


## Religious education at home: parents as disciple-makers to their youths

Philip Suciadi Chia 

Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

### ABSTRACT

This article presents a religious education exposition of the divine mandate for parents to serve as primary disciple-makers in the spiritual formation of their children. Grounded in the sovereignty of God and the authority of Scripture, the paper argues that biblical discipleship within the family is not merely a practical endeavor, but a sacred duty ordained by God. The study employs a systematic theological framework, drawing from the covenantal structure of Scripture, to demonstrate that parents are entrusted with the stewardship of their children's souls. Key theological themes include the *imago Dei*, covenantal faithfulness and the means of grace as foundational to parental discipleship. The paper concludes with a call for parents to embrace their God-given role with theological intentionality, relying on the Holy Spirit to effect transformation in their children's hearts.

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## Introduction

The task of parenting, as revealed in Scripture, is fundamentally theological. It is rooted in the Creator-creature distinction, the fall of humanity and the redemptive work of Christ. In an age where secular paradigms dominate discussions on child-rearing, the church must reclaim a robust theological vision for family discipleship. This paper contends that parents, as covenant representatives, are called to mirror the triune God's character in their homes, fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) within the domestic sphere. The modern challenges facing youth—ranging from moral relativism to the erosion of biblical authority—are not merely sociological phenomena but manifestations of humanity's fallen condition (Romans 3:23). The solution, therefore, is not found in pragmatic strategies but in a return to the theological foundations of parenting as set forth in Scripture.

In *the Century 21 Toolkit: A Handy Resource for Youth Ministry*, the Rhythms of Life Crew references the transformations occurring in human existence and activities in the twenty-first century. They identify various elements that influence youth to navigate these changes, including technological advancements, scientific progress, economic shifts, globalization, urban development, media convergence and the trend towards liberalization (Rhythms of Life Crew, 2014, pp. 16–19). Raushan Zhubanova identifies ten pressing challenges that contemporary youth encounter.<sup>1</sup> The first issue pertains to single parenting, which encompasses 14 million single parents raising 28 million children. The second concern involves substance abuse, with statistics indicating that 21% of high school students engage in drug use, while 41% struggle with alcoholism. The third issue highlights the rapid growth and development experienced by youth. The fourth concern addresses the prevalence of violence in educational settings, leading to the tragic deaths of 284 children due to gun violence, stabbings, suicides and physical altercations. The

**CONTACT** Philip Suciadi Chia  [pchia275@students.sbts.edu](mailto:pchia275@students.sbts.edu)  Tanjung Duren Timur 3 no 1, Jakarta 11470, Indonesia

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fifth issue revolves around the challenges of stress and time management. The sixth concern relates to sociopolitical factors that contribute to identity crises and the difficulty in distinguishing between right and wrong. The seventh issue is the pervasive drive for materialism, which has resulted in increased dissatisfaction among youth. The eighth concern is obesity, which is exacerbated by excessive screen time spent on television, computers and social media platforms via smartphones, iPads or tablets. Tija Ragelienė and Alice Grønhøj assert that 'Childhood overweight and obesity and related negative health outcomes continue to be a major societal problem. The number of overweight and obese children and adolescents (aged five to 19 years) worldwide has risen tenfold in the past four decades' (Ragelienė & Grønhøj, 2020, p. 1) The ninth issue is educational inequality, as evidenced by global data indicating that over 25% of children have never attended primary school. Finally, the tenth issue pertains to the shifting economic landscape, which has resulted in unemployment, idleness and challenges in the lives of young people (Zhubanova, 2015).

On the other hand, the contemporary shifts from biblical principles of parenting to secular approaches presents a significant challenge to the traditional biblical model. John MacArthur argues that the statistical evidence regarding parenting in America indicates a troubling decline, as fewer individuals are entering into marriage. The prevalence of dysfunctional marriages and the rejection of divine order in the post-modern context is both alarming and inconsistent with biblical teachings. Albert Mohler examines the cultural landscape of the West, particularly in the United States, and asserts that the survival and prosperity of societies depend on the institution of marriage and the establishment of stable families.<sup>2</sup> Mohler's insights highlight the importance of family discipleship, with the Bible serving as the essential foundation for this concept. John M. Frame emphasizes that comprehending the meaning of Scripture is vital for its application to real-life situations, enabling individuals to address their inquiries with biblically grounded responses that offer direction in their lives. Frame succinctly states that 'Theology is application' (Frame 2013, p. 1109).

Thus, our thesis is parents, as the foremost educators in their children's spiritual development, ought to implement biblical counseling to offer direction to their offspring. This thesis positions parents as essential disciple-makers and outlines scriptural methodologies for effectively fulfilling their roles in nurturing faith within the home. Initially, we will elucidate the rationale for parents to assume the dual responsibilities of disciple-making and biblical counseling. Subsequently, we will substantiate this perspective by presenting a comprehensive overview of the biblical principles governing parenting, scriptural foundations for the discipleship of children and specific biblical guidance for parents to embrace their roles as disciple-makers.

## **Methodology**

This research uses the principles in the Bible as its methodology. The Bible constitutes the primary reference for biblical parenting, outlining a comprehensive pattern from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This foundation is established in the creation narrative found in Genesis. The evolution of marriage and family dynamics is clearly illustrated throughout the Old Testament accounts. In the New Testament, the gospels convey Jesus' teachings regarding family life, while the letters of Paul further elaborate on these teachings. This summary encapsulates the biblical basis for parenting as presented in both the Old and New Testaments.

### ***Old Testament framework***

The principles of parenting are rooted in the biblical text of Genesis. The creation of humanity in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:27) implies that individuals bear certain responsibilities, including the imperative to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). This divine directive, issued prior to humanity's fall, suggests a mandate for growth and the inherent duties associated with parenting. Following the fall (Gen. 3), the Scripture illustrates a distortion of human authority (Gen. 3:16). In a well-functioning family, the father or husband is not to assume a tyrannical role; rather, his behavior should foster an environment of trust and security within the home, as exemplified in passages such as Job 29:12–17 and Psalm 68:5–6 (Köstenberger & Jones, 2012, p. 64). Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones assert that the family

structure in the Old Testament is characterized by a patricentric model, wherein the father assumes the roles of leader, provider and protector of the family unit (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010, p. 354; cf. Chia, 2020, pp. 272–284).<sup>3</sup> The framework for parenting in the Old Testament is exemplified by the narratives of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4), followed by the account of Noah’s family (Genesis 6–9), and culminating with the lineage of Abraham (Genesis 12–50). The Old Testament portrays Israel as a familial entity, with God serving as the paternal figure who imparts guidance for the welfare of His people. Through Moses, God delivered the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) and the Great Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9), which are intended to promote both the physical and spiritual health of Israel. The Great Shema serves as a model for parenting within the Old Testament context. Nevertheless, the responsibility for procreation and child-rearing is designated to both men and women, highlighting the significant challenges that parenting faces in contemporary society (Köstenberger & Jones, 2012, p. 92).

### ***New Testament framework***

The family structure presented in the New Testament is deeply rooted in the roles and responsibilities outlined in the Old Testament regarding the upbringing of righteous children. Both Jesus and Paul offer essential guidance that expands upon this foundational framework (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010, p. 138). In the cultural context of Palestine during Jesus’s time, there was a strong expectation for children to reflect the behaviors and values of their parents. Daughters were expected to emulate their mothers in domestic responsibilities (as indicated in Matthew 10:35 and Luke 12:53), while sons were to follow in their fathers’ footsteps. Jesus exemplifies this dynamic as he mirrors both his earthly and divine father (Block, 1997, pp. 506, 252). He exhibited qualities of obedience and submission (Luke 2:51) and learned the trade of a craftsman from Joseph (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Furthermore, he displayed ultimate obedience and submission to his heavenly father (Mark 14:36; cf. Hebrews 5:8) (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010, pp. 138–139). Through his actions, Jesus underscores the significance of family and parenting, illustrating a model of godliness. However, his call to discipleship seems to challenge traditional family bonds, as seen in Matthew 10:34–36.

Craig L. Blomberg elucidates the apparent contradiction surrounding Jesus’ call to discipleship. He asserts that Jesus primarily considers the conflicting loyalties of both believers and non-believers. In situations where an individual’s desires conflict with God’s will, even within the most harmonious families, allegiance to God must take precedence over the strongest human relationships (10:37) (Blomberg, 2007, p. 460). R. T. France further emphasizes that a disciple prioritizes Jesus above personal inclinations and familial interests. The essence of Jesus’ teaching is that nothing, including familial bonds, should obstruct the gospel. He references children to illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God (Mk. 10:13–16) and its characteristics (Matt. 18:3; Lk. 22:26) (France, 1985, p. 775). Children serve as a representation of the attitudes that believers should embody, symbolizing the needy (Mk. 9:24; Matt. 18:6–14; cf. Acts 20:35) and reflecting the child-parent dynamic (Mk. 10:24; 2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Tim. 1:2; 1 Jn. 2:1) (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010, pp. 143–145).

Additionally, Paul’s viewpoint is rooted in the Old Testament and complements the teachings of Jesus regarding family dynamics in the New Testament. Understanding the broader context of biblical texts related to family life is crucial for comprehending biblical parenting. Paul emphasizes the significance of the relationships between husbands and wives, as well as between parents and children (Eph. 5:22–6:9; Col. 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim. 2:8–15; 6:1–2) (Balswick & Balswick, 1999, p. 17). The primary directive concerning the household code related to parents and children is found in Ephesians 6:1–3 and Colossians 3:20–21. Paul’s exhortation reinforces the Old Testament mandate for children to honor their parents (Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 19:3; 20:9; Deut. 21:18–21; 27:16) and is echoed in the New Testament gospels (Matt. 15:4; 19:19; Mk. 7:10; 10:19; Lk. 18:20) (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010, pp. 147–150). The epistles attributed to Paul establish a biblical framework for parenting, highlighting the role of parents as the primary figures responsible for guiding their children (Eph. 6:4). This guidance encompasses both instruction in the ways of the Lord and discipline from an evangelistic standpoint.

## Christian Education framework for parenting

### *Imago Dei and divine stewardship*

The creation narrative establishes the theological basis for parenting. Humanity, created in the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27), is entrusted with the mandate to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28). This divine commission is not merely biological but covenantal, reflecting God’s design for parents to nurture children who bear His image. As stewards of God’s image-bearers, parents are accountable to God for the spiritual formation of their offspring (Ezekiel 18:4). Parenting transcends mere social or biological duties; it is a divine stewardship bestowed by God. The Scriptures affirm that children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3), and parents are tasked with nurturing them in the ‘training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). A robust theological understanding of parenting acknowledges that God is the ultimate Father (Matthew 6:9), and that earthly parenting should mirror His love, discipline and guidance. Children are God’s possession (Ezekiel 18:4), and parents serve as temporary stewards of their souls (DeVries, 2023). Parenting is a form of discipleship, which entails guiding a child’s heart, mind and will towards Christ (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

A UK-based study investigating religious engagement among 1738 Anglican adolescents aged 11–15 provided valuable insights into the formative role of the home environment in sustaining faith. Central to the analysis was a Home Influence Matrix, which identified several key predictors of adolescent religious commitment. Parental church attendance emerged as the most powerful influence, with adolescents whose parents regularly attended church being over four times more likely to remain engaged in their faith (OR = 4.21,  $p < 0.001$ ). Daily family prayer also played a pivotal role, doubling the likelihood of sustained belief and practice ( $\beta = 0.38$ ). In addition, a religiously enriched home environment—marked by visible artifacts like crosses, Bibles and participation in family rituals—significantly enhanced a sense of belonging ( $\eta^2 = 0.14$ ). The study’s comparative analysis revealed interesting dynamics within the family. Maternal influence surpassed paternal, accounting for 58% versus 42% of the variance in adolescent religiosity. In 23% of the cases, religious grandparents helped sustain faith, especially when parental religiosity was weak or inconsistent, suggesting a compensatory effect across generations. Culturally, the study noted the limited impact of institutional programs like Anglican confirmation, which contributed only marginally to long-term engagement ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ). Moreover, peer influence appeared weaker than what similar American studies, such as Erickson (1992), had reported—pointing to possible national or denominational differences in the mechanisms of religious socialization. Overall, the findings underscored the enduring power of the home—especially maternal figures and consistent family practices—in shaping young people’s religious trajectories, even amid broader cultural shifts.

### *Covenant theology and family discipleship*

The covenantal structure of Scripture underscores the continuity of God’s redemptive plan across generations. The Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:7) explicitly includes children, emphasizing the transmission of faith from parents to offspring. This covenantal framework is reiterated in the New Testament, where household baptisms (Acts 16:15, 33) signify the inclusion of children in the covenant community. Parents, therefore, are not autonomous agents but participants in God’s covenantal economy, tasked with raising their children ‘in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4). Parents are entrusted with the responsibility to exercise divine authority, not in a domineering manner, but as compassionate guides who lead their children towards moral integrity. Proverbs 22:6 states, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it’. Flor and Knapp (2001) longitudinal study offered a significant contribution to the understanding of how religious values are shaped within families by introducing a critical distinction between transmission and transaction. While transmission referred to the traditional, one-way transfer of beliefs from parent to child, transaction emphasized a bidirectional process, where values are mutually explored and co-constructed through dialogue. Studying 283 parent-adolescent dyads over time, Flor and Knapp proposed a Dual Pathways Model. They found that transmission alone explained 34% of the variance in adolescent religious behavior [ $\beta = 0.42^{**}$ , \* typically means  $p < .05$  (significant); \*\* typically means  $p < .01$  (highly significant)], particularly in structured practices like attending services or saying prayers. However, when it came to

internalizing values—making faith one’s own—the transactional process added an additional 22% of explained variance ( $\beta = 0.38^{**}$ ), underscoring the importance of collaborative meaning-making. The study also uncovered clear developmental patterns. For younger adolescents (aged 11–13), transmission was more effective; these children tended to accept and adopt parental beliefs with minimal resistance. But by late adolescence (aged 17–19), as cognitive independence matured, transactional exchanges became the dominant pathway for religious development. Finally, parenting style emerged as a crucial moderator. Authoritative parenting—marked by warmth, responsiveness and open dialogue—significantly enhanced the effects of transactional communication ( $\eta^2 = 0.18$ ). In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasized obedience and control, was associated only with the transmission pathway, limiting the adolescent’s active engagement in faith formation.

Together, these findings highlighted the dynamic nature of religious development, shaped not only by what is taught but by *how* families interact as children mature.

Ephesians 6:1–4 emphasizes that children should obey their parents ‘in the Lord,’ while fathers are advised not to incite anger in their children but to nurture them with discipline and instruction. Deuteronomy 6:7 highlights the importance of parents diligently imparting God’s teachings in their daily lives. Children are able to recognize hypocrisy (Chapman & Campbell, 2022). It is essential for parents to: embody their faith through prayer, Scripture reading and visible service to others; acknowledge their errors by demonstrating repentance when they make mistakes, share personal testimonies about how Jesus has transformed their lives, and fervently pray for their children’s salvation, asking the Holy Spirit to open their hearts (Acts 16:14), to remove any spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4) and to create opportunities for discussions about faith (Colossians 4:3). It is important to establish a home enriched with the Gospel such as to engage in family devotions by reading and discussing Scripture collectively, to participate in worship by singing hymns or worship songs together as a family and to foster conversations that naturally incorporate discussions about God (Eshleman & Eaton, 2022; Furman, 2020).

### ***The role of discipline and grace***

Proverbs 22:6 (‘Train up a child in the way he should go’) is often misapplied as a guarantee of outcomes. Theologically, it underscores the parents’ responsibility to employ the means of grace—Scripture, prayer and the church—while recognizing that salvation is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8). Discipline (Hebrews 12:11) and grace (Ephesians 4:32) are not antithetical but complementary, reflecting God’s own dealings with His children. Effective parenting requires a harmonious blend of grace, which is unconditional love, and truth, which encompasses moral standards. Parenting represents one of the most significant responsibilities assigned to individuals, necessitating both unwavering affection and strong guidance (Dobson, 2020). The Scriptures offer a parenting framework that harmonizes grace (unearned love and forgiveness) with truth (moral standards and discipline). This equilibrium reflects the nature of God—who embodies ‘fullness of grace and truth’ (John 1:14). Parents who excessively favor leniency may raise children lacking moral boundaries, whereas those who focus solely on rules without love risk fostering resentment or legalism (Colossians 3:21). A biblical perspective on parenting combines both grace and truth, guiding children’s hearts towards Christlike character. Parents embody the essence of God by demonstrating unconditional love, even in the face of their children’s failures (Luke 15:20–24—the Prodigal Son), and by maintaining righteous standards that emphasize the importance of consequences for one’s actions (Galatians 6:7). Proverbs 13:24 states, ‘He who withholds the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him’. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us that while discipline may be difficult, it ultimately produces ‘the peaceful fruit of righteousness’. Additionally, Colossians 3:21 advises, ‘Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they do not lose heart’. In short, God maintains His standards without compromising for sin, yet He provides redemption rather than condemnation. Similarly, parents should uphold biblical principles while demonstrating unwavering love (Eggerichs, 2021). When grace and truth are intertwined, children benefit from the assurance of love and the firmness of truth, equipping them to pursue Christ in a flawed world.

## ***The eschatological perspective***

Parental discipleship is an eschatological act, preparing children for the day of Christ (Philippians 1:10). It is not solely about moral formation but about pointing children to the gospel—the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). Parents must, therefore, embody the gospel in their own lives, demonstrating repentance, faith and dependence on Christ. Parenting transcends mere behavior management; it involves the cultivation of character. The most significant asset parents have is not a collection of regulations, but the demonstration of Christlike virtues. Children absorb far more from their parents' actions than from their verbal instructions (Proverbs 20:7). To nurture godly offspring, parents must first exemplify the qualities they wish to impart—such as love, humility, patience, integrity and forgiveness. This essay examines how parents can exemplify Christlike character in their daily lives, fostering an environment where faith is not only instructed but also embraced. Children acquire their understanding of faith primarily through observation rather than direct teaching. It is essential for parents to exemplify: Love (1 Corinthians 13:4–7)—demonstrating patience, kindness and selflessness; Integrity (Titus 2:7–8)—living truthfully so that children can witness authentic faith; and Humility (Philippians 2:3–5)—being open to acknowledging errors and pursuing reconciliation. Thus, parents serve as the initial 'Bible' for their children. By exemplifying Christ's love, humility and truth, they foster an environment where the gospel is both evident and engaging (Platt, 2021; Powell & Argue, 2021). The aim is not to achieve perfection but to promote growth—enabling children to observe God's grace manifesting in their parents' lives. As St. Francis of Assisi wisely stated, 'Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words' (Furman, 2020).

## **Parents as disciple-makers: a theological mandate**

### ***The primacy of parental responsibility***

Erickson's (1992) landmark study shed light on how adolescents develop religious commitment by analyzing data from 1872 teens using structural equation modeling. The results revealed a complex web of influences. Parental religiosity emerged as the strongest predictor of adolescent faith ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but peer networks played a mediating role, accounting for 32% of that influence. Schooling also mattered: parochial education boosted religious commitment ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.11$ ), while secular settings tended to weaken it. The study mapped developmental shifts across adolescence. Parental influence was strongest in early adolescence (aged 12–14), while peer influence peaked during mid-adolescence (15–17). By late adolescence (18–19), young people began to form their own religious ideologies, independent of external influences. Notably, girls retained 23% more of their parents' religious values compared to boys, highlighting significant gender differences in religious transmission.

The New Testament epistles reinforce the Old Testament's theological vision for parenting. Ephesians 6:4 charges fathers to bring up children 'in the discipline and instruction of the Lord', a task that encompasses both corrective discipline (Proverbs 13:24) and positive instruction (Deuteronomy 6:7). This dual emphasis mirrors God's fatherly care for His people (Hebrews 12:5–11). One of the most significant privileges and duties of Christian parenting is guiding a child towards salvation in Jesus Christ. Although parents cannot compel conversion—since salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit—they are tasked with diligently planting the seeds of the Gospel in their child's heart (1 Corinthians 3:6). The Scriptures highlight the essential role of parents in spiritual development (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Timothy 3:15). This article examines how parents can lead their children to a sincere and saving relationship with Christ through teaching, modeling, prayer and reliance on God's timing (Leman, 2023). The paramount responsibility of a parent is to guide their child towards salvation in Christ. According to 2 Timothy 3:15, Timothy was acquainted with Scripture from a young age, which directed him towards salvation. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus embraced children, confirming their significance in the kingdom of God. Proverbs 1:7 states, 'The fear of the Lord is the foundation of knowledge'. It is essential for children to comprehend the following: The nature of God—He is holy, loving and just (Isaiah 6:3; 1 John 4:8). The concept of sin—It is the act of disobedience towards God that creates a separation from Him (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The identity of Jesus—He is the Son of God, who sacrificed Himself for our sins and was resurrected (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The requirements for salvation—It necessitates repentance

and faith in Christ (Acts 3:19; Romans 10:9–10). For younger children: Employ straightforward language (e.g. ‘Jesus bore the consequences of our misdeeds so that we may draw near to God’). For older children: Explore more profound inquiries (e.g. ‘What is the significance of ‘taking up your cross’ and following Jesus?’). Even with dedicated parenting, children possess free will (Ezekiel 18:20). Therefore, parents should: Entrust their children to God (1 Samuel 1:27–28—similar to Hannah’s commitment with Samuel). Continue steadfastly in prayer (James 5:16). Trust in God’s sovereignty (Proverbs 16:9). As Smith (2021) investigates how religious ideology shapes intergenerational faith transmission in contemporary American families. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, analyzing survey data from the National Study of Youth and Religion alongside 120 in-depth interviews with parents and adolescents across Protestant, Catholic and unaffiliated families.

### ***The home as a sanctuary***

The household is not merely a social unit but a microcosm of the kingdom of God. Parents function as priests within this domestic sanctuary, mediating God’s truth through family worship, Scripture reading and prayer (Joshua 24:15). The Old Testament serves as a crucial basis for understanding marriage and family dynamics (Gen. 2:18–24; 4:1–2). Following the fall, the inherent beauty of these institutions was marred by sin, leading to experiences characterized by suffering, fragmentation and distress, despite their original purpose of glorifying God. John Piper identifies two distinct ways in which Christian marriages and families reflect God’s glory. The first pertains to the structural aspect, which emphasizes the importance of adhering to God’s designated roles within marriage and family. The second relates to the foundational aspect, which underscores the necessity of upholding God’s intended design for these relationships (Piper, 2002, p. 91). Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments contain passages that affirm the role of parents as the primary disciple-makers for their children. Consequently, this section will present scriptural references that endorse the responsibility of parents in nurturing their children’s spiritual development. As Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) explored how religion is passed from parents to children by studying 187 parent–child pairs. Using surveys and 14-day diaries, they uncovered two communication styles: in 42% of families, parents led one-way conversations, while in 58%, parents and children engaged in two-way, meaning-making dialogues. The latter, reciprocal communication, led to 23% greater religious retention in children. While one-way teaching worked for habits like prayer, it fell short with abstract concepts. Notably, mothers initiated 61% of all religious discussions.

### ***The Shema as a theological blueprint***

This passage reveals that Monotheism (‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one’) demands exclusive allegiance to Yahweh, a truth parents must instill in their children; love for God (‘with all your heart, soul and strength’) is the supreme commandment, shaping all aspects of life; instruction (‘impress them on your children’) is a deliberate, daily practice, reflecting the means of grace God has ordained for spiritual growth.

The Shema is not a moralistic guideline but a theological declaration that shapes the identity and mission of God’s people. Jesus reaffirms this in Mark 12:29–30, elevating love for God as the greatest commandment.

The ‘Shema’, found in Deuteronomy 6:1–9, serves as a quintessential illustration of divine guidance aimed at safeguarding the family from detrimental external influences while fostering a righteous lineage (Tripp, 1995, p. 10). In his second discourse (Deut. 6:4), Moses articulates a pivotal command to the Israelites: ‘Hear, O Israel’. This exhortation draws attention to what is referred to as the ‘Great Shema’ in the New Testament (Mk. 12:29–30; Matt. 22:37–38; Lk. 10:27). Scholars such as Walton et al. (2000, p. 177) note that archaeological inscriptions from Palestine corroborate this notion, as they reference Yahweh of Samaria and Yahweh of Teman. The historical context of the Ancient Near East during this period reveals a landscape characterized by polytheism, with the instruction to Israel serving to reaffirm the singularity of Yahweh and to ensure the transmission of this faith to subsequent generations. The phrase ‘Hear O Israel’ serves as an introduction to the profound theme of sincere obedience to Yahweh, the deity of Israel. This expression forms the foundation of a significant Jewish practice, specifically the

recitation and listening to the Shema. According to James M. Hamilton, the Israelites possess compelling reasons to express their love for Yahweh and adhere to His commandments (Hamilton, 2010, p. 69). They were presented with a choice between life and death, obedience and disobedience, as well as blessings and curses. The exhortation 'Hear O Israel' represents Moses' appeal to the people to recognize the covenantal bond that exists between them and Yahweh (the Lord our God). Verse 4a is pivotal in comprehending Jesus' interpretation of the Ten Commandments (Mark 12:29–30). An important aspect to consider is the phrase found in verse 4b: 'The Lord is one'. Moses aimed for the Israelites to affirm the true essence of Yahweh as the singular, ultimate deity, encapsulating the concept of monotheism. This declaration signifies that Yahweh is unparalleled, and his distinctiveness necessitates a corresponding commitment of total and unwavering loyalty (Deut. 6:5) (Ko, 2013, p. 61). The Hebrew term for 'one' is particularly significant when interpreted in the context of the more comprehensive revelations presented in the New Testament, which suggests a notion of compound unity rather than absolute singularity. Scholars William MacDonald and Arthur L. Farstad argue that the emphasis on God's oneness points to his existence as three persons, offering a subtle indication of the Trinity as early as Genesis 1:26. They propose that the plural pronouns 'us' and 'our' in this context accompany the singular nouns 'image' and 'likeness', thereby illustrating the concept of compound unity, or a triune relationship (MacDonald & Farstad, 1992, p. 207).

Moses directs the people of Israel to adhere to the paramount commandment articulated by Jesus in Mark 12:29–31. In this passage, Jesus cites the essential Shema, often referred to as the 'Great Shema'. He proclaims, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second commandment is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. There is no commandment greater than these'. Moses initially emphasizes the importance of loving Yahweh in Exodus 20:6, marking the first declaration of love for God by His covenant community, which is expected to observe His commandments. The book of Deuteronomy provides the most comprehensive discourse on the concept of loving Yahweh within the Torah. According to Hamilton, Moses instructs God's covenant people through the Shema, which Jesus later cites as the supreme commandment. The Shema holds significant value, particularly because of its reference by Jesus (Hamilton, 2010, p. 119). Consequently, the Israelites are called to uphold their covenant relationship by loving Yahweh above all else and adhering to His word, which entails total devotion rather than mere emotional affinity. Rydelnik and Vanlaningham (2014, p. 277) assert that Moses conceptualizes love as a commitment to Yahweh that encompasses the entirety of one's being—heart, soul and strength—indicating that complete devotion is required. Moses employs the terms heart, mind and might to illustrate the interrelation of these aspects, emphasizing the wholeness of the individual. This deliberate choice by Moses implies a desire for the Israelites to dedicate their entire selves to Yahweh unreservedly.

The Shema further indicates Yahweh's desire for the Israelites to express their love for Him through their interactions with their children and neighbors. Ming Him Ko observes that in the Christian tradition, the Shema (Deut. 6:4–5) is often paired with the command to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18), forming what is known as the double-love commandment. This foundational aspect of Deut. 6:4–5 is recognized by both Jewish and Christian communities (Ko, 2013, p. 59). For example, John states, 'If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen' (1 Jn. 4:20). This statement expands upon Jesus' articulation of the greatest commandment found in Mark 12:28–31. The Shema encompasses six key elements highlighted in verses 4–9: hear, love, impress, speak, bind and write. According to Ko, the Shema includes essential themes that enable Jewish and Christian communities to affirm, embrace and nurture a continuous, reflective practice (Ko, 2013, pp. 59–60). The notion of embedding God's word in the heart implies a commitment to daily instructing children in His teachings, thereby shaping their perspectives and behaviors in relation to the world. Parents are encouraged to 'bind them as a sign on their hand' and to prominently display the great commandment within their homes (Hamilton, 2010, p. 125). The elements of hands, foreheads and doorposts illustrate the spiritual traditions of the Jewish community, which have manifested in the practices of mezuzahs and phylacteries (6:8–9). These tangible objects signify a core aspect of Israel's identity, emphasizing the continuous service to Yahweh. The command to bind on the hand and forehead serves as a continual reminder for parents to direct their actions and

perspectives, thereby influencing future generations. Rydelnik and Vanlaningham (2014) propose that the practice of inscribing messages on the doorposts of homes and gates symbolizes a commitment to adhering to God's laws within both domestic and communal spheres (p. 278). God's directives for Israel emphasize the responsibility of parents to comply with these laws, which in turn fosters a diligent transmission of knowledge to the younger generation, who will continue this educational legacy. The Psalmist articulates that God established a law in Israel, mandating fathers to instruct their children and the generations yet to come in understanding God's commandments. Parents are tasked with instilling in their children a reliance on God, ensuring that they remember His deeds and statutes (see Ps. 78:5–7).

Historically, Jewish communities have consistently emphasized the Shema, which signifies a lasting commitment to the faith for both parents and their children. Over time, these communities have maintained the Shema as a central aspect of their worship, reciting the associated laws every morning and evening, specifically Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41. This practice has transformed the Shema into a declaration of faith that has persisted through the ages, becoming a vital component of Jewish identity across generations. Jesus aligns himself with this enduring tradition, as evidenced in the Gospels (Mark 12:28–33; Matthew 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–37), underscoring the significance of parental instruction in faith. Ko suggests that the early church adopted the Shema model in the formation of the canon and creeds, thereby safeguarding Christian doctrines for future generations to foster their relationship with God (Ko, 2013, p. 60). The Shema thus provides a foundational framework for Christian parents, guiding them in nurturing their children's faith while also educating them in secular disciplines (MacDonald & Farstad, 1992, p. 207). The Shema emphasizes the importance of God as the primary entity deserving of our love. The transmission of faith to subsequent generations necessitates that parents impart knowledge of God to their children and potentially establish a covenant relationship with Him. Robert D. Jones highlights the significant role and duty of parents in relation to God, asserting that they alone possess the privilege and authority to educate their offspring (Prov. 22:15; 29:15; Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:7) (Jones, 2021, p. 167).

For parents to effectively guide their children, they must first cultivate a proper relationship with God, characterized by learning, loving and obeying Him, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct their lives. Consequently, it is the responsibility of parents to convey God's teachings to their children, ensuring that the content of their instruction reflects their own understanding of God as revealed in His law. Jones advocates for a traditional approach to child-rearing, which he believes is more suitable than the Warning view, Individual nature view and Adulthood view (Jones, 2021, p. 171). This traditional perspective is proactive, encouraging parents to train their children to follow God according to His design. Parents are advised to take an active role in their children's spiritual education, seizing every opportunity for instruction, including through continuous meditation. They should utilize symbols and create an environment in their homes that fosters worship, where God's word is honored, reiterated and adhered to. As a result, children will come to develop their own relationship with God, as illustrated in Psalm 78 and Proverbs 22:6 (cf. Lee et al., 1997). As Dudley and Dudley (1986) examined how religious values are transmitted from parents to adolescents, focusing on factors that influence this process within Christian families. The study used survey data from Seventh-day Adventist families, analyzing parent-child relationship to assess the effectiveness of religious socialization.

According to Jones's four biblical counseling principles regarding parenting, it is essential for parents to recognize their accountability to God in their role as caregivers. God has entrusted children to parents to provide a godly influence in their lives (Jones, 2021, p. 172). Consequently, guiding parents to become disciple-makers within their households necessitates an emphasis on parental righteousness, fostering an open and receptive attitude towards their children and upholding the hope that Jesus offers to both parents and their offspring.

## Conclusion

This article contends that parents, being the primary educators in their children's spiritual growth, should adopt biblical counseling to provide guidance to their children. This argument positions parents as vital disciple-makers and delineates scriptural approaches for effectively executing their responsibilities in fostering faith within the household. The Shema extends beyond Israel to encompass successive

generations. Consequently, Moses' exhortation to deliberately transmit faith to future generations resonates with the principles of impressing, articulating, binding and inscribing the law. The Psalmist elucidates the rationale behind Moses' insistence on these practices, stating that 'the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments' (Ps. 78:6–7).

## Notes

1. Zhubanova (2015). See the same article in Zhubanova (2019).
2. Mohler Jr. (2021).
3. In their 2002 study, King et al. delved into the family dynamics that shape adolescent religiosity, using a mixed-method design involving 167 Christian adolescents aged 14–18. Their work illuminated not only which family mechanisms matter, but *how* and *why* they influence young people's religious development. At the heart of the findings was parental modeling—the consistent, observable practice of faith by parents—which accounted for 39% of the variance in adolescent religiousness ( $\beta = 0.47^{**}$ ). Adolescents whose parents lived out their beliefs were significantly more likely to adopt those values themselves. Shared religious practices, such as praying or reading Scripture together, further strengthened this internalization, nearly tripling the odds of deep personal commitment (OR = 2.8). Importantly, the study identified relational closeness as a key mediator: warm and emotionally connected parent–child relationships explained 28% of the effectiveness of religious transmission. In other words, faith was more “catching” when passed within the context of a secure and trusting bond. King et al. also examined the amplifying—or diluting—role of peers. When adolescents were embedded in networks of religious friends, the influence of their family's faith was significantly *\*enhanced* ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.11$ )<sup>\*\*</sup>. However, the presence of non-religious peers undermined 61% of parental influence, showing just how vulnerable faith transmission can be in the face of competing social norms. Gender differences added another layer of nuance. Daughters were more influenced by maternal religiosity ( $r = 0.53$ ), whereas sons showed lower correlation ( $r = 0.31$ ) and were more susceptible to peer dynamics, highlighting the different developmental pathways for boys and girls in matters of faith. Overall, the study offered a rich, relational portrait of religious formation—revealing that transmission depends not only on *what* is taught at home, but also on *how it's lived*, *how it's experienced emotionally*, and *who else is watching*. \* typically means  $p < .05$  (significant); \*\* typically means  $p < .01$  (highly significant).

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The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## ORCID

Philip Suciadi Chia  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2453-7497>

## Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no data were created or analyzed in this study.

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