Introducing Generational Discipleship

Presented 2014 – Jason Diffner

*This article is transcribed from notes from a live presentation –* The Dominion Family Training Retreat*. Those notes were designed for the spoken rather than written medium. I have only modified the text at a minimal level to adapt it to the written mode for reading. It is not sufficiently edited. Some sections are left in an outline format. It does not conform to publishable standards for source referencing (among other things). The training presentation consisted of five different sessions. I make reference to other “articles” which in the original were the different sessions of the training presentation (the titles of which were:* Restoring Families as Multigenerational Teams, The Biblical Covenant Structure, Creating Your Family Mission Statement, Family Governance: The Family Constitution, and, Introducing Generational Discipleship and Building Generational Wealth).

*The live training session behind this article was originally one session with two parts – Generational Discipleship and Generational Wealth. For this transmission I have separated them into two articles.*

Let me explain why I’m including the word, “Introducing” in this training title. This is a subject that I have not finished research on. I find myself in a bit of a dilemma. I do have things that I need to impart if I’m going to help families begin their journeys of multigenerational work, but I’m painfully aware that there is more work I need to do before I get to a more settled place on this subject.

With that qualification, what we will be doing in this training module is flying over a list of ideas and principles that I think families need to consider. We will not be able to offer full explanations on everything at this point. These are pointers in the direction I think families need to explore. My intention is that in later training materials I will put together a more complete synthesis of the things I have learned in this area.

With that, let’s turn to the subject of Generational Discipleship.

# Generational Discipleship

## Terminology – Education or Enculturation

Recall from the training module on the Covenant when we discussed the fifth part – succession – how discipleship of the next generation is necessary for succession to occur. On the one hand, “discipleship” is a primary term I want to use in this context, however, there are two related terms and ideas that we could choose to focus on. We could focus on the term *education*, and talk about *Christian education* for multigenerational families and that would be very appropriate. Another term we could use is *culture*. We could talk about the task of building and stewarding a *Christian family culture*. As we go forward, realize that we are talking about each of these ideas even though we may be using one term or another in any given context. I’m personally becoming more and more convinced that families need to be thinking more in terms of *enculturation* when they think of family discipleship.

If we focus on the idea of education, we tend to think in terms of the traditional academic disciplines: reading, writing, math, history, science, etc. In family discipleship, however, the academic disciplines are just one part of the larger project of building a godly family culture.

When you think of *culture* as opposed to *education*, what kinds of other activities come to your mind? Yes, it includes, the way we eat, the way we travel, how we sleep and wake up. It is all encompassing.

I find it fascinating that the non-Christian families who are intentionally multigenerational are finding that the building of family culture is perhaps the highest key to multigenerational success. Take a look at this quote:

*“Research completed on two separate occasions has reinforced two basic insights. First, as demonstrated by analysis completed for a private roundtable in the United Kingdom for a group of substantially wealthy international families, family culture was an area of exceptionally high importance. When asked to rank-order the critical elements of family legacy, the relative importance of formal governance documents and structures, leadership, and culture were selected as the top three issues.* ***Of these, culture came out as a surprising first choice among the families present. …***

*In the business world, it is becoming increasingly well known that* ***“culture overcomes strategy.”***

Let me offer an alternative phrase or idea for thinking about the education or discipleship of our families: think in terms of *enculturation into the Kingdom of God*. We are to build a family culture that produces individuals who are increasingly “at home” in the Kingdom of God.

We need to build what I call robust family cultures. I don’t think it is an accident that in the Old Testament, you don’t see God establishing some kind of academic-oriented school system or institution. What he did establish, in detail however, was a festival or holiday system, including a weekly Sabbath, right? I am becoming increasingly convinced that Christian families, and our churches, need to radically mature (this may sound weird, and I don’t have time to make the case for this, but hear me out) … we need to radically mature in our ability to feast, or to festival, well. We need to be a singing, dancing, feasting culture. We need to mature in how we celebrate the Sabbath, particularly. Robust daily family worship needs to be the primary family activity (or activities) upon which everything else hangs. This is not intuitive to us who build our educational activities upon a Greek system that idolizes the autonomous human mind, and autonomous human thought. But if we let the Old Testament be a clue, holy celebration seems to be one of God’s primary means of discipling his children.

Suspend that suggestion for now. We will come back to it in a little bit. For now we will take a look at some other principles and ideas that I am persuaded are necessary for multigenerational families in their discipleship.

## The Myth of Religious Neutrality

The myth of religious neutrality is the belief that some areas of life are religiously neutral. Secularists believe their thinking and their institutions are religiously neutral. Christians who send their children to public school these days, by definition have to believe in the idea of religious neutrality right along with the Secularists, otherwise they wouldn’t send their children there. I don’t have time to exhaustively make the case, but let’s look at a few Scriptures that undergird this point. As you read through the following Scriptures, be asking yourself if the Bible thinks things that go with education – like knowledge, understanding, and wisdom – are religiously neutral. Also be looking out for whether the Bible speaks as if people in general can be religiously neutral:

**Psalm 111:10**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;

A good *understanding* have all those who do His commandments.

His praise endures forever.

**Jeremiah 17:9**

The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,

And desperately wicked;

Who can know it?

**Romans 8:7**

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

**Colossians 2:3**

in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**Romans 1: 18, 28**

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness …

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind…”

The point is, according to the Bible, Man is religious in everything he does – every cultural endeavor, not just in traditional “religious” activities. He either serves on idol or the one true God. Here’s is how Roy Clouser says it in his book by the title of *The Myth of Religious Neutrality:*

“Bible writers always regard everyone as having some divinity belief or other. According to them, what is wrong with people is not that they lack religious belief, but that they believe in the wrong divinity.”

Now let me ask you this. Do you think if you’re homeschooling your children or sending them to a private Christian school that that automatically means the educational philosophy is built on biblical assumptions? I am persuaded that most of us are unaware how much non-Christian forms and methodologies are actually shaping the way we educate our children. In the next section we are going to consider a brief contrast of the purposes of education from non-Christian sources compared with a Biblical one.

## Purpose of Education

***Modern pagan = Socialization***. The modern pagan purpose of education can be summed up in the word, socialization. From the parents perspective, we are conditioned to translate this into terms of “making sure we have the tools to be successful in life.” Translated into more crass terms, it comes down to making sure we can get the best jobs to live a more comfortable life.

From the perspective of the designers of modern education, Socialization means the creation of the most productive workers in their businesses and in their State. In more crass terms, it is about the creation of the most productive worker bees. It doesn’t matter if you’re considered a culturally sophisticated, and economically comfortable worker bee… you’re still a worker bee (as a side note, the “culturally sophisticated” and economically comfortable are the more desirable (profitable) type.)

***Greek (classical) Pagan = “Freedom.”*** The classical purpose of education was freedom, but particularly civil freedom. It was believed that only an educated man had the tools to maintain his civil freedom. This is better than the modern pagan version, but I think it still falls short of a full-orbed Christian purpose.

***Christian = Knowledge of God (Relational):*** In contrast to these pagan ideas, I suggest that one Christian answer to the question of the purpose of education is this – *the knowledge of God*. That is, from a Christian perspective, the purpose of education is to know God. Whatever we study, we study God’s creation. Do you think that God had purpose and intent for each aspect of his creation? When we study God’s creation, He wants us to see what His purpose is for that specific piece of creation we are studying. We learn both about the Creation and the Creator behind the creation. In essence, studying and learning is one of the ways we relate to God. God, remember, speaks the Creation. And so when we study…. that is, this activity we call education, we are listening to God speaking. In other words, we are engaging in relationship: speaking and listening, speaking and listening. Now can you see how the pagan options do not get anywhere near the most essential purpose of education? To build our education on top of pagan platforms makes us increasingly callous to hear God speak to us in and through His creation.

Maybe I’m wrong in all this (I don’t think so, but just in case you think so). But here’s my more basic point – Christian parent: your job is to make sure you are educating your children with *genuinely* Christian purposes *at the foundation*.

## Home Sapiens or Homo Adorans

Another way of getting at the question of what is the purpose of education is to ask what the nature of the person being educated is. In other words, “what is man?” The modern pagan answer to that question is *Homo sapiens*, that is, “thinking man.” The biblical answer, however, is *Homo adorans*, or “worshipping man.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Greco-Pagan view leads to the myth of the primacy of the intellect. The implication and conclusion of this myth is that education begins and ends with the communication of mere information to the mind.

The Biblical view of man we already discussed earlier is he is *Imago Dei* – Image of God.

In an earlier training model we saw how this spoke of man’s status as son to God and as king to the world. But it tells us two other things as well. It tells us that, 1) Man is like God, and 2) Man is not the same as God.

Man is like God in that just as He creates, we create. Just as God loves, we love. We not only do things that God does, we do them in the *way* He does them. We image Him.

And secondly, because it tells us that Man is not God, it tells us two additional things. It tells us that He is infinite and we are finite. Therefore, our task of imaging Him is eternally inexhaustible. As the New Testament says, we grow from glory to glory.

And second, because we are image, it emphasizes we are Creation and God is Creator. The implication is that we are worshippers of the Creator, God. This is why, in contrast to the modern pagan view, we are not at our most essential selves, *homo sapiens*, but rather *homo adorans*, or *homo liturgicus* – “worshipping man.”

Here’s the conclusion: Christian Education is about the growth and development of the whole person in conformity to God and His world, not just about information for the mind. It includes the acquiring of information, but it certainly doesn’t start with mere information or is exhausted by it.

And because man is *homo adorans*, worship, and not reason, is it at the center of a Christian view of education.

We don’t have time to go into all the implications of this regarding how it impacts our choice of curriculum, but I’ll give just one example. From the Bible it becomes obvious that choral singing is one of the primary expressions of worship. If you take the Bible as the foundation of your philosophy of education, the training in choral music is going to be a foundational and central training for your children. In our current educational philosophy, even in Christian circles, is training in choral music an extra add-on to our curriculum or a central piece to our curriculum? For the vast majority of families it is an optional add-on. This is just another indication that we are really attempting to build so-called “Christian education” on top of a foundationally pagan system.

And speaking of the Bible, here’s one last point that needs to be made about building Christian culture in the family

## The Bible

A Christian education is not made by adding a little Bible to an otherwise pagan-based curriculum. Nor is it a matter of making Bible learning a little more intensive than perhaps we already are. Rather, it is only *through* the Bible that we are able to *accurately interpret* the rest of the world: math, geography, literature, history, science, etc.!

The implication is that Bible saturation[[2]](#footnote-2) is a necessary part of education and discipleship for families interested in passing on and maturing in multigenerational-covenantal faithfulness. Now, granted I said the point is not merely that Bible should take up a larger part of our children’s studies, but it definitely includes that. I just needed to make sure we understood the distinction and the reason for this.

The idea of Bible taking up more of your children’s study time may make you worried that it will squeeze out other academic studies. It may make you worry that they would “lag behind” their peers. I’ll offer a few responses to that.

First, if your average public school student is the benchmark here, you honestly really shouldn’t have much to worry about. That standard is pretty low.

But if you’re benchmark is say, the top 5% performing students at the best private schools, – if you’re worried about that, it tells me you still don’t really believe in the difference between the Christian purpose of education versus the (pagan) Greek purpose of education. A 9-year-old can play Bach and Mozart nearly perfectly, a 15-year-old can know advanced calculus, and a 20-year-old can be on his third successful business venture and in each case be absolutely immature as a worshipper of God. In other words, from a Biblical perspective, such individuals are *uneducated* (“always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 2 Timothy 3:7).

Here’s a little secret that I’ve come across recently. Christian culture typically takes longer to “mature” than pagan culture. And by “mature” here, I’m referring to the more superficial extensions of culture – advancements in arts and technology for example. For Christians, we can’t skip righteousness and remain faithful. We can’t be like Eve and try to gain wisdom faster through the path of disobedience. The point is, it’s okay if we “mature” a little slower in the more superficial respects by remaining faithful to the more foundational realities of our formation. He who gains the whole world and forfeits his soul gains no profit. He who becomes the most advanced academic, or artist, or scientist, or entrepreneur, at the expense of Biblical understanding and wisdom is still a fool in the end.

One last consideration to help you get over this worry. There is a sub-culture that has followed a similar model to what I’ve laid out above. And yet, they also have a reputation for characteristically producing exceptional leaders in every field of study and endeavor. Orthodox Jews. Many conservative, orthodox Jewish communities have their children spending the majority of their time (that means more than 50% to be clear!) studying Torah. And “magically” this community still tends to produce a disproportionate amount of leaders in the arts, sciences, and business. Food for thought.

## Comprehensive Discipleship Plan

We had to address big-picture, philosophical questions about family discipleship to lay a foundation. However, if there is ever to be a follow up to this training, what we would spend most of the time talking about is this – developing a *comprehensive discipleship plan*.

For *multigenerational* families specifically, the question of education, or discipleship, is about planning. Parents are to design a comprehensive plan. For we, first generation pioneers, this will be a foundation. Expect it to mature and be improved upon in later generations. Recall how we talked about one way of thinking about dominion is bringing order out of chaos. Planning and improving is an activity of bringing order out of chaos. It is applying dominion to the mandate of maturity for your family. We don’t have the space here to develop points in detail. Instead, we will mention a couple of things that will be developed more in later training modules.

***Not just academics***. We have already made the point earlier about focusing on culture. When you begin, or as you’re working on your family discipleship plan, I recommend you start with what I call rhythms. I would start with improving your daily family worship rhythms and your Sabbath rhythms. These rhythms should be full of meaning, full of symbols, very robust, very celebratory. I can’t emphasize the following enough because this is not intuitive to Christian families who have been conditioned by Greek educational assumptions. However, your daily family worship, and your weekly Sabbath rhythms are exponentially more formative for your children than their traditional academic disciplines are. The way we do our academic disciplines needs to be a second consideration after we have considered our family worship rhythms. Our academic rhythms need to be considered peripheral to our worship rhythms. Now is not the occasion to make the case for that thesis, but it does need to be heard.[[3]](#footnote-3)

***Not just for children***. Planning discipleship for multigenerational families is not just for children. It will include how to be good aunts, good grandpa-elders; how to be competent fiduciaries. Do we even know what the term, *fiduciary* means? Again, these are things that would need to be explored as part of multigenerational family discipleship.

***Write it down***. And of course, eventually, you need to write this plan down. The same principles that we discussed with writing your family mission and constitution apply here. There will be a season of study and reflection, but eventually you will want to write something down knowing that it will improve over time.

## On the Docket

This subsection I’ve labelled, “*On the Docket*,” because the subjects addressed are ones that I have not conducted enough research and reflection on to warrant writing anything definitively on. They are “on the docket” as subjects I intend to write more comprehensively when time allows. However, I have contemplated them to some measure and they are important, so I want to introduce them to my readers now.[[4]](#footnote-4) The two subjects I want to address I’ll label as, 1) A Creational and/or Covenantal Model of Education and, 2) The Relationship between the Family and Church, or Community. I will be writing off of my recollection of these subjects rather than referring back to source material. I do not like writing this way, but I’ve determined to release this present material in the near future and time dictates this lower quality mode of publication.

*Creational and/or Covenantal Model of Education*. Both my wife, Stacie, and I have been researching and debating Christian educational philosophy for several years now and we are still in process. On *practical* educational methodology, at the very least, she can run circles around me. One recent transition point for us has been a hesitation with the Classical Christian model of education. In terms of a distinctively, contemporary, conservative Christian philosophy of education that is adopted on a somewhat mass scale, this seems to be one of the few (only?) games in town. I use the word, “hesitation,” to signify that I don’t disagree (note the double negative) with this model of Christian education wholesale, but rather have critical assessments at some points. The main one being its emphasis on the Greco-Roman classical literature. There is much to commend the study of Greco-Roman classical literature as a staple for basic education for youth (as opposed to specialist study). Our hesitation (which we share with those we learned it from) lies with the fact, that for all its virtues, Greco-Roman classical literature is still pagan – one hundred percent. Yes, there is much truth, beauty, and goodness, therein, and yes, it has been an educational vehicle of literary culture during the Church’s Middle Ages and more, but that does not eliminate the fact that, overall, the content and conclusions of this corpus of literature is overwhelmingly pagan, and therefore, theologically, by definition, anti-Christ. Christian classical enthusiasts have answers to this, of course, but for those of us who question whether this corpus should constitute a large portion of a young mind’s education, we think our hesitation is warranted.

One point that I intend to eventually nail down is what the essence of the classical method is. Until recently I had assumed that in addition to the content categorization of the seven liberal arts (the Trivium and Quadrivium), that the three stages of learning were included in the essence of classical education – grammar, logic, and rhetoric. I am now hearing this three-stage distinction may owe more to Dorothy Sayers from her famous essay on classical education written in the mid twentieth century. I know of other writers acknowledging this three-stage aspect of learning but using the more biblical categories of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.[[5]](#footnote-5)

My anecdotal observation of various contemporary Christian educational philosophies (“unschooling”/delight directed, Charlotte Mason/whole books, etc.) is that while there are other models “on the market”, so to speak, they do not offer as comprehensive a model that is used on the scale that the Christian Classical model holds. My intuition is that these other models are not theologically deep enough to sustain a competing alternative. What I’m exploring is whether what might be called a Creational, or Covenantal model might provide such an alternative in the Church’s future. This model is discussed by various thinkers, but we learned most of it from theologian, James Jordan.

The thesis of this model is that the pattern of the Creation week (Genesis 1) is a structure God intends all of life to be patterned after including learning and education.[[6]](#footnote-6) Following the covenantal-creation pattern of Genesis 1, the rhythm looks something like this. We take hold of the creation. We give thanks. We divide and restructure the creation. We distribute the reworked creation. We taste and evaluate the new work. We relax and enjoy the reworked creation.

Imagine how this model might look applied to one aspect of learning – the science of agriculture. We give our attention to this part of God’s creation. We thank God for its provision. We analyze (“break apart”) how plants grow, what makes them different, and what makes them work. We learn genetics and breeding principles to help us make healthier, more productive food (restructure creation). We do not do so unethically because by starting out with thanking God we have submitted to His Lordship and law over our learning and work. We distribute the improved food (by giving or selling it). We and others evaluate it. Is it good or bad? Better or worse than last year’s crop? And finally we enjoy (literally in this case) the fruit of our labor.

Whether or not this theological hypothesis is valid will have to be tested. In the meantime, I note some significant contrasts. The classical model of education tends to get stuck in the cerebral, or at least elevates it beyond its due. The proposed creational-covenantal model is life comprehensive. Education is about mimicking the way God works and for we, his creatures, it includes receiving from Him in thankfulness and giving back to Him. And this is essential to this model. You don’t need to attach the adjective “Christian” to it.

*The Relationship between the Family and Church, or Community*. We have been a homeschooling family for virtually all of our children’s education. Recently, we have been in a church fellowship where close to half the children homeschool and the other half attend Christian private schools. Prior to this time, my assumptions about Christian education have been couched in the homeschooling context. While homeschoolers have their Co-Ops and annual conferences, these associations are typically very loose.

I cannot put my finger on it as of yet, but I have a growing intuition that families need to have a clear theology of the relationship of the family (to whom is given the primary jurisdictional authority of the education of their children) and the church or broader Christian community as it relates to the education of their children. My suspicion is that the ties to a broader community needs to be much stronger than what the current homeschooling culture provides.

I am confessing I do not have the clear theology to this question that I am convinced, nevertheless, needs to be answered. I am including this subject here to suggest it is an important theological hole that needs to be filled by Christian families.

1. The following discussion on man as “*Homo Adorans*” was learned from lectures delivered by James Jordan. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. James Jordan’s phrase [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As a “Pauline” type *apologia*, for those who may still be skeptical, I’ll repeat, I am not saying advanced academic studies should not be pursued. I think they should be. I’m making a point of emphasis… making advanced academics relative to weightier matters. I myself consider myself an intellectual and would love nothing more than to study all day long. I value sophisticated learning. It is partly because I value this kind of learning that I’m making the point here. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I did not address these topics during the live presentation which this article is drawn from. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Mulligan, *Far Above Rubies* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jordan notes that the Bible gives us many patterns from various perspectives. So, from one perspective a subject might have a three-fold pattern (Trinitarian), from another perspective a seven-fold pattern (Creation week) and another a five-fold pattern (Covenant). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)