

Gospel Saturated Families:

A Vision for Families Who Keep God's Redemptive Story in their Daily Rhythm

(GSF will be used as a short form for Gospel Saturated Families)

Philosophical Premise: Grooving to a Gospel Oriented Rhythm

The little choices you make today shape your life. They establish habits and rhythms that will lead you down a path you may or may not want to go. The over-arching rhythm I am going to urge you and families to adopt must be checked and re-checked daily or you will settle into nothingness. But if you stay in tune with this rhythm, you will find what you've always wanted.

A rhythm is a pattern, best seen in music. It is a repeated pattern of movement or sound. It's systematic, not haphazard. It is designed, developed and purposeful. The author puts it together and arranges it artistically. A good rhythm is filled with beauty, power, strength and inspiration. You see it in poetry that challenges your thinking and moves your emotions. You find it in wonderful colour combinations, lines and shapes to form stunning artwork.

You also find it in family life.

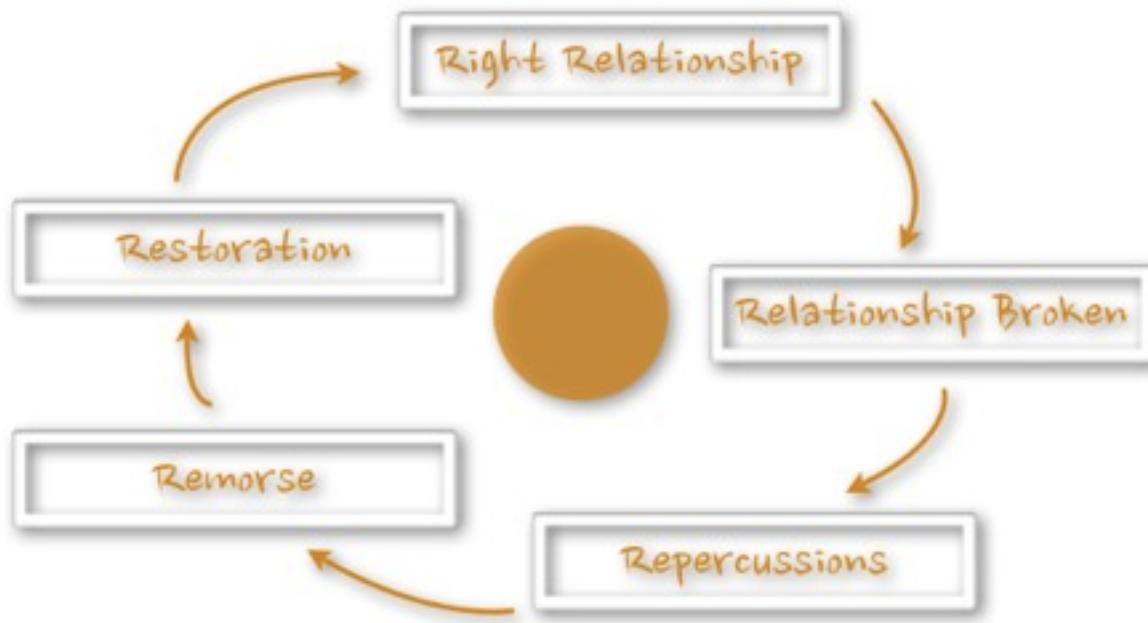
It's there when you wake up and when you go to sleep. You know it in the daily grind of work. You see relationships quickly establish healthy or not so healthy patterns. Money comes in, money goes out. Emotions rise and fall or sadly never change at all. And so your life is what it is. But does family life merely happen to us or do we have a part in writing the song and dance?

There are many rhythms in life, but I see one rhythm that we must groove to. It is more than paying bills or chewing gum. It is more than changing a diaper; this changes everything! The rhythm, once understood, can be leveraged into everything you face in life with your family. It will be what you dream about. You will revisit it moment by moment because you can't get enough of it. You will tirelessly pursue it and find that it has been pursuing you. You won't want anything else because this rhythm has everything you could possibly hope for.

The rhythm you want is the story of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is your peace with God, your hope in God and your love for God. May it continuously cycle throughout your life, day and night. There are five main parts to this delightful cycle.

1. Right Relationship
2. Relationship Broken
3. Repercussions
4. Remorse
5. Restoration

In the beginning God created everything right. All was good. Relationships were perfect. Sin broke what was good, separated us from God and left us for dead. The ground was cursed and our pain multiplied. We desired pleasure, but found it not in God, but in sin. However, some of us choose remorse. That feeling of deep sorrow over wrongdoing. It leads us to the deep desire for the right relationship with God that was lost. We find it at the cross, the place where we remember the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus so that all who desire it may come to God and be restored.



This must be our daily posture. It affects our marriages, our families, our work, our friendships. As we turn from sin to God we find our peace and our satisfaction. Have you been arguing senselessly with your spouse? Repent and seek restoration. Are your children defiant? Show them how relationships break down and how repentance can mend them. Are you running ragged, bouncing from thing to thing? Rest. Find your solace in Christ. Are you emotionally stale, lacking joy or refusing to show heart-felt compassion? Live again as you remember that God wants you and those around you to be filled with unexplainable passion. We must continue through this cycle until one day we will know full restoration and lavishly enjoy a right relationship with our Creator. May your life dance again or for the first time. May you be filled with the melody of hope. May you experience the orchestral power of God that moves you. May your families know outstanding laughter. Do whatever it takes to get this rhythm into your life!

Biblical Foundation

Hebrews 12. 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with

endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

11 *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

In this passage, we have a clear message of the Gospel (v.1-3) that gives hope to families for endurance (family life is not easy!). We see a major metaphor for God as Father and a structure for personal discipleship, which can easily translate into the context of any family situation. While the word rhythm is not in this passage, we do find a strong reference to athletic training. When any athlete trains, he undergoes ritualistic drills and practice routines. The family, too, can choose a training rhythm that permeates daily family life.

This passage is a great starting point for teaching families the concept. This could be done as a simple or extensive Bible study. Another powerful source from the Bible is the book of Judges, which contains the cycles of sin and restoration.

Deuteronomy 6 contains a rhythm principle of teaching children throughout the cycles of the day. The busyness of the morning may be a good time to share a short verse or word of encouragement. Traveling time is good for music in the car or relationship building conversations, which naturally lead to big questions. Meal time should be together as possible and can include a devotional book, Bible reading, prayer time and or discussion questions. Bed time is perfect for reviewing the day, celebrating good things, reading a Bible story, saying a prayer. The main issue here is that conversations should be happening regularly. Regimented and highly structured parent to child

lectures on the Bible are rarely effective, but strategic conversations in the flow of life lead to transformational moments where we can point each other to Jesus.

Simon Chan, in his book “Spiritual Theology,” shares a helpful insight for our purposes. He proposes a rule of life. People can become easily overwhelmed with the weight of responsibility for right living. Guilt is soon to follow when we realize that we can’t keep track of all the right things we’re supposed to be doing. The rule of life simplifies things for families. GSF avoids the idea that we need another new tip to master. Rather, we need a simple driving force behind everything we do. We need a Christian way of thinking that permeates every part of life. Chan writes, “The rhythm that a good rule establishes helps us maintain our spiritual focus,” (190) and, “To embrace a rule is to make a commitment to a certain pattern of living that helps reinforce desirable habits in the long term” (191).

As we train up our children to know, love and follow God we can use this Gospel pattern in our day-to-day lives that will leave a profound impact on them. We first start with ourselves and ask the question, “When I sin am I continually coming back to God with an attitude of repentance?” Then, when your child sins and inconveniences your world, you will already be modeling the Gospel to your child.

A Story

One Winter afternoon a friend of my wife’s came over for a visit. We had our three children and two other brothers altogether. The house was humming and busy. Kids were moving from room to room in and out of sight. I was engaging in conversation with this lady when we all heard some rustling upstairs and then loud crying. The natural response is to see what was going on. I was the first on the scene. I climbed the stairs and started asking questions to gauge the situation. After some conversation with all the witnesses I was able to determine that a door was shut on the boy’s fingers, not deliberately *per se*, but it happened due to the other boy forcing him out of the room in an unkind way. The fingers were okay. I decided that the culprit needed to take a break and sit out for awhile.

So then we all carried on. Many parents do fine until this point. I believe, however, that the moment is not complete. After a little time, I excused myself from the conversation again and went back to the culprit. We talked about what went wrong and what could be done better next time. Then I had him extend an apology and a request for forgiveness. The boy forgave and then they carried on.

So here’s how this fits. While the kids were playing, they were in the “right relationship” part of the rhythm. As tension built up, an act of aggression came out causing pain. This is the “relationship broken” phase. At this point, young children need intervention or quite likely the situation will spiral out of control. In the next phase of “repercussions” there are natural consequences such as hurt fingers, tears, separation in the friendship, feelings of rejection, etc. There are also implemented consequences that should be designed to teach and train. Here, the boy sat out for a time to think about what

happened. The “remorse” phase has the goal of true repentance, but while we can’t force it, we can coach it with the hope that the heart will follow. What happens next is “restoration.” The relationship comes back together and starts right again.

We could debate all day on how to effectively implement consequences, etc., but I share this story to show how this is a tangible retelling of the Gospel story in a typical day for a family. During this whole process, time can be taken to pray, share ideas for improvement, show affection, demonstrate emotional restraint (ie. self-control) and model and teach right choices leading each other back to a restored relationship. The challenge of course is the time commitment and the perseverance because you know this could very easily happen again in the next few minutes and, quite frankly, I’d rather just keep enjoying my conversation. Going back to Hebrews 12 though, we find joy in this process because good things will come from it. Especially verse 11, which says those who are trained by it will yield the peaceful fruit of right living. I think this verse is key because there are many families who are without peace in the home and many people who want to make the right choices, but are unwilling to first endure God’s discipline and also are unwilling to properly discipline their children.

Practical Application

This rhythm for family life can be disseminated in a variety of formats such as small group, preaching, class, seminar, etc. I think the greatest fruit will come in a mentoring relationship. There are many things we can draw from this and I think it is a way that can be a filter for the barrage of parenting self-help ideas. While there may be plenty of helpful material available, it can be nearly impossible to know what the best tactics are. For the Christian, the Bible is clear that parents are called teach the Word of God to their children. This too can feel like a tall order. This rhythm, however, is a starting point and contains the foundational elements of Scripture. God created, people sinned, there are consequences for sin, repentance is required, then restoration is possible.

Right Relationship: Before your child sins, your family is likely humming along. Your relationship is good, not perfect, but at least okay. Relationship Broken: But when your child is defiant or whiny, any glimpse of a good relationship is now gone. The warmth of a good relationship is now cold. What was strong is now broken. Repercussions: There must be consequences for wrongdoing. There always are natural consequences, but a parent must discipline, which is another way of saying training up the child to be a disciple of Jesus. Repentance: Show your children how to repent. Their words may or may not be genuine, but you will instill a habit that can live on throughout the rest of their life. Restoration: Restoring the relationship is the goal of family discipline/discipleship. If you forget this part of discipline you will raise children who despise you and may end up despising God. The whole point of Jesus’ death on the cross is to bring us back into right relationship with God. So also, as a parent, you must demonstrate this restoration with hugs, laughs, high-fives, and a positive word of encouragement.

In considering the use of this as an outreach, the words of the rhythm have been made to not sound churchy. An alternate title for this concept might be The Family

Relationship Rhythm or Love Saturated Families. Obviously, discretion will need to be used in the wording of much of what's provided here and is beyond the focus of this initial project.

Example Class Outline:

1. (5-10min) Greeting/Share about families
 1. Have families introduce themselves and share what they feel comfortable sharing about the family they grew up in and the family they have now.
2. (5min) Introduction
 1. Stir curiosity about the subject matter
 2. Discuss picture chosen for promotion and why it's not just about your family, but about families together.
3. (10-20min) Bible study: Hebrews 12
 1. Read
 2. Ask (trio share): What does this passage have to say for families?
 3. Training motif (use a story or highlights from an olympian or other athletic pursuit)
 1. This article may help to put Hebrews 12 into a family training context: http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/21/health/chrissie-wellington-triathlete-champion/index.html?hpt=hp_c2
 2. Visualize-mental images-manageable segments-learning to hurt-support and inspirational people-big cause
 3. Show how these can help put an intentional plan/rhythm together
4. (10-20min) The Rhythm (A daily story)
 1. Motivation: want peace and right choices? (Heb.12:11)
 2. 5 part cycle: Deut.6
 1. Right Relationship: Discuss character traits desired, the Eden relationship
 2. Relationship Broken: Ships in the Night by Mat Kearney illustrating how a relationship can break (share lyrics)
 3. Repercussions: What feelings, lines or consequences stand out to you? What happens to relationships when sin gets in the way. How can that be demonstrated in family life?
 4. Remorse: Getting to the heart/communication, model and coach real repentance. Sometimes we don't really feel the weight of our sin, this is a critical part for real change to happen.
 5. Restoration: The grand story of redemption. Show the joy of a family relationship that is restored. Celebrate the decision to forgive.
 6. Role play or talk through a given family situation and how this might be worked through.
5. Prayer
 1. May we never sin again, but because we know we will, may your grace abound and may we experience your restoration.



Classes could easily be extended to expand on each of the five parts of the cycle. A class on right relationships could include discussions on family faith ideas, enjoying

each other, showing kindness, serving the community, etc. A class on relationship broken could look closely at wrong attitudes, disobedience, etc. A class on repercussions could include administering appropriate consequences for children, understanding covenant implications, etc. The class on remorse could delve into real repentance, coaching kids beyond saying I'm sorry, etc. The final class on restoration can remind of the joy of fighting through the difficulties, etc. A wrap up class could look at the book of Judges and cycles of sin with a view to Jesus' resurrection making real restoration possible.

Mentoring Model

This is the question I want to ask for my family every day:

How can I tell the Gospel story to my family today within the rhythms of life?

This same question will be the guiding question for a mentoring relationship, while constantly referring to the GSF Rhythm.

Once a family has agreed to the Gospel Saturated Families (GSF) mentoring relationship a shared journey has begun. There should not really be an expert mentality here, but a mutual willingness to grow together. The mentor, of course, will be equipped with a strategy that can be molded and adapted to their unique situation. The mentor/coach will journey with another family facilitating this training mindset providing, wisdom, experience, tools and stories, etc. that help to move families closer to Jesus.

This goes beyond a once/week devotional and beyond sending kids to church. The daily rhythms of life will teach one way or another. This relationship will help the family to see that rhythms, habits, routines, etc. teach volumes. Simply saying how a child should be is not enough. Rather, living a life of faith by intentionally establishing Jesus-filled moments is what will pass on the goals of the Christian life.

An important issue to note here is that this is not a counseling relationship. Significant healing may need to take place that the mentor is not qualified to handle. In these situations, the mentor will refer to a counselor. This falls under the educational model, which seeks to enrich, support and be proactive in the growth process, preventing family decline (2 Timothy 2:2).

At the end of this project is a list of tools and ideas that will be a helpful resource that the mentor can use to adapt to the family being mentored as needed.

The first meeting is very introductory and should include time for knowing each other as well as a brief summary of the GSF approach. The mentor will tell the Gospel story and show how it can impact family life. He or she will share the value of the GSF Rhythm that is likely the best way to pass on faith. Either at this first meeting or the next a tool could be used to first get a snapshot of the family's current rhythm.

The next meeting (and all subsequent meetings) should include a review of the rhythm. The point, after all, is training so that the rhythm becomes normative and second nature. There should be a Bible study on Hebrews 12 as this serves as a foundational thought for the program. Dialogue about current practices, patterns, etc. that reveal relationship and faith-building strengths and areas for growth. Brainstorm possible new rhythms to establish, old ones to reenergize or unhealthy ones to break.

The following meeting can contain another brief Bible study or review. Narrowing down to one or two ideas to practice will be important so families don't feel overwhelmed. A simple reminder of training in stages will be helpful. Sanctification is a process; we don't attain perfection instantly!

The next meeting will include evaluating progress, celebrating successes and encouraging endurance. Role playing and demonstrating can be a fun idea to add to meeting times. Including kids in discussions will certainly add value to the process as appropriate.

The relationship may only last a few weeks, but may turn into a much longer relationship. Therefore ongoing meetings will be determined as you go. Reviewing concepts, illustrating new ideas, studying the Bible and positive evaluations can all be done again and again as long as desired.

Climbing Mount Everest is never accomplished alone or in a day. Rhythmic training spurred on by a coach working on specific skills over time will produce the “peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Here is a general and simplified “get started” guide:

FIRST MEETING. Get to know, gauge interest, share GSF concepts.

SECOND MEETING. Review GSF rhythm, Bible study on Hebrews 12, assess current family rhythm.

THIRD MEETING. Discuss activity log and possible ideas for GSF rhythms. Narrow down to one or two ideas that the family desires to grow in.

FOURTH MEETING. Assess current rhythms, revisit value of GSF rhythms, test/role play/demonstrate

ONGOING MEETINGS. Continue reviewing GSF principles, conducting related Bible studies, evaluating progress and establishing a stronger GSF rhythm.

Coaching is making men do what they don't want so they can become what they want to be. -Tom Landry

Some Tools, Ideas, Bible Studies and Principles

Note: There are many good tools available and this is just a sample to get started. The point is that whatever tool is chosen, it's to be used with the GSF mindset.

- RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

- Activity log (see table below) for gauging the current family rhythm. Use it for discussion purposes on how practically insert GSF rhythms.
- List specific faith-building practices (current, stopped, irregular).
- Brainstorm desired faith-building practices.
- Deuteronomy 6 provides good discussion points for teaching in rhythm.
- Deuteronomy 11 provides a good rationale for the high value of simply telling stories as a family.
- Genesis 1 and 2 illustrates how God created all things to be in right relationship with him.
- Discuss family devotional times such as praying together, reading the Bible together, asking questions, leading formal lesson, story-telling methods, etc.
- Discuss serving together as a family
- Elevate the value of families that play together stay together.
- Inspire church involvement showing the value of families ministering to each other.
- How to have a quiet time.
- How to pray as a family.
- **RELATIONSHIP BROKEN**
 - Bible study on Cain and destructiveness of uncontrolled anger.
 - Genesis 3 shows how relationships are broken and can break everyday in family relationships.
 - Song, “Ships in the Night” by Mat Kearney to help feel the weight of a breaking relationship.
 - Help families identify specific and individual sin habits and seek to show the seriousness of sin.
- **REPERCUSSIONS**
 - Genesis 3 shows the consequences of sin and wrong choices.
 - Brainstorm relevant consequences for specific issues family is facing (ie. removal from tense situation, taking a break when emotions are uncontrollable, loss of privilege for irresponsible behaviour, etc.) This should demonstrate that sin causes personal pain.
 - Illustrate how a bad morning not only affects your immediate family, but also the community (ie. friends at school, teacher, coworkers, etc.). A grumpy word can lead to a huffy child, which can lead to unkind words at school, etc.
- **REMORSE**
 - Prayer. Seek God for help during this process of repentance.
 - Bible stories of repentance could be referred to such as King Josiah upon discovering the Book of the Law.
 - Help families feel how the sin in our life was all put on Jesus who took our punishment. This can be a powerful tool leading to genuine repentance.
- **RESTORATION**
 - Keep the end in mind/what characteristics do you want to see in your children by the time they are 18? How will you get there? (Hint GSF is a significantly different approach from the world's approach).
 - Develop an 18 year general plan together. Ask questions such as, “How can I lead my preschool, elementary child, adolescent to Jesus?” or “What will teaching the

Bible look like at each stage" or "How does investing in our relationships benefit the discipleship process?"

- Parts of Revelation could be discussed showing the restoration that God will eventually bring.
- Delight in the joy of reconciliation and forgiveness. Remind that this is always the goal. Simply dealing out a consequence is never the goal, but relationships that are restored.
- Talk about the importance of showing affection at the end of the cycle.
- God visiting iniquity and showing steadfast love verses teach restorative purposes (Ex.20:4-6, 34:6-8; Num.14:17-19; Deut.5:8-10).
- "By itself, forgiveness does not restore a relationship. Restoration can take place only when there is confession and repentance plus forgiveness" (Family Ministry, 357).
- GENERAL
 - Spend extensive time going back to Hebrews 12 highlighting the joy and peace of endurance and sticking with the rhythm.
 - Each day has its own rhythm. Morning=right relationship; Daytime=relationship broken, repercussions, remorse; Night=restoration.
 - What story do I want to tell each day? The Gospel.
 - The discipline/discipleship pattern: wrong committed (relationship broken), consequence administered and explained (repercussions), confession and request for forgiveness (remorse), forgiveness extended (restoration).
 - Understanding family history's influence using genogram ideas. Can be helpful for understanding and breaking unhealthy cycles and building on strong legacies.
 - Training motif principles from class outline above. Use these to keep families from feeling overwhelmed and to instill GSF rhythms in manageable ways.
 - Book of Judges wonderfully illustrates cycles of sin, repentance and restoration.
 - Role play the cycle using any family situation.
 - For example, clean up after dinner problems. The relationship is right until there is refusal to make the right choice. Brokenness is seen in the bickering, resistance or complaining. Natural repercussions may include unneeded stress, extra work, etc. Enforced consequence may be loss of privilege until job is done. Remorse would entail declaration of wrongdoing and sincere request for forgiveness. Restoration provides a hug, high five, etc. and statement of encouragement.
 - Study Luke 15 to show the complete cycle and demonstrate how parents can treat the self-righteous child and the rebellious child.
 - Consider Matthew 11:28-30 in the Message to revisit the hopefulness of GSF rhythms: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."
 - Assessments may be an interest (ie. personality, spiritual gifts, etc.)
 - Teach families the Bible. Find passages that apply to their family situation and help them study it for themselves as adults and with their kids.

- Song, “Lead Me,” by Sanctus Real illustrating the need for the GSF Rhythm and the need for God to lead the family.

APPENDIX C: WEEKLY ACTIVITY LOG

ACTIVITIES	# OF MINUTES SPENT					Please note: If you engaged in two activities simultaneously, record the number of minutes spent in each box. So, for example, if you ate dinner and watched TV at the same time on Monday, record the number of minutes you spent in box #1 AND box #6 of the Monday column.			
	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	TOTALS	% OF WEEK (1,440 MIN.) (100%)
1) Eating:									
2) Sleeping:									
3) Work, school, homework, household chores:									
4) Driving:									
5) Exercising:									
6) Reading:									
7) Listening to music:									
8) Watching TV:									
9) Spare computer time (internet, video games, etc.):									
10) Talking on the phone:									
11) Shopping:									
12) Time spent with friends, family:									
13) Time spent with unbelievers:									
14) Time spent alone:									
15) Other habitual activities (list):									

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