

# Book Reviews



The book reviews submitted offer a critique of some of the latest family ministry titles. If you would like to see a title reviewed in the future, please submit at least two copies of either the book or galley copy. (Publisher's PDF proof is acceptable if not yet published or to galley stage.)





*Raising Disciples: Guiding Your Kids Into a Faith of Their Own* by Teresa Roberts. NavPress. 2024. 192 pages, \$18.99. Paper.

Reviewed by Trey Stephens, pastor at Fairview Baptist Church in Lindale, GA. He is currently pursuing his D.Min. at Liberty Theological Seminary.

“The first thirteen years of life are the most important years for discipleship” (Roberts, 2024, p. 1). There is no other stage in human development in which an individual grows cognitively, socially, and morally at a faster rate. When evaluating adults, much of how they think, interact, and believe can be traced back to these formative years. As a result, Roberts states, “No other time between birth and death provides as many opportunities to shape how individuals perceive themselves, others, and the world. This is by God’s design” (Roberts, 2024, p. 2).

Parents, grandparents, and church leaders must recognize the significance of these years and embrace their responsibility to disciple children during this time. Unfortunately, many adults underestimate a child’s capacity for discipleship. Roberts observes, “Many adults assume it is better to wait until a child’s cognitive abilities have matured before beginning the process of discipleship rather than to see the opportunities for effective discipleship that childhood presents” (Roberts, 2024, p. 6). If Roberts is correct that the first thirteen years of a child’s life are the most important in a person’s life, then neither parents nor the church can afford to delay intentional discipleship until adolescence.

Roberts has written *Raising Disciples* as a guide for parents, grandparents, and church leaders to disciple their children. Roberts states, “And though each child’s journey with Christ will be unique based on a variety of factors, there is a clear goal for their discipleship journey, and there are some general directions we can guide them along on their journey” (Roberts, 2024, pp. 8–9).

In chapter 2, Roberts presents the most important feature of the book: The Discipleship Map. Most parents fail to understand that the goal of

discipleship is “to become more and more like Christ every day” (Roberts, 2024, p. 15). Even more, they do not know how to guide their children to this goal. The Discipleship Map provides a developmental framework for discipleship that integrates insights from social science, learning theory, and psychology. Roberts explains, “With the destination of becoming like Christ as our goal, we can utilize childhood development information... to create a map for discipleship from infancy to adolescence” (Roberts, 2024, p. 16).

The Discipleship Map consists of seven developmental stages, each corresponding to roughly two years of a child’s growth: Establish God’s Foundation (0–12 months), Demonstrate God’s Love (1–2 years), Share God’s Story (3–4 years), Engage God’s Community (5–6 years), Teach God’s Truth (7–8 years), Reinforce God’s Commands (9–10 years), and Champion God’s Calling (11–12 years). While space does not allow for a full explanation of each stage, Roberts provides both developmental insights and practical discipleship strategies for each stage. Parents will find this helpful guide for understanding their children’s growth and for discipling them appropriately. Ministry leaders can use the Discipleship Map as a diagnostic tool to evaluate their curriculum and teaching strategies, to see if it aligns with the developmental needs of children.

In chapters 3–7, Roberts builds on the Discipleship Map by exploring specific areas of spiritual formation: Learning and Studying God’s Word (Chapter 3), Vocabulary of Faith (Chapter 4), Spiritual Practices (Chapter 5), Identity in Christ (Chapter 6), and Faith of Their Own (Chapter 7). In each of the chapters, Roberts excels at providing practical examples for discipleship at each stage of the child’s development.

In conclusion, *Raising Disciples* addresses a pressing issue. Most parents feel ill-equipped to disciple their children, particularly across the changing developmental stages of childhood. Roberts not only equips parents with vision and direction but also provides ministry leaders with a framework to evaluate and strengthen their programs. This book offers clarity, practicality, and biblical grounding for discipling children in the crucial first thirteen years of life. For these reasons, the author strongly recommends *Raising Disciples* to both parents and ministry leaders.



*Grandparents Make Grand Partners: How to Have an Eternal Impact on Your Grandchild's Life* by Lori Wildenberg. D6 Family Ministry, 2025. \$14.99. Paper.

Review by Jonathan Williams, Ph.D., managing editor of the *Southwestern D6 Family Ministry Journal* and affiliate professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Lori Wildenberg's *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* is a practical, Scripture-forward guide for Christian grandparents who want their relationships with grandchildren to have eternal impact. The book's central emphasis is partnership: grandparents are called to strengthen the church-home discipleship mission by supporting (not supplanting) parents and by trusting God to use ordinary moments for spiritual formation. Wildenberg frames grandparenting as spiritual stewardship—"my Mimi role and my husband's role as Papa is a divine calling" (Wildenberg, 2025, p. 7)—and then equips readers with relational wisdom, conversation tools, prayers, blessings, and faith-infused traditions. The result is an accessible resource that is especially useful for local church grandparent cohorts, family ministry training, and discipleship-minded grandparents seeking clear next steps (Deut. 4:9; 2 Tim. 1:5). As a pastor, I immediately recognize the strength of this resource for our church family.

Wildenberg begins by locating grandparent influence within Scripture's generational mandate to pass along faith, memory, and testimony. She draws attention to biblical patterns of household influence (Acts 16:11–15), the command to teach "your children and their children" (Deut. 4:9), and the multigenerational faith transfer visible in Timothy's family (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). From the outset, she refuses the cultural narrative that the final third of life should be defined primarily by comfort and leisure. Instead, she calls Christian grandparents to intentional availability, prayerful investment, and gospel conversation—expecting that grandparents can materially shape both emotional and spiritual development in their grandchildren's lives (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 6–12).

The book unfolds through nine short chapters, each combining personal stories, biblical reflection, and concrete practices. Early chapters focus on relational posture and family systems: Wildenberg offers nine grandparent “personalities” as a self-awareness tool and then explores family dynamics such as boundaries, unhealthy competition, favoritism, and the need to prioritize relationship over control (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 15–38). A pivotal theme is the “grand shift”—grandparents are no longer the primary decision makers in the new nuclear family, and their influence will be shaped largely by the quality of trust they cultivate with adult children (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 39–51; Matt. 19:4–6). She also addresses the “grand gap” between generations and the painful realities of distance and estrangement, acknowledging the compounded grief of being cut off from both adult children and grandchildren and offering strategies aimed at reconciliation and wise communication where possible (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 52–61).

The latter portion of the book provides spiritual formation tools for everyday discipleship. Wildenberg’s call to self-examination and Christlike maturity is captured in her aspiration, “I want to be the person my grandkids think I am” (Wildenberg, 2025, p. 62). She then equips grandparents to communicate life-giving messages that reinforce God’s love, the goodness of creation, and identity rooted in the Lord—truths meant to counter cultural lies that assault faith and personhood (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 71–81; Gen. 3:1–5; Matt. 4:1–11). The book also supplies themed prayers, blessing practices, and holiday and milestone ideas that weave faith into family rhythms (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 82–117). The conclusion underscores readiness for gentle gospel conversation (1 Pet. 3:15) and ends with an explicit charge for grandparents to embrace their calling “for such a time as this” (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 118–127).

### **Critical Evaluation**

The book’s primary strength comes as Wildenberg repeatedly positions grandparents as allies rather than competitors, urging cooperation with adult children and warning against behaviors that erode trust (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 27–31, 39–51). That emphasis is pastorally strategic: many intergenerational discipleship breakdowns occur not because grandparents lack good intentions, but because their communication undercuts parental leadership. By coaching readers toward respect, attentiveness, and restraint,

the book provides a practical pathway for grandparents to increase—not diminish—the likelihood of meaningful spiritual contribution.

A second strength is seen as various family dynamics are recognized. As a pastor, I am often shepherding grandparents through difficult situations with their adult children and grandchildren. Wildenberg does not assume ideal family relationships; she names distance, mental health challenges, spiritual differences, and estrangement as common contexts for modern families (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 6–12, 52–61). Her discussion of boundaries is important, particularly her acknowledgement that some situations require protective limits (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 27–31). This authenticity keeps the book from becoming a simplistic “do these steps and everything will work out” manual and instead encourages prayerful perseverance and wise, Christlike responses in complicated circumstances.

The book’s practical design is also a notable contribution. The repeated use of reflection questions, Scripture prompts, “Grand Partner Tips,” and guided prayers makes the volume adaptable for small groups, mentoring, and church-based grandparent seminars (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 13, 38, 51, 61, 70, 81, 94, 103, 117). One methodological limitation, however, is that the book functions primarily as an application-rich guide rather than a sustained exegetical treatment of grandparenting. For the target audience, that is appropriate; yet pastors and readers hoping to use this book in a Bible study or other teaching context will likely want to pair this resource with deeper biblical theology of the home, the church, intergenerational discipleship, and spiritual formation if the goal is to build a comprehensive grandparent discipleship framework.

Overall, *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* succeeds because it avoids two common errors: sentimentalizing grandparenting into mere affection, or weaponizing it into control. Wildenberg’s vision is biblically aligned and pastorally healthy—grandparents loving deeply, speaking truthfully, praying consistently, and partnering respectfully so that faith can be reinforced across generations (Deut. 4:9; Ps. 71:17–18; 2 Tim. 1:5).

### **Contribution to Family Ministry**

For family ministry contexts, this volume fills a frequent gap: many churches mobilize parents and youth leaders but leave grandparents under-equipped despite their proximity, influence, and available time. Wildenberg

provides a ministry-ready resource that can be deployed immediately for grandparent cohorts, training seminars, or intergenerational discipleship initiatives. The book's pairing of relational wisdom (partnership, boundaries, role clarity) with spiritual practices (prayer, blessing, faith-infused traditions) offers a coherent path for putting family discipleship into action (Wildenberg, 2025, pp. 39–117; Deut. 4:9). *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* can help grandparents become “grand partners” in the fullest sense—supporting parents and testifying to God’s faithfulness so that younger generations may know, love, and serve Christ.



*Backward Discipleship*. Ron Hunter Jr. Nashville, TN: D6 Family Ministry, 2026. \$21.99. Paper.

Review by Jonathan Williams, Ph.D., managing editor of the *Southwestern D6 Family Ministry Journal* and affiliate professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The contemporary church faces a profound challenge in forming disciples whose faith endures beyond childhood and adolescence. Ron Hunter’s *Backward Discipleship* enters this conversation with a compelling thesis: discipleship that lasts across generations requires intentional planning that begins with the end in mind and works backward toward present practices. Hunter argues that the church must move beyond programmatic ministry toward a generational framework that intentionally prepares believers to endure cultural pressures and multiply their faith in others. The book offers a blend of biblical reflection, cultural analysis, research engagement, and practical ministry tools designed to help churches and families cultivate resilient disciples.

Hunter frames the central concept of the book early in the introduction. He describes “backward discipleship” as the intentional process of envisioning the long-term spiritual outcome of a believer’s life and then designing

formative experiences that prepare disciples for that future. He writes that discipleship must “begin with the end in view and map every step with purpose, shaping believers who endure in faith and multiply as generational disciples” (Hunter, 2026, p. 5). Rather than reacting to immediate ministry needs, Hunter encourages churches and families to reverse-engineer spiritual formation by asking what kind of disciple they hope a child or young believer will become and then structuring ministry accordingly.

This approach reflects a broader biblical pattern. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes intentional preparation and long-term formation within God’s redemptive plan. Hunter illustrates this by pointing to examples throughout the biblical narrative where preparation precedes mission. As he observes, “Nothing of eternal weight ever happened by accident. God always began with the end in mind” (Hunter, 2026, p. 5).

The structure of the book unfolds across four major sections that move from diagnosis to strategy. The opening section examines what Hunter calls the “discipleship deficit” in contemporary Christianity. Drawing on research from Barna and other sources, Hunter highlights the alarming trend that a significant percentage of church-involved teenagers disengage from faith during young adulthood. He notes that recent studies suggest that approximately 64 percent of church-involved youth eventually drift away from active faith commitment (Hunter, 2026, p. 18). While such statistics are familiar to many ministry leaders, Hunter frames them not merely as a sociological problem but as a discipleship failure. If the church is losing the next generation, the issue may lie not only with culture but also with the church’s strategy of formation.

One of the distinctive contributions of *Backward Discipleship* is Hunter’s synthesis of a wide body of discipleship research. Drawing from numerous major studies in the fields of sociology of religion, church research, and generational faith transmission, Hunter identifies recurring patterns that consistently appear in the lives of believers whose faith endures into adulthood. Rather than merely presenting discouraging statistics about faith decline, he analyzes the data to uncover the practices that produce spiritual resilience. From this analysis he distills several core patterns that repeatedly emerge across the research—practices such as consistent engagement with Scripture, strong parental and mentoring relationships, intergenerational church involvement, and intentional spiritual rhythms within the home.

By organizing these insights into a coherent framework, Hunter moves the discussion beyond diagnosing the problem of generational faith loss and toward identifying concrete pathways that churches and families can implement to cultivate lasting discipleship.

Hunter's analysis parallels findings in broader sociological research on religious transmission. Christian Smith's landmark study on faith transmission concludes that the religious commitment of parents is the single most important factor influencing whether children retain their faith as adults (Smith & Adamczyk, 2021, pp. 96–97). Similarly, Vern Bengtson's multigenerational research demonstrates that warm and relational parental influence plays a critical role in the successful transmission of faith (Bengtson, 2017, p. 76). Hunter engages this research to argue that effective discipleship must move beyond church programming and reconnect the responsibility of faith formation to the partnership between church and home.

The second section of *Backward Discipleship* turns toward biblical foundations and models of generational discipleship. Here Hunter presents several ministry frameworks that can help churches cultivate long-term faith formation. These include the D6 model of generational discipleship, family-integrated approaches, milestone-based strategies, and mentoring relationships that function as spiritual family structures. Hunter's analysis emphasizes the importance of intergenerational relationships within the church. Rather than isolating age groups into disconnected ministry silos, the church must foster a community where believers of different generations walk together in spiritual formation.

This emphasis reflects the biblical vision of discipleship within the covenant community. In Deuteronomy 6, parents are instructed to teach God's Word diligently to their children within everyday life. Likewise, Titus 2 portrays a multigenerational pattern of discipleship in which older believers mentor younger ones in faith and practice. Hunter's proposal aligns with this biblical model by emphasizing that discipleship flourishes when faith is reinforced through family rhythms, church community, and mentoring relationships.

One of the most valuable contributions of the book is its critique of program-centered ministry models that unintentionally fragment the church's discipleship efforts. Hunter describes what Stuart Cummings-

Bond called the “one-eared Mickey Mouse” model of ministry, where youth and children’s programs function as isolated appendages rather than integrated components of the church’s broader discipleship mission (Hunter, 2026, pp. 23–24). When ministry programs become siloed, they may produce temporary engagement but fail to cultivate long-term spiritual maturity.

This critique echoes earlier concerns expressed in discipleship literature. Robert Coleman famously argued that Jesus’ method of ministry prioritized relational investment in a small group of disciples rather than reliance on mass programming (Coleman, 2010, pp. 27–30). Hunter’s argument similarly suggests that discipleship must be relational, intentional, and generational if it is to produce enduring faith.

The third section of the book shifts from diagnosis to implementation by outlining practical strategies for churches and ministry leaders. Hunter addresses topics such as curriculum design, discipleship metrics, leadership development, and staff structures that support generational discipleship. As a pastor, I particularly appreciated his emphasis on measuring discipleship outcomes rather than simply counting attendance or program participation. Hunter challenges church leaders to evaluate whether their ministries are actually producing mature disciples who know Scripture, live missionally, and mentor others.

The final section of the book brings the argument full circle by calling churches to adopt what Hunter describes as a “backward strategy” in a forward-moving culture. In a world that values immediacy and efficiency, discipleship requires patience, intentionality, and generational vision. Hunter writes that “discipleship is not a program to run but a path to walk...not a quick fix but a generational strategy” (Hunter, 2026, p. 7). This insight captures the central thrust of the book: faithful discipleship requires long-term investment that spans generations.

One of the strengths of *Backward Discipleship* is its accessibility. Hunter writes not only as a scholar but also as a practitioner deeply engaged in ministry leadership. His use of stories, research, and practical examples makes the book accessible to pastors, parents, and ministry leaders alike. The inclusion of implementation tools, discussion questions, and ministry resources further enhances the book’s usefulness for church leaders seeking to strengthen their discipleship strategies.

At the same time, the book invites further theological reflection. While Hunter effectively integrates research and ministry practice, future scholarship could explore the theological foundations of generational discipleship in greater depth, particularly within the doctrines of covenant, ecclesiology, and spiritual formation. Nevertheless, Hunter's work makes an important contribution by bridging the gap between academic research and practical ministry strategy.

In an era when churches are increasingly concerned about the spiritual formation of the next generation, *Backward Discipleship* offers a timely and thoughtful call to intentional discipleship. Hunter reminds readers that the church must resist the temptation to chase short-term ministry success and instead invest in the long-term work of shaping disciples who will endure in faith and multiply across generations.

Ultimately, Hunter's message is both sobering and hopeful. The church cannot afford to lose the next generation through passive or fragmented discipleship models. Yet the path forward is clear. By grounding discipleship in Scripture, strengthening the partnership between church and home, and cultivating generational relationships within the body of Christ, churches can raise disciples whose faith lasts far beyond children and youth programs.

*Backward Discipleship*, therefore, serves as both a diagnostic tool and a strategic guide for churches committed to generational faithfulness. For pastors, ministry leaders, and parents seeking to cultivate resilient disciples in a rapidly changing culture, this volume provides a valuable resource for reimagining discipleship with eternity in view.

### References

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