnotes directing the reader to fuller discussions. He gives as fair a presentation of the various sides of each issue as his limited space allows. His biblical conviction is evident both in the strong stance he takes on culturally unpopular positions such as barring of women from eldership, as well as in his willingness to allow for freedom where the Bible does not give specific instruction, such as whether elders should serve terms (207). His advice to choose men who already effectively serve as elders (111) is an example of the practical insight that he combines with his biblical exposition.

9. What are the book’s weaknesses?

At times, as a result of its format, the book is repetitive. Merkle’s argument against women deacons is forced, resorting both to an argument from silence (when he had previously warned against this kind of argumentation; 256-7; cf. 255) and to a circular argument about the application of the term *diakonos* to Phoebe (257).

10. Should churches use this book?

Yes. Merkle reminds us that the Bible has a great deal to say about how we do church. He presents the teaching clearly in an easy-to-use format that leaves without excuse any church determined to look elsewhere for wisdom.

11. How should churches use this book?

Due to its FAQ format the book is better used as a reference tool than as a cover-to-cover read. Additionally, many church leaders will disagree with Merkle on an issue here or there, but the format allows them to avoid introducing contention into their churches since they can recommend only the chapters that are relevant to their members (the chapter on the advantages of a plurality of elders is especially helpful). A church that is considering transitioning to a plurality of elders will find the book a helpful starting point for the vital decisions ahead of them (there’s even a chapter on making that transition).

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