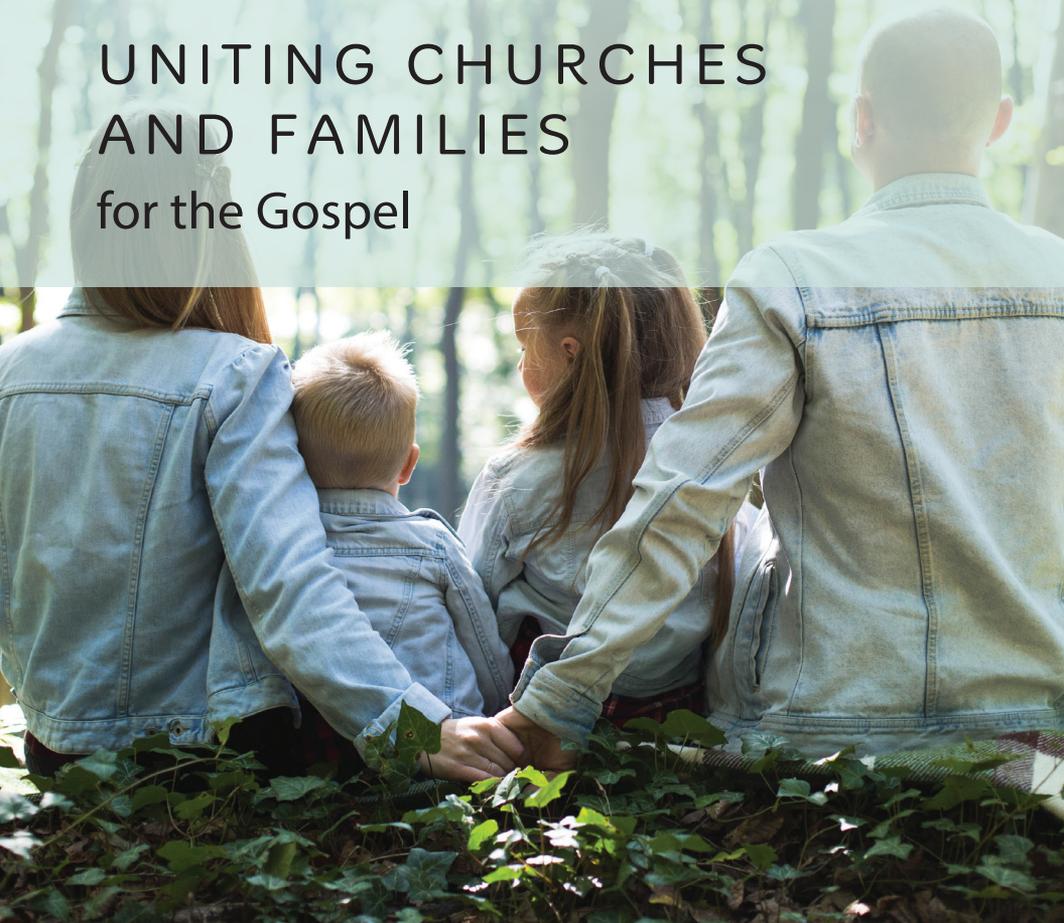




WHAT IS FAMILY MINISTRY?

UNITING CHURCHES
AND FAMILIES
for the Gospel



The global church is facing a deepening family crisis, both within the body and outside of it.

The crisis appears to be worsening. However, we see a tremendous opportunity to transform communities around the globe by building families in our churches to be agents of change and impacting their communities for Christ.

We commend Family Challenge, our partner in family ministry development among the worldwide network of national alliances, for embarking on a global initiative that rallies the church body of each nation to come together to start national conversations on building healthy families as a way of life in the corporate body.

A key instrument of this initiative is a three-part series of booklets. This is the second in the series and focuses on the “what” of family ministry—what does this kind of ministry look like? The first booklet addresses the “why” every church needs to invest in building healthy families. The third booklet will be about “how” a church can cultivate family discipleship as an integral part of its culture.

It is my pleasure to invite you to join the rest of us in building a national family ministry movement in your nation.



Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General
World Evangelical Alliance

A photograph showing a globe on the right and an open book on the left, both slightly out of focus. The globe shows parts of North and South America. The book is open to a page with text.

WELCOME

We believe “healthy families make healthy churches!” Family is a key area of focus for the Transform World movement.

We are excited about this three-part booklet series produced by Family Challenge to facilitate the on-going global conversations among Christian leaders on “why,” “what,” and “how” the Church can advance the Gospel by equipping and strengthening families.

I am glad to recommend to you this second of the booklets in your hands. I hope you will catch the heart of God in building healthy families. This booklet focuses on “what” family ministry can look like. The first booklet is on the “why” we need family ministry around the world. The last booklet will be on the “how” of building the family discipleship culture.

I hope you will be encouraged and contribute to these endeavors in your sphere of influence. Join us as we step forward together to see a greater future of the global church with much stronger families in our midst.

Thank you for taking this journey with us!



Dr. Luis Bush, Transform World





INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

Dear Church and Family Ministry Leaders,

The purpose of this booklet is to encourage you to join us and other church leaders around the world as we develop and engage in strategic, biblical ministry to families.

Ministry to families puts us on the frontlines of a great spiritual battle for the eternal souls of our children and grand-children. From the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), Satan and his demons have been battling against God's institution of the family. The Christian family threatens their evil plans to keep people far from God and headed towards Hell. The family has always been, and continues to be, a focal point of Satan's most concerted efforts.

But families are not alone. The local church has been set right in the middle of this battle to bring hope to families and equip them to build God's Kingdom and advance the Gospel for generations to come. Put simply, when churches engage in family ministry they help Christian families to:

- ▶ Stay centered in Christ and in His Word.
- ▶ Grow in health and godliness.
- ▶ Build guardrails against spiritually, emotionally, and

physically destructive patterns.

- ▶ Be intentional about discipling members of the family.
- ▶ Pass faith in Jesus to future generations.
- ▶ Become more effective in reaching their neighbors for Christ.

In our first booklet, “The Family in Crisis: An Urgent Appeal to the Global Church,” we cast a vision that each local church has a biblical responsibility to strengthen, support, and equip families to live for Christ.

In this second booklet, we will explore what “family ministry” might look like. We hope that this resource will help your team to:

- ▶ Develop a clearer picture of a healthy Christian family.
- ▶ Dialogue with each other on the definition of family ministry.
- ▶ Articulate what family ministry might look like in your local church.

Thank you for taking this journey with us!

With God’s Love,



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Pastor Matthew Ling is the international Facilitator of Transform World Family Challenge and the 4/14 Window Movement. He is also leading the family ministry development of the global network of national alliances of World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and chairs the Family Life Commission of Asia Evangelical Alliance of WEA.



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Dr. Rob Rienow serves as the founder of Visionary Family Ministries, and is an international conference speaker, author, church planter.



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WHAT IS THE FAMILY?

Before we talk about what family ministry might look like in a local church, we first need to look at what the Bible says about God's vision for the Christian family. What kind of family are we aiming to build?

Although the concept of "family" may vary from culture to culture, the Word of God gives light and truth to all families around the world. Therefore, our vision for family life and our vision for family ministry must be rooted in the Bible. God created marriage and family, and therefore He alone determines their purpose and function.

Male and Female

Jesus taught that at the very beginning of creation, God made two people—one man and one woman (Mark 10:6). The man and woman were both created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and therefore share equal value, worth, and dignity. Adam and Eve were both given necessary and essential responsibilities over creation (Genesis 1:28), and God joined them together in the institution of marriage (Genesis 2:24).

The Covenant of Marriage

In this one man/one woman covenant of marriage, God calls the husband and wife to complement each other spiritually,

emotionally, and physically. They share equal value, but are called to different roles. The husband is called to love, serve, and lead his wife and family (Ephesians 5:25–26). The wife is called, not to be subservient, but to be a willing helpmate (Genesis 2:18). The husband is commanded to love his wife (Ephesians 5:25) and the wife should respect her husband (Ephesians 5:33).

In Christian marriage, the couple makes a lifetime commitment to each other. The wife becomes the highest earthly priority for the husband, and the husband becomes the same for the wife. While this institution may have many different cultural expressions, it is ultimately a solemn covenant before God. Covenant marriage between one man and one woman is the foundation for the Christian family, and provides the best environment for raising and helping godly children get safely home to their Father in Heaven.

Raising Godly Children

Within this covenant of marriage, God gave us the gift of sexuality; for procreation (Genesis 1:28), pleasure (Song of Solomon 1), and to unite the spirit of husband and wife (1 Corinthians 6:16–17). God's clear command is to multiply and fill the earth with His people (Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 9:1). God's desire is for us to bear godly offspring (Mal. 2:15). One of God's miraculous purposes for marriage is the blessing of children, and parents are then called by God to do all in their power to teach their children about God and lead them to love Him (Deuteronomy 6:5–7).

Our Struggles, His Victory

Because of our sinful natures, marriage and family life is a constant struggle. Our deepest character problems are revealed in the intensity and intimacy of family life. Married couples need help to grow in their understanding of God's purpose for their marriage, as well as the skills needed to grow and maintain a healthy relationship. Parents need encouragement, training, and

support to raise their children to love the Lord and serve Him in this world.

We cannot do this by ourselves! Ultimately, the power for a thriving Christian marriage and family is Jesus Himself. He is the absolutely vital “third strand” that keeps us together (Ecclesiastes 4:12). In fact, He is the single most important component of any marriage. We must depend on Him daily to strengthen our relationships. For this reason, it is essential that our local churches equip and encourage couples and families to pray together and spend time in God’s Word.



WHAT IS FAMILY MINISTRY?

Family ministry is equipping church members with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to form healthy Christian marriages and families. The goal is for all families in any cultural context to come to know and apply biblical and practical principles for building Christian marriages and families.

Family Ministry is Family Discipleship

God created the institution of the local church for several purposes: to worship God, teach biblical doctrine (2 Timothy 4:1), guard the church from false doctrine (Titus 2:1, 15), disciple believers (1 Timothy 4), care for believers (Acts 4:34, 1 Timothy 5, James 1:27, James 2:15), and equip them for works of ministry in their homes, communities, and the world. (Ephesians 4:12).

Family ministry, therefore, is a vital part of the overall disciple-making structure of the local church. Pastors are called to teach couples, parents, and grandparents what it means to have a Christian family. The church must take the lead in providing biblical guidance regarding God's purpose for marriage, children, and family. The local church is uniquely equipped to both teach these things and hold members accountable to putting them into action (Matt. 28:20).

The local church is to be a “family-training center,” fulfilling part of the Great Commission mandate to “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....” (Matthew 28:19–22).

This emphasis on discipleship is vital. Families need more than just information, they need transformation. They need not only the “head” knowledge, but also help moving that information into their “hearts,” and then putting it into action with their “hands.”

Depending on the context, some churches may even want to change the name from “family ministry” to “family discipleship” to better connect this ministry with the overall disciple-making culture of the church.



PILLARS OF STRENGTH FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

Going a little deeper, what does family ministry involve? While each family is unique, key scriptural principles can guide us.

For example, three New Testament letters (Colossians 3:18–4:1; Ephesians 5:21–6:9; and 1 Peter 2:18–3:7) lay down specific relationships and instructions (commonly referred to as the “household code”) that each Christian family can focus on. We shall categorize these into broad areas of family living, or pillars for healthy families.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but here are some of the essential elements God has given to us for healthy Christian families. Our churches can develop intentional strategies to come alongside families in each of these areas.

1. Faith Formation

God has designed the family to be an active evangelism and discipleship center, shaping the hearts of its members with a love for God and others (Genesis 18:18–19, Deuteronomy 6:5–7, Ephesians 6:4). Through the institution of family, God brings glory to Himself by advancing His multi-generational plan to fill the earth with His worshippers (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 78, Rom. 11:36).

2. Mission

Missional families, as part of their identity in Christ, are engaged in service, missions, evangelism, and outreach. By equipping families for spiritual health and success, local churches fill the community with “mission outposts,” as every home becomes a beacon of hope, radiating the light of Christ, and engaging in the Great Commission. When spiritual life is taking place in the home, families can then be meaningfully challenged to use their home as an evangelistic hospitality center in their neighborhoods.

3. Marriage

If a local church is committed to the advance of the Gospel, it must be committed to preparing young people for Christian marriage. Preparation includes casting a vision for family involvement in the courtship process, teaching a biblical view of sexual purity, and warning believers against the dangers of co-habitation. The local church enriches existing marriages, supports couples in crisis, and nurtures members who need healing from divorce and loss.

4. Parenting and Grand-parenting

God calls parents to be the primary spiritual shepherds for their children (Deuteronomy 6:5–7). Grand-parents are called to take an active role in the discipleship of their grandchildren (Deuteronomy 4:9). God’s desire is that families be filled with an atmosphere where God is integrally connected to every aspect of daily life, conversations, and celebrations.

5. Leadership Development

Every family needs godly servant leadership in order to move forward together as a team. God’s Word provides clear criteria for leadership in the home, and encourages men to lead their families spiritually. Young men are to be disciplined by older men, as God provides them with a family,

young husbands and fathers need to be encouraged to love sacrificially, serve humbly, and lead spiritually (1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 5:25-33). Spiritual leadership at home is so important that God has made it a requirement for leadership in the Church (Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3). Church leaders should be held accountable to leading their own families in prayer and Scripture reading, while maintaining healthy boundaries around their ministry hours. Pastors/elders will have difficulty leading the congregation in a direction they are not personally moving in themselves.

6. Human sexuality

The Christian family guards, proclaims, and elevates God's instructions for sexuality to be enjoyed only within a monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Cohabitation, promiscuity, pornography, same-sex activity, and other sexual behaviors contradicting scriptural standards are key forms of spiritual attacks in the church today.

7. Aging

Children are to do all in their power to bless and support their aging parents (1 Timothy 5). As they learn to honor their parents, they learn to honor God (Mark 7:11). It is God's desire that parents will follow God and children will honor their parents by following in their footsteps of faith in Jesus. As parents and children get older, they are invited to increase their spiritual leadership of the family.

8. Non-nuclear Families

The New Testament church provided special care and instructions for widows, orphans, single parents, and extended family. We should seek to do the same also. (James 1:27, Psalm 68:5, 146:9, Deuteronomy 27:19, Jeremiah 49:11, Isaiah 54:5-8, and 1 Timothy 5:5).

9. Family “Resource Management”

The local church should seek to equip the Christian family to live as godly stewards of all that has been entrusted to them. Discipleship includes guiding families to joyfully and responsibly live in a way that reflects God’s will and displays His love and grace. Family ministry includes helping families practice biblical principles in every sphere of life, managing time, balancing work and home, caring for their bodies, and practicing biblical money management.



FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Family ministry does not need to be a new department or program, but should infuse every part of the life of the church.

Family ministry trains individuals for evangelism, equips people for missions, prepares the congregation for worship, and encourages everyone in the daily work of following Jesus. As such, family ministry reaches into every corner of the church.

Family ministry can be thought of as a framework that supports everything else a church wants to accomplish. Indeed, a thriving family ministry will almost always lead to a thriving spiritual community across all segments of the church.

While the specific components of family discipleship may look different from church to church and country to country, the key ingredient is an integrated approach to discipling people at every stage of life.

A church, with a fully-functioning family ministry, would ideally be supporting its members in all of the nine “pillars” explained above. Note some examples the areas of marriage and parenting that a church can focus on their family discipleship framework.

1. Marriage

- a. Preparation for marriage. Helping single adults of all ages develop the biblical knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for both choosing a mate and staying with them.
- b. Ongoing marriage enrichment. Providing ongoing opportunities to bless and encourage married couples as they grow together.
- c. Crisis counseling and divorce care. Helping couples weather marital crises through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- d. Supporting widows and widowers. Providing care, encouragement and support for those left behind when a spouse dies.
- e. Including and equipping singles. For those serving Jesus as a single person, the church affirms, equips, and integrates them into the full life and fellowship of the church.

2. Parenting

- a. Preparing young couples for the blessing of children. Helping couples transition into Christian parenthood by equipping them for the spiritual and practical mission of family life.
- b. Ongoing parenting support. Encouraging parents as their children grow and mature through the various developmental stages.
- c. Equipping for family discipleship. Training and encouraging parents and grandparents how to pass their faith to their children and grandchildren.
- d. Supporting single parents. Providing care, encouragement and support for single parents.

A photograph of a man and two children sitting at a wooden table, looking at an open book. The man is in the center, smiling and looking down at the book. To his left is a young girl with long dark hair, also smiling and looking at the book. To his right is a young boy with short dark hair, smiling and looking at the book. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a staircase.

FAMILY MINISTRY: GETTING STARTED

At first glance, the needs may seem to be overwhelming, and the scope of training enormous.

The next booklet will give more details about how to build family ministry in your church, but here are a few ideas to help get you started.

1. Teach classes on “What is Christian Marriage and Family?” to people of all ages in your church.
2. Prepare couples for life-long Christian marriage through a deliberate marriage ministry that includes marriage preparation and enrichment.
3. Begin to train parents how to pray and read the Bible at home with their children and grandchildren.
4. Make it a priority to include teaching on biblical sexuality from the pulpit as well as through your Christian education ministries.
5. Strengthen older church members with the vision and skills to be spiritual leaders for the generations of their family.



Family ministry is not just about shaping families that function and get along with one another. Family ministry is a necessary element of building the Kingdom of God.

When churches embrace the mission of family ministry we will increasingly see healthy Christian families that raise godly children to the third and fourth generation, who love their Father in Heaven with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength, and who love their neighbor as themselves.

As we equip and strengthen families, we advance the Great Commission and increasingly fill the earth with followers of Jesus.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please consider and discuss these questions within your church or leadership team:

1. What are some of the ways you have seen Satan and the worldly culture corrupt the biblical view of family?
2. How has the Holy Spirit personally encouraged you in your marriage or family?
3. How would you describe family ministry to someone else?
4. How can you be an encouragement to struggling marriages or families in your church?
5. After reading this booklet, what would be a simple next step you can take towards implementing family ministry in your church?

HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN EQUIP FAMILIES AND HELP DEVELOP THE FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY IN YOUR CHURCH.



Thriving Kids Connection - An Online Community

Thriving Kids Connection is a community of parents and Biblical Parenting Coaches who share a Godly vision for equipping kids to thrive and developing missional families. New and experienced parents gather together with trained coaches to talk about WHAT changes need to take place and then most importantly, HOW to implement them. Our goal is to help children thrive in an ever changing and complicated world. Learn more at ThrivingKidsConnection.com



THRIVE - Family Development Video Series

THRIVE! is a 12-session Video Training Program that teaches families a heart-based approach in order to help children thrive. It can be used as a small group parent training program but that's not all. This same program can be used by families at home. Learn more at biblicalparenting.org/THRIVE



Biblical Parenting Coaching Program

Identify people in your church who would like to be trained as a Biblical Parenting Coach. The online training program equips coaches to use a heart-based approach for bringing about change in children. Learn more at biblicalparenting.coach



www.biblicalparenting.org
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