

# FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

By Mike Sciarra

I have been thinking a lot about how we can encourage adults at whatever age and life stage they are at (young marrieds, young families, families with older kids, empty nesters, those with an unbelieving spouse, single adults, single parents, seniors adults, etc.) to actively initiate and engage their households in things that lead to spiritual growth. I call it "Family Discipleship" - following Jesus in the context of our families. I am also aware that even though we all value that, if we don't think about it, practice it and communicate it, like many other important things it can easily be neglected in our lives and the church.

For example, most Christians WANT to read their Bible and pray daily, but most find it difficult to actually DO. The same thing with growing spiritually with the members of our families, the closest people on earth that God has given us to shepherd, grow with, evangelize and disciple. Most Christians WANT to worship, learn and serve the Lord with their family, but most find it difficult to actually DO. With the frenzied pace and schedules and to-do lists most of us keep it's no wonder. But still, the value stands and we know we can do "all things through Christ who strengthens us" (Phil. 4:13). Most of us want to minimize the urgent non-essential things on our plates and focus more on eternally significant things. Most of us realize we leapfrog over our families too often to minister to someone else.

If we think in concentric circles, first us individually, then our family, then others in the body of Christ closest to us (i.e. people we are in a small group with) and so forth, we may be more apt to actually initiate and engage individually and as families in let's say, the Word of God and prayer, and evangelism and outreach. All with the goal of having Jesus Christ first in our lives, loving another and reaching the world with the gospel. Though not always experientially true, family can and should be the most fertile soil for fulfilling the great command of loving God and the great commission of making disciples.

My encouragement for us is this: Let's trust God and be intentional about doing these things in our own lives and families and the church. Let's actually do what we say we are committed to! Then, let's encourage this among the Body. Because if we don't share what we are thinking, people won't know what we are thinking!

If you are wondering where to start, I suggest the following "Four Ways to Grow Spiritually as a Family":

**Have a family devotional time as often as once a day or at least once a week.**

Include God's Word and prayer, maybe some singing or an activity as well. At our house, with five kids, most of the time this is a 3-5 minute segment of time! Remember that it is not brain surgery. It doesn't have to be long. God will bless your efforts, as you trust Him even if you feel inadequate. It is also helpful to remember that a desire to grow spiritually as a family, evidenced by engaging in these things, doesn't guarantee healthiness as a family, but God can use it to help a family move towards greater spiritual and relational health. I know a single man who every week has a family Bible study with his parents, his brother and sister-in-law and their kids.

**Worship together on Sunday morning at Grace Church as often as you'd like to.**

Commit to being at Grace on Sunday. Worship as a family one hour. Serve in youth or children's ministry, attend an adult class, or just fellowship with people in the other hour. For those that get flack from their kids about going to worship, let me assure you I have received a lot. Don't take the path of least resistance. What worthwhile thing in life is easy? Obviously, take the path you are convinced God wants you to take. For those that hold a personal preference of "wanting a break from my kids so I can worship" or "kids are too much trouble to have in worship", could it be that your personal preference has been elevated to the status of doctrine? What Scriptures support that view? Personally I have found worshipping together with my kids to be beneficial as I seek to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). You'd be surprised how many people come up to me and say they are glad I am taking my kids to worship and how they wish they had when their kids were younger! I want my kids to experience the Lord in worship together with Angela and me and the rest of the gathered church. I also want them to sense they are a viable part of the body at Grace. What better way than including them in the biggest, most important gathering of the week for the body at Grace!

**Consider being in a family home group (the whole family together), FAST (Fathers And Sons Together) group or other parent/child or whole family small group.**

Small groups are a great way to grow spiritually together with family members while growing with other believers as well. In these and other settings our kids get the benefit of building relationships with other godly adults that can become mentors and disciplers, especially when the child is taking steps towards independence. These are some of the relationships they can fall back on. The same is true for our involvement in the lives of our peers and their kids. It is good for our offspring to see us interested in the lives of others. Remember they are always "catching" things from us.

**Find ways to serve the Lord together in your neighborhood and in church outreach and activities.**

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15)

You may start with one of these. You may try them all. Whatever we do, in word or deed, let us do it all "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (Col. 3:17) God bless you!