

the family CHALLENGE

by Dr. Randy Johnson

with contributions by:

Carole Combs
Jayson Combs
Jennifer Combs
Josh Combs
Jeff England
Matt Hatton
Jill Osmon

Copyright © 2016 The River Church

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of The River Church. Inquiries should be sent to the publisher.

First Edition, March 2016

Published by:
The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442

Scriptures are taken from the Bible,
English Standard Version (ESV)



Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

WEEK 1: DEFINING THE FAMILY

- 7 Study Guide: Defining the Family
- 12 Devotion 1: Family?
- 14 Devotion 2: Husbands (Defined by God)
- 16 Devotion 3: A Godly Wife
- 19 Devotion 4: Children (Of All Ages)
- 21 Devotion 5: Parents Defined
- 23 Devotion 6: A Reflection of the Family of God

WEEK 2: DESTROYING THE FAMILY

- 25 Study Guide: Destroying the Family
- 34 Devotion 1: Creation
- 36 Devotion 2: Divide and Conquer
- 38 Devotion 3: Selfishness Part 1
- 41 Devotion 4: Selfishness Part 2
- 44 Devotion 5: Words
- 47 Devotion 6: Inheritance

WEEK 3: DELIVERING THE FAMILY

- 51 Study Guide: Delivering the Family
- 56 Devotion 1: Right from the Start
- 56 Devotion 2: Dad Power
- 61 Devotion 3: Mom Power
- 63 Devotion 4: Perfect Parents
- 65 Devotion 5: We are Family
- 67 Devotion 6: Walk Don't Point

WEEK 4: DEFENDING THE FAMILY

69 Study Guide: Defending the Family

74 Devotion 1: Vigilant

77 Devotion 2: Hypocrisy

80 Devotion 3: Morality

83 Devotion 4: Technology

85 Devotion 5: Unbiblical Priorities

88 Devotion 6: Have a Plan

WEEK 5: DELIGHTING IN THE FAMILY

91 Study Guide: Delighting in the Family

98 Devotion 1: Delighting in Marriage

100 Devotion 2: Delighting with Children

102 Devotion 3: Delighting with Grandparents

102 Devotion 4: Delighting with Parents

104 Devotion 5: Delighting with Siblings

106 Devotion 6: Delighting with In-Laws

DEFINING THE FAMILY

Pastor Jayson Combs | Family Pastor

It was game five of the 1990 NBA championships. The Pistons were up three games to one against the Portland Trailblazers as they chased a repeat championship title. With seconds left on the clock, Vinnie Johnson hit a game-winning shot that sealed the championship victory for the Bad Boys of the NBA. Vinnie was not a starter for the Pistons that year, but it cannot be denied that he played an important role in the championship series.

Can you think of someone who holds a special place in your heart?

What role did they play as they impacted your life?

Roles, whether in the church or the family, are one of the most debated topics in the church today. Let's look to Scripture to learn what the roles are in Christ. Our main objective will then be to understand God's big design for the family.

WEEK 1

Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 3:22-24: *The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

What do these verses say about who we are to Jesus?

Are there any differences for who can come to Christ?

Why do you think God chose these topics (ethnicity, gender, positions) to explain the equality that we all have before Christ?

Jesus showed this equality while on the earth. He talked with the woman at the well in John Chapter 4. Not only was she a woman, but she was a Samaritan woman. According to verse 27, the open actions of Christ completely stunned his disciples.

To go even further, Jesus even put the Pharisees and the adulterous woman on the same level in John 8. When they brought

WEEK 1

the woman before Jesus, He exclaimed that those who had no sin could cast the first stone.

These Scriptures beg the question: Does this mean that roles are done away with in the Church and further on into the family?

Let's compare Scripture with Scripture...

Ephesians 5:25-27:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

How does Paul describe the role of the husband to the church?

Ephesians 5:23-27:

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot

WEEK 1

or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

How does Paul describe the role of the wife to the church?

What are these roles representing? _____

Ephesians 6:1-3:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

What are the roles of the children (If Christ did away with roles in the family and the church, then children would no longer be required to obey their parents)? _____

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

What is the role of a parent? _____

WEEK 1

Why do you think roles are rejected in the church today?

Why are roles so valuable to the beautiful thing called Family?

FAMILY?

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

What is Family? This question becomes very difficult to answer when we look at how families function in the twenty-first century. In the world we live in, the definition of family could mean many different things. Most of the time that definition is based upon what one individual thinks or feels it means to them. Just like everything else in life, the definition of family is no longer an objective one, but it has become subjective. The view and definition of what family is supposed to be has been distorted by sin and the opinions of man. If you have spent any amount of time watching television, reading the news, scrolling through Facebook, or listening to the things your children are taught at school, you know the world has created its own skewed view of how family is defined. Men marrying men, women marrying women, divorce used as a solution to “incompatibility” and a quick fix to disagreements, kids with five Christmases and a last name that is different from the rest, all of which are “okay” in the eyes of the world and even many Christians. We have let the views of the world seep in the church and redefine family for us. It’s about time we step up and stick to the God-given definition of family!

God put the family in place in Genesis 2:18 when He said, ***“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”*** Following this in verses 21-25 the Bible says, ***“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall***

WEEK 1

leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” In Ephesians 5:31 God repeats Himself, ***“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*** God designed family with the idea of man and woman coming together to be fruitful, multiply, and to raise those children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

God designed the family to be one man, one woman, and children. He designed it to be something that glorifies Him. He designed it with no divorce or separation, but to be a picture of Christ and His love for the church. He designed it to reflect our place in the family of God. Over the next couple of weeks let us put aside the world’s definition and our own definition of what the family should look like and focus on how God defined and created the family to be.

HUSBANDS (DEFINED BY GOD)

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

The Dictionary is very simple when defining the word, “husband”. As defined by Meriam-Webster, husband: a married man: the man someone is married to. Definitions are good; they help us to see what a word means, and give us the knowledge to use that word better. However, the mere definition of husband does not teach us what it means to BE a husband. When God defines husband, He tells us what it means to BE a husband. He shows us what our roles are, gives us instructions on how to act and treat our families, teaches us to adjust our attitudes and hearts, and defines for us our calling as “a married man: the man someone is married to.”

One of my favorite and the most serious God given definitions/commands for all husbands is found in Ephesians. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:25-30 ***“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.”*** The role and call are simple to hear but hard to live out. Husbands, love your wives. Loving our wives is not as easy as it sounds. It is something that I pray to get better at every day because I am constantly failing.

WEEK 1

We are called to love our wives sacrificially, loving our wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Would you do anything for your wife? Where we often fall short of fulfilling this command is by placing our needs in front of the needs of our wives. If we are not willing to put our wives' needs in front of ours in the small things, then who is to say that we would be willing to give ourselves up for our wives?

One way that we as husbands (or, at least, myself) can be better at loving our wives is through sanctifying them. Not that we are God, and we have within ourselves the power to make our wives more like Christ, but we can help to make them more like Jesus by doing everything we can to promote holiness in the lives of our wives. Maybe that means spending time in prayer with our wives. Maybe it is spending time in God's Word with our wives or even serving with our wives. Being a husband means loving our wives in a way that makes them love Jesus more and grow closer to Him. Do we fit that description?

A GODLY WIFE

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

Marriage is hard. 1 Corinthians 7:28 says, ***“Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.”*** Paul tells us that being married brings struggles that single people do not experience. He tells us again in verse 34 that ***“the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.”*** This is important to understand. Marriage is hard. We face struggles as a married couple that we would never face single. As a wife, I often worry about what my husband needs. I worry about making him happy and supporting him. My attention is divided between my husband and God. Which Paul tells us will happen. It is the burden I take on by marrying. Struggles are normal. We cannot forget that we are sinful people, and sin brings hardships. There is another aspect of marriage that I often struggle with as well. This is something I think everyone struggles with, but it can affect marriage greatly. Divorces often happen based off this sin. The sin of pride.

One of the most controversial verses is found in Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:22-24 says, ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*** Sounds intense, right? I think the word that often angers or scares people is “submit.” Merriam-Webster defines the word “submit” as “yielding oneself to the authority or will of another.” Yielding to the will of another, that sure sounds familiar. So often this word

WEEK 1

brings negative connotation, yet we do it every day as believers. Are we not commanded to submit to Christ? Ephesians 5 tells us so much about what a Godly marriage looks like, including submission. So why do we struggle doing what God commands of us? Why can't we submit to our husbands? Well, because of pride. There have been so many instances where I have felt like I know better. Often times it is with my husband, but sometimes I'm foolish in thinking I know better than God. Being submissive means giving up my assumption that I know what is best; it means giving up my pride. Marriages are too often based on selfishness. It always seems to be about what he can do for me, or I deserve this. If anything is scarier than the word "submit" I would think it is the word "deserve." We are entitled to nothing, yet we are so prideful in our ways. My relationship with my husband should be an image of Christ. It is supposed to be an example of who Christ is. This includes in public and in the privacy of our own home. We need to be submissive as an act to God, not as an act to our husbands. That means showing love, mercy, and humbleness even when he may not deserve it. Let's be real here, we definitely did not deserve Christ dying on the cross for us. Christ took himself off His throne to suffer for us. His spotless, sinless, beautiful life was sacrificed for our sinful, ugly, deceitful ones.

So as a wife, that means obeying God by being submissive. That means humbling myself before my husband so that I can humble myself before God. We are not asked by our husbands to allow them to lead, we are asked by God. We need to stop confusing our role as wives with what we think we deserve. It cannot be contingent on how our husbands treat us. No, my husband is not perfect. Guess what, neither am I. As scary as the word "submit" sounds, we need to trust in God because He knows what is best for us. Christ is the true image of love and submission. We are called to be like Him. Although we can never be perfect, we can strive to

WEEK 1

be as much like Jesus as possible. A Godly marriage comes from taking the focus off your marriage and placing it on Christ.

CHILDREN (OF ALL AGES)

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

In the dictionary the first definition used to describe children is “a young person”. The second definition of children is, “a son or daughter”, which seems more accurate in my opinion because the Bible does not define children by age but by being a son or daughter. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:1-3, ***“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”*** God calls all children to obey and honor their parents. When a man and a woman leave their parents and become one flesh, they should still have a special respect and concern for their parents even though they are no longer under the authority of their parents. A child who has been raised to obey and honor their parents will always listen to their counsel, wisdom, and advice regardless of them still being in authority. My wife and I do not have kids of our own yet, but when we do, my hope and prayer is that they obey and honor us while they are under our authority and that they will desire our counsel and wisdom when they are no longer under our authority.

God commands us to obey and honor our parents. The command to obey should move children to action. To do what they are told, when they are told to do it. Obeying means that you hear what your parents say and responding with action to what they are saying. Children are to be under the words and authority of their parents. The relationship between children and their parents is a relationship that is supposed to reflect our relationship with the Lord. If children are honoring and obeying their parents, they are painting a picture of their honor and obedience to God. In Colossians 3:20 Paul writes, ***“Children, obey your parents***

WEEK 1

in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” Children have no better reason to obey and honor their parents than this! There is no punishment or reward that parents can use to motivate their children more than the motivation that Colossians 3:20 should bring them. Obeying and honoring your parents brings GLORY TO GOD! Honoring and being obedient to our parents is not something that the world has declared as “right”. It may be the right thing to do in a moral sense, but the most basic reason to obey our parents is because God calls it right. God’s standard and declaration is what makes it right!

When I hear the word “honor,” I think of much respect and great value. When children have good, God-honoring parents, it is something that is to be shown much respect and valued greatly. For many of us, our parents have been there, they have trained us in the ways of the Lord, they raised us to love and follow the Lord, they have disciplined us, and they have shown us mercy and grace when we need it. Honor your parents; give them the respect and value they deserve. Children are called to obey and honor their parents. As followers of Christ, we are called to obey and honor our Heavenly Father. Our earthly relationship between our parents and us should display an eternal relationship with Jesus.

PARENTS (DEFINED)

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

I am not currently a parent, but someday I hope to be one. As my wife and I prepare to dive into that season of our lives, there is some heavy stuff for us to consider. Being a parent is not a duty to take lightly. To have children is more than just creating offspring, taking a million baby pictures and posting them on social media, providing food for them to eat, putting a roof over their heads, putting them through 12+ years of school, paying their way through life, coaching their sports team, picking up after them, teaching them to pick up after themselves, changing their diapers, making them happy, disciplining them, and keeping their heads on straight. (Though that seems to be a lot in and of itself). Being a parent means we reflect Christ and glorify God in another area of our lives. Just as a child's relationship to their parents is that of a believer's relationship to their Heavenly Father, a parent's relationship to their children should mirror God's relationship to His children.

The Bible says in Psalm 103:13, ***“As father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”*** Parents are called to be compassionate to their children just as the Lord is compassionate to us! As simple as it sounds it is often very difficult to do! God loved us so much that He stepped down from heaven and laid His life down for us! He stands in the way of any threat. He is there to comfort and protect, help us when we are in need, provide for us, discipline us through His Word, walk through life with us, and even pick up after us when we make a mess of our lives. I am not a parent yet, but after reading Psalm 103:13, I can tell you that parenting is difficult! We must strive to be more like our Heavenly Father in showing compassion to our children!

WEEK 1

To add to the already extreme difficulties of parenting God commands in Proverbs 22:6, ***“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*** If we want to be a “good” (God honoring) parent, then we will train our children in the way of the Lord. If we have compassion for our children and want to see them grow, we will train them up in the way they should go. If we want our kids to be Jesus-loving, God-glorifying 30-year-olds, then we will train them up in the way they should go! If we want our grandchildren to know the Lord, we should be training our children in the way they should go! If we want our children to “obey their parents in the Lord for this is right” and “honor their father and mother”, then we will be sure to train them up in the way they should go!

Being a parent does not seem easy, but regardless of the difficulty it may bring, we need and should want it to be something that gives the world a picture of what God is to us! He is a harsh and just Father, He is merciful, gracious, compassionate, loving, helpful, sacrificial, and there when we need Him! Let our lives be the proof of the life that Jesus laid down for us!

A REFLECTION OF THE FAMILY OF GOD

Matt Hatton | Student Ministries Director

Husbands are called to love their wives sacrificially, just as Christ loved the church. Wives are called to submit to their husbands as submitting unto the Lord. Children are called to obey and honor their parents just as we are to honor and show great value toward our Heavenly Father. Parents are called to be merciful, gracious, just, compassionate, loving, helpful, sacrificial, and there when children need them. Just as God is merciful, gracious, just, compassionate, loving, helpful, sacrificial, and there when we need Him. The family, in all areas, is meant to be a picture of Jesus, His love for us, and our response to what He has done for us!

God has placed this truth in many places throughout His word for us to see! In Ephesians 1:3-5 Paul writes, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”*** The Lord shows us here that when we are made holy and blameless through Christ, we are not part of a club or a team, but we are part of a family! We are adopted as sons!

Christ, in His love for us, does more than make us citizens, servants, or even good friends. He makes us family. When we become Christians, we become children of God. Romans 8:15 says, ***“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”*** I have met people who

WEEK 1

have been adopted, parents who have adopted, and brothers and sisters of adopted siblings. One of the things that is neat to see in those situations is that you would have never known those families had someone who was adopted unless they told you. Being adopted means that you are a part of the family in every way. Adoption means you receive all of the privileges, love, care, duties, punishment, respect, and even the inheritance just like any other member of the family. Being a Christ follower makes us a part of the family of God.

If you are a part of the family of God, then you know all of the blessings and privileges that it brings! You have experienced the sacrificial love that being a part of that family can provide! We must live our lives as parents, husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, and grandparents as a reflection of Jesus, His kingdom, and His love for us. Family is defined when it is placed alongside the family/kingdom of God.

Does the way that you live as an earthly family member give the world a glimpse of the eternal family of God?

DESTROYING THE FAMILY

Pastor Ty Woznek | Pastor's Academy Lead Instructor

Positive thinking is looking at reality and then finding a solution. We need to understand the reality of how we can destroy the family to learn how to overcome those challenges. Too often we think we need to put on a perfect act. We know your secret. Your family isn't perfect, and neither is mine. While many outside things destroy families, this guide will take us through the ones we struggle with most. In our discussion, we will look at a reality we face and then a solution that God gives us. Positive thinking is because of the Gospel. Jesus dying and rising again for our sins means each mistake we make is covered. Hiding our sin or our struggles is of no value to us.

What resources did God give us to build our families up despite our brokenness? _____

Danger #1: Me, Myself, and I.

Genesis 3:4-6: ***But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good***

WEEK 2

and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

1 John 2:15-17: *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

The problem is you and not me, so we think. To be humble, we think that the problem is due to circumstances, other things beyond our control, and even God Himself. After all, we can't be bad, can we? Genesis 1-11 describes for us how the world became what it is today. While this passage is debated in our culture to its truthfulness, the Apostle John hits on the same theme. Ironically, John's writings are some of the last writings of the New Testament. The pattern we see in the Old Testament, and especially in Genesis 1-11, is people rejecting God. So, if the problem is us, answer this:

Why do people want to run from God? _____

Why do you often want to run from God? _____

WEEK 2

Solution #1: The Gospel

Genesis 3:15: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*

1 John 1:5-2:1: *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

We need to often state the obvious: The Gospel is the solution. John wrote his first letter to help those who love Jesus understand how to deal with the sin and brokenness in our lives. While doing this, John points to Jesus as the solution. In Genesis 3:15 we have the first hope of the Gospel. Even when the Bible points out sin, God also points to a way out. John unpacks how the resurrection of Jesus benefits you and me. We don't have to be perfect because Jesus was perfect for us. When we mess up, we have immediate access to forgiveness. We also have a choice on who and what to live for.

WEEK 2

We often discuss the Gospel separately from our discussions on the family. Why do we need to keep the Gospel front and center in building our family up? _____

Think of an area where your family is currently struggling. How does John's words give comfort to us? _____

Danger #2: Um, I forgot.

Joshua 24:14-18: *Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.'

WEEK 2

Judges 2:10-13: And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

We are forgetful people. Forgetfulness hurts. Jesus' Bible was set up in three parts: Law, Prophets, and The Writings. The Law, or Torah, was God's instruction to us so we could understand how to live in relationship with God. The prophets describe the downward spiral of Israel and their keeping the Law. They forgot God. We forget God too. Clearly, the family is where things fell apart. In our culture and even in our churches "biblical literacy," our knowledge and understanding of the Bible, are at an all-time low. Forgetfulness leads to tragedy in the book of Judges. But, again, in Judges, God provides a way out.

Why do we often forget God? _____

What are some other relationships we often forget or take advantage? Why do we do that? _____

WEEK 2

There is a cost to everything, what does it cost us when we forget God? _____

Solution #2: God in your day, not just a part of it

Deuteronomy 6:6-9: *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Joshua 24:25-27: *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, 'Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.'*

Joshua led Israel to practice what was written by Moses in Deuteronomy. We talk about what is most important to us. We celebrate what is most important to us. We set up reminders about what is most important to us. God knows we are forgetful people. He encouraged us to not forget and gave us a family solution. Joshua knew that we'd be forgetful too, so he set up a monument as a reminder. There is a pattern in Scripture where

WEEK 2

God's people intentionally set things up so they won't forget and that their children would ask about such things.

What are ways that we can incorporate God in our day and life without making Him just a part of our life? _____

What "monuments" to God's actions in your own life do you have and why? _____

How do you share and remind your family about what God has done? _____

Danger #3: Absent dads

Malachi 4:6: *And he 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.*

The last word from the Prophets is about dads. This is a painful topic for many of us. For single moms, this is a challenging issue as well. The elephant in our culture's room is absent dads. Statistics point to a crystal clear picture of what happens when dads are not present. I use the term dad because one can be a father and not be present even in one's own home. This isn't to say moms are not essential. Moms are essential. The way God made us, dads play a critical role that cannot be replicated. A key marker to restoration and healing is how Malachi ended his book. Fathers need to be

WEEK 2

dads. We learn in Malachi 4:6 that Israel's problem was a lack of active dads.

Why are dads essential to the family? _____

What are the dangers when dads are absent? _____

Solution #3: Active Dads and Active Churches

Ephesians 6:4: ***Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***

James 1:27: ***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***

Dads, we need to show up for duty. Dads need to be present not only for our own children but also to help those families where dad is not present. Paul describes being a dad as a nurturing role, not a drill sergeant or referee role. The term "admonish" carries the idea of a "velvet hammer." Pursuing God should be a delight not something that destroys our kids. God understands that life happens. An essential part of being a healthy church is caring for the fatherless. Being a single mom is an incredible challenge and one that should not be done alone. The solution to absent dads is active churches. Think of it this way: A good dad is active in his family. A great dad gets his family to be active in the lives of others.

WEEK 2

What does it mean to be an active dad? _____

How can we help the fatherless? Single moms, how can we help you? _____

Why is having our family active in the church so very important? What should that look like? _____

Danger and Solution #4: Life is hard, so don't give up!

Galatians 6:9-10: ***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.***

Remember, we don't have to be a perfect family. We just have to keep getting back up and trying again, together, until Jesus calls us home. Family is hard, but the harvest at the end is worth it!

CREATION

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” Genesis 3:6

The flowers are beginning to bloom, trees are making leaves, baseball is being played daily, spring has sprung, and hopefully the dark, dreary icy cold days of winter are becoming a distant memory. As God bestows the beauty of the season upon us all this week, I will attempt to discuss with you in as hopeful and encouraging a way possible the struggles our families have today. The “Destruction of the Family” is a topic ideally designed for a sermon series or a research paper. I have struggled for weeks with how to take it and condense it into a series of daily devotions that provide a few moments daily from God’s Word and hopefully some insight into the importance of nurturing our families. Let’s look back for a moment to Creation.

In Genesis Chapter 2 God made man from the dust of the ground and put him in charge of caring for His creation. He decided man needed a helper and partner, so He created woman from the man. He made their partnership unique as verse 24 states that man and woman should leave their parents and cleave to one another. No one should be allowed to come between a husband and wife. Prior to sin entering the world, husband and wife were naked and without shame. If you continue to read you know through disobedience and poor choices sin entered the world and we have never been the same.

WEEK 2

I have been blessed to serve in our churches for fifteen years as a Pastoral Counselor and have been working with families for over thirty years. I have watched families implode from the same struggles Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel had that are so clearly described in Genesis. Disobedience, lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, pride, and envy to name a few were as common then as they are now. As clever as Satan is, and make no mistake he is clever, his strategy remains consistent and is a fairly simple formula for disrupting our families. He is patient and uses our basic sinful tendencies against us to try and separate us from God and then each other. He tries to do this in such a gradual manner that we fail to notice the separation. Think of the old analogy of the frog in hot water and apply it to caring for our families. If you drop a frog in hot water, he will attempt to hop out immediately and aggressively. When your family comes under a sudden attack or crisis, we typically respond aggressively and quickly to protect our loved ones. If you place a frog in cool water and heat it slowly, he will adjust to the temperature until he slowly succumbs to the heat. Similarly, through our own choices, lack of focus, busyness, denial, and stress we tend to not notice our distancing from God that allows the small struggles our families typically have to become overwhelming and lead to disintegrated relationships.

For the rest of the week we will take a closer look at the struggles that undermine the foundation of our families and discuss God's ways of protecting us both from the Enemy and from our own weaknesses. We have all made mistakes and made poor choices but remember, there is no condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1) as Scripture teaches us that the abundance of God's grace is larger than all of our struggles. God has an incredible way of taking our failures and turning them into incredible, faith building opportunities.

DIVIDE & CONQUER

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

The year was 1941 and the world was at war. In one of the first allied military operations of the African desert, 30,000 British troops attacked a 150,000 man Italian army that was supposedly fortified and impenetrable. In five days, at a loss of less than 1900 men the British took 138,000 prisoners and an incredible load of weapons and tanks from a stunned enemy who was decimated by the attacks. How was this possible? By studying the enemy positions, they found weaknesses they could penetrate and cut off the Italian troops from supplies, reinforcements, and communication. The British had implemented the age old battle strategy of divide and conquer.

Satan has patiently studied your habits, choices, and defenses. He knows your weaknesses and most certainly will exploit them at the exact moment he believes you will endure the most harm. He is well aware that many people have been decimated by one impulsive decision they or someone close to them has made. Let's take a closer look at how Satan tries to divide and conquer.

Think back to those times in your life that you have made some of your worst decisions. Decisions that have caused you or others much pain. This may be difficult for you because the results of those decisions may still cause you hurt or shame. Let me help relieve you of those feelings by reminding you of yesterday's final thought. If we remain faithful, God turns those horrible choices into incredible opportunities for growth, teaching, and witnessing. As you remember those difficult moments in your life, think about what your relationship with God was like at that time. If you did not know Christ, then you had no inclination to ask God for discernment and guidance. However, if you knew Christ as

WEEK 2

Savior, my guess would be that at the time you made those poor choices you were not maintaining an intimate relationship with Him. Maybe you were “too busy” or distracted, and maybe you did not understand the importance of daily Bible study, prayer, and fellowship with believers. Satan will do whatever he can to keep you from growing spiritually. He knows your weaknesses, and he knows with what to tempt you. If he can separate you from God, he knows you are more vulnerable.

Let’s apply this concept to married couples and parents. Separation from God will almost always lead to separation from our spouse. Some may argue their marriage is fine no matter their spiritual condition. However, when we do not value Christ, what do we value? Chances are we are making “things” priorities, not God and our families. I am confident you know by your own or other’s experiences what happens when a spouse and or parent chooses the world over their families. Family time and interactions decrease and isolation increases. When parents are distracted, their kids will seek attention and entertainment elsewhere. TV, video games, computers, cell phones, opposite sex relationships, etc. all become priority over talking and spending time together as a family. This scenario plays out daily in many of our homes causing family relationships to become divided, begin to disintegrate, and give Satan a stronger foothold to conquer. However, we can limit Satan’s strength by making God our priority and asking Him to help us love and care for our families as He does us. It is never too late to begin the process of overcoming division and rebuilding family intimacy.

“A man ought to live so that everybody knows he is a Christian... and most of all, his family ought to know.” Dwight L. Moody

SELFISHNESS PART 1

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

“*T*his is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God’s love reside in him? Little children we must not love with word or speech, but with truth and action.” John 3:16-18 (HCSB)

The Bible is filled with references related to the importance of giving of one’s self to help meet the needs of others. Truly loving others as Christ loves us requires us to think of others needs before our own. Take a moment to reread 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 and Paul’s inspired description of love. It is clear that we tend to fall far short of the standards God has given us for caring for each other. I have no doubt about how much you feel love for your families. How do you measure that love? To what standards are you striving to reach and maintain? Is it clear that you love your family more than you value your own well-being or enjoyment?

Selfishness is a most common theme in the counselor’s office when families are struggling. It has developed many different names because let’s face it; no one likes to think of themselves as selfish. “We have communication issues”, “We don’t spend any quality time together”, “He or she works so much”, “We have some bad financial struggles”, “He or she never helps me with the kids or the house”, “My feelings or thoughts don’t matter”, “We fight all the time”, are just a few of the initial statements I hear from people that are most often dealing with the selfishness of one or multiple members of a family. After all, selfishness is contagious! See Galatians 6:7-9. Most people who feel their own needs are

WEEK 2

not important to their spouse or family will be more tempted to give into one of Satan's oldest cons..."I deserve this", "No one else cares, so I have to take care of me", "He or she does that so I am going to do this", etc. Self-centered thoughts will typically lead to self-centered actions. The more selfish we become, the more distant we are from God. The less sensitive we are to the needs of our families, the more division and isolation. When family intimacy decreases, Satan gains a foothold. It is my belief that more marriage vows are broken due to selfishness than any other of the choices we make.

We can be selfish in so many different ways. Satan has done a masterful job of getting us to tune out the Holy Spirit's guidance related to the importance of caring for our families. In what ways do you struggle the most with selfishness? Are you so focused on work that you bring it home with you or spend more hours than necessary on your job? Has a spotlessly clean house become such a priority that you regularly feel stress and frustration because others do not seem to care or pitch in? Does your leisure/recreational activities consume so much time and resources that they greatly reduce family interactions? Have the kid's activities caused you to be running in so many different directions that there is little if any quality "marriage time"? Have the things in life you enjoy the most taken priority over spending uninterrupted, fully focused time meeting the needs of your family? These are but a few of the ways we can allow our own self-interest and desires to become more important than the intimacy and stability of our family relationships.

Take a moment today to ponder your schedule, your spouse's attitude toward you, your comfort level with spontaneously discussing any subject with your kids, how many family meals you have together in a typical week, how many activities you regularly

WEEK 2

enjoy without any of your family involved, how much electronics are used in your home, how often you and your wife date. These thoughts and many others may give you some important insight into how much selfishness is thriving in your home. Be honest with yourself and know that God is a God of hope and He is excited to help us grow.

“At this moment, you and I are either committing selfishness, or about to commit it, or repenting it” C.S. Lewis.

SELFISHNESS PART 2

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

“Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

The concept is simple but yet so difficult to maintain. Put others ahead of us. It is the ultimate solution to our struggles with selfishness. Did you take a moment yesterday to examine the questions we discussed at the end of our devotion? Did you think of any more measures related to the level of intimacy in your own family? God has made a point in Scripture to prepare us for the battle of pursuing our own self-defined needs versus caring for the needs of our family. It is a difficult battle but a very winnable one. The process of examining our own hearts, taking a close look at the spiritual health of our family, and then studying for a week or so the typical interactions between members will give you great insight into whether or not your family is at risk for separation and the problems that accompany it. Then comes the necessary humility needed to identify the role of selfishness in your family issues, especially if through your self-examination you recognize your own selfish choices.

There is a concept in the world of addictions called “Denial”. It not only relates to a person’s refusal to acknowledge that they have a problem, but it also relates to their refusal to admit that their problem is impacting other people in their lives. I am spending two days of our devotions on selfishness because I think it is the most destructive of Satan’s tactics to harm our families and one of the easiest for us to deny as an issue. We know that no one wants to be thought of as selfish and we have become experts at rationalizing our “busyness”. It becomes extremely easy to assume all is well all the time at home. After all, “No news is good news,”

WEEK 2

right? Wrong! No news generally means little communication and no quality marriage and family time.

The often-overwhelming trials of daily life including work hours, activities, and maintaining a household are not hopeless. King David of the Old Testament had many struggles, but he knew the formula for overcoming his selfish flesh was to invite God to “examine his heart” (Psalm 26:2). He knew he had to allow God to guide him through his own sinful tendencies. Remember Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in Matthew 36 when He was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He first stated that loving God with all of our heart, soul, and mind then in verse 39 He said, “And the second is like it, love thy neighbor as thyself”. If we cherish others the way we are supposed to, selfishness is defeated. Practically speaking, the deliberate and daily acts of caring for your family members need to be a priority over everything in your life but your walk with God. You set the example, and I believe your family, over time, will begin to reciprocate. Here is the coolest part of all, when selfishness starts to decrease, communication increases. When communication increases, scheduling, planning, and organizing increases. When scheduling, planning, and organizing increases all activities are more efficiently managed creating more time and resources. If you have more time and resources, you may be able to enjoy your favorite leisure time activities more frequently without causing the resentment and anger that created the original division in your family.

What is the worse case scenario of identifying and changing your own selfish ways? What if no one in your family follows your example? What if they try to take advantage of your new selfless heart? Remember, you are still glorifying God by reflecting Christ! There is no better place to be in this world to be than deeply

WEEK 2

embedded in the will of our loving God. Truthfully, selflessness is just as contagious as selfishness.

“A man’s most glorious actions will at last be found to be glorious sins, if he hath made himself, and not the glory of God, the end of those actions.” Thomas Brooks

WORDS

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

“K*now this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”* James 1:19, 20

James understood long ago the hurt we can cause each other by the misuse of our words and the failure to control our tempers. Scripture is filled with warnings in regards to the danger of our tongues and anger. (See Psalms 34:13, James 3:5, Hebrews 4:12, Colossians 3:21, Proverbs 20:2, 16:32, 20:2, 19:19) Our words can be used tenderly to calm, encourage, nurture, and love. Calmness, in the face of disappointment has a similar ability to encourage and strengthen others.

Satan also knows the destruction our tongues and anger can cause. In his continued efforts to divide and conquer our families, he has encouraged us to ignore the power of our words and our temper. He understands and enjoys the hurtful, discouraging power of criticism, sarcasm, negativity, and dishonesty in our words. He knows that raised voices, harsh responses, snarling facial expressions, and clenched fists can trigger similar aggressive responses from some and frighten others into physical and/or emotional isolation. Satan is so cunning that he tempts us in such a subtle manner that we may be convinced that our negative words or behaviors are rational or even necessary. When he encourages us to justify our angry words or actions, it makes it easier to ignore self-control and develop the habit of regularly treating others poorly. Consistently using hurtful, discouraging words and failure to control anger can destroy any family quickly.

WEEK 2

For years now I have watched and listened to people cut each other to shreds in my office. Yes, Christian people who tear the hearts out of each other and their children and then try to rationalize why they do it. The aggressor's reasoning is almost always an attempt to explain that either the other person deserved it or that they (the aggressor) cannot help the way they act. I believe people spend more energy excusing their behavior than it would take to change it!

Parents that mistreat each other through their words and anger create kids that mistreat each other in a similar manner. It is very sad to watch a husband or wife deny that their behaviors are affecting their children. Over and over I have watched children disrespect and disobey the parent that is the victim of that same disrespect from their spouse. Your kids are watching you and your greatest influence comes not from what you say but how you act.

Yesterday we mentioned King David's approach to being who God wanted him to be. David had many struggles and many of those struggles were self-induced, but he had an incredible way of always finding a reason to be grateful to God. (See Psalms) Like David, we need to put all the excuses behind and ask God to help us examine our hearts. Some of you have endured some horrific situations and are scarred by that past. I do not want to minimize those hurts. Our family of origin and childhood environment however, do not make us act in any particular way. That background leaves us with tendencies. We still must choose everyday what our attitude and treatment of others will be. For my friends that struggle with negativity and anger, let's try to refocus our hearts on all that we have for which we can be grateful. It is difficult to be nasty with a grateful heart. Start right now thanking God for the specific blessings you have and begin each day with the same grateful heart. I know the stress

WEEK 2

is high, the worries can be overwhelming and irritability thrives when the world bears down on us, but I also know God has us in His loving arms. Positive words, peacefulness, and gratefulness defeats Satan's plans and will strengthen the bonds of your family in incredible ways.

“There is nothing that so much gratifies an ill tongue as an angry heart.” Thomas Fuller

INHERITANCE

Pastor Jeff England | Counseling Pastor

“*T*his is love: Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love on another.” 1 John 4:10,11 (NIV)

It is truly an amazing example of love that God has given us. His son, mocked, tortured, and gruesomely murdered for our salvation. The challenge is to take that example and share that love to the world through our own actions. Jesus made it clear to His disciples in John 13 that the world will know we are His disciples by our love for each other. We need to place our family in the center of our desire to love as Jesus stated. We often give so much to work, friends, recreation, and even ministry that our own spouse and children are frequently left fending for themselves. The hypocrisy a family witnesses when a parent or spouse gives more loving attention to others, or to their own selfish ambitions, builds incredible walls of division.

This week’s discussions of family division and isolation, selfishness, an unbridled tongue, and explosive anger are but a few of the ways today’s families are being destroyed. We did not have time and space to discuss appropriate Biblical roles, parenting issues, blending families, lack of accountability, and addictions to name a few more of the situations that can cause pain and destruction. The potential dangers of each of these choices and behaviors are well documented and the associated battle plans are provided throughout Scripture. If you are unsure how to find the help you need, reach out for help. You have a church family, including staff

WEEK 2

members, who would love to help you find God's plan for healing and growth.

Today I want to leave you some encouraging ideas for possibly knocking down some walls and rebuilding or strengthening relationships in your own family. I have read many books related to healthy families and the following thoughts and suggestions have been developed from many great authors as well as Scripture. I have always been fond of James Dobson, Kevin Leman, John Trent, and Gary Smalley and I recommend their many books on parenting and family. As we close out the week, consider these ideas for building closeness.

Establish, discuss, and enforce healthy boundaries. Kids draw security from rules that are established with love. Remember the old saying – Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. Discipline must be an act of love.

Limit electronics. On top of the isolation electronics encourage, they are also dangerous. Television is constantly promoting self, sex, and worldly lifestyles. The internet is exposing more children to pornography than we ever thought possible. Your kids will have enough struggles in life without the added stress of these horrific philosophies and images in their heads.

Increase praise. You will always have to correct your children but catch them doing right. They will strongly desire to please you.

Share feelings. Ask open-ended questions to encourage thoughtful answers and conversation. Tell me about your day versus how was your day? I am also reminded of a story told by Trent and Smalley in their book, *The Language of Love*, about a woman who convinced her husband she and the kids needed more interaction from him. Each day upon returning from work he said little, grabbed his

WEEK 2

dinner plate, and plopped in front of the TV for the night. She told him he reminded her of a man that ate at nice restaurants every day. He ate steak, seafood, and pasta. After each meal he took the leftover crumbs and brought them home for his family to share. That's all they got. She made her point and hopefully he understood his family needed more from him.

Demonstrate humility. Share your mistakes and poor choices with your family. You will blow it sometimes. Own it and take responsibility for it. A heartfelt apology in the spirit of repentance, making eye contact, asking forgiveness are all messages of 'I love you'.

Share family choices. Most of the time parents will decide the course of family activities but when prudent allow the kids to have input and actually decide how your time will be spent. There is nothing better than watching a "macho man" on the floor playing with dolls or my little ponies.

God Bless You.

"This is all the inheritance I give to my dear family. The religion of Christ will give them one which will make them rich indeed."
Patrick Henry

WEEK 2

DELIVERING THE FAMILY

Pastor Jayson Combs | Family Pastor

One of my good friends went to work for a moving company. Basically, his job was to pack an entire house into a truck to deliver the items to another location. After a 10-hour workday, my friend decided he was not cut out to be a part of the delivery service.

Delivering our families from the hurt, pain, and suffering of the world is actually a far more difficult mission than delivering furniture from one house to another. As the world rapidly changes and imposes itself on our families, how can we help to defend, and deliver the family to bring glory and honor to Christ? Today we will look at what the Word says about delivering the family.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Why does it say it is right? _____

WEEK 3

Colossians 3:20

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Why do you think it pleases the Lord for children to obey their parents? _____

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

How was God expecting parents who followed Him to live according to verses 4 and 6? _____

What were the expectations of parents according to verses 7 through 9? _____

WEEK 3

1: Delivering is About Bringing

Five-year-old birthday parties may be the most amazing things in the world (insert sarcasm here for many parents). There are usually two distinct types of parties at this age. There is “the drop off” party, where you drop off your child at an event facility, and let him or her run around like crazy for three hours while monitored by some professionals and mostly high schools teens. Then there is the “bring your child and family” kind of party, where you all attend and participate in the celebrations together, and where all parents can hopefully monitor the crazy five-year-olds.

What makes these parties so substantially different? _____

In Ephesians 6:4 the Bible tells us to “bring” our children up in the Lord. The word “bring” in the Greek means to “bring up to maturity, to nourish”. It’s more than just a “drop off.” It’s a process where we bring them along for the ride in this sometimes crazy, yet exciting Christian life.

What things hinder you from bringing your child up in the Lord (sin, time, job, laziness, TV, lack of patience, guilt, etc.)?

Just a simple FYI, your kids know you are not perfect. Sometimes, however, we try to make them think we are. When all is said and done, they don’t need perfect parents, they need real parents who

WEEK 3

are fighting to follow Jesus and will do whatever they can to bring their children along for the ride.

2: Delivering is About Discipline

I know, even saying the word “discipline” gets people anxious. In the Greek, the word “discipline” means to train, to steer, and to protect. The NIV says to “bring them up in training.” How is discipline more than just giving your children consequences for doing wrong? _____

Which of the three defining Greek words above do you feel you struggle with the most and why? _____

Which one of the three are you dealing with the most at this time?

“Parents provoke their children and discourage them by saying one thing and doing another—by always blaming and never praising. By being inconsistent and unfair in discipline and by showing favoritism in the home by making promises and not keeping them and by making light of problems that to the children are very important. Christian parents need the fullness of the Spirit so they can be sensitive to the needs and problems of their children” (Warren W. Wiersbe).

WEEK 3

What do you think of this quote? _____

Do you fall into any of these struggles? _____

3: Delivering is About Instructing

The word “instruction” comes from the meaning “putting in the mind.”

Romans 16:19

But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

What are some things you can do to help put Godly instruction in your child’s mind? _____

What are some ways you can use the church to help you? _____

Delivering the family may be one of the hardest things to do, but it is worth the fight. What is one thing you can take from this lesson to apply to your family this week? _____

RIGHT FROM THE START

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

Family... it is ordained by God, it gives people a place to belong, it shapes who we are and yet in all its beauty we find a way to destroy it, a way to hurt the people we love the most. It started with Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, and has continued throughout history. So how do we deliver the family? How do we break the cycle? Those are really good questions, and I hope we can, over the next week, navigate what God has called us to do.

I have been doing a study on Genesis with my friend Annie. It is such an interesting book, so much packed into the first book of the Bible. I am inclined to just skim over the genealogy in Genesis, and I think to myself, "Well it is just names, it does not have any real significance." I could not be more wrong, there are no insignificant words in the Bible. There is a reason that God speaks about families, genealogies, and the connection from generation to generation. In one of the studies that I've been reading, it speaks of Noah and that the words father and son are mentioned almost 30 times in 61 verses in his story. Words in the Bible matter, so it is no coincidence that God focuses on the family. He addresses it time and time again; we are to honor our parents and parents are to guide their children (Proverbs 15:20, Proverbs 1:8, Colossians 3:20, Duet. 5:16, Proverbs 22:6). So I think families are something that we need to fight for, need to do battle over, because, in fighting for our own families, we are fighting to defend the family of God. See, we are referred to as sons and daughters of God, 2 Corinthians 6:18 says, "***And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.***" That is the beauty of the Family

WEEK 3

of God; it is the perfect picture of what family is supposed to be here on earth.

The family was not destroyed in the last few years, it was not even destroyed in the last few decades... it was on a decline since Adam and Eve sinned. The honest truth is that every family is broken, sometimes to different degrees but we are all broken. So how do we deliver the God given concept of the family here on earth? I feel tired just thinking about it. How do we rescue what we and the world have destroyed for so long? What a difficult undertaking, but I think if we dig deep into the Bible we can understand what God expects from fathers, mothers, kids, friends, aunts, uncles, everyone who makes up a family. In understanding what He expects from each of us, we can begin to put the pieces of the family back together again. We can allow God to deliver our families.

DAD POWER

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

Fathers. There is a lot of emotion that comes with that word. Fathers have the unique ability to speak into their kids' lives.... for better or worse. There is a reason that there are millions of kids and adults that are struggling in life, a direct result of an absent father, an angry father, an emotionally absent father, or an abusive father. Dads, you have POWER. Please understand this, you have power; you have RESPONSIBILITY. You have the weight of your family on your shoulders. God has placed you at the head of the family. Please let that sink in... it is not a light responsibility, it is heavy. I thought about going in a lighter direction with this devotion, but honestly, the responsibility is too big to miss the chance to see what God expects of fathers... it begins with you.

Ephesians 6:4 says, ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*** Let's break this up into two sections.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger...” I always took the “do not provoke your children to anger” pretty literal. So my parents should not make me mad, that is what I thought growing up. Mom, Dad, you are making me angry so you must be doing something wrong. Let's dig a little deeper, with what that looks like. The Matthew Henry commentary says this, “Though God has given you power, you must not abuse that power, remembering that your children are, in a particular manner, pieces of yourselves, and therefore ought to be governed with great tenderness and love.” They are pieces of yourselves so take care...I love that. God is telling us, hey listen, you need to lead them but do not be so harsh that you injure them emotionally so that they

WEEK 3

become embittered toward you because they are a part of you. Kids are looking to their dads to lead them, and God is asking fathers to lead them with love. This does not mean that you do not lead them at all and avoid any conflict or difficult situations, but lead them with wisdom and godliness.

“...but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” I’ve never been more thankful for my dad, than when I first started mentoring and counseling women (kids, teens, and adults). Many and I mean many of their insecurities, their decisions, and their heartbreak were a direct result of their relationship with their fathers. Some realized that, but many just sat there struggling with their life and didn’t understand the connection. Sons and daughters struggle connecting with their Heavenly Father because they lack a connection with their earthly father. Daughters need to be told they are loved, they need to be protected, and they need to know that their earthly father believes they are unique, beautiful, lovely, strong, wise, and worthy.

It is the same with men. Sons need to be told that they are loved. They need to be protected and taught to protect. They need to be led and taught to lead. They need to know their earthly father believes that they are unique, strong, wise, and worthy. If they get that, if they believe that, their ability to stand in the embrace of their Heavenly Father and seek their identity in Him is immeasurably stronger. They become men and women of God who find their worth in their Heavenly Father; there is no stronger person than that. This pleases our Heavenly Father. This is how we can deliver or redeem the family. Continually pointing our kids to God, and continually finding our strength in Him.

Men, just because you may not be a father or your kids are grown or have unique situations only known to you, God is going to give you opportunities to step into people’s lives that may not have

WEEK 3

fathers or may need a strong male influence in their lives. This applies to you too, don't waste those opportunities, pray that God brings those people into your lives and point them to the Heavenly Father.

Be intentional with your actions, your words, and your instruction. God will honor that, and our families will be changed for the better because of it.

MOM POWER

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

I was in a car accident years and years ago; I had a bad case of whiplash and some bruises but nothing that even sent me to the hospital. I held it together with the police officer, the people who stopped to help, and my aunt who came to get me, but as soon as I heard my mom's voice, waterworks...I mean ugly cry! My dad may be my protector, but my mom is whom I want when something bad happens. She is my safe place.

Dads lead, they have a heavy, righteous weight that they must carry. Moms, I think God has called them to be all things at all times. It is being a little silly but think about it, your mom comforts you, makes your lunches, gives wisdom, disciplines... she is your safe place. Isaiah 66:13 says, ***“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you...”***, Proverbs 6:30 says, ***“My son... forsake not your mother’s teaching.”***, I Timothy 1:5 says, ***“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”*** All things at all times, a safe place.

So how does the world destroy this aspect of the family? I think as women we get overwhelmed with being all things at all times. We get lost in the vastness that is motherhood. We believe the lies Satan tells us that we are not good enough and what we do doesn't matter. I am sure you have your unique soft spot that Satan preys on, but the end result is the same, women sometimes let the world paralyze them and resent their role. To be the safe place, it requires strength, wisdom, and a strong identity in Christ. We have the privilege to be a picture of our true safe place. Psalm 46:1-5, ***“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help***

WEEK 3

in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.”

Women, whether you are a mom or your mentoring young women, or are a sister, or a friend, it still applies. God will give us all opportunities to speak into lives, to point them to the ultimate safe place. Let's not get bogged down by the enormity of it, but instead be grateful that we get to be used by God to be a mirror of one of awesome characteristics. Let's be a safe place for those searching in a dark world.

PERFECT PARENTS

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:1-3

Parents and kids... it is a complicated relationship. One deeply affected by our own shortcomings. God calls us, as sons and daughters, to obey and honor our parents. Obey and honor fallible human beings. That is tough. That is made even more difficult because we, as kids, are fallible human beings. So how do we make this relationship work from a child's perspective? How do we honor and obey our parents? The Bible does not give us a time limit on this. Obeying might look different at certain seasons of your life, but honoring our parents does not go away when you become adults.

It is interesting that God does not give us conditions on honoring our parents. The Bible does not say, if your parents make every right decision, honor them. It simply says honor them. How can we do that when we struggle with honoring a perfect God? If we cannot honor a perfect God, how can we honor imperfect people? Is it too simple to say because God commands us to do it? God commands us to do it!

Recognizing that our parents are imperfect makes it easier to honor them. I think we have some high expectations for our parents... we do not allow them to be imperfect. We need to remember that they are people trying to do the best they can. Sometimes their best is seriously inadequate, but when have

WEEK 3

we been perfect in any of our relationships? See, honoring has nothing to do with what our parents have done but all about God's command. In honoring our parents, we are honoring God. Even when our parents are not worthy of honor, we honor because God has given us immeasurably more, and we do not deserve it, and yet He gives.

Next time we have our moments where we are annoyed with our parents, moments that they mess up, moments that hurt us... we honor them because God honors us by loving us, forgiving us, and providing for us.

WE ARE FAMILY

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

Hebrews 10:24-25, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

We have been talking about families for the last few weeks. Family is traditionally made up of Dads, Moms, and children. Not everyone has a traditional family, whether it is through a divorce, death, or a season God is calling you to. It can be difficult to navigate. Our desire for a family or a community when we do not have the traditional form of them can be difficult. God created us to desire community... to be known and to know others. I read a quote years ago by a pastor, Ben Stuart, and it has stuck with me... “The human soul cries for intimacy and impact - belonging and meaning - love undeterred by failure and significance undiminished by time.”

God created family, the concept of community for us. He created us to crave it, and He offers us ways to have it, even outside the traditional family. God has surrounded me with a community of people, a community full of people who love me, who know me. Some of them are biological family, and some are chosen, but all are specifically in my life for a reason. It is a beautiful picture of what the Church is a community of people that come together and make each other better, challenge each other and love each other. Hebrews 10:24, 25.

Life is tough, so tough that we need to do life with people who know us, who will encourage us, love us, and speak truth to us...

WEEK 3

family. Whether that family is by blood or by choice, it is family. God created the concept family. So my challenge to you is to look around, grab people who need community... from all walks of life and do life with them. I cannot imagine a more perfect picture of what God intended for us.

WALK DON'T POINT

Jill Osmon | Assistant to Pastors Jim and Josh Combs

Proverbs 22:6 *“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

Psalm 1:2 *“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

Deuteronomy 11:18-20 *“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

We have been looking at specific relationships within the family. I think that not only do our roles reflect God and who He is and what He intended for us as a family, but He calls us to pursue Him together. As parents, you are responsible for training your children in the ways of God. Your children watch you. They actually watch everything you do... they need to see you studying His Word, and they need you to study with them. I have a 3-year-old niece. She mimics everything I do, and I love it... until she mimics something that isn't good. We have all been there, but my favorite is when she mimics something that I love. I love post-it notes (I know, my nerd is showing but I can't help it), Ada knows that, so she loves it. She writes on one, takes it off the pad and uses another one. I love it... I know strange, but I cannot help it! If you study His Word in front of them, and with them, they know it is important. They know it is something to pursue. If it is an extension of you,

WEEK 3

an extension of your family. ***“...when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise”*** they will mimic it.

Families in our culture have become passive in their pursuit of God together. We have somehow shifted the responsibility of discipleship from the family to the church. I know this is bold, but it is not the church's responsibility to be the sole spiritual discipleship to your kids. It is an enormous responsibility that is why the church comes alongside you and your children and helps, but it is not left at the feet of the church. Parents, it is on you. Follow Proverbs, Psalms, Deuteronomy... train up your kids, talk about God and His Word with them because they “...will not depart from it”.

DEFENDING THE FAMILY

Carole Combs | Women's Ministry

“Defense! Defense!” The crowd shouted as the opposing team drove the ball towards the basket for the home team. If the home team wins this game, they will become the National Champions. I sat watching this very situation developing before my eyes. Unfortunately, I watched people battle over a game that is supposed to be a sport to enjoy that does not have any eternal significance. I have also sat and watched husbands, wives, and children not battle to defend the family, which does have eternal significance.

Is there something in your life that you have defended above your family? _____

Before the family can be defended, you must first believe that God created humans, male and female, in His image. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27). Anything outside of this violates God's design. When our culture fails to respect and promote God's intended family, the union between a man and

WEEK 4

a woman, the culture is on a downward spiral to a society that defends nothing!

What is your stand against attempts to redefine marriage, which is making marriage into something that God never intended it to be? _____

But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house (Mark 3:27).

What do you think this verse means? _____

What does this have to do with defending the family?

Have you allowed plundering in your home? _____

It is virtually impossible to defend someone or something if you don't know or believe in that person or idea. The Word of God provides guidelines for good relationships in the family.

“If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.”

WEEK 4

What does the family mean to you? _____

Is it important? Is it evident that it is important to you?

Is it important enough to defend? _____

Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem to plan, work, and oversee the reconstruction of the walls and gates of his home. He and the people faced an enemy that wanted to thwart their efforts. ***...I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes"*** (Nehemiah 4:13,14).

Where have you allowed the enemy into your home?

Why is it important to know that God is great and awesome?

WEEK 4

It is challenging to defend our family as the waves of this culture are constantly bashing against the ship of our homes. You may find yourself running around just fixing the leaks - those toxic leaks of our culture that seep into our homes. They seep through 15-second commercials on television and cute characters on the kids' gaming system. The toxins can even seep through your social media accounts. These things are great for entertainment and for connecting with family and friends, but don't allow them to poison or kill the relationships within your home. Defend your family. Keep the family the top priority.

What are you too busy doing that defending your family is not a top priority? _____

What is in your home that distracts you from your family?

Defending versus Dysfunctional

- 220,000 fewer people are getting married now than a decade ago, even though the population has increased
- 20 million children live in single-parent homes
- Over 43% of children are born into unmarried households

A dysfunctional family is where everyone in the household is negatively affected by a problem, even if only one family member is experiencing the problem. Dysfunction in the family, you may be experiencing it now or have as a child, may not have been caused by your choices or under your control.

WEEK 4

How will you choose to go forward to defend your family?

Do you have to repeat the patterns of your past? _____

Defense is a choice. If my son's basketball team had not defended their basket, they would not have become the NCCAA National Champions. If we choose not to defend our families, we will all suffer the consequences of a loss that I believe none of us can ever imagine or expect. "Defense! Defense!"

VIGILANT

Pastor Josh Combs | Lead Pastor

Throughout the past couple of weeks, we have been emphasizing the importance of the family - using our Growth Communities, devotions, workshops, and sermons to draw each of us to the heart of God and to clearly see His design for the family. God created the family as a daily, tangible display of His glory.

This week we will be looking at the reality that the creation of the family is under attack, but that, more personally, each of our families is under attack. Without question, each of us has experienced pain in our family, whether in divorce, abuse, unresolved conflict, harsh words, death, neglect, an affair, and a host of other painful events and circumstances. With that in mind, we need to be extremely aware of the truth - we have an enemy. As the family is a living, breathing display of God's glory, our enemy fundamentally despises this beautiful truth and seeks to destroy it. In John 10:10, Jesus says, ***"...the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."***

We have an enemy and we, according to Scripture, must be armed and prepared for a battle with him. As I write this devotion, I am truly devastated to look back on all of the families that I have seen fall under the barrage of attacks Satan leveled against them. I have seen some restored by the power and grace of God, but many, many lay in ruin.

In 1 Peter 5:8, a much wiser and more seasoned Apostle Peter warns believers to ***"...be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."***

WEEK 4

1. Be sober-minded

The instruction here is to think clearly and rationally. In the Greek (which the New Testament was written in) the idea is to be safety-minded. So many times we become inebriated with the cares of this world and the distractions of life, that we stop thinking clearly. We simply forget that we have an adversary... an opponent...an enemy. Imagine an athlete who prepared for the biggest game of his career only to be so distracted by the cheers of the crowd and the immense size of the stadium that he simply stood frozen in the middle of the field or court as the game went on around him. Too often I see in myself and other Christians this distracted, foggy thinking. We must never forget to be sober-minded.

2. Be watchful

In the King James Version of the Bible (in which I grew up memorizing Scripture) the word is “vigilant.” The word simply means as it is translated in the English Standard Version, to be watchful, specifically watchful for possible danger. We live in the country on a very low traffic road. It is quiet and beautiful. I remember the first time I had one of my kids go across the street to get the mail. The likelihood of a car coming was relatively small, but not impossible. So I gave clear instructions about looking both ways and being very focused. Apparently, I was extremely convincing, and I watched out the window as my child refused to cross the street. At first, I thought fear had overcome her, but then I realized that she was waiting for a car. However, the car was so far down the road, and she could have crossed the street countless times before the car reached our driveway. That visual of my patiently waiting, vigilant daughter still makes me smile.

We are to be the same way. We are to look for danger constantly, not just when crossing roads or sending our kids to the bathroom, but

WEEK 4

spiritually. This is often so neglected that parents are surprised when they raise a safe, healthy, godless child. The adversary is cunning. Be watchful.

3. You have an enemy

The Scripture likens the adversary to a prowling lion, seeking his prey. Don't wait until it is too late to act. Read Ephesians 6:10-20 and do what the Lord says, specifically pray. Each night I pray with my kids before they go to sleep. I ask God to protect them, and I ask that each of them would grow to love and serve the Lord their whole life. Yes, I hope my kids are intelligent, successful, athletic, happy, and so forth, but above all else; I want them to passionately love and follow Jesus. I realize there is an adversary I am fighting, and he is not going to find easy prey at my house.

Over the next few days, my wife, Jennifer, and I are going to share with you some of the ways that we have defended our family from the variety of attacks that Satan has brought against us. I would love to tell you that we triumphed in each case, but that would not be true. We have experienced both victory and defeat...triumph and tragedy. Our prayer for you is that you will learn from Scripture and from the wisdom of those who have gone before and truly defend your family against our adversary.

HYPOCRISY

Jennifer Combs | Wife of Pastor Josh Combs

There are many different ways that we can guard our family. We do not go certain places because we want to keep them safe. We may even carry a gun because we feel safer. We have our kids wear elbow and knee pads when skating, helmets when riding their bikes, and nets around trampolines are a must. However, this is not the type of guarding I am talking about. The type I am talking about is spiritual. One the biggest ways in ministry we see people undermine the spiritual safety of their family is in the area of hypocrisy.

Over and over we watch families implode because they are experts at putting on a good face. They come on Sundays, Wednesdays, and even lead ministries in the church. They know how to smile and pretend that life is great. When in reality, their life is falling apart. Their marriage is rocky, at best. Their kids are not obedient. They are on the brink of financial ruin, battling addictions, and the list can go on forever. Are you this person, sir? Ma'am? Are you a hypocrite in your family? If you are a hypocrite, your kids know it, your wife knows it, your husband knows it, your parents know it, and your friends know, too. Are you a different person at home than when you gather with the church?

Jesus warns us about hypocrisy over and over again in the New Testament. Ever heard of the Pharisees? The Pharisees looked and acted the part. They pretended. However, Jesus says they are like “white washed tombs” because the inside did not match the outside. One of the most poignant verses is in Matthew 23:13, where Jesus says to this group of pretenders, ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter***

WEEK 4

yourself nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single [convert], and when he becomes a [convert], you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.” So what does this verse mean? If you are a hypocrite, you get in the way of people around you being saved. You are a hindrance to the gospel going forth.

Hypocrites go to great lengths to maintain their image of perfection on the outside (verse 15). When you train another person to be this way, they are “*...twice as much a child of hell...*” as you are. That is terrifying! I do not know about you, but I do not want to be the cause of that for anyone in my life.

So, what do we do to not be a hypocrite in our family? Here are six ways to guard against hypocrisy.

1. Be real. Get in a Growth Community where you can share your hurts and struggles. We are meant to do this following Christ thing together.
2. Be real. My house is a disaster 90% of the time, but that is where I am at in life. However, I do not let that stop me from being hospitable and having people over. (And 50% of the time I'm in pajamas and haven't showered...ok...probably more than 80%, who am I kidding?)
3. Be real. Our lives are not Pinterest-perfect. Stop pretending that they are. Life is messy.
4. Be real. If you talk nicely to people when we gather as a church, then talk nice to your family all week long.

WEEK 4

5. Be real. Make your inside match the outside. Jesus said in Matthew 23:26, ***“You blind Pharisee! First, clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean.”***

6. Be real. Read God’s word and pray. The Holy Spirit will reveal to you whether you are a hypocrite and in what areas. Saturate your heart in God’s Word.

MORALITY

Pastor Josh Combs | Lead Pastor

Early in 2014, my family and I began a relatively simple home improvement project that quickly turned into a home remodel that then descended into an entire scene-by-scene replay of the movie *The Money Pit*. My wife recently made me watch that movie again. Honestly, it was not a comedy for me at all. It as a horror movie...a nightmare I have been living. When we started tearing up flooring, we found that over the nearly 150-year history of our house, eight layers of flooring had been put down on top of each other in the kitchen and dining room (tile, linoleum, wood, particle board, plywood, etc.). When we got through the drywall, we found plumbing problems, framing that was missing, HVAC and electrical issues, and beyond all that, a multi-generational, epic mouse infestation. When we bought the house, we knew we were in for some remodel work, but the outside and the surface of the home did not look too bad. Little did we know, there were some “lovely” surprises lurking just below the surface.

In 2nd Timothy chapter 3, the aged Apostle Paul is writing to his son in the faith. Timothy is a young Pastor in the city of Ephesus, and from the implications of the letter, is facing some pretty serious exterior opposition and some internal problems in the church. Paul warns this young Pastor, saying, “***...understand this that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God....***” (2nd Timothy 3:2-4). Some very serious warnings from

WEEK 4

the heart of Paul, but the next phrases are haunting. Paul says of these people (those who are fulfilling this prophecy of the last days and behaving in such sinful ways) that they will have “...***the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.***” The veneer looks godly, but the core is rotten.

The group of people that Jesus addressed most pointedly and preached against most often was the Pharisees. However, many of the men who were part of this group were the most morally upstanding citizens of Israel, yet they were spiritually lost.

There are many things that we as leaders and members of our family must protect against. One of the most deceptive and appealing schemes of the devil is morality. Now initially you may disagree with that, but realize that moral people without Jesus Christ are still lost and avowed enemies of God. Theodore Roosevelt said, “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” However, I would humbly add, that to just educate and create a moral society promotes simply, as Paul writes, “...***the appearance of godliness.***” Many times as parents, we strive to have children who are moral and at the core our motives are not wrong, just misguided. We do not want our children to do drugs, have sex, drink, hang with the wrong crowd, and so forth. What we end up working towards is a moral exterior (“appearance of godliness”), but we innately deny the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our goal as parents, leaders, and influencers in our family should not be simply to develop moral children, nephews, and nieces. Our goal must be to demonstrate in our own life the inside-out transforming power of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God changes us, beginning with our motives, thoughts, and desires. Then and only then, will our behavior truly change and be governed by the

WEEK 4

gospel. When we have rules or have to give correction, we must have both of our feet firmly planted on the authority of the Word of God. When we pray for our family, let's pray not simply for good behavior, but for salvation and a transformation that only the Holy Spirit brings.

TECHNOLOGY

Jennifer Combs | Wife of Pastor Josh Combs

How many hours a day do you spend plugged in? If you are anything like me, it is more than you care to count. Whether it is for work, school, boredom, or you are just checking in with the world. Our lives revolve around it. Paying bills? Online. Looking for a vacation? Online. School? Online. Meetings? Online. Shopping? Online. News? Online. Bible? Online. Selling your house? Online. Look for a spouse? Online. Find a doctor? Online. Games? Online. TV? Online. Movies? Online. Pictures? Online. Music? Online. My list could go on for a mile. I think you catch my drift.

One of the things I try and guard my family against is the amount of time we spend plugged in. I actually have a “no technology allowed at the table” rule, (and my kids don’t even have phones or iPods) so really it is just for my husband and me. It is so easy to be distracted by what is happening in the world. When really I should be so engrossed in what is happening at my dinner table that the thought of things happening outside of my dinner table should not even be a blip on my radar. My daughter is 11, realistically how many more dinners are we going to have together? They are dwindling before my eyes. So I care more about what’s happening on Facebook, Yahoo, CNN, or Sports Center? How embarrassing. I think we collectively need to get our faces out of screens and participate in the lives going on around us. James 4:14 says, ***Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*** What are you doing with your “little time?” Checking your messages, texting, staring at a screen that will never give back the amount of attention and time you gave it? You

WEEK 4

have a family sitting around you dying for ¼ of the attention you are giving that screen.

Remember two things...

#1. I say this in love. I care about your families and don't want to see them destroyed by this distraction.

#2. I've already said all of these things to myself. The Holy Spirit convicts me just like He does you. So do not think I have it all together. Just ask my children; they will tell you the honest truth.

Now the other subject I want to broach, what is on your screen? One thing Josh and I have been very guarded on is what we let our kids see. We do not have TV or the internet in our house. Now we have TV's, but we watch movies on them. We feel that we can better control what they see with movies because we already know what is on them. Compared to television not knowing what new episodes are going to say or show them. The commercials in between are not better. I do not want my son or my husband being subject to the trash that comes on these days. Once certain images go into their brains, it takes an act of God to remove them. This is a major sacrifice for both of us. I mean my husband is a Godly man, but he is still a human man who likes his sports and news. Growing up, my dad was a TV repairman. I think at one point in our home we had 11 televisions! So it is not like we are super spiritual or anything, but like I said we are very guarded on what their eyes see. For years, I did not take my kids to the grocery store (even still it is a rare occurrence) because of all of the inappropriately clothed women on the magazines at the checkout aisle. We had to train our kids to guard their eyes. There are certain things the world says is okay to look at, that the Word of God strongly disagrees with. It was not worth sacrificing their young hearts and minds to those images. On your devices at home, what is on them? Your kids know. They know what is on

WEEK 4

your phone, what type of TV shows you watch or movies you bring into your house. Are you helping guard your eyes and theirs? Proverbs 6:27 says, ***Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Don't think you can consume your life and your family in technology and not get burned?***

If you have any questions about this or ideas of how to implement some safeguards in your home, please ask! Remember we love and care about your family and only want you to succeed in this crazy task of raising a Godly family.

UNBIBLICAL PRIORITIES

Pastor Josh Combs | Lead Pastor

For nearly ten years, Jennifer and I were heavily involved in children’s ministry. We look back on those years with a great deal of affection and gratitude. Whether sharing camp stories, VBS memories, or amazing spiritual growth in the lives of those amazing kids, we are beyond thankful for those years. However, I would be deceiving you if I pretended that those years only held perfect memories. We are, without being too dramatic, haunted by some of the faces of those kids. We think back to foster kids we saw for only a short time. We wonder and talk about them from time to time. We also pray for them, never knowing what life brought to them. We think about the kids who moved away because of divorce or a job change. We think about kids who have passed away. We think about others who took their own lives. We are reminded of their smiles and their energy. We hear their laughter and remember their little voices. There are truly some great moments and others we just can’t get out of our heads.

There is no way in 500 or 600 words that I could dissect, or attempt to explain everything that happened in each of those situations. It is simply impossible. However, I will give you the most common mistake that we witnessed in families. We saw it in poor families and rich families. We saw it in “church” families and those who were first generation Christians. We saw it in families of different races and every different background. The issue was simply having unbiblical priorities.

I saw families completely abandon raising their children “***...up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord...***” for travel sports, vacations, money, education, work, dance, and a myriad of

WEEK 4

other eternally meaningless pursuits. Before we continue, please know those activities and pursuits are not, in and of themselves, sinful. However, when they become GOD of the home, checkbook, and schedule, something is fundamentally wrong. Moreover, this principle is true of families with grown children or now children. I have seen first-hand the destruction of families who crown another god in their home other than the GOD of the Bible (See Exodus 20:3).

Jesus said, “***...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you***” (Matthew 6:33). Jesus is teaching on the fact that we become anxious about what we will eat or wear. I have heard so many families worry and become so anxious about careers, houses, money, cars, vacations, college, and so on. Jesus clearly teaches in verse 32, that our “***...heavenly Father knows that you need them all.***” God knows what we need. Our homes need to be filled with a great trust of God and a great pursuit of HIS righteousness and HIS will. When we align our lives and our homes with the will of God and the desires of God, we will find that our desires and pursuits fundamentally change and begin to align with the joys, desires, and will of our Heavenly Father.

Here are a few questions to ask:

1. What's the most important object your family owns?
2. What's the most important pursuit that your family has?
3. What does your family spend the most money on?
4. Are your priorities in line with God's Word?

HAVE A PLAN

Pastor Josh Combs | Lead Pastor

We have plans for just about everything: Retirement plans...financial plans...house plans...schedules...vacation plans...educational plans...healthcare plans...insurance plans...birth plans...wills and trusts...landscape plans...fire escape plans...disaster plans...and the list, as you can see, goes on and on.

What about a parenting plan?

I remember hearing some incredibly profound advice before Jennifer and I had kids. I do not remember the context or the teacher, but he referenced children and Genesis 2:24. The Scripture says, “**...a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**” I vividly remember the speaker saying, “The moment your child is born, the leaving begins.” I have no idea what he said before that or after, but I sat stunned. I was sad, scared, and shocked by this profound truth so clearly shown in the Scripture. Whether you have just had your first child or your first great-grandchild... whether you’ve become an aunt or uncle for the first time or the 40th time, you and I realize the brevity of life. The pace at which time goes by is staggering. Nowhere is that more clearly displayed than in the lives of the next generation. So, what’s the plan?

Let’s be rather simple for a moment. The moment your child, grandchild, niece, or nephew is born, the leaving begins. Not only does the leaving begin, but also some certain events and rites of passage are coming, whether you like it or not. Crawling, walking, talking, running, pre-school, school, puberty, dating, broken-hearts, questions about where babies come from and how they are

WEEK 4

made, college or career, homecoming, prom, sports, peer pressure, and millions of others things, some of which will be specific to your child and your situation. Don't be surprised that these things are coming. We know it. So again, what is your plan?

My wife and I are constantly amazed at the fundamental lack of planning and communication that families, particularly parents, have when it comes to these normal and expected markers in life. There are no perfect parents, so please don't think that we are putting ourselves on any sort of pedestal. But before our children were born, we had a plan. We talked openly about discipline, education, names, and how we would handle the question "where do babies come from?" I'll never forget when my wife told me about when our 4 and 5-year-old daughters asked how babies got out of Mommy's belly. Even funnier, I'll never forget the look on their faces when they got the answer. I am not saying that our philosophy and plan needs to be yours exactly, but do you have a plan? Have you talked about what you are going to do for school, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend issues, the sex talk, puberty, and entertainment choices?

Our advice to you: start talking and praying together as you develop a parenting plan rooted firmly in God's Word.

Here are some things that my wife and I committed to before the kids were born:

1. We will not lie to our kids

Whether they ask us about Santa, sex, or world news, we do not lie. We recognize that some language and topics are beyond a certain understanding, so we answer age appropriately and follow up as they mature. See James 5:12.

WEEK 4

2. No promises...Lord willing

We do not promise or pinky-swear. We use the phrase “Lord willing.” Not because we are super spiritual, but because we want to demonstrate daily to our children that our plans are always in submission to God’s plan. If He wants to change plans, we are good with that. See James 4:13-17.

3. We fight the division that our kids naturally want to create in our marriage

Children are brilliant manipulators. They love to play one parent against another. If they see even a slight hint of division, they will exploit it. See Genesis 3:24, Matthew 19:5, and Ephesians 5:31.

4. How to handle conflict within a family of seven

I hate tattling (unless there is an injury). Ironically, so does God. Essentially, tattling is gossip. We will not let our kid’s gossip to us about another one of our children. So we have taught them the principles of Matthew 18. See Matthew 18:15-16.

5. Empty nest is coming

One day our children will move out and move on with their lives. We know this. Some days this reality makes us cry, other days we dance when we think about it. Either way, it is coming, and Jennifer and I cannot neglect our relationship until then. So we take a week to ten days near the beginning of each year, to get away together...just the two of us. WE LOVE THIS TIME. I jokingly will say that it reminds us each year that we really do like each other. Throughout the year, we try to make date nights very important. We do not want to wake up one day and not know each other or care for each other. A good marriage is a daily, living display of the gospel. See Ephesians 5:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:2-5.

Start creating your “parenting plan” today.

DELIGHTING IN THE FAMILY

Pastor Jayson Combs | Family Pastor

I am currently reading “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” to my son. We just read about Edmund’s encounter with the great White Witch. The Witch offers Edmund Turkish delight, a dessert based on a gel of starch, sugar, and a little magic, to lure him in under her command. Immediately, the Turkish delight sets the hook and begins a wild ride of difficult events for Edmund and his siblings.

Titus 3:8: *The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

What are things in which you delight? _____

The dictionary defines delight as “a high degree of pleasure or enjoyment.” The Bible says that we have to be careful how we devote ourselves. What we delight in will have a tremendous impact on where our family goes and what they believe.

WEEK 5

Genesis 19:1-26: *The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth ² and said, “My lords, please turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night in the town square.” ³ But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.*

⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. ⁵ And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” ⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, ⁷ and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸ Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” ⁹ But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. ¹⁰ But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. ¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

¹² Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the

WEEK 5

city, bring them out of the place. 13 For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.” 14 So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

15 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.” 16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 17 And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.” 18 And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords. 19 Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. 20 Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!” 21 He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. 22 Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of

WEEK 5

the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

In what city does Lot have his family? _____

What do we know about this city from these verses? _____

What do the angles/men tell Lot in verse 13? _____

2 Thessalonians 2:12: and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Why must God's love and God's justice go hand in hand?

Genesis 19:15-16: As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.' 16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.

What do the men/angels tell Lot to do? _____

WEEK 5

Does Lot listen? _____

What do the men/angels do because of Lot's action?

Why do the angels do this? _____

Genesis 19:17-19, and 26: ***And as they brought them out, one said, 'Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.'*** 18 ***And Lot said to them, 'Oh, no, my lords. 19 Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.'*** 26 ***But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.***

What do the men/angels tell Lot to do after they exited the city?

How does Lot respond? _____

Why do you think Lot's wife turned back? _____

WEEK 5

Why do you think Lot and his family were so uncommitted to following what the angels said? _____

Hebrews 11:8: ***By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.***

How did Lot's brother (Abraham) respond to the Lord in Hebrews 11:8? _____

How was the response so different? _____

After the angels/men save Lot and his family, he still doesn't follow their instruction. I found this rather annoying, and then I started to think about myself. God, through Jesus, saved my life just like He saved Lot's life, yet sometimes I don't commit myself to the things that God says. Instead of delighting in His ways and trusting Him, I delight in the ways of the world.

What do you think it means to delight in the world? _____

Is this a good or bad thing? _____

WEEK 5

Does your family ever see you delighting in the world?

Psalms 37:4: *Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Psalms 37:23: *The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way.*

Does your family ever see you delighting in the Lord? _____

What do those things look like? _____

So often, I see Christians who only delight in the world, and unfortunately, this is what their families witness. I watch parents make things such as sports, work, grades, and appearances the only thing they delight in as a family. They spend their money, time, and effort in these delights and then wonder why their family is always looking back to the world. It is so important for Christians to delight in the Lord and the direction He has for us. This is how we will truly delight the family.

DELIGHTING IN MARRIAGE

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

Do you know what a “three dog night” is? No, I am not talking about a rock band. I am talking about the phrase that existed before the rock band. “Three dog night” is a sledding or Eskimo term. It was a temperature gauge. On a cold night, it was common for a dog to lie close to his master for mutual heat. However, in extreme weather, the master would have a dog on either side of him and one on top of him so he literally wouldn’t freeze to death.

Personally, I prefer Ecclesiastes 4:9-11: ***Two are better than one, ... if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?***

Next week my wife, Angela, and I will celebrate being married 33 years. I better be careful on comparing a “three dog night” and my wife or I might end up in the doghouse. Seriously though, we are told in Genesis that God had created all the animals and “it was good.” But it wasn’t good enough for man.

Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’ (Genesis 2:18). There wasn’t the right match for him until God created woman. It reminds me of reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears with great emotion saying, “Just right.” Man and woman together is a match made in Heaven.

Having an adult daughter, I am constantly telling her how proud I am of her for not settling. I want her to marry a growing Christian. I agree with James Dobson, “Don’t marry the person you think you can live with; marry only the individual you think you can’t

WEEK 5

live without.” Marriage is a lifetime commitment – which God instituted and blesses. Proverbs 18:22 says, ***He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.***

We need to delight in marriage. We need to regain the excitement of our youth. We need to give our wives affection, conversation, honesty, and openness. Normally, when a man is doing these, his needs are automatically and naturally met.

I like the advice of Martin Luther: “Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave.”

DELIGHTING WITH CHILDREN

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3 ESV). Children are a heritage from the Lord – even a reward. The Message Bible (which is a paraphrase) says, “Don’t you see that children are God’s best gift? The fruit of the womb his generous legacy?” Basically, children are a gift from God. Pastor Josh and his wife, Jennifer, wrote last week about protecting these that have been placed in our care. I want to remember the blessing they bring to a family.

First of all, how in the world can there be any atheists in a delivery room? I was giddy with excitement. We had our video camera (the size of a boom box) capturing every moment – and of course, the miracle! First, we had a son and within minutes, I was holding him. Instant pride set in – a healthy, thank you God, kind of pride. He became my shadow. He is my mini me.

Then, three and a half years later, we had our daughter. My immediate goal was to protect her forever. I had been praying for a strong-willed girl, so the world, and especially men, wouldn’t run over her. Be careful what you ask for. No, seriously, watching her find herself and step out into the world with confidence and courage is very humbling.

1 Samuel 1:10-11 has Hannah praying: ***She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life,***

WEEK 5

and no razor shall touch his head.' She knew the blessing that comes with children and wanted to delight in a child. After Samuel, we read that God blessed Hannah with three more sons and two daughters.

I like being a dad. I like going through life with my children looking for teachable moments. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 says, ***Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.***

These verses inform us of the responsibility we have in raising our children to love the Lord. It also implies that this is done through living life together. Delight in your children. There are different stages and personalities that can push our buttons, but beneath it all is a gift from God that wants to be loved.

DELIGHTING WITH GRANDPARENTS

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

“**T**o forget one’s ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without a root” (Chinese proverb). I believe part of the downfall in American culture is the mobility of the family. On the average, families move about every four years. This leaves grandparents behind. It also limits their influence of wisdom, love, and bluntness. My grandparents were allowed to say things that no one else could get away with.

I lived across the street from my maternal grandmother until I was 22 (my grandfather had died when I was four). Grandma was always there. She always was watching me and letting me know she was praying for me. She was very clear about whom I shouldn’t date and whom I should marry. I listened. Whenever I had a friend over, she witnessed. At times I was embarrassed of the situation, but always proud of her. I miss her.

Timothy had the same kind of spiritual heritage: ***I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.*** (2 Timothy 1:5). We need godly grandparents, and we need to delight in them.

My other set of grandparents only lived about two miles away. I would see them a couple of times a week, but they were homebodies and chose not to really get involved in our daily lives. To an extent, we lost out. However, my grandmother’s philosophy was, “If mother says no, ask grandmother.” We never left her house without feeling loved and with something (apple, cookie, etc.) in our hands. It reminds me of the Italian parable, “If nothing is going well, call your grandmother.”

WEEK 5

Comedian George Lopez gets serious when he says, “I had a very difficult childhood. I was surrounded by people who had both parents, which made me feel different. Having a bit of a rougher existence early on, it made me appreciate the work ethic that my grandparents instilled in me.” Have you taken the time to see the good in your grandparents?

The Book of Ruth details an accurate account of a struggling family. Due to a famine, Naomi leaves homeland with her husband and two sons. The boys marry foreigners. Her husband and sons die. It is devastating. One daughter-in-law goes back home while the other chooses to stay with her and move. Naomi changes her name to Mara (which means bitter). I can understand her being bitter. Her daughter-in-law remarries and gives birth to a son. When Obed was born, she regained her glow. They again called her Naomi.

Grandparents helped create our foundation. We need to delight in them.

Billy Graham said, “The greatest legacy one can pass on to one’s children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one’s life, but rather a legacy of character and faith.”

Take time today to delight in your grandparents. Feel free to cry, laugh, call, visit, forgive, thank, or write them today.

DELIGHTING WITH PARENTS

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

I was raised in a Christian home. My parents lived what they believed. The concept of a loving Heavenly Father is not hard for me to grasp as I still have a loving earthly father. I am blessed and without excuse. My mom passed away 16 years ago, but dad and I talk every day. When I find a penny on the ground, I call my dad. When I break 80 (or even 90) in golf, I call my dad. When over 10 people came forward in Holly for salvation, I called my dad. When seven people were baptized in Goodrich, I called my dad. I delight in my dad every day.

Jerry Falwell said it well, “When you have a godly husband, a godly wife, children who respect their parents and who are loved by their parents, who provide for those children their physical and spiritual and material needs, lovingly, you have the ideal unit.”

Not everyone has my story. The Book of Esther focuses around a girl who has been taken from her hometown, parents, family, and friends. She only has one key relative in her life, Mordecai. Mordecai becomes her father figure. He believes in her and encourages her to try to become Queen. Later, he warns her of danger. He is watching out for her. Finally, he challenges her to do the right thing. Mordecai loved her like a daughter. He believed in her, encouraged her, watched out for her, and even challenged her. He even showed tough love. Do you have a parent figure you can delight in?

Finally, God offers us adoption. He wants to adopt us. Romans 8:15 says, ***“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”*** Galatians 4:4-5 adds,

WEEK 5

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

No matter what your journey has been, you can have God as your Father. Romans 10:9 says, ***Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*** John 1:12 makes it clear, ***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.***

Delight in your parents. Send a text, flowers, a card, or visit them. Reminder: God chose our parents for us.

Also, delight in your Heavenly Father. Live for Him and like Him. It is common for a child to imitate their parent.

DELIGHTING WITH SIBLINGS

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

At an early age, I realized that it is not wise to break up a fight between brothers. They will both turn on you. Remember: Blood is thicker than water. The Kardashians seem to be in the news regularly. Their name might even create some emotions in us. However, they seem to know how to appreciate and delight in their siblings. Kim said, “Having lots of siblings is like having built-in best friends.”

One of the most famous Bible stories involves David and Goliath. Everyone quickly gets to the punch line of the underdog conquering the overwhelming favorite. However, there are some interesting details within the story.

First, why was David, a shepherd, at the battle site? 1 Samuel 17:17-18, ***And Jesse said to David his son, ‘Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them.’*** David was helping take care of his brothers.

Second, why did David take five stones? Did he not trust God with just one? 2 Samuel 21:18-22 lets us know that Goliath had four brothers. Possibly, David considered the bond between siblings and thought he ought to take a stone for each of them, just in case. Genesis 34 records the time Dina was violated and her brothers came out and took matters into their own hands.

We need to take time to delight in siblings. I remember when I was in 5th grade and my little sister was in 1st grade. I was told

WEEK 5

a 6th grade boy pushed her down. Now, I must confess I teased her regularly and I am sure had pushed her down before, but no one else was allowed to. I challenged the boy. As I went to push the boy, I accidentally stepped on his foot and he fell hitting his head. I became legendary. I beat up a 6th grader with one punch.

Hopefully, you take time to reach out to your sibling(s). No matter how distant we might appear, we have each other's backs. It is a sibling thing.

Proverbs 18:24 is quite radical in saying, ***A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*** That Friend is Jesus. He is always with us. Hopefully, you personally know this Friend because now you have brothers and sisters.

Go to a church gathering this weekend and hangout with your brothers and sisters.

DELIGHTING WITH IN-LAWS

Dr. Randy Johnson | Growth Pastor

Delighting with in-laws? Or is it outlaws? Maybe you think it should be delighting in spite of in-laws? Mark Twain has fun with the topic: “Adam was the luckiest man in the world. He had no mother-in-law.” Even Hubert H. Humphrey jokes, “Behind every successful man is a proud wife and a surprised mother-in-law.”

In-laws are important. I have spent a lot of time reminding my children that you marry a family, not a person. This can be an amazing blessing. Angela and I are blessed. Our in-laws would be our friends even if they weren’t our relatives.

There is a Jewish proverb that says, “One of life’s greatest mysteries is how the boy who wasn’t good enough to marry your daughter can be the father of the smartest grandchild in the world.”

Maybe we need to stop for a moment and realize that God crossed our paths for a reason. We can learn from each other and get insight into taking on life’s challenges.

Earlier this week, I shared the story of Naomi from the Book of Ruth. Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law and became greatly blessed because of it.

Matthew 8 tells how Peter asked Jesus to come and heal his mother-in-law. Don’t let your mind wonder, she actually had a fever and was sick. She was important to Peter.

WEEK 5

Another Bible story about in-laws occurs in Exodus 18. Verse 17 says, ***Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.*** It appears they have mutual respect and interest for each other. The next day, Moses goes back to his regular routine of being the counselor and judge for everyone. It consumes him from sunrise to sunset six days a week. Verse 17 is right to the point, ***Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good.'*** Because they had a healthy relationship Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, could challenge him. Moses learns the art of empowering others and delegation. Israel is stronger and Moses avoided burnout.

Let's be radical Christians, delight in our in-laws. Maybe, we could even brag about them?

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “we don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having “all things in common.” They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd. Holly, MI 48442
theriverchurch.cc • info@theriverchurch.cc