

Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes

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CONTENTS

Introduction: Reformation before Revival	11
PART ONE	
THE NEED TO EQUIP FAMILY SHEPHERDS	
GAINING A MORE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE FAMILY	
1 The Bible and the Family's Role in Discipleship	17
2 A Three-Pronged Approach to Biblical Discipleship	27
3 One Shepherd's Journey	39
PART TWO	
FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM	
EQUIPPING MEN TO BE PRIESTS AND PROPHETS IN THEIR HOMES	
4 Heralding the Gospel at Home	51
5 Catechism and Christian Education	63
6 Family Worship	73
PART THREE	
MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT	
EQUIPPING MEN TO LOVE THEIR WIVES AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH	
7 The Purpose of Marriage	83
8 The Primacy of Marriage	91
9 Male Headship in the Home	101
PART FOUR	
THE TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN	
EQUIPPING MEN TO RAISE KINGDOM-MINDED WARRIORS	
10 Remembering the Fall	113
11 Formative Discipline	123
12 Corrective Discipline	133

PART FIVE

LIFESTYLE EVALUATION

EQUIPPING MEN TO COUNT THE COST OF FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

13	Church Membership	147
14	Our Use of Time	155
15	Dual Citizenship	163
	A Special Concern: What about Fatherless Families?	173
	Appendix One: Tools, Follow-Up, and Accountability	180
	Appendix Two: Sample Prayer Gram	183
	Notes	186

INTRODUCTION

REFORMATION BEFORE REVIVAL

Since writing *Family Driven Faith* several years ago, I've had literally hundreds of conversations either in person, on the phone, or via e-mail with pastors, denominational leaders, and fathers of every stripe who echo the same sentiment: we need a revival of family religion!

To which I respond, "Amen"—but also, "Not so fast."

Before we can have a revival, we need a reformation. Just like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others looked at Roman Catholicism and held it up to the light of Scripture in the sixteenth century, we need men today who'll do the same with our current ideas of manhood and the family.

There's a generation of men who sense God's Spirit calling them to something more—but without reformation, they have no idea what that "more" looks like. My goal in this book is to offer what I hope to be helpful, biblical, gospel-centered truths that will prepare us to that end. May God use this to spur on the needed reformation. We must forsake our extrabiblical (and sometimes outright *unbiblical*) paradigms in favor of biblical ones.

This book is ultimately about the future. The future of your family and mine depends in large part on what we believe and how we behave in light of the truths contained herein. And I assure you, I mean that literally. It's hard to overestimate the importance of the family in general, and fathers in particular. The family is the cornerstone of society. It has been said that as goes the family, so goes the world. It can also be said that as goes the father, so goes the family.

The role of men in their families is so important that God honored it by conferring upon us his own title, Father. We're the

governors and guides of our families, and the way we lead has far-reaching implications.

Over the past several years, I've thought, written, taught, and labored long and hard over the issue of male leadership in the home. I've watched families crumble under the weight of paternal neglect. I've seen young men wander aimlessly, looking for answers their fathers should have given them in both word and deed. And I've grieved with Christian women who've grown weary of begging God to make their husbands the spiritual leaders of their homes.

I've also seen men wake up to the responsibility and privilege of being their family's shepherd. I've watched households transform quickly as fathers take the helm and begin to lead and disciple their wives and children. I've seen marriages healed as husbands begin to take seriously their duty to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25) and to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

This is the kind of transformation to which I desire to contribute. I want to help men overcome a legacy of passivity, incompetence, and indifference. I want to help shape the thinking of a generation of fathers who embrace their role with a certain amount of fear and trembling while carrying out their tasks with faith and confidence.

In short, I want to answer the question I've received from hundreds, if not thousands, of men: *How do I lead my family?*

This is merely one beggar's effort to tell other beggars where he found bread.

THE IMPACT OF PARADIGM

The church I have the privilege of serving—Grace Family Baptist Church in the area just north of Houston—is not a perfect church by any stretch of the imagination. However, it's a church where men's lives and families have been transformed in recent years. More importantly, it's a church where faithfulness to the Word of God has borne much fruit. This fruit has taken the form of conversions in the lives of those who knew they were lost and of some

who were church leaders and thought they were saved. The fruit has been borne as well in marriages healed (often without a single counseling session); in families healed; in families embracing the gift of children after having decided to close the womb; and in a host of other God-sized providences.

Let me say more about our church's paradigm and the ways in which we've worked to bring men along in what is to many a radical approach to family and ministry. In our church, the truths contained in this book are lived out in a very unusual way. We don't have specialized ministries designed to aim targeted discipleship at every age and/or constituency. We don't have youth ministers, children's ministers, singles' ministers, etc. Our focus is on equipping family shepherds and holding them accountable for the work to which God has called them. As a result, we are forced to pay a lot more attention to how we view family discipleship.

Our paradigm will seem foreign to many who read this book. However, I don't want you to get caught up in the paradigm. This book is not about a paradigm; it's about the transcendent truths that govern Christian fatherhood. So as I talk about our church, try to remember that regardless of your setting, you can—and must—pursue a gospel-centered, biblically informed approach to your family. Not being in a church like ours is no excuse. Nor is being in a church like ours a guarantee that these things will happen. We must pursue family shepherding, whatever our church environment.

WHAT DRIVES US

Our goal is the gospel. The approach to family shepherding in this book, and the things we do in our church, are not predicated on statistics about church dropouts (though that is important). Nor is it our belief that all the church's problems stem from a low view of the family (though that issue is significant). What we do, and what I'm writing about here, starts with a belief that the gospel is our only hope. The family is not the gospel; nor is the family as important as the gospel. The family is a delivery mechanism for the gospel.

In Ephesians 5 and 6 the role of fathers loving their wives and discipling their children, the responsibility of wives to submit to their husbands, and the duties of parents to their children are all couched in terms that are unmistakable in their gospel-centeredness. This is all about “Christ and the church” (5:32), as Paul declares. It’s about the *gospel*. It’s about God’s redemptive work that began in the garden with the marriage of the first Adam to his bride, and will end at the wedding of the last Adam, Jesus Christ, to his bride at the consummation of history. Every family between the first one and the last serves to remind us of the impact of the fall and our need for redemption.

In the meantime, God has called fathers to walk patiently, purposefully, and prayerfully as we lead our families toward all that is ours in Christ. It’s my hope that this book will serve as a tool to help you do just that. In the end, I want you to see Jesus. I want you to see him in a way that drives you to pursue him personally and to keep him before your wife and children in a way that causes them to seek him as well. In short, I want you to shepherd your family in the direction of the Good Shepherd.

CHAPTER FOUR

HERALDING THE GOSPEL AT HOME

To the Christian father—the man who longs to be his family’s shepherd—John Bunyan wrote these wise words to give a picture of evangelism and discipleship at home:

First, concerning the spiritual state of his family; he ought to be very diligent and cautious, doing his utmost both to increase faith where it is begun, and to begin it where it is not. Therefore, he must diligently and frequently bring before his family the things of God, from His Holy Word, in accordance with what is suitable for each person. And let no man question his authority from the Word of God for such a practice.

These “things of God” that Bunyan speaks of here are always to be centered on the gospel.

The gospel is the core of the Christian life. The gospel is the message, the hope, and the firm foundation of those who follow Christ. It’s the foundation upon which the church is built. It’s also the foundation upon which the work of a family shepherd is built. As such, we must be clear on just what we’re referring to when we use the word *gospel*.

Most people in our culture believe the gospel is shorthand for the “plan of salvation” or a succinct presentation on how to get saved. Ask the average Christian what the gospel is, and they’ll probably respond by reciting a version of the Four Spiritual Laws or the Romans Road. Few will identify the gospel as the good news of God’s redemption of fallen man through the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, that’s precisely what the gospel is; it’s the announcement of good news.



There has been much confusion in recent times about the gospel. Allow me therefore to do two things before defining the gospel in the context of shepherding our families. First, we'll simply take a look at what the gospel is *not*. Afterward we'll examine more closely what the gospel truly is. By then we'll have a better grasp on the need and nature of the family shepherd's gospel work in the home.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS NOT

The first time we took our children to Europe, we saw a living example of culture shock. My son went into the bathroom in the house where we were staying and called out to me in despair. As he pointed to the bidet sitting next to the toilet he asked, "Which one do I use?" After I answered him, he looked back at me quizzically and said, "So what do I do with that one?" I learned a valuable lesson that day: It's sometimes more helpful to know what a thing is *not* than to know what it is.

This is true not just for young boys in European bathrooms, but also for family shepherds attempting to wield the gospel in their homes. With that in mind, allow me to dispel a few myths about the gospel.

THE GOSPEL IS NOT JUST HOW WE GET SAVED

While the gospel is most assuredly the means by which we come to know God, it's not limited to knowing how to get saved. This may seem obvious, but as D. A. Carson has noted:

For some Christians, "the gospel" is a narrow set of teachings about Jesus and his death and resurrection which, rightly believed, tip people into the kingdom. After that, real discipleship and personal transformation begin, but none of that is integrally related to "the gospel."¹

Unfortunately, the use of "gospel" tracts, while helpful, has also led to a great deal of confusion. Ask the average Christian what the gospel is, and you are likely to get a *presentation* rather than a definition. The gospel cannot be reduced to the Four Spiritual Laws

or the Romans Road. These “gospel presentations” may *contain* the gospel (at least in part), but they are not the gospel.

Viewing the gospel as only the means to salvation amounts to minimizing the gospel and its greater significance—a significance that Tim Keller helpfully clarifies:

We never “get beyond the gospel” in our Christian life to something more “advanced.” The gospel is not the first “step” in a “stairway” of truths, rather, it is more like the “hub” in a “wheel” of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C’s but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.²

As family shepherds, we must not make the mistake of reducing the gospel to *introductory* status. The gospel is all-encompassing.

THE GOSPEL IS NOT THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

There’s a movement afoot in American evangelicalism that incorporates the great commandments into the summary of the heart of the gospel. The result is the increasingly popular “love God/love people” mantra.

Recently, I did a quick web search to see how many configurations of this phrase I could find on various church websites. The results were astounding. Here are a few examples:

- Love God, Love People
- Love God, Love People, Change the World
- Love God, Love People, Serve the World.
- Love God, Love People, Tell the World
- Love God, Love People, Reach the World!
- Love God, Love People, Serve the World
- Love God, Love People, Serve Both
- Love God, Love People, DO Something about It

There’s just one problem. These commandments are indeed central to Christ’s life, message, and people (Matt. 22:34–40), “but most emphatically,” as D. A. Carson says, “they are not the gospel.”³ In fact, they’re the summary of the Law! To love the Lord with all our heart,

soul, mind, and strength summarizes the first table of the Law (the first four commandments), while loving our neighbor as ourselves is the sum total of the second table of the Law (commandments five through ten). This, in fact, is Paul's entire point in Romans 13:8–10.

Thus, while many Christians are trying to sidestep the law with the “love God/love people” mantra, they're in fact sidestepping the gospel and running right back to the law.

This is not to say that the commands are bad. Indeed, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). However, the commandment is not the gospel.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS

What exactly is the gospel? Why do we use that word in particular? And why does it matter so much that we get it right?

John Hendryx offers a succinct definition:

In short, the Gospel is the life-altering news that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man, lived a sinless life under the Law, died for sinners, and rose again to reconcile them to himself, eternally victorious over every enemy that stood between God and man.⁴

I'll say more about this later, but for now note that Hendryx doesn't begin with man. Nor does he reduce the matter to sappy sentimentality and a lonely God pining over the prospect of an eternity without *you*. The gospel is not man-centered sentimentality. Michael Horton explains this further:

It is interesting that the biblical writers chose the word “gospel.” The heart of most religions is good advice, good techniques, good programs, good ideas, and good support systems. These drive us deeper into ourselves, to find our inner light, inner goodness, inner voice, or inner resources. Nothing *new* can be found inside us. There is no inner rescuer deep down in my soul; I just hear echoes of my own voice telling me all sorts of crazy things to numb my sense of fear, anxiety, and boredom, the origins of which I cannot truly identify. But the heart of Christianity is Good News. It comes not as a task for us to fulfill, a mission for us to accomplish, a game plan for us to follow with the help of life coaches, but as a report that someone

else has already fulfilled, accomplished, followed, and achieved everything for us. Good advice may *help* us in daily direction; the Good News concerning Jesus Christ *saves* us from sin's guilt and tyranny over our lives and the fear of death. It's Good News because it does not depend on us. It is about God and his faithfulness to his own purposes and promises.⁵

The gospel is the glorious, Christ-centered, cross-centered, grace-centered news of what God has done in Jesus Christ (the last Adam) to redeem man from the fall of his federal head (the first Adam) and to give man an eschatological hope that all things will eventually be redeemed in Christ.

THE GOSPEL IS NEWS

The gospel is *news*, first and foremost. The Greek word *evangelion* refers to news, an announcement or message.

Think about it; the gospel is news! Therefore, we don't "live" the gospel; we proclaim it. We can no more live the gospel than live the nightly news. Imagine saying, "Let's go live out last night's eleven o'clock news headline story." That's sheer foolishness. The event has already happened; it cannot be relived. You can live *in light of* the news, or *because of* the news, but you cannot *live the news*. And as famous as certain words of St. Francis of Assisi happen to be, he was wrong; we do not "preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words." Again, imagine the parallel: "Channel 10 News . . . News So Powerful, We Don't Use Words!"

I know this flies in the face of the contemporary vernacular, but this is no minor distinction. This is the difference between a life that views Christ and his finished work as the central message of Christianity and one that views its own experience as the central message. If *Christ's* life is the central message, then I have to tell the news. If *my* life is the central message, then my living is enough.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD-CENTERED

The gospel isn't just any kind of news; the gospel is news from, about, for, and through God.

God, not man, is at the center of the gospel. In fact, the New Testament frequently refers to the gospel as the “gospel of God.” Jesus came “proclaiming the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14). Paul was “set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1; see also 15:16). He was “ready to share . . . the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:8); he “proclaimed . . . the gospel of God” (2:9); and he knew that “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” had been “entrusted” to him (1 Tim. 1:11). Likewise, Peter warned of what the future held for “those who do not obey the gospel of God” (1 Pet. 4:17).

THE GOSPEL IS CHRIST-CENTERED

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”—those are the words Mark chose to begin his Gospel. The message of the New Testament is the message of the “gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 3:2).

Matthew begins his Gospel in this way: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). He thus anchors the person and work of Christ within the first proclamation of the gospel in Genesis 3:15, and points to Jesus as the promised “seed.”

John starts his Gospel by going back even further, demonstrating Christ’s deity and eternal origins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1–2, 14).

Martin Luther summarized it best: “Gospel is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ.”

THE GOSPEL IS CROSS-CENTERED

The gospel we preach is a bloody gospel. As Don Carson notes, “The gospel is not vaguely theological . . . it is decidedly and concretely Christological, that is, centered on the salvation provided through the vicarious cross-death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶

That’s why Paul could remind the church at Galatia, “It was be-

fore your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1). And it’s why he could say to the church at Corinth,

Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ *crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:22–24)

Later in the same letter, Paul adds this:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him *crucified*. (1 Cor. 2:1–2)

Indeed, there’s no gospel without the cross. The cross is where the message of the gospel is rooted in history and filled with theological significance. There we see an event that occurred in a real place, at a real time, before real witnesses. This event has real consequences as it points to real sin, real pain, real holiness, real righteousness, and real forgiveness.

This historical and theological reality is captured especially well in Peter’s words on the day of Pentecost:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22–24)

Do you see the history and theology in these words?

This is an important point for the family shepherd. We must not present the gospel to our children as though it were a fairy tale. They must know that these are truths worthy to be believed. These things are verifiable; they really happened. Moreover, because they really happened, their implications are inescapable.

THE GOSPEL IS GRACE-CENTERED

Because the gospel is something *outside* us, it's necessarily grace-centered. The work of the gospel is applied to those who believe—not because of anything in them, but in spite of the fact that there's nothing anyone can do to deserve it. The gospel is good news precisely because it is grace-centered.

What a glorious privilege it is to “testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24)! There we were, dead in sin and trespasses—when the message of the gospel announced our unmerited deliverance:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:4–9)

Family shepherds cannot afford to be ignorant concerning these matters. We must know the difference between law and gospel. We must know the difference between committing ourselves to leadership in our families because it's “right,” and looking to Christ as the Good Shepherd who, by his grace, will conform us to the will of his Father as we trust and obey him.

We must also know the difference between condemning our family with the law and shepherding them with the gospel. We must know the difference between what the gospel *requires* and what the gospel *produces*.

WHAT THE GOSPEL REQUIRES

All the gospel requires from us is *repentance* and *faith*.

This is the message Jesus conveyed: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17; see also Mark 1:15). This was Peter's message

on the day of Pentecost when, filled with the Spirit, he turned to the crowd and said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). And again: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). This is also the message Paul proclaimed at Mars Hill: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

It’s absurd to expect obedience from men who are “dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1)—men who “are in the flesh” and who consequently “cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). This is the heart of Paul’s argument in Galatians. There he makes it clear that we are “justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16). It is not our good works, our righteousness, our obedience that triggers the gospel’s effect in our lives; rather, the gospel calls simply for our repentance and our trust in Christ.

This distinction must mark our understanding and proclamation of the gospel.

WHAT THE GOSPEL PRODUCES

While repentance and faith are what the gospel requires, what the gospel produces is obedience to all the Lord’s commands.

This is the consistent teaching of the entire New Testament, and nowhere is it clearer than in the epistle of 1 John. John writes:

Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:4–6)

This is in keeping with Paul’s comment in 2 Corinthians 5:17 on the nature of true conversion: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has

come.” This, of course, is to God’s glory, not ours; for it’s God who has made us “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Make no mistake: “It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Our obedience is produced by God, not by us. This obedience is the fruit or evidence of the work of the gospel in our lives. Those who love the Lord keep his commandments (John 14:15, 21). Moreover, Jesus associates the keeping of his commandments with abiding in his love (John 15:10), not trying to earn it.

WHY THESE DISTINCTIONS MATTER

All this may seem like splitting theological hairs, but I assure you these distinctions are crucial. Confusing what the gospel produces with what the gospel requires will lead either to a sterile works-righteousness on the one hand or to lawlessness on the other.

For example, if we work toward getting our unbelieving children to do that which only the gospel can produce in the life of a believer, and fail to point them to the undeniable truth that there’s nothing in and of themselves whereby they may obey in a manner that will satisfy God’s righteousness, then we’re essentially telling them they can please God on their own—something the Bible says is impossible (Rom. 8:8).

On the other hand, if we merely throw up our hands in surrender, never calling our children to repentance and never holding up to them the mirror of God’s unattainable standard of righteousness, then our children will think themselves safe and secure when in fact they stand condemned before a holy and righteous judge. They must know that in the Lord’s sight, “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isa. 64:6).

Thus, we must teach our children to view the law as “our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). Only then does the gospel have its full impact.

THE GOSPEL IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

Finally, it's important to note that the gospel is eschatological—it is our hope not merely in this age, but also in the age to come.

In the here and now, we have hope because we know that, as John Hendryx expresses it, “There is nothing that separates those who believe from their Creator and all the benefits that He promises in him.”⁷ However, we also have the hope of eternal life. We know that Christ's resurrection is our hope, because “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18; see also Rev. 1:5); and he is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).

This has implications for the way we shepherd our families.

First, the eschatological nature of the gospel means we do not view our families as ends in themselves. Family shepherds are not men working to shape perfect families that will meet all their earthly needs. On the contrary, we know that Christ alone can meet our ultimate needs, and that he will fully do so only at the end of this present age. We also know that our family ties are temporal, and it's our ties to the body of Christ that matter eternally. Hence, our greatest desire is to lead our families to the feet of Christ, not to our own.

Second, the eschatological nature of the gospel means we do not hold our wives and children to unreasonable standards. We're all fallen creatures. Perfection is a hope we hold out for the age to come. In the meantime, we enjoy progressive sanctification while we praise God for making us more Christlike from day to day. This means we must not expect from our wives and children that which will be supplied only in the age to come.

Shepherding your family well is a task you must commit to because you know it to be right, and you see it as a means of grace that God will use to bless you and your family. However, it's not a practice that will eliminate all your problems. It is not a cure-all. It's not as though we shepherd our families well for a period of time, then sit back and enjoy the fruit of our labors. Shepherding is an ongoing task. The work isn't done until the Good Shepherd calls us home. In the meantime, we'll have to teach the same lessons

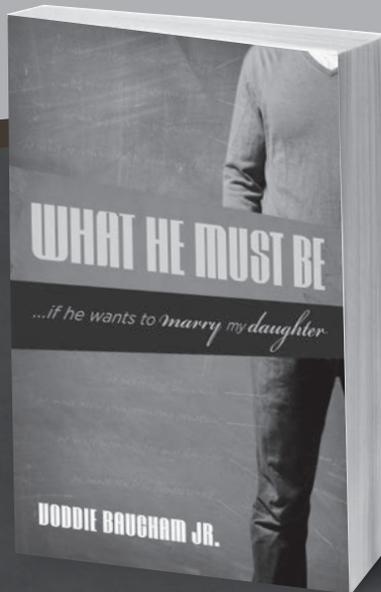
FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM

over and over, we'll often make the same mistakes again and again, and we must continue to rely on the grace of God to see us through.

We'll have to remind ourselves constantly that the gospel is news to be proclaimed constantly. We'll have to point to the God of the gospel again and again. We'll have to continually remind ourselves and our families of the Christ-centered, cross-centered, grace-centered message. And then one day, "when the chief Shepherd appears" (1 Pet. 5:4), we will see him set all things right.

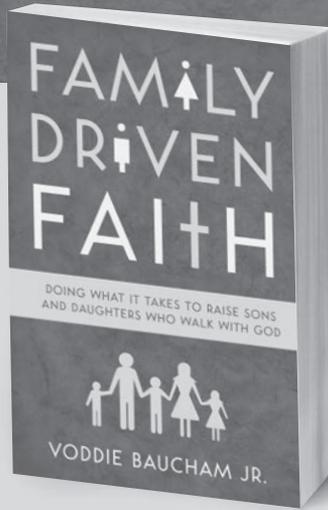
For now, we do our work and hold out hope—the hope that we find in the gospel.

Now Available from Doddie Baucham



What will you say when that certain young man sits down in your living room, sweaty-palmed and tongue-tied, and asks your permission to marry your daughter? This compelling apologetic of biblical manhood outlines ten qualities parents should look for in a son-in-law.

Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God



More teens are turning away from the faith than ever before: it is estimated that 75 to 88 percent of Christian teens walk away from Christianity by the end of their freshman year of college. Something must be done.

Family Driven Faith equips Christian parents with the tools they need to raise children biblically in a post-Christian, antifamily society. Voddie Baucham shows that God has not left us alone in raising godly children. In his Word he has given us timeless precepts and principles for multigenerational faithfulness.