

Dedication

This volume is dedicated to my loving wife, Eleanor. Without her support, encouragement and belief, it would not be possible. It has been said that a minister's wife will either make or break him. I dedicate this to my wife, a true gift from God, which surpasses all wealth and beauty. It is she who has made my ministry possible in every way.

Acknowledgements

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Illustrations

All illustrations are taken from my 25 years in the ministry. Names and situations have been altered to assure anonymity, but quotes and examples have been preserved.

About the author

Rev. Mahon and Mrs. Mahon have been married 26 years and have four children, one in high school, two in college, and one married. All are ministering actively in areas of Christian leadership and all are actively involved in sharing their faith. Rev. Mahon graduated from the University of Texas with a B.S. in Secondary Education. After teaching for three years in Austin, he accepted the call of God from the Navigators where he has served for over 25 years. As such he has ministered in the college, community and missions arm of the Navigators. In addition Rev. Mahon has earned his Masters for ministry from Moody Graduate School in Chicago, Illinois. He has served as interim pastor, Family Discipleship Minister and pastor as well. Rev. Mahon draws on this diverse ministry to and with the family in bringing you this work.

Before You Begin

Before you begin, please note the suggested approach to the manual:

Week One:

- Pre-bible study
- Scripture memory verse
- Small-group discussion

Week Two:

- Daily meditations
- Scripture memory verse
- Application projects
- Small-group discussion

This workbook has been developed so that it can be approached a number of ways.

As a small group discipleship tool

In following this approach, only the small-group leader need purchase the leader's manual. Each member of the group will have a member's manual containing the pre-Bible study, a section for notes and the post-Bible study projects. Following this format, the leader will do the pre-Bible study, and then read the chapter before deciding on how best to lead the discussion. It is suggested that you spend two weeks on each chapter. First, do the study and come together to discuss the Biblical principles involved. Then, the following week, do the projects and come together to discuss applications and to learn from one another. Daily meditations for quiet times alone with God are provided in the project section to help the Bible study participants keep focused on the Word of God as they seek to apply the principles to their family and personal life. It is very important that the leader fully cover the material from the leader's guide. It is suggested that he refer to the projects that the members will be doing to make sure that they receive from him the necessary information to complete the projects. Many leaders find that they would just as soon have their Bible-study members read the chapter as well. This will be a personal decision of the group based on both time and the added cost of the leader's manual vs. the member's manual. Couples are strongly encouraged to work through the manual together instead of separately.

As a couple-to-couple discipleship tool

In following this approach, both the leader and his discipleship partner would purchase the leader's manual. As in the above procedure, they again will spend two weeks on each chapter. Since the manual is designed to be done by couples together, the classic one-to-one approach is not suggested except in the case of the single parent. A couple-to-couple approach would be preferable.

As a discipleship tool for individual couples

Many couples find that they would like to purchase a leader's manual and then go through chapter by chapter together. This allows the couple to develop the habit of studying and applying God's Word together. This, of course, would take place if they were in a small group. This is not always possible, and many couples have found it very satisfying to systematically work through the leader's manual together.

Introduction:

Preparing Our Children To Leave

Many couples who attend our seminar invariably ask two questions. The first is relatively simple. “How did this seminar come about?” The second, though, is a little bit more complicated. It usually goes something like this, “How can we insure that our children will turn out OK?” In answer to this first question, I am quick to point out that Eleanor and I both were raised in non-Christian, dysfunctional homes. We came into marriage without a clue as to how to be good, loving, Christian parents. However, God used this for good. Realizing our deficiencies, we were determined to learn everything we could about childraising.

Our approach was two-fold. First, we read everything we could get our hands on. Second, any time we came across parents, whose children impressed us, we would interview them and record their answers in a notebook. The interview process went

something like this, “We are so impressed with the behavior of your children, tell us your secret.” Then they would respond, “Just love them in. You’ve just got to love

“If your child screams bloody murder whenever you leave them with a baby sitter or Sunday school class, what do you do?”

the little darlings in to the kingdom.” Well, we knew parents whose little darlings were in the kingdom, were loved by their parents, and were little hellions. They were the dread of every Sunday school teacher in the Church. So we persisted, “Yes, but tell us something practical,” and they would say, “Pray, just pray like crazy.” Well, we knew many Christian parents who prayed. In fact, the worse their children were, the more they seemed to pray. We wanted something more.

We found that if we asked a specific question like, “If your child screams bloody murder whenever you leave them with a baby sitter or Sunday school class, what do you do?” There would be a pause, a consultation and then, “Oh, that, well that is easy, just....” And then the race was on, we tried to write as fast as they talked. Once we got through to specifics, we found a wealth of parenting information.

Eleanor and I soon realized that many parents from the generation just ahead of us could not really put their fingers on why they were such successful parents. This was because they had been raised in Christian homes and were doing what came naturally. From childhood they had been taught both the Scriptures as they related to Christian principles of child raising, as well as experiencing the methods first-hand. They never really thought about it. That’s just the way you do things. Doesn’t everyone know this?

We did not have that luxury. We had to dig for it. As we mined these nuggets, we kept

them in a notebook and over the years organized and refined both their methods and ours. Realizing there were many young parents in our shoes, we began accepting opportunities to share our newfound knowledge and skills in workshops and seminars. Over the years, this grew to the present conference format of our Family Discipleship Seminar with this, the accompanying workbook.

Bill looked me straight in the face. He was dead serious. “John, I have been thinking about home-schooling my children. When they leave high school, they will enter a pagan world. Even the best Christian colleges are filled with temptations. With the explosion of the Internet, it is now possible to home-school my children right through college and this is what I plan to do. I mean, in Biblical times, a child was a child well into his thirties.”

My answer to this second question, “How can I assure that my children will turn out OK?” is that you cannot. You will discover as you read this book (perhaps manual is a

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better term) that it is first and foremost a volume on “Parenting” as opposed to “Childrening.” By that, I mean that it is addressed to parents. It assures not that your children will “turn out all right,” but that you, as parents, “turn out all right.” It is my conviction that true parenting is preparing children to successfully leave the home with the wisdom and life skills necessary to live a fruitful and fulfilled life apart from their parents. It is also my conviction that the Bible does not guarantee a set of methods which when employed will guarantee that children “turn out all right.” Rather, it addresses the parents in the hope of their “turning out all right.” It is my experience and seems to be the presupposition of the Bible that when the parent turns out all right, the odds of the children following suit are greatly increased.

The goal of the Family Discipleship Seminar and Manual is that you as parents would conform to the Word of God and in so doing, insure your children the opportunity of growing up and leaving home as fruitful and fulfilled disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God gives us certain injunctions or guidelines to follow in our role as parents. It is our responsibility to master these principles and incorporate them into our family life. As we do this we become disciples—followers of Christ, of God and of His pattern for our family. A follower of Christ is a disciple, thus the title of this workshop: Family Discipleship. As such, we are authority driven, not results driven. By authority driven, I mean that we base our decisions not on visible results but on the authority of the Word of God. The latter is a precarious road indeed, while the former is the road of Family Discipleship. What this means is: if God’s Word tells us to behave a certain way—even if we do not experience this behavior as positive or profitable—that we will still conform our behavior to God’s will, using His Word as our standard, irrespective of our own personal experience or the perceived experiences of others. Contrastingly, if God’s Word tells us to refrain from certain behaviors, then, even if we experience this behavior as pleasant, as profitable, or perceive it as such in others, we will still refrain from this behavior, based on the authority of God’s Word.

Let me explain: my brother, my sister and me are all engaged in full-time Christian service. So you might ask yourself, “What methods were employed in raising three fine Christian workers?” Since both our parents were non-Christian, alcoholics in a totally dysfunctional home, the reply would be, “Get drunk nightly, beat and abuse your children, neglect them in most areas, give them total freedom and in no case restrict their hedonistic tendencies. The result will be that they will grow up to be pastors, missionaries and full-time Christian workers.” I think not, but this is exactly what happened in our case.

Tom took his son out for a little talk. “You are a junior in high school now, Son, and by definition, at age 17, an adult. I want you to know something: When you graduate, you are out of this house. You are in the army, you are in college, you are in an apartment, but you are out of this house. You are an adult and on your own. You graduate in May, I’ll give you ‘til August to make your arrangements. But as of September first, you are out. You are always welcome to visit, but don’t ever plan to live here again.”

“I know you are teaching that divorce is wrong but that is not my experience. Based on my experience I would have to say that there are some cases where divorce is the best thing a man can do. I was unhappy in my marriage, I met my current wife at church. We immediately hit it off. We felt God was bringing us together, giving me a second chance. I divorced my former wife and married this godly woman. I have never been happier. What you are saying did not work and what we did, did indeed work. This is God’s will for us and who can argue with the results of our decision?”

Defensive man in Sunday school class explaining that sometimes what seems to others a wrong decision, can be right for the one making it

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Similarly, I have a former high school buddy who is a drug addict and is wasting away somewhere in the merchant marines in the South Pacific. If you ask, “How do you raise such a child?” his parents would have to respond, “Be loving parents—father, a deacon in the church; mother—a Sunday School teacher and active in the Church youth council. Be active in your child’s life: disciplining the child, nurturing him and raising him in the instruction of the Word of God.” This is exactly what happened to my high school friend. He had it all and gave it all away. In both cases, the child ultimately had to decide whom he would serve. In both cases, the parents are separate from the child’s ultimate decision. My parents will not be rewarded for their children’s decision, nor will my friends be judged. Each of us made our decision as adults. Both sets of parents will be held accountable for how they responded to God’s Word and the principles set forth in His Word in terms of their role as parents. As for my siblings and me, we had to learn everything from scratch. My friend, should he turn to God, will have at his fingertips the wealth of training which his parents laid up for him in his life.

As an illustration, I was visiting in the home of a minister and, during the meal, one of his children poured salt into my coffee and then squealed with laughter. This action reflects upon the pastor and his wife. Before leaving, I shared my disappointment with both the child’s action and their reaction, which was to view it as precocious and impish behavior. They were amused. By contrast, I know a minister who is older than me and was arrested for drunken disorderliness. This action does not reflect upon his father. I would not go to the phone, call his father and rebuke him. This action rests entirely at the feet of the offending pastor.

Another example I have seen is that of non-resident Christian parents. In some cases, parents, in pursuit of their Christian ministry and ideals, neglect their children as much as any secular, two-career family. The children, while wild and unruly as children, may “turn out all right” in the end. Again, this does not justify the decision of the parent nor validate the child-raising styles used. It testifies to the Grace of God. The parent is responsible for what God says in the area of Family Discipleship, irrespective of career, gifts and callings that the parent may have, or of the ultimate lifestyle of the child. For instance, if a neighbor receives Christ, you cannot claim credit unless you have been a positive witness. You cannot say, “Gee, I never did model Christ or get around to witnessing, but isn’t it wonderful how God honored my ministry and they came to Christ anyway! I guess that you don’t have to witness to witness after all.” In the same way, you cannot say, “Gee, I never did spend a lot of time with my kids or really model what it means to be a father at home and involved in their lives, but isn’t it wonderful how God honored my ministry and they came to Christ anyway! I guess you don’t have to parent to parent after all.”

“I tried spanking and it just did not work. My children would go crazy, become simply frantic! It was a terrible experience. We now use time outs. What you are saying about the rod did not work for us, what we are doing does work. This is God’s will for our family and no one can argue with the results.”

Defensive Christian woman to me during seminar break

Ultimately, the child becomes an adult and is accountable for his decisions apart from the parent. In American society, this begins to take place at age 13 and culminates at age 18. By age 11, the child is no longer viewed as a child by society as a whole but rather as a “young person,” and by age 13, the term “teenager” or “young adult” begins to be used. By age 18, you cannot report your child as a runaway. He is simply an adult who has chosen to leave. Given the realities of this transitional period, at age 15 it is too late to say, “Oh gee, three years and my child is an adult, I guess I better begin preparing him to

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leave.” No. When the child is born, you should take a deep breath and say, “Eighteen years max, and after that he is out in the world.”

If I see an unruly, disobedient two-year-old, I think, shame on that parent. If I see an unruly, disobedient 15-year-old, I think, shame on that young man. If you, as a parent, got up right now and went out and held up a liquor store, I would not pick up the phone and rebuke your parents. The responsibility would rest with you. We, as parents, have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the time when this will be true of our children is fast approaching, and we must be hard at work to prepare our children for that day.

That means we must prepare our children to leave. It is the goal of this volume to equip you, as a parent, to be an effective Family Discipler. Jesus Christ said to His disciples in Luke 6:40 *"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."* Now what did this look like for Jesus? Well, in Mark 3:14, the Word of God tells us, *"And He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that they might send Him out to preach."* The goal of Christ was to train the twelve as disciples, and then send them out as fruitful, responsible, independent Apostles. In Acts 4:13, the fruit of this ministry is seen in the reaction to the Pharisees to their evangelistic ministry, *"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."* As Family Disciplers, our goal, from the birth of our child onward, must be to prepare him to leave. A child has 18 years with us, and then another 50 to 60 years away from us. Our emphasis must be on these 50 or 60 years. Our success is the same as Jesus, when our children are both fruitful and fulfilled in their lives, and walk with God apart from their parents.

As of this writing my daughter Becca is serving with her husband on the mission field. While in college she was been active all four years in Campus Crusade for Christ. Each summer she has dedicated to a Summer Training Program in the U.S. or on the mission field with that fine organization. Before this, as a graduating senior, she served as a summer intern for a Baptist Church and her junior summer in high school was spent at Eagle Lake Camp, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with the Navigators on their service crew. Her sophomore summer was spent at the same camp, only half the summer was spent away from home. We carefully prepared Becca to live successfully apart from us.

People ask me, “Do you miss Becca now that she is gone and so active in this Christian organization?” and I answer, “Yes, most definitely.” Then they ask, “Was it hard to let go?” To be truthful, I would have to say it is hard in the aspect of adjusting to any change. We love Becca dearly and her vibrant personality and sensitivity make her a real joy to have around, but Eleanor and I worked hard for the day when Becca would leave. We rejoice to see the skills and convictions we worked and prayed for at work in her life. We knew she would leave, and we wanted her to leave and take her place in the Body of Christ and the Will of God, and so, we rejoice in this. Our other three children have and are having similar experiences. Like their sister, we have been allowing them the life experiences which will successfully prepare them to leave home. We are not fighting this process. It is one we have been working towards. I hope all my children make the right choices and submit to Christ as Lord, leading fruitful and fulfilled lives apart from us as parents. But I know that this is *their* responsibility and not mine. *My* responsibility is to prepare them to leave by giving them the wisdom and life skills necessary to lead a fruitful and fulfilled life apart from us as parents.

This then is what I seek to set forth: A Family Discipleship Workbook and Seminar, a tool which will equip parents in the raising of their children. It is meant to empower you and to return you to your rightful position as the head of the home. No longer will you

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have to rely solely upon the so-called experts. God chose you to parent your child and gave you His Holy Word to equip you for this responsibility. The Seminar and Workbook begins with this principle, and moves to method. It is based on the premise of the authority, inerrancy and infallibility of God's Word and on the premise of the responsibility of parents to be Family Disciplers. It presupposes parents who want their children to grow up, leave home, and lead spiritually fruitful and fulfilled lives on their own, independent of their parents. It is my prayer that you will find it a blessing.

Rev. John S. Mahon
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