

WHAT'S A FAMILY FOR? Genesis 2:18, 24

Good morning! We're starting a new series today. Strengthening Your Family. Classes have ended and everyone is focused on their families. You know, vacations, outings, bonding time, etc. Some... But not all families have it together. Not all families are having fun together. Some families are fragmented, some are disjointed, some are teetering on the brink of collapse. I hope none of our families are like that. But if your family is and you're looking for relief, this series is for you. Nevertheless, this series is for all of us, because we're going to tackle not only how to solve family problems but also how to strengthen the ties that bind the members of the family. So, we're going to take both a proactive and reactive approach.

Let us start by looking at what the Bible says about the family. We're going to start at the very beginning. In Genesis, in fact. When in doubt consult the owner's manual, so let's go back to the time of the creation and see what the Bible says the family is all about.

Genesis 2:18 & 24 "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'...That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."

Notice two things:

1. The family was God's idea. It's His institution so it will always be around. It is the building block of society.

2. God made Adam, put him in a perfect environment. Adam had everything he wanted and yet God said, "It's not good for man to be alone." That's true whether you're married or single. People were made for people. We need relationships.

Whether you are married or not, you need some deep relationships and caring people in your life. Man was not made to be alone, so God created the family. Then He looked and said, Now it's good.

"What's a family for?" -- that's the title of today's message. What is a family for? Fifty years ago I wouldn't have had to talk about this. It was assumed. Everybody knew what a family was for. But today, many people have no idea what a family's for.

For many people I can summarize the answer in two words: bed and breakfast. It's simply an economic necessity, a tax break. It's a way station for sleep and breakfast. God says there is so much more to His plan for the family!

What's a family for?

1. A FAMILY IS TO BE A SHELTER IN STORMS.

We all have storms in life because life is tough. It rains on us, pours on us. We get deluged and go through tough times. Things don't always go as planned. We need a place of protection, stability, security.

Proverbs 14:26 "Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge." Do your children have a place of refuge and security? The Bible says that God created the family to be a shelter in storms.

There are three kinds of storms we face today. There are many but let me share with you just three:

1. Change is a storm. We go through changes in life. We have illnesses, we have deaths, we have graduations, we change jobs, we move. But there needs to be a place that, no matter where the house is, there is a family in it that I know and I can count on. When change comes we need a place of shelter in storms.

2. Failure is a storm. You're not always the winner in life. You lose sometimes.

You get turned down at work for the promotion, you get an "F" at school, you don't make the team, your team has a losing season, or you go bankrupt. Things just don't always go as planned. You can handle a lot of failure in life if you come home to hugs, where there's a shelter in time of storm.

Eccl. 4:9-10 "Two are better than one. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad because there's no one to help him." Family members are fans even when you have a losing season. They are a shelter in a storm.

3. Rejection is a storm. This is probably the most difficult storm to handle of all. We hate to be rejected, put down, ridiculed, criticized. Some of the most difficult rejection you had was growing up on the playground. Kids are cruel. If you don't believe in sin nature, just become a teacher. Kids are ruthless. Many of you even today can remember points of pain when you were a child or embarrassing situations. You still remember them vividly when you were embarrassed or put down as a kid. Somebody said something about you and it hurt. If you didn't have anybody to go home to, to reinforce the positive in your life, that can have a long lasting, lifetime, emotional wound. We need a storm protector when people put us down.

When you play games in life most of the goals is to get home because when you're home you're safe. Homes were meant for safety. They are a shelter in a storm. It's safe to cry at home. That's what homes are for. They are shelters in the storm where you can let down and be consoled and comforted and cared for.

Many of you remember the pain as a teenager of breaking up. When you go through a period of rejection you need a shelter in the storm. You need somebody who cares for you.

What is my response to this? Simply to demonstrate my love. Love your family. Demonstrate it this week when they're going through a tough time. Give Hear, Hug or Help. Hear -- listen to their hurt. Hug -- give them a touch. Help -- help them out. God meant for homes to be shelters in storms.

That's why divorce is so painful. The place of acceptance becomes the place of rejection. The shelter from the storm becomes the center of the storm. God's ideal is that homes would be shelters in times of storm.

2. A FAMILY IS A LEARNING CENTER FOR LIFE.

We usually think of parents teaching kids, but I'm learning constantly from my kids. If you're not learning from your family, you're missing a lot to learn. The family says that families are to be learning centers. You learn basic skills for life: how to walk, talk, eat, all of life's basic skills you learn at home.

Ps. 144:12 (NLT) says "*May our sons flourish in their youth like well-nurtured plants.*" The Bible often compares the family to a garden. It's a place to grow people, a garden to grow people in.

Ephesians 6:4 "*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" That's what a family is to have. I remember a story told by my pastor years ago. One dinner time he noticed his 10-year-old son playing with his food. He said, "Rick, don't play with your food. And I hope you'll obey because the Bible says, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right'". And his son shot back, "Dad, the Bible also says, 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children.'"

Some have said that the bottom line in training your child is knowing which end to pat and knowing when to pat it. When you're training your children you want to take them through three stages: from parent control to self-control to God's control. God intends for our families to be learning centers for life.

In Luke 2:52, it says, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” Jesus grew in four ways: wisdom -- intellectual growth; stature -- physical growth; favor with God -- spiritual growth; and favor with man -- social growth. That ought to be the goal for your family, that they grow in four ways: intellectually, spiritually, socially, and physically.

You see, we learn a lot of things in our families. There are three things you won't leave home without. **Three things we learn in our families:**

1. Relationships -- You learned to relate in your home. Good or bad, right or wrong, effective or ineffective. Your happiness depends on your ability to relate to other people. You got it at home. That's why it's so important that we learn good relationships at home. Relationships are worth saving, we work on them, we talk out our problems, we ask forgiveness quickly -- we need to model that as parents. You're helping your kids determine how they're going to relate to others the rest of their lives.

2. Character -- Much of what you are you basically picked up from your parents. "Like father like son" as the saying goes. Some can say that the older they get, the more they become like their dad or their mom. You know, character is caught not taught. You don't tell your kids, "Always be honest," and then when the phone rings, "Tell them I'm not home." You see, they watch your actions, not what you say.

3. Values -- Think of all the things we learn at home: about work, sex, time, money, play, God, other people. We learn what is really important to us -- our values. Values come through loud and clear -- unintentionally and intentionally.

Isaiah 38:19 says, “The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.”

Your family is a relay of values. It's like a relay race. You're passing the baton on to your children and they'll pass the baton on to the next generation and so on. Your family is simply one link in a long chain throughout time, linking the families before you to the families that come after you. That's serious when you think about it. It's saying that I'm not only influencing my kids right now, but I'm influencing future generations. So are you!

You have been influenced not only by your parents but by the influence that they had and the influence that was on their parents and on and on. When I raise my kids, it's not just "Are my kids going to make it?" but I'm influencing future generations of my own family name. We pass it on.

Let me ask you. What are you passing on to your kids? If you're not teaching your family about God you're making a major mistake that has eternal implications. The Bible says that if you are a parent that's part of your job description -- teaching values.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up." Why don't we do this anymore? Because we don't walk along the road, lie down, get up. We watch TV. The average child watches television about 1000 hours a year. If you're an average American, by the time you've reached 18 you have amassed 18,000 hours of television viewing. Those statistics were for years ago. Today, that has doubled, tripled maybe because they now watch TV on their phones, their tablets, their laptops. Do you notice that children, even little ones, have their tablets propped up on the table while eating? So, they spend thousands of hours on TV. Compare that to one hour of Sunday school once a week. By age 18, they will have amassed a

total of only 936 hours compared to 36,000 hours of watching TV. Where are the kids getting their values? Television or God's word?

What is my response then? I need to evaluate my values. I need to ask myself two things:

What am I unintentionally teaching to my kids? -- What am I teaching them about money? What am I teaching them about character, honesty, all the issues of life -- hard work and its value? What am I teaching them about the importance of the family itself and the ability to relax? What heritage do I want them to have?

In preparing a shelter for storm I demonstrate my love. But in preparing a learning center for life, I need to evaluate my values and say what's really important.

3. A FAMILY IS A PLACE TO PLAY.

It is a place where you have fun, relax, and enjoy life. That's missing in a lot of homes.

You've seen these bumper stickers: "The family that prays together, stays together" -- I tell you that the family that plays together, stays together. The family that has fun! In so many homes the basic problem is they need to lighten up! It starts with the parents. Lighten up and have fun with your kids. Relax and enjoy.

Kids are inherently funny. From Chuck Swindoll's book You and Your Child, this is what he says: "Mealtimes are good times for character training. Many years ago Cynthia and I decided we need to work on our table manners. We were beginning to look and sound like a pen of pigs than a home of humans. Before supper began I whispered to Curtis, who was six years old, that he should serve Carissa, who was four years old, before he served himself. Naturally he wondered why since the platter of chicken sat directly in front of him and he was as hungry

as a lion. I explained that it is polite for fellows to serve girls before they serve themselves. The rules sounded weird and he was willing as long as it didn't take too long. You'll never believe what occurred. After prayer he picked up the huge platter, held it for his sister, and asked which piece of chicken she wanted. She relished all that attention but being quite young however she had no idea which piece was which so very seriously she replied, "I'd like the foot." He glanced in my direction, frowned as the hunger pains shot through the stomach, and then looked back at her and said, "Carissa, Mother doesn't cook the foot" to which she replied, "Where is it?" With increased anxiety he answered a bit louder, "I don't know! The foot is somewhere else but not on this platter. Look! choose a piece! Hurry up!" She studied the platter and said, "OK, just give me the hand." By now, their mother and father are biting their lips to restrain from laughing out loud. We would have intervened but decided instead to let them work it out alone.

That's part of the training process. Curtis said, "A chicken doesn't have a hand, it has a wing, Carissa." "I hate wings, Curtis. Just go ahead and give me the head!" By then I was headed for the bathroom. I couldn't hold my laughter any longer. Curt was totally beside himself. Carissa was totally frustrated not being able to get the piece she wanted. Realizing his irritation with her and the absence of a foot or hand or head, she finally said in an exasperated tone, "All right, I'll take the belly button!" That did it. He reached in and grabbed a piece and said, "That's the best I can do!" He gave her the breast which was about as close to the belly button as he could get."

Where can you get humor like that except in a home?

Do you have fun with your kids? Do you enjoy your family? If you don't have fun with your kids, don't be surprised that when they grow up they don't care to come back and visit. Kids want to be where the fun is.

What is my response then? I ought to celebrate my family. Enjoy the family God has given you. The Bible says your children, if you have them, are a gift.

Psalm 127:3-5 "Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!"

I am increasingly aware that my kids are only here for a season. They're not going to be around for very long. I want to make that time last. I want to make it count. There are always other days to do other projects. But you only have your kids for a short period of time, a season of life. There is time for careers and other things at other points in your life. If God's given them to you, celebrate them, enjoy them.

4. A FAMILY IS A LAUNCH PAD FOR MINISTRY.

You may never have thought of your family as being a ministry team together. But it will unify your family and bring more joy than anything else you will do if you will have some projects to serve the Lord, together.

1 Corinthians 16:15 (Living Bible) "Stephanas and his family were the first to become Christians in Greece, and they are spending their lives helping and serving Christians everywhere." What a great goal to have a ministry team, to see our family as a launch pad for the kingdom of God! How do you do it? By helping and serving other believers.

The divorce rate in America is now 1 out of every 2 marriages. A number of years ago Harvard University did a study. It was later reported in *Marriage and Family* magazine. They studied families where they read the Bible daily together. They prayed together and they went to church together and the divorce rate was one of 1,286. That's the difference God can make in a marriage. He is the glue.

Joy comes when our family believes in God. There is nothing like the thrill to me personally when I see them coming to the front during our prayer for the children time and they go to Sunday school and after the service, Eza comes to me with a paper and shows me what they learned. Nothing does more for my heart to know that I have another generation behind me that's going to love Jesus. My number one task as a father is to do the best I can to make sure my kids grow up loving Jesus Christ. That's so important and if you have people in your family that don't know the Lord you should be praying constantly for them. Nothing is more important to me as a father than I know that my kids' eternal salvation is insured and secured and we'll be in heaven together. Make that a priority in your life.

If your family are already Christians what do you do? Turn it into a ministry team. How? One practical family project is simply hospitality.

The Bible says it's a Christian duty. **Romans 12:13** *"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."*

You can show hospitality in many ways. Like inviting people over for dinner. Decorating your home, keeping it clean and tidy so people feel welcome, hosting a Bible study, inviting friends to watch a movie or as Pacquiao fights on TV, or playing games, or celebrating a birthday, etc. Who knows, you may even be entertaining angels or messengers from God by doing so. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

You can also serve in church as a family or reach out to the community as a family. When I see families, parents and children alike, ministering to others, maybe like preparing food, setting up chairs, decorating the stage, handing out gospel tracts, I feel blessed. Parents who lead this effort are teaching and modeling it for their children. This way, a heritage is being passed on to the next generation.

Remember, when you serve others, you serve the Lord. Let Joshua 24:15 be your guiding rule, “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord”. (Joshua 24:15 NLT)

What should be your response in making your home a ministry launching pad? I would say the starting point is to dedicate your home to God. You've dedicated your life to God if you're a believer, but I'd challenge you to dedicate your home to God. Maybe it will be a site of a home Bible study. Maybe inviting people over. Dedicate your home to God.

This is God's ideal. We've just barely scratched the surface today on what is God's plan for the family. There are no perfect families because there are no perfect people. It's like a church, if you ever find a perfect church don't join it because it won't be perfect anymore! My guess is that every family needs to be strengthened.

What about the singles? the never marrieds, the widowed, the formerly married? Two things:

1. Do not discount or ignore the relatives you do have -- brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, whoever might be alive in this point in your life. Don't ignore that family.

2. Realize as a Christian, you are a part of a large family which, in Galatians 6:10, is referring to the church. The church is called "the family of believers". This is just a larger family, a larger expression of what should be going on in our smaller family. Commit yourself to a local church family.

Everything that God said to do in the natural, biological family we're to do as a church. The church is to be a shelter for storms, a learning center for life, a place where you have fun and fellowship, and a launch pad for ministry. If you don't have a natural family in proximity of where you live, make this your family.

Why is the church your family? Because God put you in it when he saved you through the death of Jesus. It says in Ephesians, “So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family.” (Eph. 2:19 NLT) We share the same blood, the blood of Jesus, who poured out his blood on the cross for our salvation. And this afternoon, I hope you already know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. All you need to do is to trust him, put your faith in him, believe that he is the only one who can save you. Not your religion, not your good works, because as the Bible says there’s no name under heaven by which we are saved except the name of Jesus.