

CHAPTER 4



GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE FAMILY IN DISCIPLING NATIONS

What is God's ultimate aim in creation? Is it to see people from every nation come to a saving faith in Christ? Is it to see new churches planted? Is it to see the hungry fed? These are all important, but they are not God's ultimate aim. They should be viewed as essential "means," not ends. God's ultimate end is that the knowledge of His glory would fill the earth as the waters cover the seas (Habakkuk 2:14). To be sure, this ultimate purpose won't be fully realized until Christ returns. But until then, on the basis of His finished work on the cross, Jesus calls us to pray and to work in His strength to advance His kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

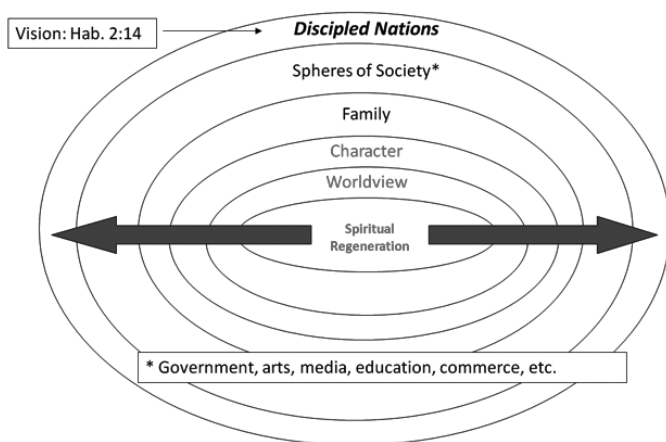
Not only does God have a comprehensive plan for creation, He has a strategy to advance it. It is an "inside-out" process of transformation that begins at the level of human hearts and minds. By the transforming power of the gospel, individuals are "born again" as "new creations" (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17) filled with the Spirit and enabled to do God's will. From here, transformation begins to

transformation (n.) Change in the nature of something, whether the heart and life of an individual, the life of a family, or the character and behavior of a nation.

ripple outward into the social sphere. The first, most basic and most important social sphere is that of the family. As husband and wife pursue God’s way in marriage, they and their children are blessed. Such parents disciple their children to be the self-governing, “godly offspring” our Lord desires. They carefully prepare them to exercise godly dominion in every area of society. In due time, as these children assume positions of influence in the various spheres of society, these areas are reformed and increasingly reflect God’s knowledge and righteousness. When this happens, the nation is blessed—the nation is *disciplined*.

The local church and its leaders play an essential role in this process. They not only proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ but serve as “equipping centers” (Ephesians 4:2). They equip singles for marriage, parents to be the primary disciplers of their children, and members of the body to advance God’s kingdom in every area of society. The Church also serves a prophetic role as the conscience of the nation.

THE INSIDE-OUT PROCESS OF DISCIPLING NATIONS



Two important points need to be made about this process. First, it doesn’t happen overnight! You may see little progress in your lifetime. Things may get worse before they get better, because we face stiff opposition. Our enemy, Satan, is busily advancing his counterfeit kingdom. He is planting his weeds in the midst of the wheat of

God's kingdom, and the two grow side-by-side (Matthew 13:36-43). We can expect him to do everything in his power to oppose us, yet by the blood of Christ we can resist him as we put on the full armor of God described in Ephesians 6:10-18. Transformation is the work of God through *generations*. This is why the family is so central to God's plan, for it is a uniquely multi-generational institution. With the hearts of the children won to their father and their father's God, the cause of Christ in the world can go forward through the generations.⁵³

Second, transformation at every level (individual, family, and nation) is contingent upon transformation in the preceding level. Another way of saying this is "as the family goes, so goes the nation." Theodore Cuyler affirms this:

I care little for the government which presides at Washington, in comparison with the government which rules the millions of American homes. No administration can seriously harm us if our home life is . . . godly. No statesmanship or legislation can save us, if once our homes become the abode of profligacy. The home rules the nation.⁵⁴

God created marriage and family to carry out the cultural mandate

God blessed Adam and Eve, the first couple. He placed them in a magnificent garden and gave them a task: "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground*" (Genesis 1:28). This mandate is expanded upon in Genesis 2:15: "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*" (emphasis added). These tasks are sometimes referred to as the cultural mandate. The garden of Eden perfectly displayed the knowledge and glory of God. It was perfect, but it wasn't complete. Adam and Eve and their offspring, as image-bearers of God, were to rule as kings and queens over God's magnificent creation on His behalf. They were to use their creativity and imagination to create God-glorifying *culture*, to develop new works of art, music, poetry, science, and technology. God's purpose was (and is) to fill the Earth with the

cultural mandate Sometimes called the "creation mandate," this term refers to God's command to the first human couple to tend the garden and cause the creation to be fruitful. All human activity toward the creation flows from this mandate.

knowledge of His glory (Habakkuk 2:14). Though the Fall damaged our ability to fulfill this mandate, the task remains, and marriage was designed specifically to carry it out.

PRINCIPLE 1:

Husbands and wives play essential, yet distinct, roles in carrying out the cultural mandate

In fulfilling this high calling, Adam required a companion, “*a helper suitable for him*” (Genesis 2:18, emphasis added). He needed a partner perfectly designed to complement and complete his strengths. The cultural mandate was given by God to *both* Adam and Eve, but they have different roles to play in carrying it out. These roles reflect the unique roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both in creation and in

redemption.⁵⁶ In other words, the unity and diversity of the Triune God extends to the human realm in marriage.

role (n) Proper or customary function.⁵⁵

Douglas Wilson describes the roles of husband and wife this way: “They need one another, but they need one

another differently. The man needs the help; the woman needs to help. . . . He is called to the work and must receive help from her. She is called to the work through ministering to him. He is oriented to the task, and she is oriented to him.”⁵⁷ Contrary to common understanding, there is no sense of inferiority in the word *helper*. In fact, in our daily experience, it is the strong who typically help the weak. God is often referred to in Scripture as our helper (Isaiah 41:10).

Today, many reject the God-given roles of husband and wife. The present-day feminist movement has blurred the distinctive roles and design of men and women. As a result, men are increasingly feminized, while women are encouraged to deny their feminine nature and act like men. There is a crying need in this generation to reclaim the distinctive biblical design and roles of husband and wife in fulfilling the cultural mandate.⁵⁸

Applying this principle in your life

Talk with your spouse about your roles in marriage. Plan how together you can be even more compatible partners in cultivating a home and family full of the life of Christ. Discuss how each member can prosper and know abundant love and blessing, which can then

overflow into the lives of others and their families. Seek God together in prayer for specific steps to take.

PRINCIPLE 2:

Marriage exists to produce godly offspring

The cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 begins with the *first* command given by God in Scripture: “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth.*” It is repeated to Noah and his sons after the flood in Genesis 9:1. Malachi 2:15 makes God’s intentions plain: “*Did [God] not make [husband and wife] one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was God seeking? **Godly offspring***” (emphasis added). Simply put, God created marriage for the purpose of multiplying godly offspring—reflectors of His image and glory—across the face of the Earth. On a human level, there is nothing more miraculous than God’s partnership with husband and wife in the creation of an entirely new human being. Every child is a unique person of incredible complexity and intricate design, complete with immortal spirit, mind, and will, with vast potential and incalculable worth—wrought from that most intimate coming together of husband and wife. To call children a blessing, as the Bible consistently does, is an understatement.⁵⁹ The multiplication of children is one of God’s chief purposes in marriage, yet merely having children is not enough; the Lord wants “godly offspring.” To achieve this end, He designed marriage and the distinct roles of husband and wife to be the perfect environment for nurturing, training, and discipling godly offspring. Here’s a little exercise to stir your vision. If you and your spouse raised six children to be godly offspring, and if each of them raised six godly offspring, and so on for five generations, the total number of devoted Christ-followers blessing and serving your nation would be 7,776! Think of the impact this could have on your nation and the world.

In our fallen world, children are seen not as a blessing but as a burden and a nuisance. They are seen as interfering with our rebellious and selfish desire for personal autonomy. Anti-children attitudes, in various degrees, are sadly found in the Church as well, with many married couples choosing to have fewer and fewer children. In many countries, particularly in Europe, Russia, and Japan, many couples have simply stopped having children altogether, and as a result, their

cultures are literally dying.⁶⁰ Even cultures that are more traditionally associated with large families are falling below the replacement level of 2.1 children per family. Seventeen nations or territories in Latin America, as well as the United States, now fall below this level.⁶¹

Applying this principle in your life

Make a list of all the reasons you value children. Are you willing to make sacrifices in order to have children and to teach them the ways of the Lord? What are the most powerful challenges for you in dedicating yourself to raising children who love, honor, and obey the Lord? Is there an older Christian couple you know who have successfully raised children who are now living for Christ and serving the Lord? If not, ask your pastor for a recommendation of a couple with whom you could develop a friendship for support and counsel.

PRINCIPLE 3: A fundamental duty of parents is to educate and disciple their children

The Bible stresses the importance of the family as *the primary training ground* for mature godly character. In the words of Philip Lancaster,

Throughout the ages, the family has been the nursery of faith for each new generation, the primary place in which Christian discipleship has occurred. The future is shaped, generation-by-generation, in homes. The home is the primary arena for living out the Christian life. In the home, sin, hurt, reconciliation, and healing occur daily. In the home the ignorant are taught, the rebellious disciplined, the repentant restored, the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick healed. . . . The home is the place where proper roles and relationships are practiced.⁶²

The Bible also teaches that parents bear the first and most fundamental responsibility for the education of their children. Certainly grandparents, church leaders, and schools can play important roles, but it is the father and mother who bear the *primary responsibility* and privilege. The most fundamental task of a mother and father is to show God to their children. Children know their parents before they

know God. As parents open their hearts, love and train their children, walk with God openly before their families, and urge their children to follow the Lord with them, the children will have opportunities to experience God as a living reality in their own lives.⁶³

God created the family to “be a community of teaching and learning about God and godliness.”⁶⁴ To mothers and fathers, God says: “*You shall teach [My ways, My commands and precepts] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*” (Deuteronomy 6:6–8). This instruction must be more than head knowledge; it must be applied within the family, the church, and the community. The goal is for the commitment of the parents to God and His Word to pass from their hearts to the hearts of their children. This happens in the context of an intimate, discipleship relationship that continues at all times (from rising up to lying down) and in all places (at home and along the way).⁶⁵ Of course, the Bible must be the principal curriculum—its content, doctrine, and application to every area of life. Albert Mohler writes,

The Bible presents a model of education that begins with the knowledge of God and then extends to a knowledge of God’s law and the created order. All objects of knowledge and disciplines of study are made meaningful by the fact that God has created an intelligible universe that he intended his creatures to understand, at least in part.⁶⁶

Both mothers and fathers share the responsibility to instruct their children. Proverbs 6:20–21 says: “*My son, keep your **father’s** commandment, and forsake not our **mother’s** teaching*” (emphasis added). It is critical that mother and father be united in this endeavor, yet the father, as household leader, has a critical role. “*And you, **fathers**, . . . bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4, emphasis added). “The father’s goal should be the hearts of his children. He wins their hearts by demonstrating sacrificial service, compassion, and tenderness; by washing his children’s feet; and by setting aside his will in order to do what is best for them.”⁶⁷ He is to shepherd his children, and to do this he must know the condition of his flock. It takes a great deal of time to discover what is in

the heart of a child, but a father must make it his business to know. Only then can he give the kind of encouragement and instruction that will be most helpful. Discipline is also important as a form of corrective training, aimed at leading children beyond foolishness to self-controlled wisdom. Just as there is purposeful and loving discipline in God's family, the Church (Proverbs 3:11–12; Hebrews 12:5–11), so there must be in the human family.⁶⁸

It should be the goal of every godly mother and father to prepare a quiver full of well-made “children arrows” (Psalm 127:4, 5), with which they can advance God's kingdom. Indeed, doing this is among the greatest privileges of parenting. As the parents devote themselves to molding and shaping their children to be disciples of Jesus, these children in turn influence their own children and grandchildren through many generations. “*His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed*” (Psalm 112:2).

Applying this principle in your life

Are you in agreement with God that He has made you, as parent, the primary teacher of your children? Ask Him to show you areas in which you have unconsciously yielded your authority and responsibility to the church, school, or government. Are you willing to embrace this role as your child's principal teacher of God and His ways? If so, the following chapters will help guide you in this role. Ask God to open your heart and mind to be renewed and to be released fully into this magnificent call upon your life together.

Closing Thoughts

Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) stands among the finest theologians, pastors, and intellectuals the United States has ever produced. He played a central role in the First Great Awakening, authored many books, preached countless sermons, and inspired generations of missionaries. Yet his greatest legacy is one he shares with his wife, Sarah—the amazing influence their godly offspring had on shaping the United States across many generations. Jonathan and Sarah Edwards are a prime example of how God can use the uniquely multi-generational institution of the family to bless an entire nation. In the span of 150 years, from this one couple came:

- ✦ Thirteen college presidents and sixty-five college professors
- ✦ One hundred lawyers and thirty judges
- ✦ Sixty-six medical doctors
- ✦ Three United States Senators, three state governors, three mayors of large cities, and a vice president of the United States.
- ✦ Leaders in banking, commerce, and industry
- ✦ Over one hundred cross-cultural missionaries.⁶⁹

This kind of culture-shaping influence did not happen by accident. It is the fruit of a marriage built upon the teachings of the Bible. Could your family have a similar impact on your nation? A husband and wife who adopt this vision see in their children their most important mission in life.

“Children are a heritage from the Lord . . . like arrows in the hands of a warrior” (Psalm 127:3, 4).

Arrows are weapons of war. Our children are likened to arrows in a battle against an enemy. The battle is for the advancement of God’s kingdom and the discipling of nations. Our enemy is Satan. Why arrows? With a sword, a soldier can attack only as far as he can reach. But a properly made arrow can strike an enemy far beyond. Likewise, our children should far surpass us in their godly maturity and impact for Christ’s kingdom. And their children should advance even further. Allow this to be your vision for your marriage and family—a vision to raise up a generation of warrior-servants who will advance boldly against the enemy in every sphere of society.

Heavenly Father, I understand more clearly than ever before that You hold me accountable to disciple my children for Christ, and that I have a generational duty to pass a godly legacy to my grandchildren and great grandchildren. My desire is to see my children leading godly lives and making noble contributions in society, but I need Your help and wisdom. I ask You this day to illumine my mind and equip me for the task at hand. Help me keep the

long-term commitment and make the necessary changes in my life that will yield righteous fruit in my children, that we as a family can contribute to seeing the Earth filled with the knowledge of Your glory. Amen.

Additional Resources

Lancaster, Philip. *Family Man, Family Leader: Biblical Fatherhood as the Key to a Thriving Family*, San Antonio, Tex.: The Vision Forum, Inc., 2003.

Miller, Darrow L. *Nurturing the Nations: Reclaiming the Dignity and Divine Calling of Women in Building Healthy Cultures*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

- 46 Darrow Miller, *Nurturing the Nations: Reclaiming the Dignity and Divine Calling of Women in Building Healthy Cultures* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 142.
- 47 Packer, 230.
- 48 Piper, 101.
- 49 Nancy Wilson, *Praise Her in the Gates*, 48.
- 50 Miller, 146.
- 51 Packer, 232.
- 52 See Proverbs 5:23; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Hebrews 12:6; 9–11; and Revelation 3:19.

CHAPTER 4

- 53 Lancaster, *Family Man, Family Leader*, 6.
- 54 *Ibid*, 15–16.
- 55 *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, 1983.
- 56 Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 40–41.
- 57 Nancy Wilson, *Praise Her in the Gates*, 19–20.
- 58 A helpful resource on this subject is John Piper, *What’s the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible* (Wheaton:Ill.: Crossway, 2009).
- 59 Psalm 127:3–5; Matthew 19:13–14.
- 60 See <http://www.deomgraphicwinter.com> for a sobering overview of recent demographic trends.
- 61 See the World Factbook published by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>.

Anguilla	1.75
Aruba	1.84
Barbados	1.68
Bermuda	1.97
Brazil	1.82
Cayman Islands	1.87
Chile	1.87
Costa Rica	1.92
Cuba	1.45
Nicaragua	2.08
Paraguay	2.06
Puerto Rico	1.64
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1.79
Saint Lucia	1.8
Trinidad and Tobago	1.72
Turks and Caicos Islands	1.7
United States	2.06
Virgin Islands	1.78
Anguilla	1.75

- 62 Lancaster, 130–131.
63 Ibid., 147.
64 Packer, *Concise Theology*, 233
65 Lancaster, 140–141.
66 Albert Mohler, “America’s Educational Crisis—A Christian Response,” August 17, 2004, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2004/08/17/americas-educational-crisis-a-christian-response/>.
67 Lancaster, 142.
68 Packer, 233.
69 Lancaster, 148.

CHAPTER 5

- 70 Webster.
71 Vocabulary and language usage change over time, but the Bible does not present human language as having developed from animal sounds. God spoke to Adam after He created him, and Adam understood and named all creatures!
72 James 3:5, 6; 4:4.
73 John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *The Power of Words and the Wonder of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), 19.
74 Matthew 5:3–11.
75 James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville, Tenn.: Crusade Bible Publishers, 1974).

CHAPTER 6

- 76 Matthew 18:1–5.
77 *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>.
78 Genesis 1:27.
79 Genesis 11:30.
80 Genesis 15:4–5.
81 Genesis 1:26.
82 1 John 2:12.
83 Galatians 4:3; Ephesians 4:14; Proverbs 1:4.
84 Jeremiah 1:6.
85 Psalm 139:14–15.
86 Jeremiah 4:31; Isaiah 11:8; Isaiah 28:9; Esther 3:13; Psalm 8:2; 1 Samuel 17:56; Proverbs 1:4; Psalm 10:14; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 31:8.
87 1 Kings 13:1–3.
88 Jeremiah 1:4.
89 2 Kings 22:1.
90 Romans 5:12.
91 John 3:16.
92 Ephesians 1:17–18.