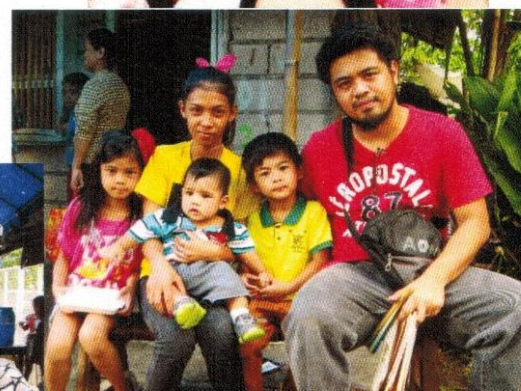




Book 3

Basics of God's Plan for Relationships



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Book 3: Basics of God’s Plan for Relationships

A Tool for Using the Bible to Discover God’s Plan

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Guidelines for Using The Basic Training Manuals

Tools for Using the Bible to Grow with God

There is no greater joy or fulfillment in life than living in a personal relationship with our Creator, who understands everything, has all power, and loves us more than we can imagine. Jesus Christ, our Creator who became a human, said that he came to give us life to the fullest. (John 1:1-5 and John 10:10) During the short time Jesus lived here, he trained a group of followers to know God and to experience life to the fullest by living in cooperation with him. The *Basic Training Manuals* are tools to help make this possible.

Based on God's revelation to us

These *Basic Training Manuals* are based on the Bible, which is God's written revelation of himself. The Creator of this world, and of all galaxies in space, inspired the compilation of the Bible's writings, written by weak and limited people over a period of about two thousand years. **(To better understand this, read Appendix 2 in Book 1.)** In the Bible we learn the character, feelings, and thoughts of this amazing Creator. We also learn his guidelines for experiencing the fulfilling life that he created us for.

Created to love

God is love. (1 John 4:16) God not only created us to live, but also to love. Jesus said that the most important aspect of the whole Bible is love. (Matthew 22:37-40) First, we learn the extent of God's love for us (giving his own life to redeem us forever), and then we respond to that love by thanking him, loving him, and then loving people, all of whom are precious to him.

To love someone means both to know them and to experience them. This is God's desire for us in our life with him. He already knows every detail of our lives, and he wants us to know him so we can experience him more and more throughout our lives.

Christ's death and resurrection made it possible for his Spirit to live inside us because of his gift of forgiveness. (Ephesians 1:13-14) When we choose to respond to God's love, and we open ourselves for his Spirit to live in us, the door is open for us to experience oneness and intimacy with God, which means the potential to experience life to the fullest! When his Spirit comes into us, he also makes us new people. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He, by his Spirit, comes to live in us (Romans 8:9-11), and when he does, he gives us his purity, his heart, and his mind. A new identity!

When God's Spirit lives in us, we have all of God and are united with him forever. This becomes our new relationship with God, and we have opportunity to grow in that loving relationship with him as much as we want. We are already pure in Christ, but our growth allows us to mature into the life that God created us for. Our growth benefits us and also blesses the people around us—and brings glory and joy to God.

Growth in this loving relationship happens as we make choices that will help us grow in knowing God and experiencing him. The *Basic Training Manuals* are designed to help you to

both know him and experience him in every aspect of life. The following chart summarizes how this can happen in your life and how you can help others in a similar way.

CHART SUMMARY OF THE BASIC TRAINING MANUALS

Title	Purpose	Focus	Method
Book 1 – Basics about God	A tool to use the Bible to give understanding of who God is and who Jesus is, as the Son of God	WHO the teacher is—God! (Father/Jesus/Holy Spirit)	Looking for what the Bible says about God’s characteristics, salvation, and promises
Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training	A tool to use the Bible to learn and apply basic lessons that Jesus taught his disciples	WHAT the teacher (God) teaches	Looking for what the Bible says about 16 basic lessons that Jesus taught his disciples
Book 3 – Basics of God’s Plan for Relationships	A tool to use the Bible to understand the basic aspects of living life with him	HOW the teacher (God) has designed us to live life	Looking for what the Bible teaches about God’s plan for the basics of life in families and spiritual families (churches)

These manuals are tools to help you know God as described in the Bible and to know God’s instruction in the Bible for living life to the fullest. By tools, we mean things like a hammer, saw, or pliers. Tools are things we can use in many situations for the rest of our lives. For example, we will never graduate from using a saw to cut things, yet we *can* become more skillful at using it. In a similar way, the three *Basic Training Manuals* are tools you can use throughout your life to know God more fully in the Bible and to grow in life with him.

These *Basic Training Manuals* are tools to help you and others learn and practice the same things Jesus taught his disciples.

- He helped them understand God more fully – Book 1
- He helped them learn how to live the life that God has planned for our joy– Book 2
- He helped them learn God’s design for living life in relationship with others – Book 3

Jesus is the example for HOW to teach

It was no accident that Jesus focused his three years of public ministry on the personal training of twelve men. He knew his investment in those twelve men would make a greater difference in the world than establishing a large seminary that could train thousands of students or establishing a large synagogue (or church) where he could preach to thousands each week.

Jesus’ strategy was very similar to that of a father and mother who invest years of their lives to train a few children. We know that children who grow up in a healthy home—under the leadership of parents who provide love, encouragement, instruction, and training on a daily basis—are the ones who are best prepared for life. We also know that even the most effective parents cannot provide this kind of personal care and training to 100 or more children living in their home. Jesus invested his life into the lives of a few like a parent would. That is his model and example, and that is the best method and strategy for using these *Basic Training Manuals*.

Practical application

In the accounts of Jesus, we find 71 times that he had conversations with his personal disciples. Jesus asked questions 307 times, and people asked Jesus a question 185 times. In the recorded Gospels, Jesus used personal discussions more often than lectures to help his disciples and others learn. This is the primary way parents teach children, and this is the method for which the *Basic Training Manuals* were designed. They are designed to help people follow Jesus' example of training in the following ways:

- ***Spend time with disciples.*** Get to know them. Show compassion for what is happening in every part of their lives and learn what they are experiencing.
- ***Pray frequently for disciples.*** God is the most important teacher for every person. Prayer asks God to work effectively in people's lives. Jesus prayed for people and Paul prayed for people. Many of Paul's prayers are recorded in the New Testament. Learn to follow Jesus's example and Paul's example in praying for people.
- ***Help disciples focus on knowing God more completely.*** Help them understand more about God and what he is doing in every aspect of life. This is the purpose of Book 1.
- ***Help disciples know how to live by God's Word in daily life.*** God is always working every day and, in every circumstance, to help us know him and live life with him. Book 2 is a tool to help us know which parts of the Bible will be helpful in each circumstance we experience in life. As you become familiar with the content of Book 2, it will help you know which places in God's Word will be helpful for you and your friends. You don't need to go through the material in the same order that it is written. Book 2 is especially helpful for a disciple to make progress in character and habits for the rest of his life. You can pray and decide which things will be helpful for the disciple according to the experiences they are going through.
- ***Help disciples focus on relationships.*** God works through relationships, and families are his design for close, strong relationships. God has designed marriage, families, and churches for these close relationships, and jobs are an additional context for growth in relationships. Book 3 is a tool to understand God's design for families and churches so people can develop strong relationships with him and with each other.
- ***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."*** (Appendix 1)

Training for new Christians and for pastors

In summary, these manuals cover the basics that Jesus (and his disciples) taught all followers of Jesus Christ.

- The training manuals are good for helping a new Christian and for training mature Christians.
- The manuals can help people become strong parents and strong leaders.

They have all the basics for someone to become a pastor, and they can help pastors become more effective.

Instructions for Using Book 3

Book 3 helps people discover God's plan for physical families (marriage, children and parents) and his plan for spiritual families (church). This manual covers the design, purpose, and function of physical families and of spiritual families. Living out God's design for physical and spiritual relationships requires practicing all sixteen of the basics in Book 2. Moreover, the main motivation for succeeding in those sixteen basics will come as you grow in your understanding of who God is, which is the purpose of Book 1!

Jesus developed an environment of relationships to help his followers grow, which is also his plan for our growth now. Relationships are a key aspect of God's design for growth and maturity. This is why our marriages, families and spiritual families (churches) are so important. Relationships are designed to promote our growth in life, providing support for the many lessons we learn and the battles we face. God has designed us for loving relationships with himself and with each other.

Family and church are primary environments that God has designed for the closest relationships. The most ideal environment for every person is to have both a healthy physical family and a healthy spiritual family. Though many people don't have the opportunity to be in both, everyone can still trust God to meet their needs in one way or another.

Throughout life we also develop very important relationships in many other places such as at work, at school, and in the community. Plus, we must learn to relate well to authorities in our lives, such as government officials. In all these various relationships, God wants to teach us lessons of humility, cooperation, and love to help us grow into maturity in Christ.

This manual, "Book 3 – Basics of God's Plan for Relationships," focuses on how to promote good relationships in the family and at church. These are primary places where you will personally have opportunity to develop good structures and initiatives in relationships. Book 3 explores God's plan for healthy physical families and spiritual families (churches) to help us experience the blessings of spiritual maturity and secure, loving attachments.

References in this manual include both Old Testament and New Testament passages. The first section of the manual focuses on what God says about physical families. First, Bible passages are given about the design and purpose of physical families. Then a section follows that gives Bible references on how physical families can function well.

The next part of this manual focuses on what God says about spiritual families, which is the church. Bible passages are given about the design and purpose of the spiritual family. Then you will also find a section on the function of spiritual families (church) with Bible references.

This manual is a reference book for these two subjects. However, strong marriages and strong churches cannot happen by merely knowing *about* God's design and purpose for family and church. You must also live by the basics (Book 1 and Book 2 of these training manuals) to turn your knowledge about God's design into the reality of well-functioning families and churches.

A good use of this manual, Book 3, is to meet together with one, two, or three others and discuss the Bible references given for each subject. Share together what you have already experienced and learned, and discuss ways you would like God to help you grow and make progress.

Following are two examples of how this manual, Book 3, can be used in conjunction with the other *Basic Training Manuals*.

Example 1

In this manual, you will read that one function of a physical family is for teaching and training children. This is a very broad subject and extremely important. However, this manual does not explain all the various methods for teaching and training children (for example, reading them stories, helping them memorize truths, or taking them to a school or church to learn from others). It can be helpful for parents to learn about training children from more experienced families or teachers. But this manual helps parents know what the Bible says about the *importance* of training their children.

Parents can also use the Basics in Book 2 of these training manuals as guidelines for teaching and training their children. As children grow, it is good for parents to start helping their children learn and practice all sixteen of the basics.

Appendix 1 at the end of this manual, Book 3, provides another tool you can use to help children (**Appendix 1 – Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent**). There you will find a simple plan for Bible study and Bible discussion that uses five questions. This is a very helpful tool for parents to use with children as soon as they are able to read. Many helpful discussions can happen in the family when parents use this tool.

Example 2

In the second part of this manual, in the section about the function of a spiritual family (church) you will read about preferences for church leadership. This manual (Book 3) only gives the structure and design for church leadership, and does not give answers for all the problems that come up when leaders work together. That's the purpose of Book 2. Working closely together with other church leaders often has many challenges, especially with so many different ways of thinking. Many of the basics in Book 2, such as Basics #5, #7, #8, #9, and #10, teach us how to cooperate with God in our relationships with people. In fact, all sixteen of the basics in Book 2 are things that church leaders need to continually practice and to learn more about. In summary, Book 3 gives what the Bible says about the design and structure for church leadership, and Book 2 gives what the Bible says about the character and daily practices of a church leader. The patterns and designs found in the Bible for church leadership are important, and they provide structure and framework for leaders as they learn to serve together.

Design and Purpose of the Family

Jesus shines his light on the design and purpose of marriage and family

In the beginning, when God created the first man and woman, God designed marriage. Jesus recognized this in Matthew 19:4-6 when he quoted Genesis 2 and said:

“Haven’t you read, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Jesus defined marriage as the most complete and strongest bond of love. He was never married, but he referred to himself as the bridegroom. (Matthew 9:15 and Mark 2:19-20) And he told his followers that he would be doing the work of a bridegroom, by saying, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3) Jesus also used this analogy of a bridegroom returning for his bride in two parables that he told for the purpose of helping people understand his future plan to leave and then return for his bride, the people he loves.

- Matthew 22:2-14 – Parable of invitations to the wedding feast.
- Matthew 25:1-13 – Parable of the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom.

With this awareness of Jesus viewing himself as the bridegroom, it’s easy to think he must have had his future union with his bride in mind when he told his disciples at the last supper with them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:15-16) The description of the marriage feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19:1-9 fits with what Jesus was talking about at that time.

This concept of marriage that Jesus’ talked about helps us understand the importance of marriage that has always been in our Creator’s mind since the beginning of creation. Many times in the Old Testament, God used the analogy of marriage to describe his relationship with his people, such as in the following examples:

- Isaiah 54:5-8
- Jeremiah 31:32
- Ezekiel 16:8-14
- Hosea 2:14-23

In summary, Jesus and the whole Bible present marriage as the strongest bond of love between two people and as an analogy of God’s strong bond of love to people who desire that relationship with him.

God's further design is that marriage will bring children. Not all couples are able to have children, but this is God's design. And this is the context into which Jesus came when he lived here physically. He lived in obedience to his parents, where he "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people." (Luke 2:51-52) Apparently, he lived in this environment for thirty years until he began his public ministry, as we read in John 1:29 – 2:12.

Jesus gave more understanding of both physical marriage and of our spiritual marriage with him. He explained that the true children in his family are those who believe in him. "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:5-6) "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12-13)

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 the rest of their lifetime, 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

Genesis 2:15-25 – God, the Creator of everything, explained his design for people right from the beginning. In 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 also designed for a close working partnership. God's purposes are accomplished in the best way when a man and a woman work together in partnership.

Matthew 19:4-6 – Jesus quoted the same passage from Genesis 2.

1 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31 – Paul also quoted Genesis 2:24 as a definition of sexuality the way God planned it.

From all these passages we learn the following about God's design for marriage:

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 possible without getting caught rather than to focus on how completely they can apply God's truth to their lives. Moses, Jesus, and Paul gave the same definition and standard for sex. The standard is for **your** 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 that 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 can 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 very enjoyable when it's burning on a candle in our house, or 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 very horrible and painful. God designed sex to be within the context of a marriage of a man and woman who have made a life time 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 – God said to his people, Israel, "Your Maker is your husband." 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 with whom we are "one flesh" 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 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 each is secure in God's 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 that they 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 (6:1)
- **Adult children** honor parents for their whole life (6:2-3)
- **Fathers** have the primary responsibility for nurturing and instructing 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 to care for their children's welfare and maturity.
- 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. (1 Timothy 3:4 and 1 Timothy 5:8) 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).

- A husband is to **lead with the attitude of a servant**, not demanding submission from his wife, just as Jesus Christ humbled himself as a servant. (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 desire to submit to his leadership.
- Husbands are the primary ones **responsible for unity** in a marriage, yet many husbands blame a wife as the one hindering unity because she didn't submit to what the husband directed or demanded. In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter says husbands are to seek to understand their wives with respect and honor, and God will answer the husband's prayers when he does that. The husband is responsible for how God can work through his marriage.

Wives are designed to be the valuable helpers

Genesis 2:20-22, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

God designed men and women as partners for his good purposes. Men and women are the same in most ways, but God has also designed them with some differences. This is for a good purpose. We are designed in God's image, and God's image is most clearly seen when men and women complement each other in loving unity. Men do not show God's image completely by themselves, and women do not show God's image completely by themselves. It is when they are united together in love that God's image is most clearly seen.

- Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all deity (God) with different roles, similarly husbands and wives are humans, united as one flesh, with different roles. Neither person is inferior or superior, but each role is different. Romans 8:11 is an example of how God has different roles as the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Genesis 2:18-24 – The husband is designed to carry the responsibilities of leading the family and the wife is designed to elevate the husband's leadership by being his valuable helper. The role of being a helper reflects God's image—God is our Helper. (Psalm 54:4 and John 14:16,26) To be a husband's helper is to be like God, which is a high calling, not a position of inferiority or subservience.
- Being a helper 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. The disciples of Jesus sometimes did this with him, such as in Matthew 14:15. Being a helper does not mean that it's wrong for her to take initiative to present ideas or plans. She can engage in dialogue and initiate new ideas as ways of helping her husband.
- In God's design, humility is a key attitude for everyone to have (see Basics #5, 6, 7). For wives to be helpers, humility is a key factor, expressed through a voluntary, cooperative attitude. This attitude is often referred to as submission.
- 1 Peter 3:3-6 – 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 not try to force or

demand that his wife submit to him in any way. When true submission is happening from the heart, it is extremely beautiful and attractive.

- Ephesians 5:21 – Submission to God and submission to others is part of God’s design for everyone.
- Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Peter 3:1-6 – God gives special instruction to wives about voluntary submission to husbands. However, 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)

Show love by having children

Genesis 1:26-28 – Children are God’s plan for more people for him to love. 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. Parents (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 the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.” (Malachi 4:5-6. See also ESV and NASB – “fathers”) 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 parents [“fathers” in other translations] to their children.” (Luke 1:17) Obviously, the parents’ relationship with their children is extremely important, and specifically the father’s relationship with the children.

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

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)

Here are two observations about God’s plan in Genesis 18:

- 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 this world of confusion, pain, and suffering.

Function of the Family

Jesus shines his light on the function of the family

As stated previously, Jesus grew up in a family with parents and siblings. It was in this context that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people. (Luke 2:52) This is the normal plan that God has for all children—to grow up in the context of a family designed according to God’s design and purpose. (Luke 2:51-52)

Jesus never married, but he did have spiritual children. He said that “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:46-50) With that in mind, we have much to learn from the example of Jesus in how he led, taught, and trained his spiritual children. The principles that Jesus taught and trained his spiritual children are really the most important things for all parents to teach and train their children.

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)

- Honoring our parents 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, giving up his own comforts to meet her needs. (Ephesians 5:25 and 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. In marriage, sexual love means to be a giver rather than a taker. Each 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.
- Material needs – A family needs shelter, food, and clothes. Also, different kinds of material needs at home will always be present, such as cleaning, repairs, and improvements.

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 Thessalonians 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. Giving praise also encourages them. Ask God to help you think of kind words to say to those you love. (Ephesians 4:29)
- 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 every other aspect of their life will be affected. ***Asking God daily to help your children know him is an extremely important strategy.***

Loving your children includes teaching and training them – Deuteronomy 6:4-9

God's plan is for parents to be the most important teachers for children. As stated before, 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 for this to work out in family function. Here are some suggestions:

- Parents can help their children learn the Bible even if the parents do not know very much about the Bible yet. 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 will learn the Bible at the same time!
- 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 the lessons they learned from those experiences. 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, with discretion.
- 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 repeats the first phrase and 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. You can store God's Word, which is truth, on the shelves of the mind. It will be 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 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.

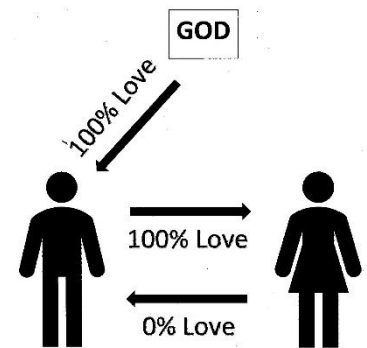
Of course, parents need to also be examples to their children about how to live life with God. And it's important for parents to remember that they cannot change the selfish hearts of their children—only God's Spirit can do that. That is why prayer for children is so important. Parents need to be examples 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 need 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. This can happen either way in a relationship. 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

Mark 10:42-45 – 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. 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 onto 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 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 that 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, 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. You can ask these questions about the practice of your family:

- 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 kinds of consequences are good for the parents to enforce? Are the parents consistent with their plan of enforcing consequences? (God's Spirit, not the parents, makes the changes 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.)

Design and Purpose of the Church

Jesus established the design and purpose of the church

Jesus explained that people with new spiritual life make up a new kind of spiritual family. He pointed to his disciples and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:46-50) Jesus invested the three years of his ministry into this group of followers who were always with him. They learned together and they helped each other. This group of people following Jesus was the first church. In this way Jesus and his followers became the model for the basic essentials of a spiritual family, a church. Then, after Jesus returned to heaven, his followers wrote down description of the design, purpose and function of this spiritual family, which we now have recorded in the Bible.

The leader, the head of the church

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

Descriptions 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 a body, each member has gifts and abilities for serving the others. (Romans 12:4-8)

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 cornerstone – 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

- The church is referred to as Christ’s bride, which includes all believers everywhere for all time. The bride of Christ is the universal church.
- As a subset of the universal church, each local group of believers in Christ is also referred to as 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

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 had 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 his message with many but then to focus on investing into just a few people (like a spiritual family). He then gave them instructions to do the same with a few others. (Matthew 28:20)

The spiritual family (church) is 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 can improve their lives, 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)

Everyone needs a spiritual family

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 spiritual children, similar to the way it is not a matter of gifting to become a father or mother of physical children. 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 spiritual children to care for young spiritual children and help them grow to reproduce more spiritual children and also help them grow. (See Appendix 1 at the back of this book for a detailed guide for becoming a spiritual parent.)

God's design for human leadership in the church

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

- Shepherd (pastor), elder, and overseer 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

Church leaders are similar to parents of a family in many ways.

Designed to help each other

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

An important way of helping each other is to encourage each other daily.

- Hebrews 3:13 – "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:10-11 – "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."

Every day we need encouragement from each other.

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 more apparent in our weaknesses. (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:

- John 3:16-17, 1 Timothy 2:4 – All people in the world to have opportunity to be rescued from sin
- Ephesians 4:11-16 – All rescued people (Christians) to become mature in life with Christ
- Matthew 28:18-20 – All nations (people groups) in the world to have trained disciples and spiritual families

Light to the world

- Hebrews 1:1-4 – When Jesus was here physically, he was the representation of God to the world.
- John 1:4 – Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus said that his followers (churches) are also the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14) The church is the representation of God to the world. (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 parents 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 seven 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. As Creator of the world, he understood the best way to help the most people. With this in mind, it's interesting that Jesus never traveled very far, and he only chose a few disciples. He 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 as a large organization. But that's not how the Creator of the world thought when he lived here. And 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 obey (practice) everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Then what did they go and do?

Did they start an organization? No.

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.

Paul followed the example of Jesus

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.

Family	Organization
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 of 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 be separate from the first organization
Parents have a priority concern for good relationships with the children	Leaders are more concerned about managing the organization than relationships with the members
Results of a strong family • Strong relationships with parents and with brothers and sisters • Children are strong in character. They are kind and helpful to each other.	Results of a strong organization • The members accomplish a purpose • Members do not make much progress in their personal character

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 it. A man cannot learn very much about being a parent by only reading a book or by only attending classes. He must 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 but gives the baby to the grandparents to raise, the parents 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 trust) and in his relationship with God.

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

- Book 1 is a tool to help a person get to know God through the Bible.
- Book 2 is a tool to help a person make progress in important basics for Christian growth.
- Book 3 is a tool to help a person learn the benefits of having a strong marriage, family, and church.

When you help another person grow in all these basics, you will not only benefit that person, but you will also help all the future people that person helps!

Uphold truth in the world

1 Timothy 3:15 describes another purpose of the church. It is a pillar and support of truth for the world. The Bible is the source of truth. No one in any church understands all of the Bible with complete accuracy, yet God's plan is for the church to be God's vehicle for communicating truth to the world.

Be a blessing to the world

Jesus came to bring blessing to the world. All those who believed in him received that blessing. Jesus is now gone from the world, so now the church is his means of bringing his blessing to the world. (Matthew 28:18-20) Because of the message given to the world through the church, all who believe and follow Jesus will then experience his blessings in the following ways:

- Believing God and obeying his Word is the source of blessing. (Luke 11:28, John 13:17, 20:29)
- Living as part of God's kingdom is a source of blessing. (Luke 14:15)
- People are blessed when they are set free from sin. (Acts 3:26)
- People are blessed when they live according to God's values and thinking. (Matthew 5)
- People are blessed when they believe in Jesus Christ for every aspect of their lives. (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)

Function of the Church

Jesus shines his light on the function of the church

As stated previously, the example of Jesus (his leadership and how he cared for his spiritual children) provides an example for all spiritual parents. Jesus laid the foundation for the things that are most important for all churches. Then his followers wrote down the description of the design, purpose and function of the church, which we now have recorded in the Bible.

It was the desire of Jesus for spiritual families to be established at every place where there would be spiritual children. He set the example of what is most important for a spiritual family, and then he instructed his followers to do the same for all people groups around the world. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Love God and love people

Jesus said that the summary of all God's instruction is to love God and to love people. (Matthew 22:37-40) This is the primary need of every person in the world. God, himself, loves every person in the world. That's why he came to the world as a human. (John 3:16) Jesus expressed this love in a variety of ways, but especially when he sacrificed his life as a substitute for what each of us deserves. (Romans 5:8) After Jesus rose to life and returned to heaven, he instructed his people to communicate his love to a very broken and hurting world. This is the mission and function of his church.

Jesus expressed this desire in his final prayer before his crucifixion. As he prayed to the Father for his future followers, he said, "so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (John 17:23, 26)

God, through Jesus, designed the church to express his love to a broken world (as described in "Design and Purpose of the Church"). To do this, 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 Jesus – to be united as one
2. Close, growing relationships with other believers in Christ – to be united as one

The primary quality of these relationships is love. 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

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

- They were devoted to God's word (learning and applying it).
- They were devoted to Christ's family, sharing life with each other and meeting each other's needs.

- They were 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 other 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 spiritual death penalty to be paid, which we deserve for our sin. Paul explains this also in 1 Corinthians 10:16.
- They were devoted to talking to God about everything (prayer).
- They were devoted to Christ’s desire to reach the lost. (Acts 8:4, Acts 2:47)

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

Help each other in all aspects of life

The New Testament gives instruction about a variety of ways we can help each other. All of these are important expressions of love.

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

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 and women who spent a lot of time together and who knew each other well in every aspect of their lives. Like a family, this is the best context for helping each other grow in love. 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. Book 2, “Basics of God’s Training,” gives more details of sixteen basic things Jesus taught his disciples. He knew that the best way for people to learn and apply God’s truth to their lives was in the context of a small group of people who were able to discuss, love, encourage, and challenge each other through their friendships.

Helping each other remember Jesus

In Luke 22:19, at the final Passover meal before he was crucified, Jesus “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’” They were celebrating the Passover meal together, which symbolized the sacrifice Jesus would make during the next 24 hours. Jesus would allow himself to be killed as the sacrifice for the sin of all people for all time. (1 John 2:2) Jesus gave us a way to continually remember what he did for us. This remembrance is one of the responsibilities that the followers of Jesus help each other with.

For hundreds of years before Jesus, the people of Israel (Jews) had been celebrating the Passover by sharing unleavened bread and grape juice (wine) together to remember the lamb that was sacrificed in Egypt to save them from the angel of death. If the blood of a lamb was not on the door frame of the house, the angel of death would kill the oldest son in that house. (Exodus 11-12) Jesus had already been celebrating the Passover with his disciples in previous years, remembering the lambs in Egypt, but on his final Passover recorded in Luke 22, Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body given for you.” The disciples didn’t understand what he meant by that statement until sometime later after his resurrection.

Later Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Ever since that last supper of Jesus, followers of Jesus have been helping each other remember his sacrificial work by sharing some form of grape juice and some form of bread. Churches have been doing this in many different ways. Whether it’s unleavened bread, wafers, crackers, or a loaf of bread, or grape juice, wine, or a substitute; whether it’s sharing one cup or many small cups; whether it’s done every week or once a year, the purpose is always the same. The purpose is to remember that the finished work that Jesus accomplished on the cross is the only hope of every human for being restored to an eternal relationship with their loving Creator.

Helping each other be grounded in our new life with Christ

All Christians need the help of brothers and sisters in Christ to help them grow in their life with the Lord. This is God’s plan. Similar to human babies needing a family to grow up with, so also do the children of God. (Ephesians 4:11-16, Hebrews 3:12-13)

Near the beginning of Book 2, “Basics of God’s Training” is a section titled, “First Steps for New Believers.” These first five steps are:

- Assurance of salvation
- Water baptism
- Fellowship with other followers of Jesus
- Feeding on God’s Word
- Communicating with God (prayer)

All five of these steps are important for the brothers and sisters in a spiritual family (church) to help each other understand and practice. The other sixteen basics in Book 2 are also important, which take further time and attention to apply them to the many aspects of living life with the Lord Jesus.

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 to say that he wanted 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 all followers of Jesus, not only the church leaders.

Before Jesus left, he had already been a model of communicating God's love and truth. He had given his followers an example of how to help a world of people stumbling in blindness and separated from God's love. Jesus had already set the example of helping many but at the same time focusing on a few people to help them grow in their life with God, similar to a parent helping and training children. Since his is the Creator of everything, we know his example is the best strategy for helping a world of people who need God's love and truth.

Pastors/shepherds know and care for Christ's followers

Jesus and Paul both taught that the mature followers of Christ have the responsibility of caring for the younger ones. Jesus used the model of a shepherd to describe his care for people (John 10:1-18), and then Peter later explained that mature Christians (elders) are to care for God's children in the same way. (1 Peter 5:1-4) The shepherd (church leader) is to know each of the sheep under his care and each of the sheep (church members) are 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 organization than a family.

Qualifications for church leaders

Followers of Christ grow in maturity as they live with him, and part of this growth is learning to care for and help others. God wants all his children continually to learn how to help others, but God's plan is that some of the more mature ones should be recognized and given special responsibility as leaders.

There are two places that list the qualifications needed before designating someone as a church leader. (In the Bible a designated church leader is variously called elder, pastor, overseer, bishop, all of which are synonymous terms for the church leader).

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

Servants of the church

In Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 we read that sometimes it is helpful to designate certain members of a church to have specific responsibilities of service. It is explained that these recognized servants should have a certain level of maturity in their life with Christ.

Note on “deacons”: Some churches use the word “deacon” to describe church members who have been given a special responsibility of service in the church. Some translations of the Bible use the word “deacon” in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, but the Greek word is actually the same word translated “servant” in many other places in the New Testament. For example, it is the same

word Jesus used when he said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” (Mark 10:43)

Note on “apostles”: Some churches use the word “apostle” to describe certain church leaders, but use of that word today is not consistent with the basic requirements of a New Testament apostle. This is because the requirements to be an apostle in the New Testament 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.

Leaders to follow Jesus’ style of church 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 young 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 good leadership style as serving (Mark 10:42-45), which is applied in a variety of ways, as listed here:

- Jesus’ style of church leadership is to invest time, energy, and resources for the benefit of others, especially for those in your care. (John 10:7-18, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
- Jesus’ style of church leadership is to work with people according to their desires, inviting them to follow 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, “But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.”
- Jesus’ style of church leadership is to take the time and effort to come to a common understanding with the people under your 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 tell 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 in government or family include responsibility for dealing with crime or rebellion. These types of roles require law enforcement and discipline. This can be civil servants who enforce civil laws (such as police) or parents. Law enforcement officers are referred to as 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 exemplified. 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 addressed men as the leaders in the church. (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9)

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

The practice of men having the responsibility for church 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 to work together than for a single leader to make all 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. Consensus means all the elders come to a common agreement, which is different than making decisions by a majority

vote or by 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 and ask questions to understand their underlying reasons.
- Validate the other person. Show appreciation and affirmation.
- Restate the other person's thinking on an issue and why his point of view is important to him.
- 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.

Members materially 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. (Luke 8:2-3) Jesus gave instructions for people to invest in treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20) and not in treasures on earth. One way Jesus' followers could do that was to give toward his needs.

After the church was established in the New Testament, Paul explained that financial support of the leaders enabled 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. (2 Corinthians 8:7-8)

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 principles 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. When we feel we are unable to give a tithe, yet still give it, this becomes a greater opportunity to express 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. He loves to bless us in many kinds of ways. Paul described this same principle of blessing. Paul

emphasized that under the New Covenant in Christ, generosity is to be voluntary and not from compulsion, and that God has all resources to provide for us and bless us. (2 Corinthians 8:6-11, Philippians 4:14-19)

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.
- In Romans 16:4-15, Paul gives a picture of many churches having relationship together.
- 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 and how to apply it. Experiences such as dreams, revelations, and events are all subject to God’s written truth understood by the members of Christ’s body as they trust God’s Spirit to help them interpret all experiences of life accordingly. An example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33.
- **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 does heal 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 really believing God, or that 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)

Appendix 1

Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent

When God created people, his plan and design for them was to marry and have children. Although not everyone is able to have physical children, it is still God's normal plan for most people. Spiritually, God's plan is similar. When someone is born into his family, God's plan for them is to mature and to help others too. In this way, God's normal plan for his spiritual children is to become spiritual parents. Jesus made this clear when he gave a commission to his followers before he ascended to heaven. (Matthew 28:18-20) Following are some practical steps for anyone to become a spiritual parent by helping another person to grow spiritually.

First of all, understand what a spiritual parent is.

- A spiritual parent is someone who helps one or a few people to make progress in their personal life with Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 1:11-12
- This can be a father or mother helping one or more children. Ephesians 6:4
- This can be anyone who follows the example of Jesus to help one or more disciples. Matthew 20:18-20 (NOTE: In the Bible, the word for disciple comes from a word that means "to learn.")



Understand what a spiritual parent does.

- A spiritual parent encourages and helps others to learn from Jesus. Hebrews 3:13
- A spiritual parent prays for each disciple and also helps each one pray for others. We



learn this from the example of Paul and from the principle in Ephesians 6:18,

- A spiritual parent discusses together with each disciple how to live every aspect of personal life in relationship with God according to the Bible. We learn this from the example of Jesus and from the principle stated in Joshua 1:8-9.

Understand what a spiritual parent does not do.

- A spiritual parent is different from a physical parent in one major way. A spiritual parent does not try to control disciples. Disciples always have complete freedom to participate or not, just as Jesus gave his disciples complete freedom to follow him or not. For example, Jesus gave Judas complete freedom, even while aware of the fact that Judas would use that freedom to betray his spiritual parent. Do not view yourself as having the authority to control your disciples.

Understand and practice the steps to become a spiritual parent.

1. Pray for and look for someone with a desire to make progress in their life with God. John 7:37-38
2. Meet together regularly. Hebrews 3:13-15
3. Discuss together who God is, in his character and attributes, and also learn what he has done for us. Discuss how all aspects of personal life can be lived in a relationship with God according to the Bible, God's Word. This is what Jesus did with his disciples, helping them live according to God's truth in every way.
4. Use the *Basic Training Manuals* as guidelines for what to discuss in the Bible. The manuals are guides to help you find references in the Bible according to the subjects that Jesus taught his disciples. At the beginning of each of the three manuals (Books 1, 2, and 3) are instructions for how to use that specific manual. Each one is used in a different way, but always to help people go to the Bible as their source for living life with God.
5. If other friends have a similar desire to make progress in their personal life with God, include one, two, or three others to be part of the group that you meet with regularly, (Five or more in a group makes it difficult for each person to share and discuss what is happening in their personal life.) NOTE: For complete openness in these personal discipleship groups, it is best for men to meet with men and women with women.
6. Advise and encourage your spiritual children to pray for family and friends and to look for one or more people they can help become a child of God and to grow in their life with God. In this way they will also become spiritual parents! (This follows the example of Jesus, who taught his spiritual children to help others, as he stated in Matthew 28:18-20.)
7. Continue friendship, prayer, encouragement, and advice with your spiritual children as long as possible. (This follows the example of Paul with his spiritual children, as in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-20.)



Additional guidelines for FAMILIES and BIBLE DISCUSSION LEADERS

Here are some guidelines for parents who want to help their children learn from the Bible or for spiritual parents who want to help others learn from the Bible. These guidelines are helpful for anyone who wants to learn and live by God's Word.

First of all, write down the following five questions and keep them in your Bible. They will help you learn what the Bible says and how you can live according to its truth. You can use these questions even if you have not read much of the Bible and even without preparing ahead of time (although preparation can help).



Five questions for Bible study groups:

1. What does this passage say about **God**?
2. Is there an **example** to follow?
3. Is there a **command** to obey?
4. Is there a **promise** to claim?
5. Is there a **warning** to be careful about?

When you meet together with your family or your friends for Bible study, do the following:

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

Appendix 2

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 toward becoming 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 to teach all future disciples to do all that he had taught them to do. (Matthew 28:20) Paul later wrote in Ephesians 4:12-13 that the purpose of the church is to "equip his [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)

The value of discipleship training groups

Helping one person to learn and grow is very valuable. But if God gives you opportunity to help more than one person grow to maturity, it can be good to help them learn in a group context rather than you always meeting with each one separately. They can learn extra from one another in a discipleship training group, more than just you meeting with each one separately. You can still give each one personal attention within the context of the group or occasionally meeting separately for personal conversation and counsel. This was the practice of Jesus with twelve of his followers. (John 21)

In larger churches, another reason for the formation of discipleship groups is that the care and maintenance of a whole church can be very consuming. Therefore, in a church family, it can be good to have several, or even many, groups for personal discipleship training. It's easy to get caught up in the details of maintaining a church and forget to 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). When he left, he instructed them to do the same thing he had trained them to do. They followed his instructions, and within a few decades many people around the world were impacted by the transformational message of forgiveness, new life, and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Practical steps

In your journey of becoming a mature follower of Jesus Christ, there are also practical steps you can take to help others follow Jesus and become mature.

NOTE: The following steps do not have to be accomplished in the order given. You can adjust them according to the needs and desires of the person(s). Or you can do part of one step while you are also working on a different step.

Step 1. Follow the practical steps listed in Appendix 1 (Practical Steps to Become a Spiritual Parent). Continue regularly helping others grow.

Step 2. Help a person, or anyone in your group who is interested, to grow with God by helping them learn Book 1, “Basics about God.” Discuss each subject with them and help them record their observations in the journal section of 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 same person, or the group of people, study through Book 2, “Basics of God’s Training.” No one will ever be finished learning those character qualities, but the important thing is to help the person practice the principles taught in each of the sixteen Basics so that they can continually make progress. 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 all of our lives! There is a summary appendix near the end of Book 2 titled, “Characteristics of a Christ-follower who is practicing the Basics”. This will help you understand how these principles can be applied to normal life. (Note: Do not focus only on that one-page summary, but help the person understand and apply the Bible passages given in each of the Basics.)

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

Step 5. Help the person, or group of people, to 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!

Step 6. As you get to know the person, or the members of the group, find out about their personal spiritual growth. Do they each have assurance of salvation? Have they been baptized? What needs do they have? Is there some part of their life in which they would like to become stronger? Do they have needs that might require the help of someone more experienced than you? 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 these young Christians 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 7. 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 you, as the group leader, to frequently talk things over with your 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.

NOTE: The following steps (Steps 8 - 12) are not necessary for all groups, especially if the group is part of a larger group or church. But if the group is not part of a church, then the following steps can lead toward the formation of a new spiritual family (church).

Step 8. If the plan becomes the formation of a new spiritual family (church), it would be good to join with one or more other groups of disciples for times of singing in worship and sharing communion (also called the Lord's supper or breaking of bread) together. A larger group like this can meet once a month or weekly, depending on the desires of people in the groups.

Step 9. At this stage, it is important for the leaders to understand and apply the Biblical principles of "Spiritual Family (Church)" as described in this manual, Book 3.

Step 10. Sharing communion together can be done very simply. Read a short Bible passage together that helps you remember the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. Then pass around a piece of bread for everyone to break off a piece. Next pass the grape juice around and each person can dip their piece of bread in the juice before eating it. (If grape juice is unavailable, you could use grape-flavored drink powder in a package or whatever is available.) 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 desires. 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 11. When groups meet together for worship in singing and communion, it will be important for the leaders to evaluate the need for teaching the truths of the Bible. Much can be learned in discussion groups, especially if there is a mature leader facilitating the discussion. But many times, there will be a need for mature leaders to give messages about Bible truths to the large group. Prepared messages can be very helpful. If a time of discussion can be provided after the message is given, even more understanding and learning will take place.

Step 12. When the steps above 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 in which you can help this new spiritual family is to teach them what the Bible says about making the Lord first in their personal finances. 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. However, you must personally practice humility and dependence on God so that you will not apply pressure and expectations about financial giving to the members of the group.

When a brother completes all these steps, 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.

Maturity

When a person has grown in their understanding of God and is growing in 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!

Mature followers of Jesus Christ are crucial for helping this very broken world. These are the people who know how to cooperate with the Creator and 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. Life without Jesus is detrimental to everyone. 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.

Appendix 3

Recognition and Certificates

These *Basic Training Manuals* are not the same as text books. They are tools for learning and practicing what God has given us in the Bible. Those who use these manuals to grow in their life with God will be trained in a similar way that Jesus trained his close disciples. When he left, they were qualified to be the leaders of the church that Jesus had started. Following are suggested ways that people can be recognized for their growth with God in the use of the *Basic Training Manuals*.

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

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Plan for Relationships
4. Read the complete Bible.
5. Complete the “Practical Steps to Become a Spiritual Parent.” (Appendix 1)

Women who complete ALL the following requirements can receive an additional certificate stating recognition as a ***Godly Woman Trainer***.

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Plan for Relationships
4. Read the complete Bible.
5. Complete the “Practical Steps to Become a Spiritual Parent.” (Appendix 1)
6. Have 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 ALL the following requirements can receive an additional certificate stating recognition 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 Plan for Relationships
4. Read the complete Bible.
5. Complete the “Practical Steps to Become a Spiritual Parent.” (Appendix 1)
6. He has helped someone take the first steps of being a new believer. (Steps given at the beginning of Book 2.)
7. He has also led a time of communion (Lord’s supper or breaking of bread).
8. Approval from the leaders of his church, his wife (if married), and the members of his church to be a pastor.
9. Approval from the pastors who know him well that he meets the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.