

# Ways to Disciple Your Children "As You Go"

*Rich Griffith, D.Min.*

Discipleship should not be something scary or time consuming. In fact, when we consider Deuteronomy 6, much of discipleship is "as you go," or as you do life together. Deuteronomy 6:7–9 reads, "Impress [the commandments of God in His Word] on your children. Talk about [His Word] when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie [God's commandments] as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (NIV). Notice that each of these verses imply an "as you go" way of discipleship with your children. Further, these guiding statements are both for the home and the community as indicated by the doorframes and gates.

Discipleship and theology are simply speaking about the things of God and how his Word applies to our lives. Do not worry about your kids knowing more than you do or asking difficult questions. Discovering answers together are, in and of itself, discipleship.

It is also important to remember to do things that are simple, functional, and sustainable. Here are some practical ideas for discipling your children as you go:

## At Home

- **Read through the Psalms.** My son and I drive together to his school and my work. We work our way through the book of Psalms, one Psalm each morning. He will read the Psalm out loud and then we discuss what is written and how we can apply it to our lives. The Psalms allow us to find our comfort in God, but they also allow us to see that it is okay to have a whole range of emotions we can express toward God. As we finish, either he or I pray. You can also mix it up by doing the same thing with Proverbs or the Gospel of John.
- **Develop a family mission statement.** My family's mission statement is to "love God, love each other, love others, and relieve suffering whenever and wherever possible in the name of Jesus." We then try to go out several times a year and join in some sort of local community mission work in keeping with this statement.
- **Learn about spiritual disciplines and put them into practice.** Solitude, fasting, giving, prayer, being present, worship, and Bible study remain some of the most important spiritual disciplines in the Christian life and discipleship opportunities in the home. For instance, when children are older, teach them to fast from electronics or even food for a short period of time. Talk to them about the discipline of giving and use periods of the year (Christmas, birthdays, Thanksgiving, etc.) and encourage them to think about how the family can give to others. Families can also incorporate times of joint prayer, praise, and Bible study in the home through family worship.
- **Practice active listening.** As parents, we spend a lot of time teaching, correcting, and disciplining. It comes with the job. However, we need to set a time apart, at least one time a week, to just listen to our kids. This means no distractions. Put the phone away. Listen to listen, not answer. Look your child in their eyes. Lean forward. Really listen. Repeat back what they are saying. This lets your child know that you are listening. Ask simple questions like, "how do you see God at work in your life?"

- **Pray with intention.** Find a time each day where intentional prayer (not the rote mealtime prayers) can be expressed together. Just as Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, prayed in front of them, and prayed with them, parents can teach their children to pray, pray in front of them, and pray with them, inviting them to grow in their own prayer lives.
- **Do a family video prayer journal.** Sort of like TikTok, families can record their challenges (prayers) and hopes (praises). Keep these in a video file. Save them to the Cloud (or have individual flash drives for each month) and after six months or so, go back and review your videos and see how God has moved. Do this as a family so that, as your kids get older, they will remember, and have access to, the legacy of valuing prayer and praises in your family.
- **Have each family member choose a favorite Bible verse.** One way that parents can disciple their children “as they go” is to encourage their children to choose a favorite Bible verse. Families can then discuss and memorize these verses together and even find creative ways to post them throughout the home or on the “doorframes of your house.”
- **Look for teachable moments.** Some of the best teachable moments occur naturally. Whether it is a question that comes up from watching a movie together, a song lyric that turns into an impromptu discussion, or a simple observation of people as you go, parents can use these moments to engage in conversation and ask their children, “What do you think about that?” “What do you think God would say about it?”
- **Enjoy a regular family game night or something else special.** Families can enjoy great conversations as they play a game or just go out for ice cream. Take time to be present with your children intentionally and have fun. Loving your family and spending time together is just another practical way to show them the love of Christ “as you go.”

## In Church and in Your Community

- **Attend worship together.** This sounds simple, but the modern Western church is far too often segregated by ages during worship services. However, even young children can learn to worship with their parents and older generations in the church. Prior to the service, challenge your child to listen for at least one thing they can learn. After the service, compare what you and your child learned and talk about it. Worshipping together with the church family is just one more way to disciple your children “as you go.”
- **Form family connection groups.** Be intentional about creating and connecting with church family affinity groups. It is amazing the amount of support you get from each other. Be intentional about planning a quarterly get together. Maybe it is a picnic, a cookout, or a casual meeting at Dairy Queen. A game night also works really well. Invite “adopted” singles, grandparents, aunts, and uncles from the church family to join your family. These groups can gather weekly, monthly, seasonally, or during the summer. Such gatherings allow both parents and children to build Christian community with other believers and other generations.
- **Serve in a ministry area together at your church.** Whether it is singing, running AV, greeting, taking up the offering, or serving in children’s ministry, serving together as a family is how you train up the next generation of leaders as you teach them to serve alongside adults. Christian children and youth are the church now, not just of the future, and if we do not engage them now through owning ministry, they will not be around to be “the Church of the future.”
- **Find a spiritual mentor for your child outside the home.** The earlier you do this the better because your child will come to a point in their lives where they will have situations they do not want to talk to you about, either because they are embarrassed or they do not want to disappoint you. An outside mentor becomes a partner in your family’s discipleship ministry, providing a Titus 2 example of intergenerational discipleship.
- **Surround your child with other godly adults.** Other godly adults investing in the discipleship of your children may include your children’s minister, youth leader, a coach, a teacher, “adoptive” grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The fact is that the more Christian, caring adults you have involved in different capacities, the more your child will be surrounded by Christian nurture. People often panic if you ask them to “mentor” a child because they think they are not

equipped, so I use the term “spiritual encourager.” My son has a spiritual grandma named Mrs. Harriett. Jamie will go over and help with yard work or other tasks and Mrs. Harriett takes time to play games, teach Jamie how to cook or bake, and most importantly, to listen to him. God intends for the entire community to nurture and spiritually guide our young people.

As you can see, discipleship does not have to be difficult. You do not need to be a Bible scholar to disciple your children. My sons and I have often learned deep spiritual concepts together. By listening to them process God’s Word as we go, I learn a great deal from my kids, making me a better parent, pastor, and professor.

Having more natural spiritual conversations with my sons allows me to point them to Jesus Christ every day. In Him we are free to do the things that work for our family. We do not have to do them perfectly, because His righteousness covers our sins and shortcomings. Following the guidance of His Word and His Spirit, you too can establish rhythms that work for your family and allow you more and more opportunities to disciple your children “as you go.”

## **Author Biography**

**Rich Griffith**, D.Min., is associate professor of youth ministry at Toccoa Falls College. He has two master’s degrees (Theology and Organizational Leadership) and a doctorate in “Youth, Family, and Culture” from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is an author, speaker, coach, and part-time pastor. He is a single dad of three adopted sons.