

Building a biblical foundation for life-long ministry: How the framework of Dispensationalism is a good friend to children's ministry

Ty Woznek
Heartland Church, Norfolk

Introduction

“If you cannot teach theology to a child, you do not understand it well enough,” said Dr. Charles Ryrie on the way to the airport. A good test of the efficacy of a movement is how well it can be understood or taught to children. This paper will seek to demonstrate that dispensationalism is child worthy because it connects with what children need. It will do this using Ephesians to illustrate what Paul instructs in Ephesians 6:4.

Recognizing there is a noble discussion regarding what is the sine qua non of dispensationalism, this paper will adhere to Ryrie's three. After looking at Ephesians 6:4, connecting the three aspects of Paul's instructions to fathers with the sine qua non demonstrates how dispensationalism is a friend to children's ministry. First, by linking not provoking but nourishing a child with the distinction between Israel and the church, one sees how the Father's care illustrates what a father should be. Second, associating bringing up in the discipline of the Lord with plain interpretation of Scripture, one sees how dispensationalism is simple enough for a child to follow. Finally, explaining bringing up in the instruction of the Lord with the glory of God, one sees the importance of living for something bigger than oneself, a critical need for children.

The needs of children

Childhood is an important season of life. In a short 12 years worldview, personality, and character foundations are set for the remaining 60+ years of life. Paul states, in his discussion on spiritual gifts, that “when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”¹ Paul used the reality of childhood vs adulthood as a metaphor. For the metaphor to work, there needs to be a difference between the two. We see this in one of the purposes for the book of Proverbs where the writer states, “to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.”² Proverbs is a road map for a child to choose wisdom over folly when he becomes a man. Jesus uses this unique season of life to teach the simplicity of faith when he states, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”³ Jesus uses the simple faith of a child as the example of how all should come to the faith. The Gospel is simple enough for a child to understand and have a relationship with Christ.

Critical in the lives of children is the role of godly fathers. Revival in Israel will occur when “[Elijah] will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”⁴ The failure of fathers fulfilling their role is a pattern in the First Testament. The Torah instructed parents to constantly t

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

² Proverbs 1:4 ESV

³ Mark 9:37 ESV

⁴ Malachi 4:6 ESV

alk about God and the things of God with their children. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Not long after Toray was complete the next generation did not know God nor anything he had done.⁵ Israel's need for fathers to assert their godly responsibility to lead their children to know God was not fulfilled throughout the First Testament. This raises the question: Is God is done with Israel.⁶

One can look down on Israel for their failure, but are the gentiles any better? The statistics on fatherless homes is alarming. Demonstrably, engaged fathers in the home is the silver bullet to slay this beast. Note just a few statistics on fatherless homes:

- 1) Four Times More Likely to Live in Poverty
- 2) Two Times Greater Risk of Infant Mortality
- 3) Seven Times More Likely to Become Pregnant as a Teen
- 4) Two Times More Likely to Suffer Obesity⁷

From biblical and sociological perspectives, the role of the fathers grounds the emotional stability of children. Without fathers one tends to biblically fall into judgement and sociologically fall into danger.⁸ This leads to what is currently known as childhood trauma. This prevalent problem creates the need for training for ministries on how to serve children who cannot regulate themselves. Robert and Lori Crosby states:

When [trauma] events occur before the age of eighteen, researchers call them adverse childhood experiences, or "ACEs." Over the past twenty years, researchers have discovered that these experiences are startlingly common in the United States and around the world. They have also discovered that ACEs can have a devastating effect on children's thoughts, emotions, relationships, and self-esteem. They can impact every part of a child's life – home, school, church – and the effects usually last into adulthood.⁹

To give an example of what trauma does in a church setting, the writers describe multiple ways children act out when they are emotionally dysregulated. Distrust and suspicion are common traits. They state:

Trauma – exposed children may also be distrustful of their peers, actions and intentions. This is a survival instinct that has developed from living in an unsafe or unpredictable home environment. Consequently, they may interpret another, child's blank stare as an invitation to fight. If another child accidentally knocks their pencil on the floor, they may assume that it is done on purpose and seek revenge. If they see other children laughing,

⁵ Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; Judges 2:10

⁶ The Song of Moses, Davidic Covenant, and New Covenant explicitly state Israel's fall and future restoration. This is well understood by dispensationalists.

⁷ <https://www.fatherhood.org/championing-fatherhood/the-father-absence-crisis-infographic>

⁸ Daniel and his friends lived for God though Israel was judged. One also sees people thriving despite being in a fatherless situation.

⁹ Crosby, Robert G, and Lori A Crosby. 2022. *Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry*. Wipf and Stock Publishers. pages. 5-6

they may assume they are the butt of the joke. And if another child does something nice for them, they may think it is some kind of trick.¹⁰

In trying to navigate the needs of children, Churches often try to support families through seminars. These seminars give tools for parenting. Titus 2 does instruct older men and women to help younger men and women in their roles as parents. Ivy Beckwith states:

In truth most parenting seminars are poorly attended. A popular psychologist/speaker friend of mine who packs out his speaking engagements all over the country has recently written a book on parenting. He was asked if he would turn this book into a parenting seminar the same way he had with his books on relationships and other topics. He said he doubted that he would, in his experience, no one comes to parenting seminars. The lesson is that the last thing parents want from their churches is a parenting seminar. What they want and desperately need are creative ways to care for the souls of their children.¹¹

Church, then, becomes the place for soul care. The focus is often on education. In the *Handbook of Children's Religious Education*, contributors Cary Buzzelli and Kevin Walsh define religious education as such:

The aim of religious education is development, which includes the intellectual, social, emotional, and moral growth of children. Development results from interactions embedded in a social community. Through deep and significant relationships with others we come to know ourselves and orient our lives and actions towards what is moral and ultimate in life.¹²

Religious education is not soul care. While Buzzelli and Walsh focus on education and touch on the role of relationships, Catherine Stonehouse tempers the effectiveness of education:

We do not give children their primary understanding of God through formal religious instruction. Even young children come to church with their own God. Our teaching is secondary to the primary image they have formed. In formal education, children are introduced to new ideas about God and must reconcile their image of God with what the teacher tells them about God. As we teach children, at home and in the church, we do not give them our understanding of God, rather, we guide them as they shape their God in the light of what they learn from us, and in their ever expanding life experiences.¹³

One reading this section may be confused as it moves from trauma issues to education to relationships. However, the issue with ACEs is it disrupts the ability for children to learn due to their of distrust. Even in writing this, one feels the angst of Paul's words in Romans 7:24 "who will deliver me from this body of death?" If one's conclusion is childhood is in a dark place, that would be correct.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.28

¹¹ Beckwith, Ivy. 2009. *Postmodern Children's Ministry*. Zondervan. pages 118-119

¹² Ratcliff, Donald. 2009. *Handbook of Children's Religious Education*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock. page 143

¹³ Stonehouse, Catherine. 1998. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey : Nurturing a Life of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books. page 134

Childhood can be a dark place because of sin and the trauma that results. Fatherlessness has a significant role in this. From the failures of Israel to the trauma of today, the biggest need of children are healthy relationships, especially with their father. Healthy relationships open the door to learning and healing. Children need this to thrive. While this may seem like a paper on fatherhood, it is this writer's opinion that the framework of dispensationalism is useful to help with the healing children need. It helped this writer. But, one does not base sound doctrine and living on experience. One bases it on the Bible.

What Ephesians 6:4 says: Fathers modeling the Father

Ephesians 6:4 is the timeless antidote that will make an impact for the Gospel. After briefly looking at the context, the details of Paul's instructions for fathers will be examined. This gives us the framework to juxtapose Paul's instructions with the structure of Dispensationalism and its usefulness for children's ministry.

Processing hardship is an undertone of Ephesians. After all, Paul wrote it while in prison. We see this in his prayer request.¹⁴ Rather than play victim, Paul operates as a victor in his request for boldness and seeing his imprisonment as for the gentiles.¹⁵ Boldness stands out as Paul continually points to God and gives him the glory. A prominent feature in his prayer in chapter 3, when life was hard and not fair, Paul got the job done.¹⁶

Commonly understanding holds that Ephesians contains two sections, the doctrine of the church in chapters 1-3, and the walk of the church in chapters 4-6. Ephesians 6:4 exists in the latter section with a focus on wisdom. "Look carefully how then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."¹⁷ This section, Ephesians 5:15-6:9, Paul plays off of the book of Proverbs and other wisdom literature.¹⁸ As Proverbs describes being wise as being godly this section of Ephesians demonstrates to be godly is to be wise.¹⁹ Like Proverbs, this section deals with importance of wisdom (v.5:15-17), wise conduct (v.5:18-21), marriage (v.22-33), child rearing (v.6:1-4), and work ethic (v.6:5-9). As Proverbs is a father passing wisdom to his son²⁰, Ephesians is the walking out of that commands in v.6:4.

The verse is straight forward: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Conservative scholars and translators see the subject to be fathers, though it is possible that parents are in mind.²¹ Fathers are given a negative and a positive command; do not provoke to anger (μὴ παροργίζετε) and bring up (ἐκτρέφετε). Both commands are present imperatives. This carries the sense to stop one action a²²

¹⁴ Ephesians 6:18-20

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:20; 3:1, 11-13

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:21

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:15-16 ESV

¹⁸ O'brien, Peter T. 1999. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity ; Leicester. pages 380-381

¹⁹ Proverbs 1:7; Ephesians 5:17-18

²⁰ Proverbs 1:8

²¹ Note 7 from the NET Bible translator notes: **tn** Or perhaps "Parents" (so TEV, CEV). The plural οἱ πατέρες (*hoi pateres*, "fathers") can be used to refer to both the male and female parent (BDAG 786 s.v. πατήρ 1.b). *NET Bible*. 2019. Thomas Nelson.

²² Wallace, Daniel B. 1996. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament ; with Scripture, Subject and Greek Word Indexes*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan 2008. page485

nd to start the process of the other. The positive command to bring up is given content of both discipline (παιδεία) and instruction (νουθεσία). Some take these words together, while viewing them separately is more astute.²³ The genitive statement is of some discussion as the target or sphere of learning is the Lord.²⁴ Commentators tend to explain the words and move on with little controversy. But what does the content of discipline and instruction of the Lord look like in opposition to not provoking children to anger?

Anger is a danger to avoid. A cognate of provoke to anger is used in Ephesians 4:26 where Paul stays to “be angry and do not sin.”²⁵ There is anger that is appropriate and anger that is not. Harsh discipline was an issue in the culture of that time.²⁶ The previous section on the needs of children demonstrates why it is crucial to turn from provoking and towards good discipline in the Lord. Discipline that is harsh is not biblical.

The contrast to anger is how one brings up a child. The focus of fathers in particular (though mothers are important as well) is the growth of the child. In describing a godly home Dr. Ryrie states:

The third factor has to do with the purpose of proper presiding and providing, and that is, promoting the growth of the children of the home. This, as we have shown, is the purpose for which God has ordained the home. The Scriptures are very clear on proper procedure at this point, declaring “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Notice, incidentally, that the direct address of this verse is to the fathers, not because mothers are not involved in promoting the growth and discipline of their children but because the governing of the home rests primarily with the presiding officer, the father.²⁷

The growth mindset of the home comes from two things: The discipline of the Lord and the instruction of the Lord. The text does not say that fathers are not to push their children to grow or say things that would be hard to hear. The issue at play is whether a father’s aim is harshness or growth. Dr. Roy Zuck is helpful in clarifying the first term discipline, which as one will see is close to the word instruction:

It is clear from the cognate nouns *pais*, a child, and *paidion*, a young child, that *paideuō* pertains to children. The noun *paideia* (translated “nurture” in Eph 6:4; “instruction” in 2 Tim 3:16; and “chastening” in Heb 12:5, 7, 11) initially meant “the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals) and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment.”²⁸

In helping understand the concept of instruction Jay Adams notes:

²³ O’Brien, p. 446]

²⁴ Ibid. p. 446-447

²⁵ Ephesians 4:26a ESV

²⁶ Keener, Craig S. 2014. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press. Page 552

²⁷ Charles Ryrie, “Is Your Home Scriptural?.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109, no. 436 *(Oct 52): page 349.

²⁸ Roy B. Zuck, “Greek Words for Teach.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122, no. 486 *(Apr 65): page 165.

Often, the very situation faced by the counselor was handled in the biblical record. This is to be expected since sinners and their problems have not changed all that much. Thus, when Paul wrote, “Fathers do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and nouthetic confrontation of the Lord” (Eph 6:4), he was giving directions that can be applied explicitly to every Christian parent in every era. The way that God disciplines is the norm by which all Christian discipline must be guided.²⁹

The word *νουθεσία* which the ESV translates as instruction carries the idea of care-fronting that helps the person, in this case children, learn what the Lord wants. It is from this term which the field of biblical, or nouthetic, counseling is founded. Avoiding anger does not mean avoiding hard conversations. One of the hardest issues to address with one’s children is their purpose in life. This is what one is equipping them for.

The final piece in understanding this passage is what Paul means by the genitive “of the Lord.” Peter O’Brien gives two possibilities: a subjective genitive or a genitive of quality.³⁰ One signals who is behind the instruction and one the sphere of the instruction. This writer agrees with O’Brien that the latter is more in view given Paul’s earlier statement “But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus...”³¹

Restating the verse based on what was discussed, Paul is saying “Fathers, mothers as well, stop being harsh with your children and instead focus on their growth by shaping them to be disciplined and having the hard conversations that lead to being like our Lord.” Given the needs of children, obedience to this command is essential. As the verse was heard by the original audience, one would picture what was already said as the model and resource to live out this verse. It is in this context of Ephesians that God, through Paul, illuminates what is needed from godly fathers: The Lord’s discipline and instruction.

The security God brings: Israel and the Church

A good leader does not ask his followers to do what he or she has not or would not do, and God is a good leader. When Jesus said to follow him one must pick up their cross, one knows that Jesus died on the cross for them. When the Bible tells people to be godly fathers, God also demonstrates what it is like to be such a father. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of Ephesians. Paul describes our heavenly Father which gives fathers a template to focus. That is on growth over harshness. Where one sees this most is God’s relationship with Israel and the church. Ryrie states:

A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct. This is stated in different ways by both friends and foes of dispensationalism. Fuller says that “the basic premise of dispensationalism is two purposes God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity.”³²

²⁹Jay E. Adams, “The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131, no. 523 *(Jul 74): page 198-199

³⁰ O’Brien, p. 446-447

³¹ Ephesians 4:20-21

³² Charles Caldwell Ryrie. 2007. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago, Il: Moody Publishers. page39

Does God write off Israel? Does God right off his people? The need to feel safe is an essential for children with ACE's, a thirst for those struggling with trauma.³³ Children with ACEs can easily think "If Israel messed up and God is done with them, God is probably done with me." Here is where one sees the beauty of being secure with God the father.

Paul gives these descriptors of Christians based on God the Father: Blessed, chosen before the foundation of the world, blameless, loved, predestined, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, enriched, heirs, sealed, promised, guaranteed.³⁴ These words paint a picture of an extremely secure relationship between a Christian and God the Father. What is interesting is the word adopted. Francis Foulkes states:

Men and women were created for life in fellowship with God, as children with the Father (Gen. 1:26; Acts 17:28). By sin that privilege was forfeited, but by grace, in and through Christ, restoration to sonship is made possible (John 1:12). Adoption is the best way to describe this (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5), because adopted children have their position by grace and not by right, and yet are brought into the family on the same footing as children by birth.³⁵

Some see this as the church having replaced Israel, but that is not what is described in chapter 2. There one sees two distinct groups: one natural and one adopted. "[We] were children of wrath like all mankind."³⁶ The weight of sin makes one a child of wrath and God would be right to be mad. Rather than provoke one to anger, God the Father modeled what it means to bring one up. Paul states, "but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."³⁷ God saves. Here we see a distinction between gentiles and Israel in verses 2:11-22. The message of the Gospel is peace to those who are far- gentiles, and those who are near- Israel.³⁸ This gives both gentiles and Israel access to God through the one body, Christ. God adopts gentiles, who were far off, into his household. He also brings his children, Israel who are near, back into his house because of Christ. The distinctions are maintained.

The elephant in the room is that word adopted. When one adopts a child, one does not replace the original child, but *adds* the new child to his household. God in his rich mercy chooses to give mercy, grace, and life to his own and even to those who were far off. The distinction between Israel and the church is more than categories and eschatology. It includes biblical counseling. God's continued relationship is to bring Israel into his household in peace. More than that, to bring everyone else in Christ as well. God drops his anger and chooses to nourish Israel and those who had no identity in Him as well. In the next section one sees more clearly that the gentiles are part of something once hidden, but now revealed.

³³ Crosby, p. 47-49

³⁴ Ephesians 1:3-14

³⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), page 56

³⁶ Ephesians 2:3

³⁷ Ephesians 2:4-5

³⁸ Ephesians 2:17

Plainly read: Literal interpretation

Another approach to teaching the Bible to children would be literal (or plain) interpretation of the Scriptures. That would be dispensationalism. One could accuse this paper of forcing dispensationalism onto Ephesians on this point. This section is asserting that plainly reading Ephesians gives us a dispensational viewpoint. It will also demonstrate that bringing one up in the discipline of the Lord is to teach one how to study the Bible. Using the mystery Paul discusses in chapter three will illustrate both these points.

For a decade this writer was a proponent of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This was a controversial topic a decade ago. A big reason for being in favor of CCSS was the ELA objectives. This section of study and discussion goes by another name in the seminary world: hermeneutics. Here is a sample of the standards children were trained to achieve in their schooling:

Key Ideas and details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.³⁹

Teaching the discipline of the Lord, commonly known as Bible study, from a dispensational perspective, would give dispensational children a competitive advantage. As seen above, key aspects of how one should study the Bible are demonstrated. Ryrie states:

If God is the originator of language, and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey his message to humanity, then it must follow that He, being all wise, and all loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell mankind. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect people to understand it, in its literal, normal, and plain sense. The Scriptures, then, cannot be regarded as an illustration of some special use of language, so that in the interpretation of the Scriptures, some deeper meaning of the words might be sought. If language is the

³⁹ Common Core State Standards for English Language arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and technical Subjects, p.10 https://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf

creation of God for the purpose of conveying His message, then a theist must view that language as sufficient in scope and normative in use to accomplish that purpose for which God originated it.⁴⁰

Thus far in the paper one looked at the theme of fatherhood in Ephesians 6:4. From that discussion one looked at how God the Father modeled what Paul instructed in Ephesians 6:4, noticing a distinction between Israel and Gentiles. One would be correct in saying that a distinction between Israel and Gentiles is not a distinction between Israel and the church, only that Israel is distinct. The Church as distinct was saved for this section.

Chapter three of Ephesians described the mystery of the church. The concept of mystery is mentioned four times in the ESV.⁴¹ If one does a study on the concept of mystery, one sees two frequent meanings: Something once hidden and now revealed, and a deeper meaning now realized.⁴² Context is king⁴³ on determining which definition Paul intends. Multiple times Paul demonstrates that the concept of Church was something hidden but now must be made known.⁴⁴ The battle of meanings then rests on the *as* statement in verse 3:5-6. Is the mystery a deeper meaning of a continuing trend or something truly new? Ryrie states:

There is certainly continuity of the body of Christ with the redeemed of all ages simply because those in the body are redeemed people. But there is also discontinuity in that the redeemed today are in the body of Christ, and not some sort of Israel. Just as the redeemed before Abraham's day (like Enoch and Noah) were not a part of Israel, so the redeemed of this age are not either. Enoch and Noah and other pre-Abrahamic saints belong to the family of God's redeemed, but they never belonged to the commonwealth of Israel. So today redeemed Jew and Gentile belong to God's family of saints, without being members of any kind of Israel. They are members of the body of Christ, a new man, entered by the baptizing work of the Spirit, and all, whether Jew or Gentile have equal standing. This is the Content of the mystery of Ephesians 3:6.⁴⁵

One of the conclusions Robert Saucy makes regarding the mystery of Ephesians 3 is:

The mysteries revelation is a new action of God. Despite the fact of old testament promise, the mystery was hidden in the council of God, and hence unknown or not yet actualized. According to the mystery, the church unifies gentile and jew in Christ, and is therefore truly a new work. It rests on the New Testament work of Christ, first coming in the bestowal of the spirit.⁴⁶

Ryrie discusses in his article how if one looks at the concept of body, it's usage is absent in the First Testament, being exclusively found in the Second. Both Ryrie and Saucy demonstrate

⁴⁰ Dispensationalism, p. 81

⁴¹ Ephesians 3:3, 4, 6, 9

⁴² Charles Ryrie, "The mystery in Ephesians 3." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123, no. 489 *(1966) page26

⁴³ Pun intended for postmillennial friends.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 3:2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10,

⁴⁵ Ryrie, p. 28

⁴⁶ Blaising, Craig A, and Darrell L Bock. 2010. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*. Zondervan Academic. Page 155

that point as well as the baptism of the Spirit being a key signifier of the Church. Both in depth articles and the brevity of this paper's look at Ephesians 3 demonstrate that mystery is something once hidden and now revealed. That mystery is the church.

The mystery of the Church is both Jew and Gentile are one in the body of Christ. Paul's mission is to share this revelation to the effect that one "not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."⁴⁷ From the discussion on Ephesians 2, God is not finished with Israel. One sees a new dispensation is at work in chapter three. Using the context of that chapter, the concept of Church is something hidden and now revealed. Part of the subject matter on bringing a child up in the discipline of the Lord is to help them understand this mystery and their role in it. This moves to the bringing a child up in the instruction of the Lord i.e. those hard conversations. One of the hardest is one's purpose in life.

The purpose God gives: The glory of God

In describing his third sine qua non, Ryrie quotes Walvoord stating:

"The larger purpose of God is the manifestation of His own glory. To this end each dispensation, each successive revelation of God's plan for the ages, His dealing with the non-elect as with the elect... combine to manifest divine glory."⁴⁸

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" is a question one often asks children. Sadly, most people do not take the time to figure out their purpose in life.⁴⁹ How does one move from what one wants to be to having no answer? Perhaps one of the roles children play is to remind one of their purpose. Purpose is vital because it gives hope and definition to one's life. Any survivalist will state, "you can only survive seconds without hope." One of the hard yet rewarding conversations with one's child is defining their purpose in life. This is one of the "bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord" conversations.

In Ephesians chapter 1, one sees they are chosen before the foundation of the world. In chapter 2, one reads they are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."⁵⁰ One's election is for good works, but to what end? Is one to live merely in obedience or is there something more? Paul gives an answer at the end of his prayer in verse 3:21, "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." The glory of God is the point.

In attending a Simeon Trust workshop on 2 Timothy, a question was raised during the Q&A. "If our preaching is to be Spirit lead and Christ centered, where does God the Father come into play in our preaching? After all, was not Jesus' message to point people to the Father?" Having never been asked such a question, the instructor was unable to provide the answer.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ephesians 3:13

⁴⁸ Dispensationalism, p 41

⁴⁹ Covey, Stephen R. 2004. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People : Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. New York: Free Press. Pages 109-110

⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:10

⁵¹ Course Notes, "Preaching 2 Timothy." Simeon Trust, November 7-9 2018, Union Lake Baptist Church

This writer found a vacuum in the area of theology proper discussing the personhood of God the father when finalizing his ordination paper. Looking at 5 systematic theologies, no development of God the Father was to be had. This led to writing a blog article which stated:

More importantly the need of an alignment is our view on God the Father. While much of the Bible points to and is about Jesus, I would suggest God the Father is the central figure. We ignore him too often. Paul alludes to this in Philippians when he says "... every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Paul's prayer in Ephesians chapter one amplifies this point. Paul thanks the father for the work done in us, through us and for us in Jesus.⁵²

It is this writer's opinion that one of the greatest contributions of Dispensationalism is remembering the first part of the trinity. At the start of this paper one saw the need for fathers and the cost of fatherlessness. Perhaps one reason churches struggle is they have forgotten that one is to minister for God's glory. While salvation is significant, it is not purposeless.

Dispensationalism answers a critical question that children, especially those with ACEs, need answered. In the distinction between Israel and the church one sees the healing power of God's love. One can be secure in him. In plainly reading the Scriptures one gets to know God's plan. Yes, it takes discipline. To answer the question of a child's purpose, one can point at bringing God glory by living for something greater than self. This life is mapped out in Ephesians 2:10. But what does that walk look like? God is going to do amazing things in and through a child for his glory. But what does even that look like?

Paul tells one to "walk in a manner worth of our calling."⁵³ That one "not walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds."⁵⁴ That one "walks in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."⁵⁵ That one "walks as wise not as unwise."⁵⁶ When life becomes hard and not fair, one stands firm.⁵⁷ After all, dad sends his love.⁵⁸ God the Father models what he asks fathers to do in Christ's church, which lays the foundation for how to walk as we ought to walk in those good works.⁵⁹

A question often asked on the playground: "Who's your daddy?" Paul starts his letter saying "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ."⁶⁰ He ends the theological portion praying "now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all Generations, forever and ever. Amen."⁶¹ Through the rest of th

⁵² Ty Woznek. "The Jesus centered wheel needs an alignment." <https://twoznek.com/2019/01/15/the-jesus-centered-wheel-needs-an-alignment/>

⁵³ Ephesians 4:1-16

⁵⁴ Ephesians 4:17-32

⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:1-14

⁵⁶ Ephesians 5:15-6:9

⁵⁷ Ephesians 6:10-20

⁵⁸ Ephesians 6:23

⁵⁹ Ephesians 2:10

⁶⁰ Ephesians 1:3

⁶¹ Ephesians 3:20-21

e book, Paul describes how to live that out. The glory of God is the edge of the quarter of theology and life. Larry Pettegrew states:

Not only is God the source of ethical standards, His glory is the goal of ethics. We are familiar with the catechism's questions and answer: "What is the chief end of man?" "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."⁶²

The glory of God is rich in that it gives both the how and the why for living for God. It answers for a child how they can live and why they should live that way. Bringing a child up in the instruction of the Lord by having the hard conversations should result in them being like their dad who is like God the Father. Jesus is the hero who grants one access to the Spirit and God the father.⁶³ That access grants the one thing all people crave: to be at peace with one's Father.

Art, play, and Dispensationalism

In Ephesians, Paul's descriptive imagery of wealth, use of the word "workmanship", imagery of walking, discussion of marriage, and the illustration of armor all demonstrate artistic expression as well as theological truth. Ephesians is a simple book to teach children because of this imagery and descriptive language. Children learn and do life through art and play.⁶⁴

Like with any endeavor, it takes time to build and grow in the arts. Over time, skills improve for most. One could take out the movie "Left Behind" and put in "Facing the Giants" and this issue would still need discussion. Dispensationalism needs to champion progress towards engaging the arts. Art helps build depth and process thoughts and emotions. Criticism should be to improve artistic engagement. For adults in academia, art, movies and play will be hard to process as they are not precise, but they are critical for children.

In the need to differentiate between "pop" dispensationalism and "academic" Dispensationalism, one must be careful to respond rather than react. There is danger in how the current discussion is framed. The movement's failure to wrestle with this question will impact its ability to connect with younger generations. Perhaps the lack of such is how the categories of "pop" and "academic" varieties arose. The issue of art and play in regards to Dispensationalism is beyond the scope of this paper, but the question does need to be addressed: What is a theological view of art? For children will play, and play they should.

Four practical applications

First, Teach and develop curriculum that addresses the confidence one can have in God. Even when one is dealing with the consequences of their sin or pain, this would be helpful. Bringing out the emotional and relational security aspects of God the Father shapes God as one who can be trusted. As God was hurt by Israel's mistreatment, the power of forgiveness and loving even those beyond one's natural family sets children to be emotionally healthy and courageous. This would also bring hope and healing to children with ACE's.

⁶²Larry Pettegrew, "Theological Basis Of Ethics." *Master's Seminary Journal* 11, no. 2 *(Fall 2000): 149.

⁶³ Ephesians 2:18

⁶⁴ Elkind, David Ph.D. *The Hurried Child: Growing up too fast, too soon*. DaCapo Press, 2007, 2001, 1988, 1981

Second, English language arts is of paramount importance. Not just the ability to read, but the ability to comprehend what one is reading. Bridging the gap between schooling and the Bible builds confidence and boldness in handling God's Word. This fuels further and deeper engagement. Dispensationalism has the most consistent and relatively easier frameworks to accomplish this. It would be prudent to match teaching materials with corresponding objectives taught in school classrooms.

Third, help children understand why God has them here, at this time, and at this place. Guiding children to take on responsibility to live for something greater than themselves is counter-cultural, but it is what they need. This brings clarity in a time of grave confusion. As the glory of God is vast, how each person will glorify God will vary. Helping kids see how God can use them sets them up with a purpose that also gives hope. This needs to be a primary thought rather than something merely tacked onto a children's ministry.

Fourth, as dispensationalism is primarily concerned with what the Bible says, we must champion fatherhood. Healthy, biblical, God honoring fathers is the best theological education one can give to a child. It is what the text says, commands, and illustrates. The championing of fathers should be more than "the Bible says so" for dispensationalists. It should serve as an example of God the Father, something core to dispensationalism. This helps with parodical situations as well as healthy homes.

Conclusion

Dispensationalism is a good friend to children's ministry because the framework of dispensationalism meets some critical needs of children. Using Ryrie's sine qua non connected to Paul's instructions in Ephesians 6:4, three needs of children were examined. Dispensationalism helps in counseling by exemplifying how God does not give up on his own even when they mess up. Dispensationalism's focus on how to study the Scriptures is critical to and parallels needed discipline in English language arts. Dispensationalism answers a critical question children have because with the glory of God as the central focus of God's plan for the ages, one needs to live for something greater than themselves. Moving beyond the nations, theology, and eschatology, Dispensationalism brings healing, clarity, and purpose. It provides resources needed in counseling, discipleship, and relationships. This paper also raised the need to answer the question of what is a theology of art and play, as such is critical to children. At its core, Dispensationalism is a church and Bible study movement. The same is true for Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The vibrancy of a church living out this calling is how one best hands off the movement to children. The book and the movement were not given to the family, but to the church. Paul addressed a community of Christian fathers and children; that as a church family, God would be glorified at home, work, and in Christ's church. To him be the glory.

Works Cited

Beckwith, Ivy. 2009. *Postmodern Children's Ministry*. Zondervan.

Blaising, Craig A, and Darrell L Bock. 2010. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*. Zondervan Academic.

Common Core State Standards for English Language arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and technical Subjects, p.10 https://www.thecorestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf

Covey, Stephen R. 2004. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People : Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. New York: Free Press.

Crosby, Robert G, and Lori A Crosby. 2022. *Trauma-Informed Children’s Ministry*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Elkind, David Ph.D. *The Hurried Child: Growing up too fast, too soon*. DaCapo Press, 2007, 2001, 1988, 1981.

Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989)

Fatherhood Absences Crisis infographic. <https://www.fatherhood.org/championing-fatherhood/the-father-absence-crisis-infographic>

Jay E. Adams, “The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131, no. 523 *(Jul 74)

Keener, Craig S. 2014. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press.

Larry Pettegrew, “Theological Basis Of Ethics.” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 11, no. 2 *(Fall 2000)

NET Bible. 2019. Thomas Nelson.

O’brien, Peter T. 1999. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity ; Leicester.

Ratcliff, Donald. 2009. *Handbook of Children’s Religious Education*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

Roy B. Zuck, “Greek Words for Teach.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122, no. 486 *(Apr 65)

Ryrie, Charles “Is Your Home Scriptural?.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109, no. 436 *(Oct 52)

—. 2007. *Dispensationalism*. Chicago, Il: Moody Publishers.

—, “The mystery in Ephesians 3.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123, no. 489 *(1966)

Stonehouse, Catherine. 1998. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey : Nurturing a Life of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

Wallace, Daniel B. 1996. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament ; with Scripture, Subject and Greek Word Indexes*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan [20]08.