This book is dedicated to Abby and Josiah. My greatest prayer is for you to treasure Jesus more than anything else in this world.

– Tad Thompson
“Here is a practical page-turner that encourages fathers to engage the hearts of their families with truth and grace. In an age when truth is either ignored or despised, it is refreshing to see a book written for ordinary fathers who want their families to be sanctified by the truth. Thompson writes with a grace which reminds us that parenting flows from the sweet mercies of Christ.”

Joel Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“As parents, we know God has given us the responsibility to train our children in his ways. But many parents don’t know where or how to start. Tad has done us all a favor by identifying seven key categories of biblical teaching we can utilize in teaching our children godly truth and principles. This easy-to-follow plan will help any parent put the truth of God’s Word into their children’s hearts.”

Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention; father of six

“Need an introductory text for parents to the topic of discipling children? Here is a clear, simple book on family discipleship, centered on the gospel rather than human successes or external behaviors.”

Timothy Paul Jones, Ph.D., Professor of Discipleship and Family Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Are you doing what you can to make sure the coming generation will praise the Lord? This book can help you in that great task. May the Lord use it powerfully.”

James M. Hamilton, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This approach is creative, thoroughly biblical, and a must read for any parent who desires for their children to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. This is a great strategy for anyone looking for a way to pull their family together around God’s Word.”

Blake Gideon, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Inola, Oklahoma
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I can see the room as if it were yesterday. Metal folding chairs, flannel board, musty carpet, and all my church buddies gathered for the weekly ritual of Sunday School. As I leaned back against the wall in my chair, I had no sense there was anything unique about this particular lesson. It was simply another hour with my friends, listening to a story I had heard a thousand times before. And this is no exaggeration; I had heard the simple gospel message at least one thousand times. My dad, a Baptist pastor, was faithful to share the gospel, my mom was faithful to talk to me about the gospel, and our church was faithful in its proclamation of the gospel. I had heard the message of the cross time and time again, so when my first-grade Sunday School teacher began to tell it again that day, it seemed like an old, broken-in ball cap, very comfortable and familiar.

But something was unique about this particular
lesson; the Holy Spirit began to work in my heart. From one moment to the next, something changed. I realized in an entirely new way that the cross was about my sin, and that this all-too-familiar story demanded a response. I was undone, convicted of my sin. I spent the rest of the day thinking about Jesus hanging on the cross, dying, his sacrifice paying for what I had done. I vividly remember lying in bed that evening praying a simple, child-like prayer to God, asking him to forgive my sins. This was not the grandest of all confessions. It was not theologically precise or soteriologically accurate. But it was wrought by the Holy Spirit, who had gently and persuasively led me, a six-year-old boy, to the cross of the Savior.

I reflect often on that Sunday, and cherish it as the day I was born again by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the gospel. When I ponder that day, it is obvious to me that two groups were vital to my conversion and subsequent discipleship: my parents and the local church.

God intends for a beautiful partnership to exist between the home and the local church. As a matter of fact, God intends for the Christian home to be the body of Christ in microcosm. As George Whitefield once put it, “[E]very house…a little Parish, every Governor a Priest, every Family a Flock…”

But historically it has been rare for the Christian
home to function even remotely like a little church. As I think about my childhood friends who were with me in that Sunday School class, I do not believe many of them were afforded the blessing of being discipled by their parents. Few of them are active in the church today.

**The Situation**

I have served on a church staff as a student pastor, as an associate pastor with oversight of adult education, and now as a lead pastor. At every stage of my seventeen-year experience in ministry, the disconnect between parents and children with respect to the discipleship process has become increasingly evident. The hard fact is that fathers and mothers are not taking on the responsibility to disciple their own children, and churches are doing very little, if anything, to challenge this reality. One look at my Facebook page demonstrates the painful fact that many young adults who were once quite active in student ministry programs have left the church and are questioning their faith. A young man found my Facebook account and wrote, “I just want to let you know that I don’t believe in organized religion anymore. I’m not even sure I believe in God.”

Personal experiences do not prove societal trends, but current research demonstrates that this young man’s experience is not uncommon. Polling has
shown that, of adults in their twenties who attended church as teenagers, 61 percent no longer do so.²

During the past thirty years, the Church has become increasingly geared towards the consumer. Pastors and church-growth experts have thought of every way imaginable to compel the masses, through attractive facilities and programs, to at least walk in the door. Often the motive is a genuine desire to share the gospel with those who need to hear it—and who presumably would not come to church absent video screens, concert-hall sound systems, or wacky children’s sets complete with slime machines and fire truck baptisteries. The results of these efforts may look good at first, with some churches boasting increased attendance. The data, however, demonstrate otherwise. Alvin Reid, professor of evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary writes,

Over the preceding twenty years the number of full-time youth pastors had grown dramatically and a plethora of magazines, music, and ideas aimed at youth has been birthed along the way. Meanwhile, during that same time span, the numbers of young people won to Christ dropped at about as fast a rate.³

The lesson here is that the church’s emphasis on attracting the unchurched through entertain-
ment and child-centered programs has not only not helped, it has hurt. Another researcher concurs, “Sugarcoated Christianity, popular in the 1980s and early 90s, has caused growing numbers of kids to turn away not just from attending youth-fellowship activities but also from practicing their faith at all.”

So while the church and parents alike want to raise up spiritual champions, the discipleship model in which church professionals essentially replace parents as the primary agents of discipleship is just not working. One key reason for this was revealed by a comprehensive study on the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers, which concluded,

> When it comes to the formation of the lives of youth, viewed sociologically, faith communities typically get a very small seat at the end of the table for a very limited period of time. . . . Religious communities that are interested in the faith formation of their youth simply must better address the structural competition of other, not always supportive institutions and activities. This will likely require developing new and creative norms, practices, and institutions appropriate to specific religious situations and traditions.

That is, the Church must change course. For one thing, we must recognize that a few hours a week
of consumer-oriented church events cannot successfully compete for the hearts of young people if those hearts are not being attended to spiritually in the home. The spiritual futures of children must be placed as a matter of primary importance back into the hands of the people who have the greatest opportunity to influence them for the Kingdom of God—their parents.

The idea that fathers and mothers should be the primary agents of discipleship in the lives of their children is hardly a “new and creative norm.” It is a scriptural and historical norm. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). In the Book of Psalms the author writes, “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children” (Psalms 78:5). Richard Baxter, the Puritan pastor famous for his disciplined watch over the flock placed in his care, wrote in his classic work to pastors, “Get masters of families to do their duty, and they will not only spare you a great deal of labour, but will much further the success of your labours.” What Richard Baxter wrote in 1656 can and should serve as an important paradigm shift for many churches today. Fathers and mothers must be equipped to fulfill their scriptural duty, partnering with the local church to disciple a
new generation of faithful and devoted followers of Christ.

It is my desire that this book will help the local church equip parents to engage in the discipleship task. If you are a parent, I am writing this book for you in the hopes that your children, and your children’s children, might be afforded the same experience I had as a child—to grow up in a home that loves the Lord and his gospel and demonstrates that love practically, overtly, and consistently. My childhood home was not perfect. Neither is the home I lead, nor any home I know of or have ever heard of. How good it is to know that perfection is not necessary—simply a desire, a plan, prayer, and a regular reliance on God to equip us with the grace and strength to be faithful.

The scriptural and historical record combines with the current research to show that the Church must return to the basics. The Church must again turn its attention to parents, equipping them to both disciple their children and to model for them how to reach other families with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Now Make It Stick:**

1. Take a moment to reflect on your exposure to the gospel as a child. In what ways, if any, did this gospel exposure help you come to faith in Christ?
2. In what ways does your family function as a “little church”?

We pray together as a family:
  daily | weekly | monthly | rarely/never

We read the Bible together as a family:
  daily | weekly | monthly | rarely/never

We talk about spiritual matters as a family:
  daily | weekly | monthly | rarely/never

We share the gospel with others as a family:
  daily | weekly | monthly | rarely/never

3. Read Ephesians 6:1-4 and Psalms 78:1-8 and describe in your own words your scriptural responsibility to disciple your children.
When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:11-13)

On the wall in our master bedroom hangs a full-length mirror. Of all the places in the house, it never occurred to me that this spot would be so frequently occupied. At least, not until I connected two salient facts—it is the only full-length mirror in our home, and we have a seven-year-old daughter.

Abby likes fashion. How much of this may be genetic I just don’t know, but I am certain her obsession with clothes and accessories has been fostered by her two grandmothers, both of whom are certified professional shoppers. Abby has more outfits than a seven-year-old really needs, and as she
studies her stylishness in that bedroom mirror, it seems to me that all she can see is perfection.

Children like the mirror. Me, not so much. I noticed this morning that I am getting more and more gray hair. My physique is not like it was in my “playing” days, and honestly I’m glad I met my wife fourteen years ago and not today. What I see in the mirror is decay; imperfection on the march.

Paul writes something in 1 Corinthians 13:11-13 that will serve us greatly as we begin our family discipleship design project. He alludes to the fact that maturity brings with it the realization that we don’t have it all together, that we don’t understand everything perfectly. He says, “We see in a mirror dimly,” and “We know in part.” I find it intriguing that he makes this statement after a passage about giving up childish ways of thinking and reasoning. It is as if Paul is saying, “When I was child, I thought I knew everything and saw myself for who I really was, but now I have left that foolishness behind and recognize I am not as put together as I imagined.”

Seeing our own imperfection and vulnerability is vital to the process of family discipleship. That is why we begin our design project with the mirror of Scripture. Like a mirror, the Bible exposes us and tells us the truth about ourselves. As you read through this book you will be confronted with how often you fall short of God’s design for discipleship.
in the home. Trust me—while writing these chapters I was more than once forced to the floor by the Holy Spirit in repentance for my failings as a father, husband, and pastor. So please be encouraged that not one parent who reads this book will honestly be able to approach the content like my daughter approaches that mirror in our bedroom. All of us will be confronted with our flaws and failures. This is the indispensable starting point, the place where hope begins.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 13:12b, “Now I know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” As you read, treasure up these words in your heart: “even as I have been fully known.” This is such an amazing statement of the grace of God. Although we can only know him and understand him in part, he has known us fully and completely. He knows all of our blind spots, struggles, and fears. He knows our laziness, arrogance, and pride. He knows every point of failure in our lives, and he knew all of these things before he laid the foundation of the world. He knew us fully before he died as our substitute! He knows us today, and makes his grace available to bind up every wound.

**Discipleship by Love**

A few weeks ago I sat across from a dear friend telling
him a little about this book project. All his children are young and I know his heart is to see them follow after Christ. He told me how much he needed this kind of help because he had no clue where to start in leading his family spiritually. I have written this book for him, and for so many parents just like him who desire with all their hearts to disciple their children, but no one has ever shown them how. I have written this book for me, so that I might be able to disciple my own children and equip the parents in my local church to do the same. The aim of this book is love. Love for my children, love for my church, and love for the body of Christ.

Paul concluded 1 Corinthians 13 with these words, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” The reason we ought to pursue family discipleship is love! Love for our children, no matter what age they may be. I will tell you right now that if you have teenagers and this is the first time you have considered family discipleship, the material in this book is going to be very challenging for you. True discipleship is a long, steady process, and you have fewer of those especially formative years left to work with. But please do not be driven away by guilt or fear. Don’t doubt for a moment that God still desires to work through you in powerful ways for the good of your children. Be motivated by love to capture the years that
remain for Christ. Remember that our Lord Jesus is able to do “far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Look in the mirror with me. Let’s gaze for a moment at all of our flaws and imperfections, and admit them freely to ourselves. Then let’s put down this book, get on our knees, and thank the Lord that despite all of our ugliness, he has redeemed us. He died in our place and for our sin on the cross, even while we were sinners. Let us thank the Lord for our salvation and ask him to do a work in our homes for his glory. The Sovereign King of heaven and earth has the power to transform your home. Let’s get started.

**Now Make It Stick:**

1. Get alone with God and ask him to search your heart, exposing areas of weakness pertaining to parenting and family discipleship. List your failings, and bring these items to Jesus in repentance.
2. Share your list with your spouse and spend time in prayer together, asking the Lord to transform your home for his glory.
3. Set aside an extended period of time to discuss the spiritual condition of each of your children.
4. Write down some specific areas where your children need to grow and develop spiritually, and begin praying together over these items.
RECOMMENDED READING

Key:
+ = Good place to start  *= For children  ** = Parent/Child resource

1) The Gospel
   a. Two Ways to Live, Matthias Media
   b. Two Ways to Live for Children, Matthias Media
   c. The Gospel and Personal Evangelism, Mark Dever (Crossway)
   d. + What is the Gospel?, Greg Gilbert (Crossway)

2) The Big Story (Biblical Theology)
   a. + According to Plan, Graeme Goldsworthy (IVP Academic)
   b. God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment, James Hamilton (Crossway)
   c. The Mission of God, Christopher Wright (Zondervan)
   d. * The Big Picture Story Bible, David Helm and Gail Schoonmaker (Crossway)
   e. * The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name, Sally Lloyd-Jones (ZonderKidz)

3) The Big Truths (Systematic Theology)
   a. + Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem (Zondervan)
   b. ** Big Truths for Young Hearts, Bruce Ware (Crossway)
   c. ** Training Hearts/Teaching Minds, Starr Meade (P & R)
   d. Various Reformed Catechisms
   e. The Westminster Confession

4) The Great Commission
   a. Let the Nations Be Glad, John Piper (Baker Academic)
   b. + Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, J.I Packer (IVP)
   c. How to Bring Your Children to Christ, Ray Comfort (Genesis)
   d. ** Operation World Prayer Guide

5) Spiritual Disciplines
   a. + Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, Donald S. Whitney (NavPress)
b. *Five Things Every Christian Needs to Grow*, R.C. Sproul (Reformation Trust)
d. *Gospel Worship*, Jeremiah Burroughs (Soli Deo Gloria)
e. *Dig Deeper*, Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (Crossway)
f. *Listen Up*, Christopher Ash (Good Book)
g. *Literary Study Bible* (Crossway)
h. *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway)
i. **The Good Book Company Devotions** (Different Guides for Children/Middle School/Youth/Adult)

6) Christian Living
   a. *Desiring God*, John Piper (Multnomah)
   b. *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges (NavPress)
   c. + *The Cross-Centered Life*, C.J. Mahaney (Multnomah)

7) Worldview
   a. + *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey (Crossway)
   b. *Saving Leonardo*, Nancy Pearcey (B&H)
   c. *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl (Baker)
   d. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson)
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**Community:** We want to encourage and facilitate the sense of community that naturally exists among Christians who love the gospel of grace.

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Pastor Mark Driscoll
Mars Hill Church
Acts 29

“Online pornography is not just a problem for Christian men; it is THE problem. Many men, young and old, in our churches need Sexual Detox. Challies offers practical, doable and, above all, gospel-centered hope for men. I want every man I serve and all the guys on our staff to read this book.”

Tedd Tripp, Pastor, and author of Shepherding a Child’s Heart

“Tim Challies strikes just the right balance in this necessary work. His assessment of the sexual epidemic in our culture is sober but not without hope. His advice is practical but avoids a checklist mentality. His discussion of sexual sin is frank without being inappropriate. This book will be a valuable resource.”

Kevin DeYoung, Pastor and author

“Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness. Read it and believe it.”

Ben Zobrist, Tampa Bay Rays

“Sexual Detox is just what we need. It is clear, honest, and biblical, written with a tone that is knowing but kind, exhortative but gracious, realistic but determined. We have been given by Tim Challies a terrific resource for fighting sin and exalting Christ.”

Owen Strachan, Boyce College
Reclaiming Adoption
Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father
Dan Cruver, Editor
John Piper
Scotty Smith
Richard D. Phillips
Jason Kovacs

"The authors writing here are some of the most fearless thinkers and activists in the Christian orphan care movement. Read. Be empowered. And then join Jesus for the orphans of the world."

Russell D. Moore, Pastor and author of Adopted for Life

"A stirring call to be involved in the ministry of adoption for Jesus' sake. Gospel-centered. Prophetic. Practical."

J.D. Greear, Pastor and author

"There is no greater need in our day than theological clarity. We need the ancient wisdom of the Bible, not another business book or glory story from some cool church. Dan has brought us near to the heart of God. As you read this book, you will sense the need to embrace your own acceptance as God's adopted child."

Darrin Patrick, Pastor and author

"With spiritual insight and effective teaching, Reclaiming Adoption will help believers better understand our place with Christ and work in His kingdom."

Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research

"I can't recall ever hearing about, much less reading, a book like this before. Simply put, this remarkable volume fills a much-needed gap in our understanding of what the Bible says both about God's adoption of us and our adoption of others. I highly recommend it."

Sam Storms, Author of The Singing God: Discover the Joy of Being Enjoyed by God
Wrestling with an Angel
A Story of Love, Disability, and the Lessons of Grace
by Greg Lucas
*Every word is true.*

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’—and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

**Justin Taylor**
Managing Editor
ESV Study Bible

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. In our culture which is so quick to devalue life, *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. And inside these pages he passes on his lessons of grace to us. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

**Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International**

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

**David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**

“This is not primarily a book for parents of special-needs children. There is only one disability that keeps a person from heaven, the sin that lives in our hearts. Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

**Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper**