

“Every parent wants to disciple his or her kids well. Most of us think we have more time, but what if we don’t? What if today is what matters and tomorrow isn’t promised? Reading Chris Swain’s words on discipling our kids in the faith felt like a commentary on a life well-lived. It would be easy to romanticize his final words on discipleship and see them as unattainable, but Swain didn’t write that way. He wrote as a parent in the trenches, providing accessible and encouraging tools for parents to use with their kids. I only wish we had more from him. His final work is a gift to parents, like me, who desperately want their kids to know that they love them and God loves them.”

**COURTNEY REISSIG**, Author, *Teach Me to Feel: Worshiping Through the Psalms in Every Season of Life*

“Christian parenting is discipleship. There is nothing more precious than discipling our children—and Chris helps and equips us to do that carefully and intentionally.”

**ED DREW**, Founder, Faith in Kids; Author, *Meals with Jesus*

“Much ink has been spilled on parenting and how to raise children. That’s not this book. Chris doesn’t provide formulas for obedience or discipline. What he provides is a book about intentionally investing in your child through things like love, connection, and prayer—all things that can easily get lost when you just want your child to stop throwing a temper tantrum or leaving their socks all over the house. It’s a book about helping both children and parents grow to be more like Jesus—which at the end of the day is what discipleship is all about.”

**CHRYSIE COLE**, Author, *A Woman’s Words; Redeeming Sexuality; and Body Matters*

“An inheritance is what you leave for the next generation. A legacy is what you leave in the next generation. As Chris poured out his heart in this book, he truly left a legacy. As you read this book, you will be inspired and equipped to reach and disciple the next generation.”

**DALE HUDSON**, [www.buildingchildrensministry.com](http://www.buildingchildrensministry.com)

“Get ready for a double dose of the profound and the practical. Let Chris point the way to becoming the spiritual guide you were born to be!”

**WILL MANCINI**, Founder, Future Church Company; Author, *Future Church*

“*Write It on Their Hearts* is the practical resource that so many parents are looking for. I was always blown away by how intentional, yet simple, Chris’s discipleship lifestyle was with his kids. This book captures both the deep insights and the practical applications that he lived out so well. This book is simple, yet powerful. Putting these principles into practice is simple enough to do this week, but powerful enough to change the trajectory of your family.”

**VICK GREEN**, Executive Director, Replicate Ministries

“Parents need easy wins in this post-Christian culture. Chris offers a practical playbook to help parents disciple their kids through easy-to-achieve daily routines. With each new page, parents will feel more confident to step into their God-ordained role of being a “Deuteronomy 6” mom or dad.”

**RON HUNTER JR., PHD**, D6 Conference Director; Author, *The DNA of D6: Building Blocks of Generational Discipleship*

“Parents, this is a must-read! What a tremendous resource to foster the spiritual roots of our children. No simple short cuts but a doable, intentional process that can open a child’s heart to the Father.”

**KATHY FERGUSON LITTON**, Director, Planter Spouse Development, North American Mission Board

“As parents, God doesn’t call us to be perfect, but he does want us to be good stewards of what he has entrusted to us. Embrace the principles and advice Chris shares here and you will know you are stewarding your role as parent well.”

**KEVIN EZELL**, President, North American Mission Board, SBC

“Most Christian parents know it’s their responsibility to disciple their own children. However, very few actually know how to do it. Thankfully, Chris Swain provided this extremely relevant and practical book for all of us. It’s a must-have for every parent, grandparent, and guardian. I’ll personally be using this book and gifting it to others.

**SHANE PRUITT**, National Next Gen Director, North American Mission Board; Author, *9 Common Lies Christians Believe*

“*Write It on Their Hearts* is a clear example of Chris’s dedication and commitment to helping families raise their children to love and follow Christ. This book will serve as a great resource in parenting. Chris gives practical insights that are easy to follow while pointing parents to the Father’s love.”

**ERIC GEIGER**, Senior Pastor, Mariners Church, Irvine, California

“You will want to read *Write It on Their Hearts* and put what you learn into practice. In doing so, you are making an eternal impact and leaving a legacy with the children the Lord has entrusted to you.”

**KANDI GALLATY**, Author, *Disciple Her*

“*Write It on Their Hearts* is the most clear, accessible, and practical book written to help parents disciple their kids. Through this book Chris and Melissa will help you understand how to build relationships with your kids that lead to eternal impact.”

**BEN TRUEBLOOD**, Director, Student Ministry, Lifeway Christian Resources

“*Write It on Their Hearts* isn’t just a great book; it’s a necessary read for every parent. In a world demanding your attention, you’re reminded to chase after what matters most—what matters for eternity. A must-read for every parent who is serious about raising Jesus-loving disciples.”

**JERRAD LOPES**, Founder, Dad Tired

“Many parents do not know how to disciple their own children. Yes, we need to invite parents into a spiritual awakening in their own lives. And we need to call them to lead and disciple their children. But the very next step must be *showing* them, in a practical way, *how* to actually do that. That is what Chris and Melissa Swain have done.”

**RICHARD ROSS, PHD**, Senior Professor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In *Write It on Their Hearts*, Chris and Melissa help parents like me (a mom who feels like I have no idea what I’m doing) to navigate a tough and weighty calling. They cut through the fog of nebulous ‘I shoulds’ and stick to Scripture, offering ways for us to engage with our kids over the long haul. What a gift this is for parents like me, who need biblical wisdom and practical ideas.”

**KRISTEN WETHERELL**, Author, *Humble Moms* and *Hope When It Hurts*



**WRITE IT**



**ON THEIR**



**HEARTS**



**Chris Swain** WITH **Melissa Swain**

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Published by:

The Good Book Company



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[thegoodbook.com.au](http://thegoodbook.com.au) | [thegoodbook.co.nz](http://thegoodbook.co.nz) | [thegoodbook.co.in](http://thegoodbook.co.in)

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Cover design by Faceout Studio

Art direction and design by André Parker

ISBN: 9781784987749 | Printed in India

*Caedmon and Honor,  
Run hard after Jesus,  
no matter where it takes you.*



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# Foreword

*By Robby Gallaty*

**E**veryone who was friends with Chris knew he lived purposefully. Everything he did was intentional.

Whether it was learning a new hobby, researching a leadership-development tool, finding a new fishing lure that worked, or perfecting a card trick—all things we both loved—he was fully invested, which is why we got along so well. One responsibility he focused on more than most was discipling his family at home. Our staff would say often, “If I was half the dad Chris was...,” or “I really need to do with my kids what Chris is doing with his.”

Two years ago, I lamented to Chris about the lack of discipleship resources that would help parents to invest in their children. “We need someone to write about how to disciple children,” I said. “We need someone to write the book who is actively practicing what he preaches.” The person that came to mind was him. He disclosed, “I didn’t tell you this yet, but I’ve been working on a manuscript outline for the past few months.” I couldn’t think of anyone better to provide a guidebook for discipling.

Writing can be a chore for many; however, *Write It on Their Hearts* was not for Chris. Regularly, I would walk into his office to find a new picture, diagram, or acrostic on his

whiteboard. “Hey, do you have a minute for me to run this by you?” was a consistent phrase I heard. The writing process was life-giving from the start. As with everything, Chris set deadlines for himself, normally months before the actual date to provide a margin for unexpected things happening. He set a goal to finish the manuscript by July 9, 2021. Why? His words were, “Pastor, that’s the day before you leave for your month sabbatical. I want to get it in your hands to read and comment on while you’re away.” Neither of us knew at the time how important that completion date would be.

On July 9, while both of our wives were out of town with our children, Chris and I had planned to go to a local baseball game. Just before he was to arrive at my house, I got a call that he was being rushed to the ER. We spent the next six days at the hospital day and night, praying and waiting for Chris to come out of the non-responsive state he was in. People from all over the country texted, emailed, and called to say they were praying alongside us for a healing miracle. On July 15, God answered our prayer by giving Chris the ultimate healing in heaven.

Even though he’s been gone for months now, I think about him every day. I still can’t comprehend why God would take my best friend prematurely. I don’t know if I will ever understand it this side of eternity, but that doesn’t minimize my trust in God’s sovereign plan.

Even though Chris is not with us anymore, these final words will continue to impact lives for years to come. Everything Chris believed about not wasting one’s life, making the most of the time we have, and leaving a legacy long

after you're gone was realized on July 15, the day he went to be with Jesus. He practiced everything he presents in this book. He didn't write as an ivory-tower theologian, propped up in a monastery, secluded from the world. No, he shares from experience, as a fellow pilgrim on the journey of parenthood, figuring it out along the way.

What you have in your hands is not just a resource to read and put on a shelf. It's a manifesto Chris and his wife, Melissa, lived by. From the vantage point of someone with a front-row seat to the principles in action outlined in this book, I can attest to the impact they have made in his family and mine.

*Robby Gallaty, Pastor, Long Hollow Church  
December 2021*



# Introduction

## *Who Is Discipling Your Children?*

**W**hat's so hard about being a parent? As a youth pastor, I asked myself this question often. I would encourage the parents of my students to raise their children well. To instill biblical principles in their lives. To bring them to every church event possible. I told parents, "You are the primary disciple-maker in your kid's life." And I believed it. I told every parent I connected with that if they just did a few simple things, they would be successful.

I remember the looks on parents' faces when I would tell them just how easy it was to lead their children to be like Jesus. These parents looked at me with exasperation, others looked incensed, and some looked at me with pity in their eyes. Every once in a while, a parent would say, "Chris, some day when you have kids, you'll understand why it's not that easy." I would just nod for that parent, but inside, I was disagreeing. It couldn't be that hard, I worked with kids all day every day, I knew how it worked. Then that "someday" arrived. My first child was born.

As I held my brand-new baby boy in my arms, I thought about the future. What if I made a mistake with him? What if I drove him to a life of disappointment or failure? What if all the things I had said and taught as a youth

leader weren't enough? Could everything I believed about raising Christ-centered kids be theory alone? The faces of those parents haunted me as my heart raced. I wanted to go back in time and slap myself. The sudden realization that I knew absolutely nothing about being a parent set in. I was clueless. What was God doing putting me in charge of a living, breathing human being? If there had been a camera in the delivery room, it would have zoomed in on my face to highlight my misguided understanding of the weight of parenthood.

Since that momentous day, I have gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the challenges parents face. Raising my own children, a teenager and an elementary-aged child, has exposed me to both sides of the coin. It is definitely not easy. There is no shortcut. If we want to lead our children to Jesus and for them to be like Jesus, it will take work. But there is so much more to it than that. Ultimately, it comes down to some good news and bad news.

Let's start with the bad news. Being a parent is tough. Let that understatement sink in. You are in charge of another human. The highest of highs and lowest of lows come at you on a daily, if not hourly basis (ok, for real, minute by minute). The blessing and the agony of parenting are oars in the same boat. One minute they're melting your heart with macaroni art, the next minute they're melting your favorite plant in the firepit out back. Children don't come with a how-to manual. There is no pause button for this season of life. There is no helpline, no tech support. God blesses you with a child and entrusts that child's care and well-being to you.

Parenting is tough but add to that the difficulty of being a Christian parent in a post-Christian culture. Even the easier elements of parenting are dialed up to the highest difficulty in this day and age. Teaching your children to walk pales in comparison to teaching them to walk with wisdom in a world flooded with foolishness. Likewise, teaching your children to talk, and use proper grammar is child's play compared to teaching them to be slow to speak, and to do so with grace and humility amidst the godless banter of modern media.

This post-Christian culture is a monumental challenge, but it is nothing new. Thousands of years ago, the world's greatest ruler set out to conquer Jerusalem. He had the largest army, the greatest tactics, and all the resources he would need to accomplish the task ten times over. But instead of overwhelming the city with force, he did something very different. He came bearing sacrifices to Jehovah.

Alexander the Great used a brilliant method to conquer the culture.<sup>1</sup> He didn't come to destroy the societal norms and traditions; he came to celebrate them. But there was a caveat: he introduced exciting new elements to the mix. Mr. The Great was ok with whatever it is you held as important, he just wanted to share some intriguing new stuff that your people were sure to love. And by doing so, he introduced four specific means by which he ultimately integrated you into his empire.

## **1. Entertainment**

Theater and the arts were a critical piece of Alexander's strategy. Popular culture crafted shared experiences that fostered a new mindset in the hearts of the people.

While often indirect, entertainment is most commonly a commentary on culture. The real question is, who is crafting the commentary, and what are they trying to say through it?

## **2. Information**

In our modern world, we have access to information instantly. We can quickly access even the vaguest information within seconds on our phone or device. But in the time of Alexander the Great, things moved much slower. Couriers had to deliver messages from town to town. Often, critical information would take days or weeks to reach various cities. It isn't hard to imagine the power someone could wield if they had control over this information network. We see it in our world every day. What news channel do you trust? Whose version of the news is more accurate? We typically like our news filtered by whoever leans our way politically. But Alexander was in control of the news quite literally. Not only could he determine when people heard what was going on, he could also shape the narrative.

## **3. Sports**

Imagine the children gathering to listen to the rabbi consistently, their free time filled with elements that engrained what it meant to be Jewish. When Alexander the Great brought sports into the culture, the focus shifted from things of eternal consequence, to the story about the fastest runner in all the known world. As an avid lover of football, it is all too easy for me to see how the insignificant pastime of sports can occupy my thoughts and lead to distraction. I'm not trying to create a feeling of guilt here, but

perhaps you too can sense the ease with which things like sports can affect a culture.

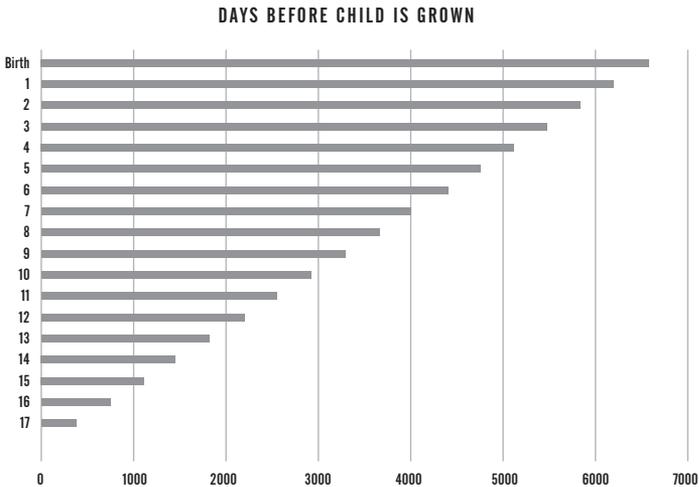
#### **4. Education**

When children learned in Jerusalem, they learned of their heritage. They were taught the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) as well as important moves of God through the ages. Alexander didn't tell the people to stop teaching these things; he simply brought new information to add to the mix. What about the other gods celebrated across multiple cultures? Alexander encouraged those as well. Education shapes children's minds, that is no surprise. But when education is institutionalized, there is always a narrative framework by which educators work. We must again ask the question, who controls this narrative? Alexander knew that if he could reach children, generations to come would move farther away from their existing culture to embrace his new one.

Alexander the Great's method for assimilating cultures was so effective that he became one of history's most powerful rulers. It doesn't take a genius to look at our current post-Christian culture and realize that perhaps we too have been enveloped in a modern version of Hellenism. For parents trying to raise disciples of Jesus, we must be hyperaware of the methodology of the enemy to distract and derail us. We live in a vulture culture that has an agenda to prey upon our children. It is subversive, and it is effective. And guess what, it only gets more challenging! (Stay with me. The good news is coming!)

68% of Christians make a decision to follow Jesus before they turn 18 years old. That means the chances of your

child following Jesus after they leave home decreases dramatically. Knowing this, the challenge to lead our children to follow and be like Jesus is even more critical. This is especially poignant when we look at the timeline we have with our children. Think about your children's time with you. You'll get about 6,570 days with your children before they turn 18. 5,840 days before they get their driver's license. 4,380 days before they hit the teenage years. 2,190 days before they start school. 365 days before our children learn to walk. I don't know where you are in this timeline but if it's anywhere after your child is born then you have even less time to get intentional. Look at this time chart:



If that visual doesn't get your mind racing and your heart beating faster, then you've got it together more than most. At the time of writing this, my children are 14 and 10. Realizing I only have a few more years to impact my

oldest child is mind blowing. Just yesterday it seems he was learning to ride his bike, and, in a year, he will be getting his learner's permit to drive a car! Lord, help us!

Take a moment and reflect deeply upon this time chart. Perhaps, like me, you have a teenager, and you see just how much less time you have ahead. Maybe you have a newborn, and it feels like you have all the time in the world. Over my years in ministry, parents have told me again and again, "Don't take your time for granted; it flies by!" I cannot reiterate that truth to you enough. Maybe you already understand how critical each moment is with your children. The challenge is that, in the moment, we rarely feel the pressure of losing time. It's only when we reflect back that we realize how short these years are.

When it comes to the little time we have with our children, we must strike a balance between being overbearing and ever-present, and becoming apathetic. One way to keep things in perspective is to map out the milestones in our children's lives. This way we can have more intentional clarity when we engage with our children. Set a reminder on your calendar to look over milestones on your horizon. Think about key moments like your child getting a phone or moving from elementary to middle school. Being more aware of these times will help you lean into them as they happen.

Parents are facing a vulture culture that uses the Hellenistic tactics of Alexander the Great. As we have seen, we are also up against a time constraint. Additionally, there is a minimization of faith in our culture. If we analyze the top child-rearing values across American adults, we find that being responsible is number one. Hard work is number two.

And coming in third at just 30% of those polled is faith.<sup>2</sup> I guess we could celebrate the fact that faith is even on the list, but, in this day and age, that's not saying much. Over half of adults contend that Christianity is just one of many faith options, and they are more likely to pick and choose beliefs rather than adopt those of a church or denomination.<sup>3</sup> So for many parents, faith is not a top priority for their children, and what faith they do have tends to be a buffet of preferential beliefs rather than foundational orthodoxy.

Let's get this straight:

- As Christian families, we are living in a vulture culture designed to integrate our children.
- We are up against a time constraint to lead our children to Christ.
- The culture's focus for our children is more about hard work than pursuing their faith.
- The majority of parents aren't modeling an orthodox faith worth following, anyway.

Yeah, like I said, let's start with the bad news. The odds seem stacked against Christian parents. It feels overwhelming. It may even seem insurmountable as you think of your own children. But don't despair and give up yet! The bad news is pretty bad, but the good news—well the good news is here to save the day.

## **A Person**

The good news, parents, is this: we have hope. And not just any hope, but the hope of glory, Jesus Christ in us. While

there are no perfect parents, there is a perfect God. Jesus provides us with a purpose and a plan. So, while the odds aren't in our favor, Jesus is the one who makes the way for us to succeed. I'll take those odds any day.

Think about this: the first children ever born were not born in the Garden of Eden. They were born after the fall. That means there have been no perfect parents. God alone is the perfect Father. Presenting your children mature in Christ is the goal. The challenges pushing back against this goal are strong, but the apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1:29, "I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me." Jesus Christ—working in us—can and will accomplish his will; we don't have to go it alone. We don't have to hope it all works out. We can know that Jesus is at work in us and through us to impact our children. The Holy Spirit is at work empowering us to accomplish his will.

## **A Purpose**

Here's more good news: we have a purpose. Jesus is very clear to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20: "Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Our purpose as parents is clearly defined here: we are to make disciples. That includes our children. I'd argue that, for parents, our children are our priority in making disciples. The Great Commission begins in the home. This is

the purpose each and every Christ-following parent must embrace. The person, Jesus Christ, gives us this purpose: to make disciples. That's good news.

We don't have to scour the internet looking for a reason.

We don't have to do any soul-searching in order to discover some deep truth.

We don't have to take an assessment to be told what our focus should be.

Jesus summed it all up in these two words: make disciples.

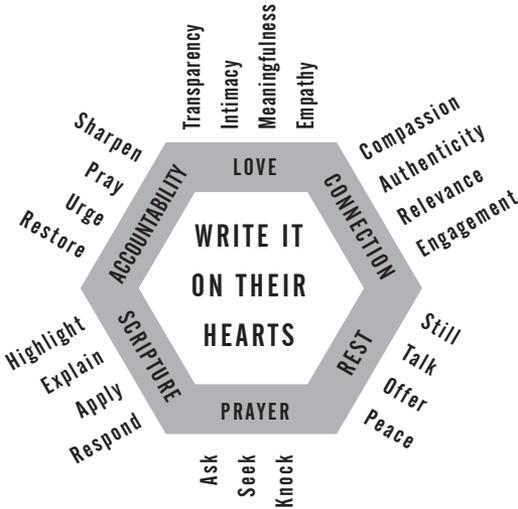
## **A Plan**

The good news is we have a person in Jesus, who gives us a purpose in the Great Commission. That leads us to the last bit of good news: we have a plan. This book will walk you through the plan, but here it is in a nutshell: discipleship happens when we spend intentional time with our children. It is in these moments that God writes his word on their hearts. He does the writing, but we help create the atmosphere for this to take place. There are six key elements that Jesus modeled in his discipleship:

1. Love
2. Prayer
3. Connection
4. Scripture
5. Accountability
6. Rest

You will be able to develop a strategy that is custom-fit for your season of parenting. Remember the beginning of the chapter where I recalled my early days of youth ministry,

happily telling parents how easy it was to lead their kids to follow and be like Jesus? Well, I wasn't completely wrong.



The plan is simple. What's difficult is the investment. I can show you how to get to my house on a GPS and it won't take me more than a few minutes. But the actual trip is going to take time and effort and resources. I know now that parenting is hard work. Parenting to make disciples is even more challenging. But the plan itself, it's simple. What we have to do to work the plan will take time and effort and resources. And that is anything but easy. Discipling our children will not be easy, but it will be worth it. So just what is the plan? That, we will discuss in full in the next chapter.

Take some time to think through specific ways the culture has impacted your children. List some key responses to how you want to help them navigate the four areas we discussed:

- *Entertainment*: How does your child's exposure to TV, YouTube, Twitch, and social media influence their perspective on life? How does it impact their faith?
- *Education*: What are your children being taught? What are teachers leading them to believe about society, religion, ethics, and other key subjects? Have you had discussions with them about these areas and what you believe?
- *Sports*: How do extra-curricular activities take a priority in your home? How are each of your children learning to prioritize their pursuit of Jesus over their pursuit of athletic success?
- *Information*: Where are your children learning about the events of the day? Whose version of those events are they seeing as most trusted? Have you spoken with your children about how to discern truth when everyone has their version of what is right and wrong?

In addition to examining the impact of the culture on your children, here are some more key practices to try:

- Chart out the key milestones in each of your children's lives.
- Create a reminder that you get on a consistent basis that reminds you of key dates and the time you have left with your children.
- Consider developing some values that your family can adopt as guiding principles. Write them down

and talk through them. Examples might be: we tell the truth, we seek Jesus first in all circumstances, we show grace to one another, etc.