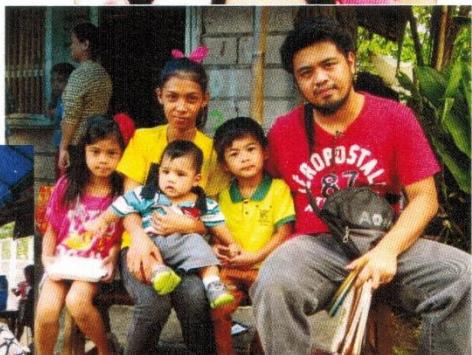


## Book 3

# Basics of God's Family



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**Mike Bergen – Basic Training Manuals**

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# Guidelines for Using the 3 Basic Training Manuals

The best way to use these manuals is to follow the example of how Jesus trained his followers. Here is a summary of what Jesus did to train them:

- Jesus spent a lot of time with his followers.
- Jesus discussed many life experiences with his disciples and helped them apply God's Word to their daily lives.
- Jesus helped them understand the Father and how to grow in relationship with the Father with the Holy Spirit's help.

Jesus Christ not only provided salvation for everyone in the world, but he also taught and exemplified an effective way to help others, and ultimately how to impact the whole world. He did this by focusing on a few disciples who really wanted to learn from him. He could have started a big organization or set up a school with classes, but instead he invested his three years of ministry into the lives of a few followers with whom he spent a lot of time, discussion, prayer, and working together. His influence then multiplied across the globe.

The apostle Paul later said that he followed the example of Jesus for how he helped people (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1), and then he exhorted us to follow his example in doing so.

This is why the three Basic Training Manuals have been developed. These manuals are tools for helping people learn to follow Jesus' example for helping people, as described in the Bible. Jesus trained his disciples from the beginning of his ministry to the time when he sent them out as leaders, and that is also the purpose of these manuals.

## How to follow Jesus' example by using the Basic Training Manuals

- ***Spend time with disciples.*** Get to know them. Show compassion for what is happening in every part of their lives and learn how they have grown in their life with Jesus Christ.
- ***Pray frequently for disciples.*** Jesus spent many nights in prayer. Also, Paul recorded many of his own prayers in the New Testament. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help the disciples you know to understand more about God and Jesus Christ.
- ***Help disciples focus on knowing God more completely.*** Help them understand more about God and also see what God is doing in every aspect of life. (Book 1)
- ***Help disciples know how to live by God's Word in daily life.*** Ask God to give you wisdom about which things in God's Word would be most helpful for them at the present time of their lives. When you know the content of the three Basic Training Manuals, the manuals will help you know which places in God's Word will be helpful for the disciple. You don't need to go through the material in the same order that it is written. Book 2 is especially helpful for disciples to make progress in character and habits for the rest of their lives. You can pray and decide which things will be helpful for the disciple according to the experiences they are going through.
- ***Have many personal discussions with each disciple.*** Discuss things they are learning about God. Learn about their progress in living life with Jesus Christ. If possible, include one or two other disciples in the discussions so everyone can learn from each other.

- **Work together and serve together with disciples.** Be an example to the disciple and help them learn from your example and experiences.
- **Follow the instructions for “How to Become a Spiritual Parent”,** at the end of Book 3.

### **Other ways to use these manuals**

- Resource for teaching, preaching, and leading Bible studies
- Guidelines for training a pastor
- Guidelines for parents to train children
- Overview of the Bible

## **The 3 Basic Training Manuals**

### **Book 1**

#### **Basics about God**

**(A workbook to know God and the Bible)**

- God Greatness Shown in History
- God’s Salvation
- God’s Characteristics
- God’s Promises

### **Book 2**

#### **Basics of God’s Training**

**(A mentoring guide)**

- First Steps
- Basics of God’s Training

### **Book 3**

#### **Basics of God’s Family**

**(A model for family and church)**

- The Basics of Family
- The Basics of Spiritual Family (Church)
- Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent
- Practical Steps for Becoming a Mature Spiritual Leader
- Recognition and Certificates

# The Basics of God's Family - Introduction

God has designed us to enjoy a loving relationship with himself and also with other people. But this doesn't happen naturally. We need his help, and he also wants us to help each other.

That is why God has designed family and church. He has designed these relationships to support our growth with him and with each other.

God has made us for loving relationships with himself and with each other. Family and church are the environments he has designed for these closest relationships. These relationships are then the basis for growth in our life and are the support we need for the many battles we face in life.

The most ideal environment for every person is to be in both a healthy physical family and a healthy spiritual family. Many people don't have the opportunity to be in both, but they can still trust God to meet their needs in one way or another.

This manual, "Book 3 – Basics of God's Family," outlines God's plan to use our family to help us grow in love (with him and people) and God's plan to use our church (spiritual family) to help us grow in love with him and people. Following is the outline of this manual:

## **Basics of God's Family**

### The Basics of Family

- Design and Purpose of the Family
- Function of the Family

### The Basics of Spiritual Family (Church)

- Design and Purpose of the Church
- Function of the Church



# The Basics of Family

God made people for strong loving relationships, so he designed family to be the strong foundation for all aspects of life. This is the plan he gave to the very first man and woman he created, Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:18-25). A family is the first part of God's plan for people to help each other.

The importance of family in God's mind is made clear by what he told Abraham in Genesis 18:18-19. He told Abraham that he would work through Abraham's descendants to be a *blessing to all the nations of the world*. And the plan for this to happen for Abraham was "to direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18:18-19). In summary, God said, "Focus on helping your family walk with God and you will have a powerful influence on the world."

Later in history, when God was preparing the world for his Son, Jesus Christ, to come, he made a very interesting statement. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6).

Then an angel said a similar thing a few hundred years later when he described what John the Baptist would do to prepare people for the coming of Jesus Christ. He said John the Baptist would "go in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children" (Luke 1:17).

There's no question that God sees his plan for families as foundational for helping people know God, thus having a powerful influence on the world.

What is God's plan for families? The basics of God's instruction are outlined here in the following two aspects:

- Design and Purpose of the Family
- Function of the Family

Bible passages on each of these two aspects are given in detail on the following pages.

# Design and Purpose of the Family

## Designed for love – Genesis 1:26-27

After God made all kinds of animals he said, “Let **us** make man (people) in **our** image, in **our** likeness...” (Genesis 1:26). From this statement we see a truth that is taught all through the Bible: that God is one, yet his deity is expressed in three persons. These are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. There is, and always has been, a strong loving relationship between them. A good example of this is found in John 5:19-30. To be made in God’s image means we are made with the ability to love the way he loves.

- We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)
- God says love is to be the most important characteristic in our lives (Matthew 22:37-39, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13).
- A man and woman united together as one flesh for all their lives is the priority relationship God has designed for the practice of love (Genesis 2:18-24).
- Love between a husband and wife is for their benefit, and it is also designed to be a picture of God’s love for his people (Ephesians 5:21-33).

This aspect of God’s image (love) is emphasized all through the Bible. Our relationship with him is a two-way expression of love, and the relationship he designed between men and women is for expressing love.

God’s love is to be shown in a variety of ways in the family, as we see throughout the Bible.

## Marriage

God, the Creator of everything, explained his design for people right from the beginning. In Genesis 2:15-25 He made the following points:

- Men and women are designed for close relationship.
- God made them for emotional and physical relationship. It is not good for people to be alone.
- Men and women are designed for a close working partnership.

Jesus quoted this same passage in Matthew 19:4-6. Paul also quoted Genesis 2:24 as a definition of sexuality the way God planned it (1 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31). From all these passages we learn the following about God’s design for family:

1. God made people for close relationships, emotionally and physically.
2. When a man and woman have sex, they become one flesh.
3. When a man and woman have sex, they remain as one flesh and should never be separated in their relationship.
4. Children are a normal result of the union.

Other conclusions from these passages:

- Having sex without a lifetime commitment is a violation of God’s plan, whether or not the government or any other human organization is involved. (Matthew 19:8-9)
- God’s plan for two people to become one flesh was because he made people male and female. He did not say that any random two people should become one flesh, but rather a male and female should become one flesh.

People have a tendency to pursue as much selfishness as they can get by with rather than focusing on how completely they can apply God's truth to their lives. Moses, Jesus, and Paul all gave the same definition and standard for sex. The standard is for *our* benefit! The question is whether or not we will focus on the standard--God's design--rather than try to justify something else.

### **Conclusions**

- Sex should only happen in the context of lifetime commitment.
- Sex should only happen between a man and woman.
- Children are God's plan for the union of a man and woman.

### **Marriage is designed to be a picture of God's relationship with us**

God's design for the union of a man and woman in marriage has potential for some of the greatest joys in life. God has created us for loving relationship with himself and with other people. God designed marriage to be the closest relationship, and he says it's a picture of the close relationship he wants with each person (Ephesians 5:25-32). God says his people (the church) are his bride forever (Revelation 19:6-9)!

### **Danger of misusing God's design for marriage**

As much as marriage has the potential for the greatest joys in life, so also the misuse of God's plan for marriage will bring the greatest pains and suffering in life.

- The strongest man in history was defeated by a wrong relationship with a woman (Judges 14-16).
- The wisest man in history fell because of wrong relationships with women (1 Kings 10:23-24, 1 Kings 11:4-6).
- The man exalted in the Bible with a strong heart for God (1 Samuel 13:14) fell because of a wrong relationship with a woman (2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:12).

Today and all through history men and women have suffered some of the worst pains in their lives because of misusing God's design for marriage. About three thousand years ago God warned us in the Bible, "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife. No one who touches her will go unpunished." (Proverbs 6:27-29) This warning is equally true and important for us today.

Sex is attractive and extremely enjoyable, but it is like fire. Fire is so enjoyable when it's burning on a candle in our house, cooking our food on the stove, or warming us when we are cold, but when fire is given freedom to go where it wants, the destruction is so horrible and painful. God's design for sex is within the context of a marriage of a man and woman who have made a lifetime commitment to each other. When sex is given freedom outside this design, the result will eventually be pain and suffering, often of the worst kind.

### **Show love through marriage**

As already stated, marriage is the most important relationship for love. And love is expressed when the following purposes of marriage are fulfilled:

#### **1. Partnership - Genesis 2:18-24**

- Emotional partnership (not good to be alone) – Genesis 2:18
- Work partnership (wife is a helper for the husband)
- Physical partnership (one flesh with each other)

## 2. Follow God's example of love

All through the Bible God says that his love for people should be the example of love for all relationships. This is why God often compares his love for his people to a husband's love for his wife.

- Isaiah 54:5 – “Your Maker is your husband,” is what God said to his people, Israel. This shows that God thinks the love of a husband to his wife should be the strongest kind of love possible.
- Ephesians 5:25-30 – A husband is to give up his life in many ways to benefit his wife, similar to the way Jesus Christ gave up his life for people.
- Ephesians 5:31 and Matthew 19:1-9 – A marriage should never be broken, just as God's love and commitment to us is never broken. God also made this clear to Hosea when he asked him to marry an adulterous woman (Hosea 1:2-3). God said Hosea's relationship with an adulterous woman was a picture of God's relationship to Israel. God has always been faithful and committed to Israel, but Israel left him.
- Revelation 19:7-9 – God compares his relationship with all his children to be like a groom marrying his bride.

## 3. Unity

God blesses unity (Psalm 33 and John 17:20-23). The person we are “one flesh” with is the most important person for us to be united with. Our spouse is our top priority relationship.

The world will know who Jesus is when his people are united as one. This is what Jesus stated twice in His last prayer with his disciples (John 17:20-23). There is no other relationship more important than a marriage for this kind of unity to be practiced.

## Practical Advice before Considering Marriage

Because marriage is God's plan, it usually does not work well unless God is the leader (Lord) of each marriage partner's life in every way. When they are secure in his love for them, they will gladly make him Lord of their life in every way. Sacrificial love is important for each person to practice in marriage. It becomes almost impossible for them to do so unless they are secure in God's love for them.

This means that someone who is considering marriage should first of all make sure they themselves are secure in God's love and have made a personal commitment to God (Jesus Christ) that he is and will always be the Leader (Lord) of their life in every way. Then discussion can be had with the other person to learn if they have also made the same commitment and to learn how they have been living their life with Christ as their Lord. Other people who know them well should also be able to testify to this reality in the person's life. If the Lordship of Jesus Christ has not been clearly established in each person's life, it would not be wise for them to be married.

## Roles in marriage and family are God's design – Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4

- Each member of the family is to submit to the others (5:21).
- Wives submit to husbands out of trust in Jesus Christ (5:22-24).
- Husbands love their wives by giving their life for them as Christ gave his life to the church (5:25-33).
- Children obey parents (when living at home under parental authority) (5:1)
- Children honor parents for their whole life (5:2-3).
- Fathers have the primary responsibility for training children (6:4).

## Husbands are designed to be the responsible leaders

- Ephesians 5:25-31 – Husbands are responsible to meet the needs of their wives.
- Ephesians 6:4 – Husbands (fathers) are responsible for the training of their children.
- 1 Timothy 3:1-5 – Husbands are responsible for the management of their family, which includes care for the family and the actions of his children.
- 1 Peter 3:7 – Husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way, showing them honor and respect. This means the husband will respect his wife's opinion as equally important to his own. If he fails to honor and respect her as equally important to himself, this verse says his prayers will be hindered, which means his ministry (at home, at work, or anywhere else) will be hindered.
- A husband's marriage is the ***basis for God using him to minister to other people***. The Bible teaches that a husband's responsibility to his wife and family is his top priority. The more he learns to love her the way Christ loves the church, the more effective he will also be in loving other people and meeting their needs. Conversely, falling short in his marriage will have a negative effect on his ministry to other people.
- A husband's unity with his wife is ***a key factor for reaching the world*** with God's love and truth, as Jesus stated twice in his prayer to the Father in John 17:20-23 (based on the principle that our marriage partner is the most important person for us to be united with).

- Husbands are to **lead with the attitude of a servant**, not demanding submission from his wife, just as Jesus Christ did toward us (Philippians 2:3-8). (It is the wife's choice to obey God's instruction of submission to her husband, and not the husband's responsibility to demand her to do so. In a similar way, the wife is not to demand her husband to love her, but it is his choice to obey God's instruction to love his wife.) The more a husband practices understanding and respect toward his wife, as 1 Peter 3:7 instructs, the more likely his wife will choose to submit to his leadership.
- Husbands are the primary ones **responsible for unity** in a marriage, even though many husbands will blame their wives as the ones hindering unity if they don't submit. In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter says God will answer the prayers of a husband when he understands his wife, respects her, and honors her. The husband is responsible for how God can work through his marriage.

### **Wives are designed to be the invaluable helpers**

- Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal beings but with different roles, likewise husbands and wives are created as equal but with different roles. Neither person is inferior or superior, but each role is different.
- The husband is designed to be the responsible leader and the wife is designed to be his invaluable helper (Genesis 2:18-24). The role of being a helper is a high calling since it reflects God's image—God is our Helper (Psalm 54:4 and John 14:16,26).
- In God's design for wives to be helpers, humility is a key factor, expressed through a voluntary, cooperative attitude. True submission, like love, can only happen when it is voluntary and not forced. God does not force people to love him, and a husband should never force or demand his wife to submit to him in any way. When true submission is happening from the heart, it is extremely beautiful and attractive (1 Peter 3:3-6). Submission to God and submission to others is part of God's design for everyone (Ephesians 5:21), but God gives special instruction to wives about voluntary submission to husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Peter 3:1-6). This instruction becomes very difficult when the husband is not fulfilling his responsibility of being a loving leader in the same way Christ loves us. Since no husband is perfect, God's instruction for a wife to submit to her husband will always be challenging to some degree. That is why her focus needs to be on God as the primary one who will meet her needs, rather than her husband (1 Peter 3:1-6).
- Being submissive does not mean that a wife should simply be quiet and never dialogue about issues. She can help her husband understand things he's not aware of. She can do this by communicating her observations and by expressing her experience. Being submissive also does not mean that it's wrong for her to take initiative to generate plans. Dialogue and initiatives are often great ways to help a husband.

True submission, like love, can only be accomplished if it is voluntary and non-forced. God does not force us to love him, and a husband should not try to force or demand that his wife to submit to him in any way. For true submission to occur, it must come from the heart, which is very attractive and beautiful (1 Peter 3: 3-6).

### **Show love by having children**

Children are God's plan for more people for him to love (Genesis 1:26-28). People are to reproduce children. (This is the norm, but sometimes God does things differently for special

reasons, such as not giving a couple the ability to have children.) Love is expressed when the following purposes regarding children are fulfilled:

### **1. Fathers are to delight in their children – Malachi 4:5-6**

As stated in the introduction, when God was preparing the world for his Son, Jesus Christ, to come, he made a very interesting statement. “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6). Delighting in children fulfills an important purpose of love.

Then an angel said a similar thing a few hundred years later when he described what John the Baptist would do to prepare people for the coming of Jesus Christ. He said John the Baptist would “go in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children” (Luke 1:17). Obviously, a father’s relationship with his children is extremely important.

### **2. Training children is a priority for helping all people in the world – Genesis 18:17-19**

God had a plan for how Abraham would be a blessing to the other people of the world. It was a simple plan but very profound. Here is what he said,

“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”  
(Genesis 18:18-19 NIV)

Here are two observations about God’s plan:

- God’s plan was for Abraham to focus on training his family in the ways of God. This meant more than teaching information, but helping them “**keep** the way of the LORD by **doing** what is right and just.”
- God’s plan was for Abraham to become a world influencer by focusing on his family. God has always loved everyone in the world (John 3:16-17). He told Abraham repeatedly that his plan was to use him and all his descendants to be a blessing to all people on earth (Gen 12:2-3). And the method to be a blessing to all people on earth was for Abraham to focus on training his family to walk in the ways of God (Genesis 18:18-19). God’s plan for Israel to become great was also based around families (Numbers 1:44-45). The structure for the nation was based on families. The leaders of Israel were the family heads of the tribes (Numbers 32:28). The training of children was to be done by families (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

When we train our children, not only are they helped, but they also become a blessing to the world around them, fulfilling God’s purpose for showing love.

### **Summary of the design and purpose of the family**

Marriages that are strong in love and unity are the foundation of strong families, and strong united families make strong churches and strong communities. Churches of loving, united families are then a strong influence in a world of confusion, pain, and suffering.



# Function of the Family

## Continual love – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

All functions and responsibilities of family members in their different roles are to be done in love.

(Note: Fathers sometimes misuse their authority to lead their families in ways that cause exasperation. God, through Paul, warns against this very real danger in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. Humble, submissive love is God's way of leading – not only for fathers, but also for church leaders. Compare 1 Peter 5:1-4.)

## Loving your parents – Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2-3

Love for your parents is shown by honoring them. Honor your father and mother is the first command God gave with a promise – “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:3).

- This is a command that applies to all of us for all our lives, no matter who our parents are or what they have done.
- The more we learn to unconditionally love (honor) our parents, whom we usually know better than anyone else, the more we learn about love toward other people.

## Loving your family means they are first priority – 1 Timothy 5:8

This passage says that parents are to provide for their immediate family as a first priority.

Husbands are to love their wives as their highest priority relationship. This means loving her as Christ sacrificially loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), giving up his own comforts to meet her needs (Philippians 2:3-7). It means caring for her in the same way he cares for his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29), which means caring for her as a higher priority than all other people.

Meeting the needs of family members means understanding their needs in at least three categories:

- Physical and material
- Emotional
- Spiritual

If a father works to meet needs of other people, but neglects his wife or children (either physically, emotionally, or spiritually), he is missing God's plan for him as a husband and father.

Physical and material needs – These are usually the most obvious needs. It's often easier to see when they are not being met, especially for the children. But husbands need to be careful to give attention to their wives' material and physical needs also. Often wives will see things differently than their husbands, and so each husband will do well to be sensitive to this and ask for God's help to meet the needs of his wife.

- Physical affection – 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. Love means to be a giver rather than a taker. In marriage the spouse belongs to the other person for the purpose of lovingly meeting the needs and desires of the other person (voluntarily, without them demanding it), rather than trying to get them to meet our own personal needs and desires.

- Needs at home. There are always different kinds of material needs at home. Cleaning, repairs, painting, and improvements are some of the physical needs that will always be present.

Emotional needs – Another important aspect of loving someone is to meet their emotional needs. Paul was an example of doing this with the Thessalonian Christians. He wrote, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, **encouraging, comforting** and **urging** you to live lives worthy of God, ...” (1 Thess. 2:11-12) This is opposite of a father exasperating his child (Ephesians 6:4). Several factors are important to meet emotional needs:

- Time together. Understanding another person takes time and work, but it’s a good way to meet emotional needs. It takes time to listen, ask questions, and understand them. This does not mean we tell them what we think, but love means we learn to understand the other person’s thoughts and feelings. Because people change and always have new experiences, this is a lifetime work that will take much time with our family members. Doing whatever is necessary to understand our marriage partner is our first priority, because God says they are the first priority of our love.
- Giving gifts helps meet emotional needs. Gifts don’t always have to cost money – they can be small things to show we are thinking of them.
- Speaking kind and encouraging words meets emotional needs. Ask God to help you think of kind and encouraging words to say to those you love.
- Actions of service to help another person. Doing something to help another person is another strong way of showing love. It could be cleaning or cooking for someone, going to the store for someone, or repairing something.

Spiritual needs – We cannot force people to have a relationship with God (which is the most important thing for every person), but we can do things to cooperate with God’s Spirit as he works in the lives of our marriage partner and children.

- Ephesians 5:26-28 – Husbands can love their wives by helping them be exposed to God’s word. This is also true for their children, as described in Deut. 6:4-9.
- Our children are our first priority disciples. When Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, we need to remember God’s instruction to Abraham (Gen. 18:18-19), and what God said through Moses (Deut. 6:4-9). Neglecting to meet our children’s spiritual needs is as serious as not meeting their material needs (1 Timothy 5:8).
- Prayer for spouses and children is the first priority of parents. In 1 Timothy 2:1 and Ephesians 6:18 we are instructed to pray for all people, and 1 Timothy 5:8 is a reminder that children are our highest priority of responsibility. **Paul’s example** of how he prayed for his spiritual children is an important example for parents to follow. The primary thing he prayed for people was that they would know God better, such as in Ephesians 1:15-21. This is extremely important, because the better someone knows God, the more that every other aspect of their life will be affected. **Parents asking God daily to help their children know him is an extremely important strategy.**

### **Loving your children means teaching and training them – Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

God’s plan is for parents to be the most important teachers for children. At the beginning of the Bible, God told Abraham that if he would train his children in the ways of God, then God would

make his descendants to be a blessing to the world! (Genesis 18:18-19) At a later time, God gave instruction to parents at the time of Moses. He said that parents should teach their children about God's Word diligently every day, when they sit at home, when they travel, and when they get up and lay down. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) There are many ways this can happen. Here are some suggestions:

- Parents can help their children learn the Bible, even if the parents do not know very much about the Bible. The 5-Question Bible study method is very useful with children, as soon as they learn to read. Go to the end of this book, Book 3, to learn this method. Near the end of Book 3, there is a section with the title, "Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent." There you will see instructions for how to use the Bible study with five questions. Parents can read the Bible with their children, and then help them find answers to the questions.
- Parents can help the children learn songs about God and the Bible. For many people, it's easier to memorize a song than to memorize a Bible verse. There are some very simple songs about God that are written for children.
- Parents can tell children about experiences they have had and lessons they have learned. Even if the experience was bad, if the parent learned a lesson from the experience, it will probably be helpful to tell to their child.
- Parents can help children memorize Bible verses. Most children are able to memorize quickly, even before they are able to read. Parents can help children memorize by asking them to repeat the first phrase after the parent. Then the parent adds another phrase and the child repeats the first phrase with the next phrase added on. This is continued until the child learns the whole verse or passage.

The mind of a young child can be compared to many shelves in a room. When the child is a baby, the shelves are empty of information. Parents usually have the most influence on what kind of information their child receives. Every day new information is stored on the shelves as the child goes through life. Hopefully God's Word, which is truth, is stored on the shelves of the mind. It is up to the child to decide what they do with the information, and they might make very selfish decisions. But when the child gives their heart to God to be the leader of their life, God's Spirit uses the information the child already knows to lead and teach the child. If the child's mind has no information from God's Word, the Holy Spirit is very limited on what can be done to lead the child. But if the child's mind is full of God's Word, then the Holy Spirit can help the child remember and the Spirit can help the child live according to the truth that is already in the mind.

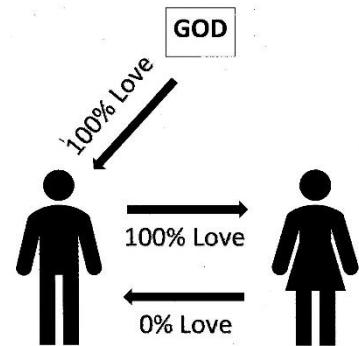
Of course, parents need to also be examples to their children about how to live life with God. And it's important for parents to remember that they cannot change the selfish hearts of their children – only God's Spirit can do that. That is why prayer for children is so important. Parents need to be examples and they need to teach God's Word to their children every day, but it is only God's Spirit who can change the heart of children.

## The foundation of love is to hope and trust in God – 1 Peter 3:1-7

Hope and trust in God needs to be the foundation of family relationships. When we don't have confidence that God will lovingly meet our own needs, it is difficult to invest our lives into loving other people.

- Wives cannot completely submit to husbands without putting their hope in God's care for them (1 Peter 3:1-6). This also means that wives do not demand their husbands to love them.
- Husbands cannot completely love and respect their wives without putting their hope in God (1 Peter 3:7). This also means that husbands do not demand their wives to submit to them.

This diagram illustrates how this works. When a spouse has confidence in God's complete unconditional love toward him (100% love), it makes it easier to give that same kind of 100% love toward his spouse, even if he receives 0% love in return from his spouse. Since we are all made to be loved, a person who does not know of God's love toward him will have a difficult time giving 100% love to another person unless he receives a lot of love in return.



Joseph was an example of trust in God as the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation after his brothers had treated him so cruelly. Joseph summarized this trust in God when his brothers approached him, fearing what he would do in revenge. He told them,

“Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid, I will provide for you and your children.” (Genesis 50:19-21)

## Husbands to follow Jesus' style of leadership

Jesus taught a different kind of leadership than what is normally practiced in the world. He taught his disciples that leaders should not “lord it over” others (Mark 10:42-45). Jesus’ example, and the teaching of the Bible, is that a strong leader is someone who builds love and unity, not someone who forces his own decisions on to others. What does this look like for a husband to be the leader in a marriage?

- The husband follows Jesus’ example of leadership, which means he lays down his life for the benefit of his wife. This means investing time, energy, and resources for her benefit. (John 10:7-18 the good shepherd, 1 Peter 5:1-4). Jesus’ example of washing the feet of his disciples (John 13) is a good example for husbands to follow as they learn to meet the needs of their wives, which will include physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.
- The husband follows Jesus’ example, which means never pushing his wife to do something she is not ready to do. This means husbands and wives function in a similar way to the way that Jesus and his Father functioned (John 5:19-30). Warning: Some Christian husbands take advantage of God’s instructions for a wife to submit to the husband, and use that as an excuse to make decisions the wife is not in agreement with. This is in contradiction to passages such as 1 Peter 3:7 and Ephesians 5:21. If a wife is not in agreement with a decision, the husband’s responsibility is to lovingly and patiently do two things. First of all to carefully listen, ask questions, and understand how she feels and thinks and why she feels and thinks that way. (This might even cause the husband to change his mind.) Then, secondly, to lovingly and patiently help her understand his thinking. If a husband is not able to bring his wife to agreement, it is best

that he *not* move ahead. God could be protecting the husband from getting into some difficulty he is not aware of. God has not promised to give husbands special wisdom in a different way than the wife. A husband needs the wisdom of his wife as much as our head needs our heart to function healthily (1 Corinthians 12:21-25). If a husband makes a decision against the thinking of his wife, he shows disrespect for his wife and is taking a risk that God will not answer his prayers, as Peter warned in 1 Peter 3:7.

### **Practical considerations**

Following are some questions for you to consider for your marriage and family. Each question is an application of a Biblical principle that has proven to be helpful for many marriages and families.

- When do the husband and wife make time to listen to each other, seeking to understand each other and freely discuss every aspect of their lives together?
- When do the parents make time for the family to do something enjoyable together, without having other people around?
- When do the husband and wife pray together?
- When does the father have a time of Bible reading (or Bible discussion) and prayer together with the whole family?
- How often does the father pray for his children, and what does he ask God to do in their lives?
- When a child doesn't cooperate, how are the parents helping the child? What consequences do the parents enforce? Are the parents consistent with their plan of enforcing consequences? (God's Spirit, not the parents, makes a change in a child's heart. The parents' role is to help the child understand truth and the seriousness of sin, and to help the child see their need for Christ, always praying for the Spirit to work in their hearts.)

# The Basics of Spiritual Family (Church)

When Jesus Christ, the loving Creator of the universe, came to this world (Hebrews 1:2), he came to rescue the people of the world, and not to condemn them (John 3:17). He came to rescue every person who wanted to be free from sin and eternal death (Mark 10:45) and to bring hope to a very broken world. He told the people that he came to “preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:17-21).

But Jesus Christ was killed, buried, resurrected three days later, and then he returned to heaven. Now, who will continue his work of rescue and help? It is still Jesus Christ! He has sent His Spirit to live in each person who puts their hope in him (John 14:16-17, Ephesians 1:13-14), and he has told his followers how to cooperate with him and unite together to continue the work he began when he was physically here. This is what a spiritual family is!

During his short time here, Jesus Christ introduced the concept of a spiritual family to his followers. He taught and modeled this concept with his disciples. The only qualification to be a member was humility and trust in the leader, Jesus Christ. It didn’t matter how weak, poor, addicted, or helpless a person was, if they wanted to be part of this group, they could. Jesus’ disciples called this spiritual family a “church”, and Jesus stated that nothing in the world or in hell (Hades) would be able to stop the progress of this group (Matthew 16:18)!

## **The importance of spiritual family**

Jesus Christ was the most effective teacher this world has ever known. Some people might think he could have helped more people if he would have started a school or university where hundreds or even thousands would have attended to learn under his teaching. Obviously, Jesus was convinced that the most effective way to help the most people in the world was to share the gospel with many but focus on investing his life into just a few people (like a spiritual family) and then give them instructions to do the same with a few others (Matthew 28:20).

## **God’s solution for a broken world**

Because people in the world are looking for hope and answers in this very broken world full of pain and suffering, various solutions have been promoted, such as different governments, more education, or more money. But often these solutions do not deal with the deepest root problem, which is the problem of sin in every person. Sin has broken people’s relationship with God and it has also destroyed human relationships. Sin issues are the root cause of all the other problems in the world. Jesus Christ came to provide forgiveness for all sin (which no one else can do), and thus open the door for a restored relationship with God and also provide a foundation for loving relationships with people. When this deepest root cause is dealt with, there is a stronger foundation for providing other aspects of help to the hurting world of people.

This is why our Creator and Savior formed his church! Even though the church is full of weak people who are also struggling with many of the same problems as everyone else, the church is God's vehicle to help people find the answer to their root problem of sin.

- For those who are concerned about all the corruption and injustice in the world and who want to make a change, education and money will not go very far until the issues of sin and selfishness are dealt with.
- For those who are concerned about the masses of people being slaughtered through war and terrorism, and who want to make effective change, military might and force will not make much difference until the hearts of people are changed.
- For those who are looking for the answers to sickness, diseases, and cancers that are destroying so many, it is good for them to remember that these are only surface problems in light of the problems in each person's heart.
- For those who are concerned about the masses living in abject poverty and dying of hunger around the world, education and money will not remove the root cause of sin which has caused all kinds of greed and abuse.
- For those who are concerned about all the religious confusion and fighting because of so many different beliefs, it is important for them to recognize that Jesus is the only One who came to provide forgiveness of sin. All other religions focus on different ways that people should try to deal with their sin, without accepting what their Creator has provided for forgiveness.

A spiritual family built around the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ is the environment every person needs in order to learn how to apply this kind of love and forgiveness to every aspect of their lives. There is no world government and there is no powerful business that can provide the help that Jesus Christ can, and he has chosen to work through his church. And at the end of the world, the Bible says that no government or business will remain except the church (Revelation 20:11-15).

When children grow up in a loving, healthy family, they benefit in many ways. In a similar way, every new Christian will benefit from growing up in a loving, healthy spiritual family. And because everyone needs a spiritual family, it is not a matter of gifting to become the parent of a spiritual family, similar to the way it is not a matter of gifting to become a father or mother of a physical family. God's plan is for most people to become physical parents and have children, helping them grow and learn to become parents themselves. Similarly, God's plan is for his children to care for young spiritual children and help them grow to reproduce more spiritual children and also help them grow.

Following is a basic outline for this kind of spiritual family as found in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, as recorded in the New Testament. There are three aspects:

- Design and Purpose of the Church
- Function of the Church

Bible passages on each of these three aspects are given in detail on the following pages.

# Design and Purpose of the Church

## The leader, the head of the church

- Jesus Christ is the head of his body, the leader of his church – Ephesians 1:22-23
- Jesus Christ lives in every person who believes in him by his Spirit – Ephesians 1:13-14
- Each believer is a member of Christ's spiritual body. – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

## The members of the church

The members of Jesus Christ's church are like a family.

- Ephesians 2:19, 1 Timothy 3:15 – we are members of God's household!
- John 20:17 – we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ!
- Hebrews 2:11-13 – Jesus is not ashamed for us to be part of his family!

The members of Jesus Christ's church are like a body.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

- All believers in Christ make up the body of Christ. The body of Christ is also called the church (1 Cor. 12:27-28).
- Like the body, each member has gifts and abilities for serving the others.

The members of Jesus Christ's church are like a building.

1 Peter 2:4-10

- All believers are like stones that make up a building.
- Jesus Christ is the corner stone – the essential part of a foundation.

The members of Jesus Christ's church are like a bride.

2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:6-10

- All believers in Christ make up the bride of Christ. This is sometimes called the "church" and includes all believers everywhere for all time.
- Each local group of believers in Christ is also called a church (1 Corinthians 1:2).

## Close relationship with the loving Creator and Lord of the universe

The fulfillment of the purpose of the church is seen at the end of the Bible in Revelation.

- The church is the bride of Christ, to be united with him forever – Rev. 19:6-9
- The members of his church are to live with him and be close to him forever – John 14:1-6, Rev. 22:1-6)
- All believers in Christ will be worshiping and serving him forever – Rev. 7:9-17

## God's design for human leadership in the church

Jesus Christ is the leader of his church, but similar to a family, he has designated people to provide human leadership until he returns again physically. Peter, one of the original people Jesus trained, describes this kind of leadership in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

- Shepherds (pastors), elders, and overseers are synonymous terms for those who care for churches. They are different words for the same person. 1 Peter 5:1-4
- Church leaders are to be examples to the church. 1 Peter 5:1-4
- Church leaders are servants of the church. Mark 10:42-44

- Church leaders are to feed the church. John 21:15-17
- Church leaders are to protect the church. Acts 20:28
- Church leaders train and equip the church members. Ephesians 4:11-16

## **Help each other**

Because God loves each of us so much, he wants us to always live with him, both now and forever. “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:10-11) Encouraging one another and building each other up is a major purpose God has for his people.

Also, the members of a church are designed to help each other accomplish God’s purposes, similar to the way that members of our physical bodies (ear, toe, hand, etc.) are designed to help each other and to work together to accomplish the purposes of the head. We are all different, but all of us need each other.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-30
- Ephesians 4:11-16

## **Designed to be weak and needy**

Naturally, we do not like to be weak and needy. But God designed us to always need him (John 15:1-5). God’s greatness is also more apparent in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). The church is designed to function as a group of weak and needy individuals.

God has designed us with many limitations so that we need the help of other people continually.

- How much does your foot need your hand, or your ears? And vice versa. This is how much we need each other (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Like physical body parts, members of Christ’s body are designed with different abilities, gifts, and personalities. When these members work together in close unity, everyone benefits (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- What happens when members of Christ’s body don’t encourage and build each other up? (Hebrews 3:12-13)

## **Fulfill Christ’s desire in the world**

The church is Christ’s body for the purpose of fulfilling his purpose in the world. His desire is for:

- All people in the world to have opportunity to be rescued from sin – John 3:16-17
- All rescued people (Christians) to become mature in life with Christ – Ephesians 4:11-16
- All nations (people groups) in the world to have trained disciples and spiritual families – Matthew 28:18-20

## **Light to the world**

- When Jesus was here physically, he was the representation of God to the world (Hebrews 1:1-4).
- Now the church is the representation of God to the world. Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:4), and then he said that his children (the church) are also the light of the world (Matthew 5:14, Philippians 2:15-16).

## Reproduce spiritual children and establish spiritual families

When Jesus was here, his desire was for people to be “born again” into his family (John 3). He taught his disciples to bring people into spiritual birth. Jesus Christ was the model of a spiritual parent for us. He trained his disciples in a similar way that effective parents raise and train their children. He focused on a few, similar to a parent investing in a few children to the best of their ability.

Since a church is a spiritual family, the leaders of churches would do well to follow Jesus’ model for the reproduction of spiritual children and the training of spiritual children. Keeping Jesus’ example in mind, the following chart shows the similarities between a spiritual family (church) based on Jesus’ example and a healthy physical family.

Physical Family	Spiritual Family
Normal to have new children	Normal to have new spiritual children
Babies need help to grow	New Christians (children) need help to grow
Adult parents are to help their children by providing food, care, and protection	Older Christians are to help the younger ones by providing spiritual food, care, and protection
Parents are to take responsibility to help their children in every way	Older Christians take responsibility to help younger ones in all aspects of life
Personal attention and understanding each child is the best way to help children	Personal relationship and understanding of a person is the best way to help people
Lectures and nice programs are good, but inadequate	Lectures and nice programs are good, but inadequate
Children are trained to think it will be normal for them to start a new family	Young Christians are trained to think it will be normal for them to help start a new spiritual family

## A spiritual family is God’s best design for the growth of disciples

Jesus Christ was the most effective teacher and trainer who has ever lived. His whole-hearted desire was to help every person in the whole world. So what plan did Jesus follow to help the most people in the most effective way (remember he was the Creator who knows how to do everything in the best way)? The answer is that he chose a few disciples and then spent most of his time for the rest of his life focusing on these twelve disciples like they were his children. He did not start a large organization or a large school, but his most effective plan to help the most people in the world was to focus most of his time and effort on helping a few people who were committed to grow with him like children in a family.

Many people think a large organization is more powerful and effective than a small family. Church leaders often would like 100 people to be in their church, or even more than that! But that’s not how the Creator of the world did it when he lived here. Church leaders often think they will have a more powerful influence to help the world if they can have a large church that can work like a large organization. But that’s not how the Creator of the world thought when he lived here.

And then when the Creator, Jesus Christ, sacrificed his life, came back to life, and returned to heaven, he gave instructions to the few disciples he had trained. He told them, "Go and make disciples of all nations,... teaching them to observe (practice) all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Then what did they go and do? Did they start an organization? A school? No. Acts 2 tells the story of how they told the people who Jesus was and what he did for them. And then in Acts 2:42-47 a description is given about what the first disciples did with the new Christians. They helped them do what Jesus had trained them to do. They shared their lives together every day like a family.

Later Paul was one of the primary church leaders. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other person. He described himself as a mother and a father to the Christians he helped (1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 1:7-12, 2 Corinthians 12:14-15). He was not the leader of an organization. In fact, Paul wrote in one of his letters, "In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:15-16).

When he wrote the letter to the Romans, it's interesting that Paul gave greetings to many different Christians who met in different homes in the city of Rome. (Romans 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15) They did not all meet together in one large church or one organization, but they were connected together in different households. Paul's description looks like many spiritual families. They formed many churches that looked more like families than like organizations.

Following is a chart that shows the difference between a family and an organization.

<b>Family</b>	<b>Organization</b>
A family starts because of a loving marriage, and then children are born because of a desire to show love	Organizations start for many other reasons besides a desire to show love.
Parents take responsibility for care, provision, growth, and training of each child	Leaders are concerned about the function of the organization and often don't have personal relationships with the people
Parents have a loving relationship with each child	Leaders of the organization are there because their ability to manage the organization, not because of a love for each person
Parents gain more relationships when they have children and those children grow to become parents and have more children	Leaders accomplish more work when the organization becomes larger
Parents train and prepare children to become parents and have their own children and families	Leaders usually do not train the members to start new organizations
Parents are the models and examples for what the children can do when they grow up	Leaders do not expect the members to do the same thing they are doing

Parents want the children to grow up, get married, and begin their own families	Leaders want the organization to become bigger. They do not want people to start new organizations that would give competition to the first organization
Parents are more concerned about relationships with the children than trying to control the children	Leaders are more concerned about managing the organization than relationships with the members
Results of a strong family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong relationships with parents and with their brothers and sisters</li> <li>• Children are strong in their character. They are kind, helpful to each other,</li> </ul>	Results of a strong organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The members accomplish a purpose</li> <li>• Members do not make much progress in their personal character</li> </ul>

This strategy of forming spiritual families does not look or feel powerful. But it is helpful for us to recognize who it was that designed this plan. And today, who are we to think that any different plan will be better than the plan of the Creator and Savior of the world?

### **The key to being a parent of a spiritual family**

The best way for a man to learn to be a parent of a physical family is to have a baby with his wife and take responsibility to raise the baby and train him. A man cannot learn very much about being a parent by only reading a book or by only attending classes. He needs to take responsibility for his own child. This is also true for someone who wants to train another disciple.

If a married couple has a baby and gives the baby to the grandparents to raise, they are not taking responsibility to care for the baby and train him. Even if the parents visit the baby once a week, they are not taking very much responsibility for the child.

The same is true for helping another person spiritually. God wants his children to take responsibility to help another person grow in every possible way. This is the key to being a spiritual parent of a spiritual family. When someone takes responsibility for the growth of a young Christian ***in every part of his life***, not only will the young Christian make better progress, but the spiritual parent will also grow more in his character (such as patience, perseverance, love, and dependence on God) and in his relationship with God.

These three Basic Training Manuals are excellent tools for helping another person grow spiritually.

- Help the person get to know God by using Book 1.
- Help the person make progress in the most important basics for growing as a Christian by using Book 2.
- Help the person learn the benefits of having a strong marriage, family, and church by using Book 3.

When you help another person grow in all these basics, you will not only benefit that person, but you will also help all those who have friendship with that person!

## **Uphold truth in the world**

1 Timothy 3:15 – The church is the pillar and support of truth for the world.

## **Be a Blessing to the World**

Jesus came to be a blessing to the world.

- In his sermon on the mountain, Jesus taught how people can be blessed (Mathew 5).
- Jesus taught that believing God and obedience to God's Word is the source of blessing (Luke 11:28, John 13:17, 20:29).
- Jesus said all who are in God's kingdom are blessed (Luke 14:15).
- Jesus blessed people by rescuing them from sin (Acts 3:26).
- Jesus was also a descendent of Abraham, helping fulfill God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to the world (Acts 3:25-26).
- All people in the world who believe in Jesus Christ are blessed (Romans 4:6-12, Galatians 3:8-9).
- All believers in Christ will be blessed at the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

The followers of Jesus Christ (the church) now bring the blessing of Christ to everyone in the world. (Matthew 28:18-20)

## Function of the Church

To fulfill the purposes of Jesus Christ in the world (as listed in “Design and Purpose of the Church”), each member of the church (spiritual family) needs two kinds of relationships. Jesus described these kinds of relationships in John 17 when he was praying to his Father about the future of his disciples and all who would believe in him.

1. Close, growing relationship with the Lord – to be united as one
2. Close, growing relationships with other believers in Christ – to be united as one

God has designed us to help each other with both kinds of relationships. To do this, he has given us a variety of instructions.

### **Help each other have a close relationship with Christ**

The first spiritual family (church) in Jerusalem, immediately after Jesus left, was a good example of helping each other continue a close relationship with Christ. They did this in the following ways (Acts 2:42-47):

- Devoted to God’s word (learning and applying it)
- Devoted to Christ’s family, sharing life with each other and meeting each other’s needs
- Devoted to breaking bread together, which meant remembering the last Passover meal with Jesus when he broke bread with them and said it represented his body (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The meaning of this term “breaking bread” can be more clearly seen after reading passages where it is used, Acts 2:42, 46, and 20:7. This is a simple form of worship done by using bread and grape juice to help us focus on Jesus’ sacrifice of himself as the Lamb of God. The sacrifice of his life for us is the only basis for our death penalty to be paid, which we deserve for our sin. Paul explains this also in 1 Corinthians 10:16.
- Devoted to talking to God about everything (prayer)
- Devoted to Christ’s desire to reach the lost

Because they were devoted to Jesus Christ, the believers in Acts 2:42 were devoted to things that helped them have a close, growing relationship with Christ.

### **Help each other in all aspects of life**

- Carry each other’s burdens – Galatians 6:1-2
- Confess sin to each other and pray for each other – James 5:16
- Bear with each other and forgive each other – Colossians 3:13
- Encourage each other daily – Hebrews 3:12-13
- Meet together regularly – Hebrews 10:24-25
- Teach, admonish, and sing to each other – Colossians 3:15-16
- Pray for each other – Ephesians 6:18
- Give to each other – Acts 2:45
- Help each other with physical needs – 1 John 3:17-18

## **Help each other in small discipleship groups**

Jesus set the best example for helping each other grow as his disciples. He organized a small group of men who spent a lot of time together and who knew each other well in every aspect of their lives. They did this over a long period of time, during which Jesus was able to help them apply God's truth to all aspects of their lives. Practical application of his example is explained in Book 2, "Basics of God's Training." This explanation is found in the introduction under the headings: ***The best method for learning to practice the basics***, and ***Guidelines for the small discipleship groups***.

## **Help each other reach a lost world with the love and truth of Christ**

After Jesus' resurrection, the most common instruction he gave whenever he talked with a group of his followers was asking them to tell other people about him –Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 22:46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:8. He clearly instructed his followers to reach every person in the world with his love and truth. This is an opportunity and a responsibility for everyone, not only the church leaders.

We can be confident that Jesus Christ modeled the most effective strategy for reaching the most people in the world with his love and truth. He was an excellent teacher and he could have traveled to cities all over the world teaching thousands of people, but instead he spent his whole time of ministry focused on the deep, thorough training of twelve of his disciples. Then, just before he left, Jesus asked them to teach others to do the same as he had taught them to do. He knew this was the most effective strategy to reach and help the most people in the world. Large organizations and churches are attractive, but their effectiveness will be limited if their primary strategy is not the multiplication of small spiritual families like Jesus did.

## **Pastors/shepherds know and care for the members**

God gives spiritual leaders the responsibility of caring for the people under their care (1 Peter 5:1-4). Jesus described the model shepherd in John 10:1-18. He is the primary example, and human shepherds are to follow his example as much as possible. The shepherd (church leader) is to know each of the sheep under his care and each of the sheep (church members) is to know their shepherd in a personal way. If this is not true in a spiritual family (church), the group is probably more like a business than a family.

## **Leaders to follow Jesus' style of leadership**

Many think a strong leader is someone who is able to tell others what to do and who is able to control others. This was not Jesus' style of leadership. In fact, Jesus said that leaders should *not* "lord it over" others (Mark 10:42-45). Jesus' example, and the teaching of the Bible, is that a strong leader is someone who builds love and unity among people. The disciples of Jesus were eager to establish who would control others and who would have authority, but Jesus repeatedly taught and reminded them that his way of leadership is different. He defined his leadership style as serving (Mark 10:42-45), which is applied in a variety of ways, as listed here:

- Jesus' style of leadership is to invest time, energy, and resources for the benefit of others, especially for those in his care. (John 10:7-18, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
- Jesus' style of leadership is to work with people according to their desires, inviting them to follow him but never pushing them to do something they are not ready to do

(Matthew 4:19). This was the way that the Father in heaven related to Jesus. The Father never pushed his Son to do anything the Son was not willing to do. We see an example of this when Jesus declared that angels would come and rescue him from death if he asked his Father for it. (Matthew 26:53) Paul followed this example in his relationship with Philemon. He wrote, in Philemon 14, “I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.”

- Jesus’ style of leadership is to take the time and effort to come to a common understanding with the people under his care before making a decision that will affect them. We see how Jesus did this with his disciples at the last supper (Passover) in John 13:1-17. He took on the role of a servant and began washing the feet of the disciples. When Peter didn’t want Jesus to wash his feet, Jesus could have said, “Peter, you need to do whatever I want you to do.” But instead, Jesus explained what would happen if Peter didn’t want Jesus to wash his feet. Then, when Peter understood, he gladly agreed for Jesus to wash his feet. After Jesus washed everyone’s feet (including the feet of Judas Iscariot), Jesus explained more about why he did what he did (John 13:12-17). Jesus was a strong leader because he helped his followers cooperate with him according to their conviction and desire. This is how a leader builds strong unity. If unity with a leader is based on forced support, it is only superficial and not from the heart. Building unity based on voluntary desire often takes more time, since the leaders will need to listen and communicate to build a common understanding and agreement. This is important for church leaders working together in unison as a plurality, and it is also important for church leaders working with all those under their leadership.

NOTE: Some leadership positions entail responsibility for dealing with crime or rebellion. These types of roles require law enforcement and discipline. This can be parents, at times, or civil servants who enforce civil laws, such as police. These are also ministers of God (Romans 13:1-5), but they need to serve in humble, caring ways.

## **Leadership preferences**

Whenever leadership of the church in the New Testament is mentioned, two practices are present. These are –

- Plurality of leaders (elders) in a church – Acts 20:17, Hebrews 13:17, Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:14, and other passages.
- Men as leaders – Jesus chose men to train as leaders (Mark 3:13-19), and Paul said men should be leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9).

Both of these practices are preferences and not issues of right or wrong. They are modeled but not commanded.

The practice of men having the responsibility for leadership is consistent with the husband’s role as leader in marriage and family. This principle is explained more in this manual under the heading, “Husbands are designed to be the responsible leaders”, which is in the section, “Design and Purpose of the Family”. This principle does not mean that men are more important than women. They have different roles because of differences in design. This is seen in the beginning of the Bible where God created both the man and woman in his image but gave them different roles. A church is healthier if men are taking loving responsibility to be the leaders,

just as a family is healthier when a father is taking loving responsibility to lead, along with help and input from his wife.

Plurality of leadership in a church means that two or more leaders are working together as a team. They each have equal responsibility in the church, but that does not mean they all do the same things or that they all spend equal amounts of time serving the church. We see plurality in the New Testament by example and not by command, which means it's not wrong for a church to have one person making leadership decisions. Just as a family is usually stronger with two parents working together, so also in a church, it is usually better for two or more leaders working together than for a single leader making the decisions in a church. Plurality of leaders is beneficial in several ways:

- It is an excellent way to model love and unity.
- There is greater wisdom when the experience, knowledge, and gifting are combined from more than one person.
- It provides support and protection for leaders.  
It protects from bad decisions.
- It promotes humility.

Consensus in decision making is important for plurality of leadership. This is different than making decisions by a majority vote or the senior leader making the final decision. Discussion with humility is required. All the leaders coming to agreement (consensus) usually takes more time than other methods, but the results are well worth the time. Following are practical guidelines for coming to consensus when making decisions:

- Pray together.
- Listen closely to everyone's opinions, asking questions to understand their underlying reasons.
- Validate the other person. Show appreciation and affirmation.
- Restate their thinking on issues and why their point of view is important to them.
- Give time for processing. Quick decisions might neglect some of the issues.
- Look for solutions that accommodate and include each person's view point and concern.
- Defer or compromise with each other whenever possible.

NOTE: These same principles are also important for husbands and wives making decisions. Actually they are important for every situation where people need to work together.

## **Qualifications for church leaders**

No person is ever perfect, but those who are more mature and who are being used by God to help others are the ones recognized to be older or "elder" than the others. Two places give a list of qualifications for these elders (also called pastors, overseers, bishops).

- 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:6-9
  - models of character
  - strong walk with God
  - strong marriage and family
  - able to teach (groups or individuals)
  - tested in life with God
  - men
- 1 Peter 5:1-4 – examples of godliness to others

**Deacons** (another word for “servant”) – This term is rarely used in the New Testament (Acts 6 gives an example of this role and 1 Timothy 3 gives qualifications). Because of this, we know having deacons is not a strong requirement for a church, but it can be a helpful option sometimes. When there is a long term task to be done in the church, someone (man or woman) can be designated to be the one to take leadership to fulfill that task. (Note – Romans 16:1 talks of a deaconess (woman) in the church.)

**Note on apostles:** Because the basic requirements of a New Testament apostle included having been with Jesus and having seen him in his resurrected body (Acts 1:21-25, 1 Corinthians 15:7-9), no one today can be recognized as an apostle in the same way. Today’s church leaders can certainly follow the example of the *work* of the apostles, but no one today is qualified to be designated as an apostle according to the New Testament definition of the word apostle.

### **Members support the pastors/shepherds**

Before Jesus came, the spiritual leaders of Israel were the Levites. In Numbers 18:8-32 we read that God’s plan was for the rest of Israel to provide for the material needs of the Levites, so they could have adequate time to provide spiritual ministry for everyone.

When Jesus was here, he never demanded anyone to provide for his needs. Yet many of his followers voluntarily did so. Jesus did give instructions for us people to invest in treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20) and not in treasures on earth.

After the church was established in the New Testament, Paul explained that financial support of the leaders enables them to serve more freely (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Paul also explained that spiritual leaders of the church have the right to receive financial support from those they are ministering to (1 Corinthians 9:3-15). However, Paul did not demand people’s support, but he taught that it was a good thing for church members to do voluntarily.

Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (material needs) will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33) A practical way to put God first in your life is to follow the same principle God taught the people of Israel. This is giving a tenth of your income to God as soon as you receive it, and then trusting him to meet your needs with the rest of your income. As taught to the people of Israel, the first tenth of their income (tithe) was given to God for the support of their spiritual leaders (Numbers 18:8-32).

The principle of giving a tithe to God is a very practical way of expressing our worship of God, our thankfulness to him, and our dependence on him. In fact, the more we feel we are unable to give a tithe, the greater the opportunity to show our dependence on God instead of trusting in our own ability to control our lives (Proverbs 3:5-6). When the Israelites did this, God said he would bless them (Malachi 3:10-11), and the same principle is true for us today. This does not mean God’s blessing will always be financial or physical. God loves to bless people in many kinds of ways.

## **Churches help each other**

As already explained in the “Design and Purpose of the Church,” God has designed his people to need each other to accomplish almost every purpose in life. We not only need each other at a personal level, but also at the level of churches being united together.

Jesus was convinced that the unity of his followers was essential for his purpose of showing the world who he is (John 17:11, 20-23). There are several aspects to this unity:

1. Unity of individuals in a local church
2. Unity of churches in a city
3. Unity of churches nationally
4. Unity of churches internationally

This kind of unity is exemplified in the New Testament.

- In Acts 15, church leaders from different churches worked together in decision making.
- Romans 16 gives a picture of many churches having relationship together (16:4, 5, 16).
- In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, we see churches from other countries who gave financially to help the church in Jerusalem.

Members of Christ’s body need each other, as clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30. Most pastors emphasize this principle to the members of their local church, but many fail to recognize that this principle applies equally to their church needing other churches.

The more that pastors have the same vision as Christ – to see disciples made in their whole city and in the whole world, the more they will see how much they need other churches.

- The more that pastors want to influence their whole city for Christ, the more they will work toward unity with other churches in their city.
- The more that pastors want to influence the whole world for Christ, the more they will work toward unity with other churches throughout the world.

## **Standards of belief and practice**

Our beliefs are the foundation for what we do and how we live. God’s Word is the foundation and his church is the pillar and support of truth in the world (1 Timothy 3:15). Because of this, the beliefs and practices of a church are extremely important. Following is a summary of the beliefs and practices for a healthy church based on God’s Word.

### Basic beliefs (statement of faith)\*

- **The Scripture** – The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is unique in that every portion and every word was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was without error in the original manuscripts, and has been passed down to us with great accuracy. It is the supreme and final authority for faith and life in this age.
- **God** – There is but one God, everywhere present; infinite in power and knowledge; perfect in justice, goodness, and love; Creator of the universe; eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

- **Man** – God created the first man and woman in his own image and appointed them to rule and care for the earth. They lived in perfect relationship with God and each other. God instituted marriage, which is the life-long union of one man and one woman and the foundation for bearing and raising children in a family.
- **The Fall** – The first man and woman doubted God's goodness and rebelled against him. In judgment, God brought death into the world and creation fell from its state of perfection. Since then, all human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life and are under the wrath of God because of their sin.
- **Jesus Christ** – God the Father, by his own choice, for his own glory, and out of love for sinful men and women, sent his Son, Jesus, the Christ, into the world to reconcile sinners to himself. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus satisfying God's justice and declaring righteous all those who trust in him alone.
- **The Resurrection** – Three days after his crucifixion, God raised Jesus from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which he lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the only mediator between God and man, makes intercession for his own.
- **Salvation** – Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness, or religious observances, but by the undeserved favor of God alone which was given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God forgives and accepts all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.
- **The Holy Spirit** – The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ, to convict men and women of their sins, and to impart new life to all who place their faith in Christ. He permanently indwells believers from the moment of spiritual birth, guides them into truth, and empowers them to live a life pleasing to God.
- **Assurance** – All who are born again of the Spirit can, through the sure promises of God, be fully assured that God will complete the work he has begun in them. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is God's deposit, guaranteeing their eternal inheritance. Good works are not the basis for acceptance by God, but as believers grow in doing good, they grow in their assurance that they are truly children of God and that they will be with the Lord when they die.
- **Jesus' Future Coming** – The Lord Jesus Christ will physically return to earth to reign in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment. The righteous will receive immortal bodies and be welcomed into eternal fellowship with God in a world where all things will be made new.
- **Baptism and the Lord's Supper** – Jesus commanded that those who believe in him are to be baptized in water as a declaration of faith and a symbol of new birth in Christ. He also instructed his followers to remember him by partaking in the Lord's Supper, which reminds us of his death, resurrection, and future coming.
- **The Church** – All true believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor—people of all ages and races—make up the Church worldwide as God's family. They should gather together in local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship, and teaching, in

order to become conformed to the image of Christ and to become equipped to carry out the “Great Commission” that Christ gave his followers.

[\*The above Statement of Faith is from the Great Commission Churches Archives, <https://www.gccweb.org/statement-of-faith>, accessed 4/4/2024]

### Values and practices

The values and practices of a healthy church are summarized in the three manuals of the Basics (Books 1, 2, and 3). In addition, a few other guidelines from Scripture can also make a great difference in the health of a local church. These are listed here.

- **How God Speaks** – God speaks through his Spirit, and his Spirit speaks through God’s written word. His written word is complete, with no need for more. The Holy Spirit helps the members of Christ’s body to understand the written word. Experiences such as dreams, revelations, and events are all subject to the interpretation of the members of Christ’s body as they trust God’s Spirit to help them interpret all experiences of life according to God’s written truth.
- **The Gift of Languages** – The original gift of languages (sometimes called “tongues”) that we read about in Acts 2:5-12, happened in Jerusalem when Jews from many other countries were visiting Jerusalem. God gave the apostles the ability to tell these visitors about Jesus Christ in languages the apostles had not learned. In amazement, the listeners heard the apostles speaking in their own languages! This ability was given by the Holy Spirit. Later in the New Testament, Paul addresses a misuse of this gift in the Corinthian church, when people were imitating this gift by speaking and praying in ways that no one understood – neither the speaker nor those who heard the speaker (1 Corinthians 14:1-28). Paul said he spoke in languages (tongues) more than they did (he knew Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew), but he said he would rather speak five words that people could understand than 10,000 that people could not understand (1 Corinthians 14:19). Today, if a person makes sounds that are not a language that is understood by someone who hears him, it is a practice that is not found in the Bible. But if someone who has never learned Chinese suddenly speaks perfect Chinese, and at least one person who hears him knows Chinese, this is the same kind of ability given by the Holy Spirit that we read about in Acts 2:5-12. The listener who speaks Chinese can then interpret the Chinese to the other listeners. Anything different than this is unbiblical. We also read in 1 Corinthians 14:13-19 that is unprofitable for someone to speak or pray in a way which they themselves do not understand what they are saying. If unbiblical practices are allowed in a church, the result will eventually be confusion.
- **Healing** – It is true that God can heal today, but a believer should not assume that God will heal him before he receives his new body after the Lord returns. God is always able to heal, and he heals people in many ways. But if someone says that God will always heal when a Christian truly believes, that is a false teaching and harmful. It is true that God will heal every person when he gives every believer a new body after his return, but it is false to say that God will always immediately heal if we pray with faith. The Father did not answer Jesus’ request to take away suffering (Luke 22:42) and God did not answer Paul’s prayer to take away the thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Paul’s prayers did not result in healing for Trophimus in 2 Timothy 4:20. The false teaching that God always heals when we pray in true faith has caused many Christians to fear they are not true believers because God has not answered their prayers. Job’s friends (in the

book of Job in the Bible) declared that Job was suffering physically because he had hidden sin in his life. But later in the book of Job, God said his friends were making false accusations (Job 42:7-8). God used suffering in Job's life for a good purpose, and many times God uses suffering in the lives of his children today for good purposes (Hebrews 12:4-11).

## Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent

Many Christians, including pastors, become busy with all kinds of church activities. Some people are trained to be leaders of ministries such as music, youth activities, and service projects. But what is often missing in churches is people who will help others grow spiritually. Following are some practical steps to begin training people to become leaders who help others grow spiritually.

### Qualifications necessary

- Born again child of God
- Ability to read
- Desire to help others
- One hour made available in the weekly schedule to meet with people

### Steps

If you are a pastor, remember that it is always important for you to be praying for the people you want to help grow. Follow the Apostle Paul's example in how he prayed for people.

As you pray for people, observe those in your church and see who has a desire to follow the Lord. Ask them if they would like to learn how to help others grow in their life with God. If they agree, then help them follow these steps, one by one.

If you are a young Christian reading about this practical training, you can also follow these steps. You also need to be asking God for his help in every way so he can use you to help other people know God and grow with him.

Step 1. **Prepare** to lead a simple Bible study by writing down these five Bible study questions and keep them in your Bible. You can use them even if you have not read much of the Bible and even without preparing ahead of time (although preparation can help). Step 5 describes how you will use them.

- a. What does this passage say about God?
- b. Is there an example to follow?
- c. Is there a command to obey?
- d. Is there a promise to claim?
- e. Is there a warning to be careful about?

Step 2. **Pray** and ask God to help you find one other person who would like to read and discuss the Bible with you.

Step 3. **Ask your friends** (Christian or non-Christian) if they would like to read and discuss the Bible with you.

Step 4. When you find one person who is interested in reading and discussing the Bible with you, work out a time when both of you can meet together for 20 minutes or more.

Step 5. When you meet together with your friend, follow these guidelines:

- a. Choose any part of the Bible to read.
- b. Pray aloud to ask God to help you understand what you read.
- c. Read a section out loud together. (It could be half a chapter or a whole chapter.)
- d. Look for answers to any of the five questions, beginning with the first one about God.
- e. Pray and ask God to help you remember what you learned (preferably take turns praying aloud).

Step 6. Ask your friend if they would like to meet with you again and continue reading and discussing the next section of the Bible.

Step 7. If your friend wants to meet again, encourage them to pray and ask God to help them find another friend who would like to join the two of you for reading and discussion.

Step 8. Continue meeting together with your friends for reading and discussion. If there are only two of you, that is good. If there are more, that is good also. When you have a group of six or more, divide them into two groups for the reading and discussion. When you first come together, you will begin as a large group and ask for God's help. Then divide into smaller groups for reading and discussion (This allows for more personal interaction.). After you finish the reading and discussion you can join back together as a large group.

Step 9. When the group is comfortable with each other, tell them that the next step is to have a time of prayer for each other's needs at the end of your meeting. You can ask the members of the group if any of them has something the group can pray for them about. As the leader, you can lead in prayer about each item, but it is good to encourage others to participate in the prayer time also. It would be good to try to do this each time the group meets together.

Step 10. As you get to know the members of the group you can ask them privately about their spiritual growth. Do they have assurance of salvation? Have they been baptized? Do they have something they would like God to help them with? Is there some part of their life in which they would like to become stronger? If someone shows a desire to grow with the Lord, ask them if they would also like to meet together at a different time. Then spend as much time together with them as they would like. You now have the opportunity to be a spiritual parent for them. Like a father or mother who sacrifices their time, energy, and money for their child every day, you can invest your time, energy, and money to increase your friendship with this young Christian and to encourage and help them in every part of their life. If you are not sure how to help them, you can ask another Christian leader, such as your pastor, for advice.

Step 11. As the group grows, it would be good to ask the Lord to provide a co-leader who can work with you and help make decisions for what is helpful for the group or for individual needs in the group. Until the Lord provides a co-leader it is important for the group leader to frequently talk things over with his pastor. It would be good not to make decisions about the group until you are in agreement with your pastor or with a co-leader.

Step 12. If the group continues to be comfortable with each other, ask them if they would like to sing one or two songs of worship to God. The singing can be done before the Bible reading or after the last prayer time – whatever the group prefers.

Step 13. Continue meeting with the group regularly. Another thing you can do with the group is to share communion (also called the Lord's supper or breaking of bread) together. This can be done very simply with one piece of bread and a glass of grape juice made from grape-flavored drink powder in a package or whatever is available. Read a short passage together that helps you remember the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The bread can be passed around first and everyone breaks off a piece. Then pass the juice around and each person can dip their piece of bread in the juice before eating it. Encourage people to say short prayers of thanks to the Lord for his sacrifice. Singing one or two songs after prayer can help with the attitude of worship. A time of communion like this can be done as frequently as the group wants. A good practice is at least once a month, since Jesus' sacrifice for all our sin is the foundation of our relationship with God and it's something we need to remember clearly in our daily battle with temptation in a world that's full of sin.

Step 14. As the leader prays and thinks about the needs of the group there will be times when he will see a need to teach certain truths from the Bible. He should do so in place of the normal Bible study and discussion. And because discussion is often helpful, it can also be done after a message is given.

Step 15. When the above things are being regularly practiced, God has given grace for another part of his eternal family to be established! This is his church and he will continue to help you care for the dear brothers and sisters that belong to him. One more area you can help this new spiritual family practice is to teach them what the Bible says about making the Lord first in their personal finances. With the help of your pastor you can prepare a Bible study on the subject of giving. This will help the members grow in their relationship with God, and financial help might be provided for the leaders and the ministry of this new church. Humility and dependence on God must be practiced so pressure and expectations will not be applied to the members of the group.

When a brother completes all these steps and he continues to do the same things with the group, he will be doing the basic work of a pastor! As he continues to help people know the Bible and grow with God, he will become more mature and effective as a minister of God. Sisters can take these steps to help others grow spiritually, but it would be best for her not to have the responsibility of being a pastor of a church, as we see in Scripture.

## **Certificate of Recognition**

When God has given grace for a person to establish another spiritual family as described here, his pastor and another qualified trainer can give their recognition by signing a certificate for

becoming a *Spiritual Parent*. If desired, the certificate can also be given before a person accomplishes all these steps. For example, if a church member helps two or more people grow spiritually for a period of time, such as one year, it would be good to recognize their faithfulness by giving them the certificate of a *Spiritual Parent*.

## Practical Steps for Becoming a Mature Spiritual Leader

After you have helped someone begin growing in their life with God, you can continue helping them to become a mature spiritual leader. This is God's desire for each one of his children. We see this in Jesus' instructions to his first followers when he said, "Teach all future disciples to do all that I have taught you to do" (paraphrased from Matthew 28:20). Paul later wrote in Ephesians 4:12-13 that the purpose of the church is to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we *all* reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become *mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness in Christ." Paul specifically told Timothy to entrust his teaching to reliable men who will also be able to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Following are practical steps you can take to become a mature follower of Christ or steps you can take to help another person become a mature follower.

**NOTE:** These steps do not have to be accomplished in the order given. You can adjust them according to the need and desire of the person. Or you can do part of one step while you are also working on a different step.

Step 1. Help the person follow the practical steps listed in the section before this, titled, "Practical Steps to Become a Spiritual Parent." When the person has established a group like this, help them be faithful to continue it. It's good for spiritual parents to continue helping their spiritual children.

Step 2. Help the person work through Book 1, "Basics about God." Discuss each subject with them and help them record their observations in the manual as described in the instructions at the beginning of the manual. It is a workbook that will help them grow in their understanding of God and the whole Bible, which will provide a strong foundation for their life-long relationship with him. The manual is a tool they can use for the rest of their life.

Step 3. Help the person through Book 2, "Basics of God's Training." This could take many months and even years to complete. The important thing is to help the person practice the principles taught in each of the 15 Basics so that each one becomes part of their normal lifestyle. Every person's life continues to change in many ways, so there will always be new ways to apply each of these principles. That is why these are the essential "Basics" for the rest of our lives! There is a summary page near the end of the manual titled, "Characteristics of a Christ-follower who is practicing the Basics". This will help give an idea for how many of these

principles should be applied to normal life. (Note: Do not merely focus on this page, but help the person understand and apply the Bible passages that explain each of the 15 Basics.)

Step 4. Help the person understand and apply the Biblical principles of Marriage and Family as described in this manual, Book 3, “The Basics of Family.” This manual is also a tool to be used for a lifetime.

Step 5. Help the person understand and apply the Biblical principles of “The Basics of Spiritual Family (Church)” as described in this manual, Book 3.

Step 6. Help the person train one or two other people who are eager to know God and live their lives in obedience to him. As he/she helps another person through these steps to maturity, your trainee will grow even more in their own maturity, just as you are growing even more by helping them!

## **Maturity**

When a person has grown in their understanding of God and is practicing all the Basics, their life will have more joy, peace, and love (fruit of the Spirit) than ever before. Their life will be more fulfilling and other people will enjoy being around them because they are so loving and helpful. God’s Spirit will be helping them to be more like Jesus Christ than ever before!

Mature followers of Jesus Christ are the most important people to help a very broken world. These are the people who know how to cooperate with the Creator of the world and the Savior of the world. The world needs mature followers of Jesus Christ in every aspect of life – business, education, music, government, social justice, and all kinds of social services. Mature followers of Jesus Christ make the best fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, and leaders of all aspects of life. All this is true reality because we were created to enjoy every aspect of life in the fullest way possible with our Creator. Life without him is detrimental to everyone.

### **Practical Plan for Training Mature Disciples**

When God gives opportunity to help more than one person grow to maturity, it is best to help them learn together in a group context, rather than you always meeting with each one separately. This could be the time to form a Discipleship Training Group.

Another reason for the formation of a Discipleship Training Group is that the complexity of many relationships in a spiritual family can be very consuming. It’s easy to get caught up in the maintenance of the church and to lose focus on what Jesus emphasized when he was here. A major part of Jesus’ ministry was to train leaders who would in turn train other leaders (multiplication of disciples). To do this, Jesus formed a group of twelve to learn together the principles of discipleship. When he left, he instructed them to do the same thing he had trained them to do (Matthew 28:18-20).

Since you and I are not the same quality of trainers that Jesus was, it is better to start with a smaller group. This group can be called a “Discipleship Training Group.” Depending on the size of the church, there will eventually be several Discipleship Training Groups.

# Discipleship Training Groups

## PURPOSES of the Discipleship Training Group

- Help each other make progress in relationship with God
- Help each other make progress in relationships with physical family and spiritual family
- Help each other make progress in reaching non-Christians and training disciples

## DESIGN of the Discipleship Training Group

- Three to six people (four is the ideal number) so that every member will be able to share what they are doing with each of the three purposes for the group
- Preferably all men or all women, to allow more freedom for personal sharing
- Meet at a different time from when the church fellowship meets.
- Eventually some of the members of the group will want to form a new Discipleship Training Group. Similar to children growing up and starting their own families, disciples will mature, become spiritual parents, and start their own spiritual families. Multiplication of spiritual parents is the goal Jesus gave, and which we pray about and work toward.

## FUNCTION of the Discipleship Training Group

- The DT (Discipleship Training) Group will decide how frequently they will meet. Depending on the factors in their lives, their frequency of meeting might be anywhere from weekly to monthly.
- At each meeting, every member of the group will share what is happening in each area listed under the Purpose of a DT Group. Ideally it is good for each person to share something encouraging and something challenging that is happening in their lives in each area of purpose.
- Advice, ideas, instruction, and strategizing will take place during the time together. God's Word needs to always be the foundation for learning and practice. Those with experience and maturity will share lessons they've learned. As suggested previously, the three training manuals, Basics about God, Basics of God's Training, and Basics of God's Family are helpful tools for training disciples.
- Follow up from past plans, hopes, and commitments will be discussed. The purpose is not to condemn for failure, but to encourage and build up.
- Prayer for each other is always important.

# Recognition and Certificates

When a person also completes the requirements for each of the following, they will be given a certificate:

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent

Women who complete the following requirements can be recognized as a ***Godly Woman Trainer***, and will also receive a certificate.

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent through Step 10 (at the end of Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family)
6. Approval from the leaders of her church, her husband (if married), and the members of her church to be a trainer of women

Men who complete the following requirements can be recognized as a ***Commissioned Minister of God***.

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent and continues to lead a group that is growing in their life with Christ (at the end of Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family)
  - He has also baptized someone.
  - He has also led a time of communion (Lord’s supper or breaking of bread).
6. Approval from the leaders of his church, his wife (if married), and the members of his church to be a pastor
7. Approval from the pastors who know him well that he meets the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1

Men who meet all these requirements will be recognized as a ***Commissioned Minister of God*** and will be given a certificate stating this recognition.

