

EXCERPT



Family Discipleship That Works Guiding Your Child to Know, Love, and Act Like Jesus

October 8, 2024 | \$18, 172 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0996-3

Family discipleship is one of the most basic ways God builds his kingdom, yet most parents struggle to do it consistently. Without piling on guilt or making us feel like failures, Brian Dembowczyk, a parent himself, offers practical advice for teaching our kids to act like Jesus as we participate in the Christian life together.

Acting Out God's Story Together as a Family

I'm not an actor. The closest I came to acting was as a high school senior, when I agreed to be in a play that never came about. For whatever reason, not enough guys were available to perform, and I reluctantly agreed after quite a bit of cajoling. I can't remember why we never did that play (I consider it an act of God's kindness), but that's the closest I came to being a thespian.

I'm not much of a drama buff either. I've read plays. I've been to plays. I even took a theater course in college. But I'm far from being an enthusiast, let alone an expert. I might be one of the least likely people to make a case that we should read the Bible as a drama. But if we do this, it might just revolutionize our family discipleship.

Big claim, right? I need to back it up. What difference could reading the Bible as a drama rather than as a story make? The key is that stories are meant to be read and enjoyed; dramas are meant to be read and performed. What we do after reading the Bible makes all the difference. As we saw in the last chapter, God intends for us to act out our faith. And as famed acting instructor Viola Spolin says, "Acting is doing." Teaching the Bible as drama positions our discipleship toward doing and builds that work on the foundation of Scripture.

We can certainly find a lot of things to do when we read the Bible as information, history, or story. The Old Testament alone has 613 commandments, 365 of which are prohibitions (think "thou shalt not") and 248 of which are requirements (think "thou shalt"). That's a lot of space to be doers, and we haven't even gotten to the rules in the New Testament, which number over 1,000. But even over 1,600 commands don't cover all of daily life. Think of the decisions you and your kids make each day—from little ones to big ones. You probably can't identify a clear command ("thou shalt") or prohibition ("thou shalt not") to guide each. We can't find verses in Scripture saying, "Thou shalt take a summer job, and this is the one thou shalt take," or, "Thou shalt not cheer for football, but rather for basketball thou shalt cheer," or, "Thou shalt not buy a gaming system, but rather thou shalt buy your father better birthday gifts." Many of our everyday decisions fall between what the Bible clearly tells us to do and what it clearly tells us not to do.

The challenge we have as parents discipling our kids is that it often seems we can read and teach the Bible to our kids without having a way to connect it to where they are and how they should live in this gap. We know the Bible was given to guide how we live in every aspect of our lives. We know God cares about all the details of our lives. But how do we connect those dots? Our kids can know the facts of Rahab protecting the spies in Joshua 2, for example. They can know it's history, and they can even recognize how it connects to the metanarrative of Scripture and ultimately to Jesus.

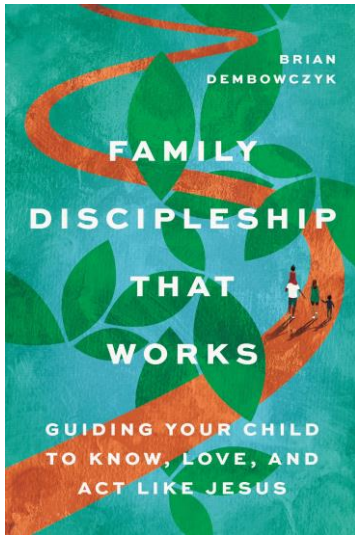


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"Family Discipleship That Works encourages parents to help their children become actors in the Bible's story of redemption by learning to act in ways that embody the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. Home, neighborhood, school, and church here become the stage for living out the faith in embodied ways in everyday situations. Imitation of Christ, meet improvised discipleship!"

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

But what difference does it make to them? There aren't any commands or prohibitions in that account. How do we apply it then? This, I think, has been the Achilles heel of family discipleship.

Reading the Bible as a drama to perform provides a solution. It turns the space between the "thou shalt" and "the thou shalt not" from being a nebulous gap of uncertainty and confusion into an amazing opportunity to perform as Christ in new, yet faithful, ways. As we read the Bible, we discover the plot undergirding the drama, the characters performing in the drama, and the action advancing the drama. We also look to these prior acts of the drama in Scripture—such as Rahab protecting the spies—to learn how we can rightly perform our role in our act.

When we do this—when we begin with the goal of changed living in mind—we minimize the disconnect we often experience between what we read and what we do. We don't close the Bible and wonder what to do next; we close the Bible ready to perform the role we've been given. And that performance makes all the difference for us and the world around us.

—adaptation from chapter 3, "Point of View"

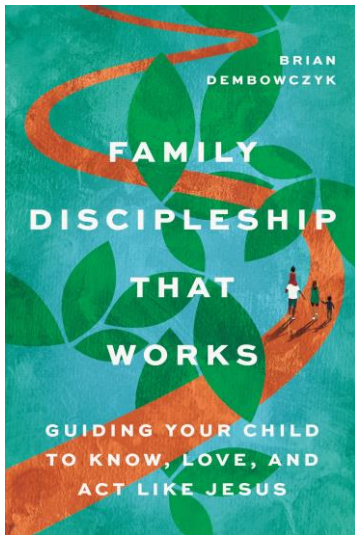


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Q & A



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"Brian Dembowczyk speaks clearly and authentically to parents who long to teach their children to know Jesus but feel unprepared, unsuccessful, or hopeless. Brian takes the posture of a fellow learner, shares his own successes and failures as a parent, and invites his reader to take the next step."

Cas Monaco, vice president of missiology and engagement for FamilyLife

Family Discipleship Isn't as Mysterious as It Seems

In what ways does your book offer something new to the family discipleship genre?

Brian Dembowczyk: There are some really helpful books for parents on family discipleship, but most of them—I believe—create really high and unrealistic expectations of the parents. If you are new at it or haven't had the greatest success, they can often leave you feeling overwhelmed. In addition, the messaging we often hear is so critical of parents. So I wanted to write a book that respects parents, challenges parents, but is encouraging and realistic for them. I wanted to give them a book they would read and feel good as they read it and afterward, and that gives them a model to use that they can actually do.

Many other books on this topic focus on what our kids do—their behavior—but I don't believe that is arrived at through moralism. It's not about a list of right or wrong behaviors to do or not do to be "good Christians," but rather through the gospel. I think many (most?) other family discipleship books can take a moralistic approach, or, more often, focus more on what a kid knows or believes. I hope this book closes that loop faithfully.

What do you believe is at the heart of family discipleship?

Brian: Family discipleship is about parents helping their kids understand who they are in Christ and finding ways to live like Christ in their context. It's about looking at the character of Jesus and finding faithful ways to display that character wherever you are and in whatever you do.

What is your hope for this book?

Brian: I have really tried for this book to convey hope, optimism, and freedom for parents. When I began my PhD dissertation research on this topic that led to this book, that was one of my earliest observations—parents have been given grief in the American church from its beginning. COVID increased that when churches weren't meeting as much and churches turned to parents in that time, and frustration from the church grew because they felt parents weren't doing enough.

I hope parents can see that they are not failing. Family discipleship isn't as hard and mysterious as it might seem. The goal is to have kids living like Jesus in their unique context, and it can be achieved by reading the Bible and helping them see the character of Jesus. Parents can do this. They are equipped to do this.

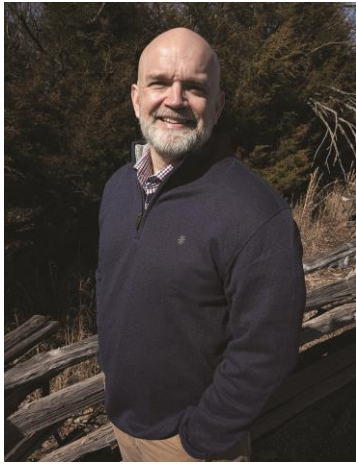


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Fourth Book Captures Seventeen Years of Gospel-Centered Family Ministry Experience

Brian Dembowczyk is the Associate Publisher for Thomas Nelson Bibles in Nashville, Tennessee. Before that, he served as the Managing Editor and Kids Team Leader of The Gospel Project, a Bible study curriculum used by over 1.6 million adults, teens, and children each week. Kids and parents know him as “Pastor Brian,” based on a weekly 5-minute video segment called “Questions from Kids” that was part of the curriculum. Brian served as a pastor, discipleship pastor, and family pastor on church staffs for seventeen years.

He is the author of *Cornerstones: 200 Questions and Answers to Learn Truth*, a catechism for children, and *Cornerstones: 200 Questions and Answers to Teach Truth*, a corresponding parent guide that provides commentary on each question and answer. Brian is also the author of *Gospel-Centered Kids Ministry*, a guide for developing children’s ministries around Jesus.

Brian has preached, spoken on the main stage, and led breakouts and trainings for a number of churches, organizations, and events, including the [KidzMatter Conference](#) (2023, 2022), [CentriKid Camps](#) (2023, 2018, 2017, 2016), the [Children’s Pastors Conference](#) (2019, 2018), an [Acts 29 Regional Conference](#) (2019), the [ETCH NextGen Ministry Conference](#) (2018, 2017, 2016, 2015), and the [One Conference](#) (2018, 2017). He has also spoken in South Africa, the Philippines, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Most often, he speaks on gospel-centeredness in ministry, various topics in children and student ministry, family discipleship, ministry leadership, and Scripture engagement.

Brian earned a PhD in Ministry from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2022. He also holds a ThM from Midwestern, a DMin from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and an MDiv from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He serves as an instructional designer and adjunct professor in children/family ministry at Lancaster Bible College/Capital Seminary.

Having lived in nine different places in his lifetime, including Baltimore, Hawaii, Germany, Tampa, Maryland, Florida, and Kentucky, he and his wife, Tara, now live in Murfreesboro, Tennessee with their three children.



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