

# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Looking Back on Things That Matter

Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25; Matthew 15:1–5; Mark 6:31



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

The cultural ground upon which the “traditional” family stands has become soft and uncertain, especially since the countercultural quake of the 1960s. Regardless of the shifting sands of time and societal mores, God’s original design for the family begins with establishing a stable foundation with the marriage of two individuals—male and female. Once the foundation of the marriage is firmly laid, six pillars should be built, which will give any family resilience to withstand the erosion caused by the influence of culture.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. A Few Words of Clarification (Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25)

God created humankind in His image to accomplish three purposes. Humanity is to rule over the earth and everything in it (Genesis 1:26, 28), to produce families (1:28), and to spread out over the earth (1:28). To achieve these goals, God divided humankind into two distinct genders—male and female (1:27).

When God looked back on all that He had created, He pronounced it “very good” (1:31), meaning that every tree, every bird, every fish, every flower, every insect, and every mammal functioned according to its design and purpose. But God said that it was “not good” for Adam to be alone (2:18). By himself, Adam could not fulfill the purposes for which he was designed—to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (1:28). So God caused a deep sleep to come over Adam, and the Lord removed one of Adam’s ribs. From Adam’s rib, God “fashioned” together a woman—Eve—and presented her to Adam (2:21–22). English translations of the original Hebrew miss the great exclamation in Adam’s response the first time he laid eyes on Eve. The Hebrew emphasizes the word *now*. We could translate Genesis 2:23 as, “Now at last! She is the one I’ve needed. This woman, who was built from my bone and has my flesh, is the answer to my aloneness.”

God loves creativity and uniqueness. If God had wanted all humankind to be identical, He would have created us all males or all females. But He didn’t. However, postmodern culture, especially after the 1960s, has turned society in the opposite direction. Confusion reigns, and now same-sex couples can legally marry. This, of course, is contrary to the plan and purposes of God, for homosexual couples cannot fulfill the commands of God as exemplified in Genesis 1:26–28.



### Quotable

*Paying attention  
to the needs  
of others pays off.  
We are happiest  
when we give our  
lives away.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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MM01

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### 2. In Light of This . . . What Really Matters? (Matthew 15:1–5; Mark 6:31)

An old maxim says that children spell the word *love* as T-I-M-E. But when we become consumed by chasing rabbits down holes, small bits of time are forever lost. With each bit of lost time comes a lost opportunity to accomplish those things that are most important. To build a strong family, there is no time to lose in constructing six pillars vital to a family's life.

The first pillar that really matters is *principles*: “*Biblical principles are more important than traditional opinions.*” Marital and family traditions can enrich relationships through the creation of memories. But tradition divorced from purpose and meaning becomes traditionalism and can prevent a marriage or family from growing.

The second pillar that really matters is *relationships*: “*Mutual relationships are more valuable than individual accomplishments.*” It is exciting to succeed in business, in politics, or in our professions. But no fulfillment or joy can match that of having a successful marriage or rearing a child, whether it's one child or a houseful of them. Why, then, do we live as if family is an impediment to success, as if family is secondary to “more important matters”? When Jesus pulled aside the disciples in Mark 6:31, He did so to give them a little rest and to enjoy fellowship with one another, not to send them out to accomplish something great. He had already sent them out and they had already accomplished much (Mark 6:7–13, 30), but now they needed rest and a chance to renew their relationships with each other and with Jesus.

The third pillar that really matters is *priorities*: “*Domestic priorities rate higher than church programs.*” Sometimes it's easy to get so busy doing things for the Lord—going to church, teaching a class, supporting a missionary or ministry—that we forget to do the best thing for the Lord: to care for those whom God has placed in our immediate families (1 Timothy 3:2, 4–5).

The fourth pillar that really matters is *acceptance*: “*Positive reinforcement is better than negative reactions.*” An old saying advises that a person can catch more flies with a drop of honey than with volumes of vinegar. Do our attitudes attract or repel our children?

The fifth pillar that really matters is *forgiveness*: “*Unconditional forgiveness is much preferred to lingering probation.*” Is anything greater than forgiveness? If we answer “love,” we really haven't answered the question because forgiveness is an act of love. And like love, forgiveness is not a cheap commodity, but the treasures we can buy with it are priceless.

The sixth pillar that really matters is *respect*: “*Mutual respect is a greater concern than chain of command.*” Contrary to what many parents think, a sermon a day will not keep rebellion away. Every parent and spouse wants respect, but children and spouses do not respect us because we preach at them. If we want respect, we must show respect and be persons worthy of respect (3:2). When our spouses or children speak, we must give them our undivided attention. When they disagree with us, we must listen carefully to their opinions, always letting them express their feelings.



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## Looking Back on Things That Matter

*Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25; Matthew 15:1–5; Mark 6:31*



### DIGGING DEEPER

#### *What Is a Christian Family?*

The traditional family is under assault these days. If we watch any given prime-time television program about the family, we'll soon discover that fathers are presented as idiotic, mothers as overbearing, and children as wise beyond their years. That's assuming we can find a program portraying a "traditional" family with a husband and a wife.

To say "traditional" families are under attack, however, is to acknowledge that our definition of the family is more culturally informed than biblically informed. Our Western, modern-day model of the family, where a husband and wife live together and rear two or three children, is not the model we see in the Bible, where husbands were often married to multiple wives, had relationships with concubines, and produced a prodigious number of children. Defining family, therefore, especially a "biblical" or "Christian" family is no easy task.

What we can definitively say is this: God is the originator of the family and continues to hold the patent. The ideal, established at the beginning of humanity, is for one man and one woman to join in a spiritually and physically committed union for a lifetime, conceiving and rearing children (Genesis 1:27–28; 2:18, 21–25). Clearly, this model wasn't followed consistently throughout the Scriptures and is not followed today, where single parents, married couples without children, grandparents rearing their grandchildren, and empty-nesters—just to mention a few—make up a considerable percentage of "Christian" families. We would be hard-pressed not to label these relationships "families," even though they don't meet the ideal set forth in Genesis. Furthermore, the Lord continues to bless these types of families.

So where does this leave us in trying to define family from a Christian perspective? We can say this: "A Christian family is a group of people who are related to each other through marriage, birth, or adoption and are committed, first and foremost, to the person and work of Jesus Christ, faithfully witnessing to the love, power, and forgiveness of God to a watching world in its unique time and place."



### LET'S LIVE IT

It would be wise for every family to apply three practical suggestions. First, every family must keep in mind the "big picture." Second, every family must make Christianity easy to live with. And third, every family must work on changing itself, not other families.

**Go back through this message mate and consider the six pillars that really matter. Which ones have you mastered? What is one practical thing you can do today to begin to master one or more of the six pillars?**



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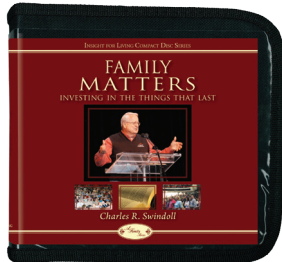
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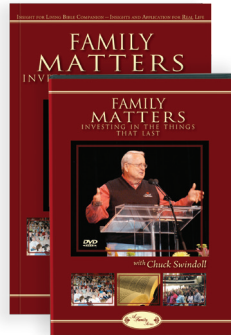
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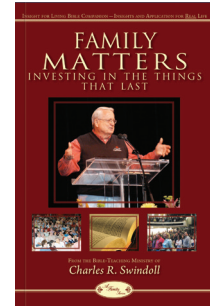
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MM01

# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

Untying the Knots in Your Family's Air Hose  
*Deuteronomy 6:1–14*



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

"If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times!" How many times did we hear that growing up? How often have we said that—or something like it—to our own children? It's funny, but no matter how bright we were as children or how intelligent we are as adults, it often takes a "thousand" reminders before the truth sinks in. That's one reason God placed us within families—to prepare us for the world, even if it takes hearing the truth "a thousand times." And few methods are better suited to unclogging our ears than an honest evaluation of ourselves and our families.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Let's Take a Family-Life Quiz

It's easy to become consumed with the petty distractions of life that direct our focus inward rather than outward, threatening to destroy our families. We need an opportunity to reevaluate just how well our families are doing. Here are some topics and questions to help.

*Flexibility and freedom.* Do openness, vulnerability, and a willingness to be flexible exist within your family? Does an atmosphere of freedom exist where new thoughts and ideas are encouraged and discussed, even if they tend toward the unusual or strange?

*Affirmation and appreciation.* How positive is your family's outlook on life? How valued does each member of the family feel? Are there put-downs, cutting sarcastic remarks, or ugly name calling? Or is your home filled with "thank yous" and "pleases" and "I love yous"?

*Maturity and stability.* When family emergencies arise, do you solve them together? Are you even-keeled, or do you fly off the handle? Are you a firmly planted tree that your family can find shelter in when storms rage, or are you a sapling easily bent and broken?

*Integrity and character.* How highly do you value truth-telling, ethical standards, hard work, keeping your word, and honoring your commitments? Is your word your bond? Can your family and others "take it to the bank" just because you said so?



## Quotable

*Is your family  
supportive?*

*Do you give  
hugs, kisses,  
and words of  
encouragement?*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Untying the Knots in Your Family's Air Hose

### Deuteronomy 6:1–14

*Love and commitment.* How loyal is your family? Do you stand up when a family member is criticized, sick, or hurt? Do you show support by attending each other's band concerts, plays, and games? Do you touch each other with hugs and kisses and speak words of encouragement?

*Yearly activities and traditions.* Do you have certain holiday traditions that enrich your family life? Do you celebrate birthdays or anniversaries every year? What milestones do you and your family mark year in and year out?

*Leadership.* How fair and consistent is the leadership in your home? Do you work with your spouse, or do your parents work together to ensure that strong but just discipline occurs? Do you take responsibility for what takes place within the family?

*Interest in spiritual things.* Does your family express authentic devotion to Christ? Does your family seek to glorify God? Is God's Word honored? Is prayer an important part of your family's life? Is corporate worship a regular part of your family's life?

*Fun, leisure, and relaxation.* Do you have fun together? Will the walls of your home echo with the memories of laughter? Do your children and their friends like to spend significant time in your home? Or is your home a place of legalism, demands, and unrealistic expectations?

*Expressiveness and openness in communication.* Do you talk openly, or do you have to guard and measure your words? Is there transparency and freedom in conversation? Do you really listen when others are talking? Do you work out disagreements with civility and love?

## 2. Let's Seek God's Truth for Some Answers (Deuteronomy 6:4–13)

Moses emphasized four eternal truths that remain just as applicable for our families today as they were for the ancient Israelite families that stood before him on that day.

The first eternal truth is meant to arrest our attention: *hear the truth continually*. In Deuteronomy 6:4–5, as the Israelites prepared to enter the idol-ridden Promised Land, Moses called the Israelites to hear and believe that Yahweh is Elohim, the only LORD, the great "I AM" of the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). And the Israelites were, uniquely, His chosen ones. We need the same reminder today because we live in a culture of pseudo-gods which constantly woo us and our families into the idolatry of fat bank accounts and flat abs.

The second eternal truth in Deuteronomy 6:5–6 is meant to capture our affections: *love the Lord fervently*. We belong to God, the Master of all that is visible and invisible, and we owe Him our complete devotion and worship. The temptation of familiarity and indifference is a struggle for many who grew up in Christian homes or who are rearing their children in Christian homes.





# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Untying the Knots in Your Family's Air Hose

### Deuteronomy 6:1–14

The third eternal truth is meant to direct our responsibility: *teach the young diligently*. Truth must first reside in our hearts and minds before we can teach truth to our children. So there is an assumption, even on the part of Moses in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, that we will obey God and learn to love Him passionately before we attempt to pass these truths on to the next generation.

The fourth eternal truth is meant to focus our reverence: *fear the Lord greatly*. Standing on the precipice of great blessing, Moses delivered a stern warning: “watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you . . . out of . . . slavery. You shall fear only the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 6:12–13). The Israelites were about to occupy fertile lands they had not worked and luxurious homes they had not built (6:10–11). When we are given much, without working for the good we enjoy, we must be wary. The subtle sins of indulgence, indifference, and independence from God are crouching at our doors. The only defense against these sins is reverence for the Lord.



### LET'S LIVE IT

No responsibility is weightier for parents or grandparents than teaching our young ones the truths of God's Word. As Moses made clear, teaching children is not a once-for-all-time event; rather, it is a process spanning a lifetime. Obviously, children should know as many biblical lessons as possible, but the foundational truths of the Bible are really quite few. Here are three.

First, *the fear of God will restrain your family from presumption and pride — cultivate it*. Because too little is understood or appreciated, too little is said in Christian homes about this significant truth. Let's change that in our families, and let's begin today.

Second, *the worship of God will equip your family with strength and stability — participate in it*. Some parents have come to the conclusion that they don't want to “impose” their religious beliefs on their children, so they don't teach their children the Bible or take them to church. These parents want to allow their children to decide for themselves whether or not they want to bother with all this God stuff.

Third, *the name of God will give your family identity and security — repeat it*. In a culture surrounded by the false gods of beauty, wealth, and power, do our families stand out as worshipers of Yahweh Elohim?

What do you think it means that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7)? What does fearing the LORD look like in your marriage or family life? Read Deuteronomy 6:7 and then read Ephesians 6:4. Are these suggestions or commands? How can you apply these passages in your marriage or family life?



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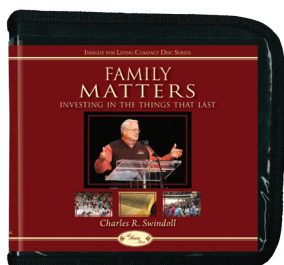
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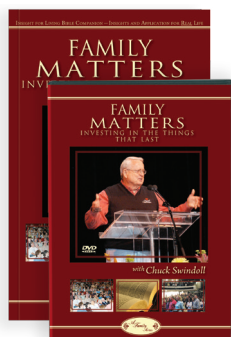
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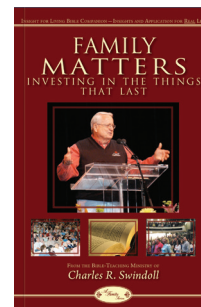
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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

Surviving Those Challenging Years  
Proverbs 1:8–11, 15; 9:10–11; 12:1; 24:3–4



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

It doesn't take long for parents of teenagers to trip over a difficult truth every parent of teens must learn to accept: teens believe that parents are about as smart as sea urchins. A direct correlation exists between the age of a child and his or her perception of a parent's intelligence. On average, children aged 0 to 12 believe their parents possess an IQ greater than Albert Einstein. Children aged 13 to 19 think their parents are semi-moronic. And as children aged 20 and upward get older, they gradually observe a remarkable increase in their parents' intelligence.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Overall Guidelines for Parents to Remember (Proverbs 24:3–4)

Three critical family building blocks are found in these two verses of Scripture: *wisdom*, *understanding*, and *knowledge*. Combined with the right mortar mixture of love, discipline, and consistency, these three blocks can build or rebuild a strong family.

Solomon instructed that *wisdom builds a home* (Proverbs 24:3). Wisdom, or the ability to see with discernment, is the only way to build a home. Keeping things in proper perspective, wisdom looks beyond today and peers into tomorrow, taking into account future ramifications from present actions. Like X-ray vision, wisdom looks beyond the obvious and sees what others miss.

Wisdom builds a home, but Solomon also instructed that *understanding establishes a home* (24:3). Understanding is the ability to respond to people and situations with insight, to hear what is really being said—not just the words but the intention behind the words. When we heed Solomon's wise words, stability, order, and security are created in the home.

Finally, Solomon instructed that *knowledge furnishes a home* (24:4). Knowledge is the ability to lead with perception or with the ability to grasp the “big picture.” A knowledgeable person is a teachable person—one who is willing to listen and learn and who has a desire to discover truth. For those who seek and find truth, Scripture promises that “the rooms [of a home will be] filled / With all precious and pleasant riches” (24:4). With knowledge, a home will overflow with an abundance of priceless treasures—love, peace, harmony, joy, laughter, precious memories, and rock-solid character, which cannot be destroyed by fire or stolen by burglars.



## Quotable

*Want to  
motivate your  
kids? Cultivate  
good relationships,  
pleasant memories,  
and mutual respect.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Surviving Those Challenging Years *Proverbs 1:8–11, 15; 9:10–11; 12:1; 24:3–4*

### 2. Specific Principles for Kids to Ponder (Proverbs 1:8–11, 15; 9:10–11; 12:1)

From the very beginning of Solomon's book of wisdom, we learn an important lesson: *wisdom emerges when children heed their parents' warnings*. Solomon wanted to capture the attention of young readers early on, "Hear, my son [or daughter], your father's instruction / And do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 1:8). Children, Solomon warned, must pay careful attention to and obey what their fathers and mothers have to say about the company they keep, because their friends determine their reputations. If children listen to their parents and stay away from those who always get into trouble (1:10–11, 15), they'll be people worthy of respect because their lives will be attractive (1:9).

A second important truth in Proverbs: *understanding grows as we get to know God better*. Teenagers must get serious about biblical things now, and there's no better verse to take seriously than Proverbs 9:10. If teenagers really get to know God, three areas in their lives will come into sharper focus. First, *teenagers will know themselves better*. They'll appreciate their strengths, skills, and gifts more and be able to look at their weaknesses and failures. Second, *teenagers will like themselves more*. Their identity and esteem will be found in Christ, not in what others think, how good their grades are, or how great their accomplishments. Third, *teenagers will be themselves with greater ease*—they'll be more comfortable in their own skin.

Solomon punches us in the gut with this third truth: *knowledge increases while we adjust our lives to right living*. God places us within the families of His choosing. Our parents' responsibility is to prepare us for real life by instructing and disciplining us, so we might live skillfully (wisely). If discipline and instruction are done with love, consistency, and in an environment of godliness, we'll turn to the Lord and grow in our understanding of Him and His will. And with greater understanding comes a greater capacity for knowledge, that we might better absorb and apply truth in our lives. This is the smart way to live; anything less is just stupid.



# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

Surviving Those Challenging Years  
*Proverbs 1:8–11, 15; 9:10–11; 12:1; 24:3–4*



## DOORWAY TO HISTORY

### *Teenagers in the Bible*

Lest we think the Bible is just a book full of adults shaking a scolding finger in the face of teenagers, we'd do well to remember that these teens of the Bible made a significant difference during their time and were highly praised by God.

- Joseph courageously withstood his jealous brothers' harsh treatment and became the prime minister of Egypt (Genesis 37:1–36; 41:1–45).
- David, a young man after God's own heart, was anointed king of Israel and killed the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 13:14; 16:1–13; 17:1–58).
- Josiah came to the throne of Judah at the tender age of 8 and ruled in righteousness for thirty-one years (2 Kings 22:1–3).
- Daniel, along with three friends, was taken captive and carried away to Babylon and distinguished himself in the university without compromising his faith (Daniel 1:1–21).
- Mary as a teenage girl was chosen by God to be the mother of God's Son, Jesus (Luke 1:26–38; 2:1–20).
- Jesus as a young man challenged in the temple the learned teachers of God's Word with difficult questions (Luke 2:39–52).
- John Mark fled from the garden of Gethsemane and had to sneak back into his home in Jerusalem completely naked but became a man greatly esteemed (Mark 14:51–52; Acts 13:13; 15:36–40; 2 Timothy 4:11).



## LET'S LIVE IT

Solomon's teaching can be summarized like this: you cannot be a great man or woman until you learn to surrender your rights in obedience to your parents. No one said it would be easy. Obedience and surrender are difficult but required if you desire to live your life in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

*For you who are teenagers, you likely struggle with surrendering your rights—your desire to go your own way—while living under your parents' roof. Yet, you must learn to submit without argument, which is a sign of true maturity.*

*For you who are parents of teenagers, you likely struggle with surrendering your rights to maintain ultimate control of your growing children. You must learn to release them without fear.*

**What “rules” must you live by in your parents' house? Why do you think these rules exist? What did Paul command in Ephesians 6:1–3? What is the promise in verse 3? What do you think this promise means?**



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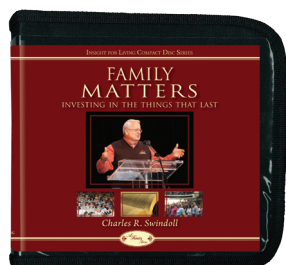
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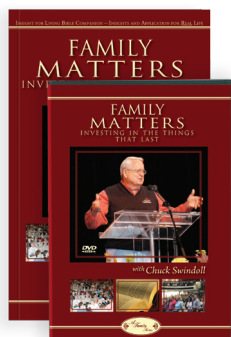
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*Proverbs 1:8–11, 15; 9:10–11; 12:1; 24:3–4*



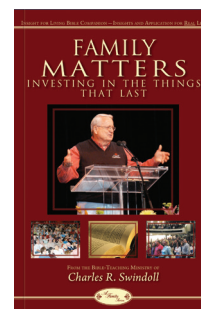
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MM03

# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

Getting Past the Guilt of Your Past

Isaiah 58:1–12



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

It's one of those little quirks in life: we can pick our friends, we can pick our spouses, but we can't pick our families! No one asked if we wanted our particular parents or grandparents or siblings or aunts or uncles or cousins, but they're all ours. Being thrown into such a mix inevitably leads to friction because none of them is just like us, and all of us are imperfect. Family relationships are bound to strain at times and in many cases fracture, leading to feelings of failure and guilt, but there is a way to repair and rebuild damaged relationships—whether or not we've chosen them.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Inescapable and Painful Realities of Humanity

All of us live with a double-edged truth: we have suffered wounds from our families, and we have inflicted wounds upon them. But these deep cuts need not be fatal to those relationships, not if we apply four principles of divine truth.

The most basic of all theological truths is our first principle: *we are all imperfect*. Paul couldn't have been clearer when he wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Each and every one of us is a sinner, and sin affects every aspect of our lives—our wills, our minds, and our emotions.

The second principle is a hard one to swallow: *we cannot change the past*. Neither we nor God can change what has been. But God can redeem our past and bring healing.

The third principle can also stick in our throats: *we are personally responsible for our own wrongs*. No excuses here. No blaming mom or dad because they made us eat lima beans when we were 3 years old.

The fourth principle follows on the heels of the previous one: *we are not responsible for another's wrongdoings*. Obviously, there are times in our lives when we've invited pain to come for coffee, through foolish things we've said or done. But often, the pain that comes into our lives kicks down the door because of someone else's foolishness. For these times, we aren't responsible; it isn't our fault.



## Quotable

*When you're  
ready to come  
to terms with  
the guilt of  
your past,  
begin by humbling  
yourself.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Getting Past the Guilt of Your Past

*Isaiah 58:1–12*

### 2. Guidelines for Recovery and Renewal (Isaiah 58:1–12)

The Lord, through the mouthpiece of Isaiah, instructs us to put away empty religiosity (Isaiah 58:1–5). When sin infects our lives, God knows our pious exercises of religion are mere lip service. The nation of Judah *looked* righteous, but their hearts were twisted. Their fasts were only a means to receive God's blessings. A true fast—one that recognizes spiritual poverty—would have led to forgiveness of sin and the restoration of a relationship with God (58:6).

Hollow religious motions may fool others, but they never fool God and they never lead to the healing of broken relationships. For that, we must commit ourselves to true obedience as laid out in five biblical steps.

Step one: when we want to come to terms with the guilt and shame of our past and how we've hurt others, we must *humble ourselves* (58:7–8). This is difficult because humility means counting ourselves as nothing before God and as secondary to the one we've wronged.

The second step will help with the first step: we must *pray* (58:9). We cannot really pray and be proud at the same time. True prayer is an act of humility. Bowing our heads brings our heart to its knees in recognition that our needs and sins can only be addressed by God.

Step three: in coming to grips with our wrongs, we must "*remove the yoke*" (58:9–10). This step demands we clean up our attitudes and quit playing the blame game and pointing fingers at others. It tells us to "straighten up and fly right," to give up our rights.

Step four is another difficult one: we must *make ourselves available and vulnerable to the persons we've offended* (58:10–11). All the other steps lead to this one. Now it's time for us to cross the threshold and make right our wrongs. This step will test our humility, because it requires us to confess and to ask for forgiveness.

The final step: we must *trust God to bring changes* (58:12). There is no guarantee that our confessions will lead to restoration of relationships, but confession gives God an opportunity to work in our hearts and the hearts of the offended, so that which was broken has the ability to be restored. God can remove our guilt and shame and heal the other person's brokenness. God can turn enemies into allies.



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Getting Past the Guilt of Your Past

Isaiah 58:1–12



### LET'S LIVE IT

Playing the blame game plunges us into the ever-swirling vortex of irresponsibility. Finger-pointing begets finger-pointing, until, eventually, we find ourselves trapped in a vicious cycle of “it’s never my fault,” which is a lie. We are often at fault for the hurt in another’s life. For the follower of Christ, we must break free from immature attitudes of irresponsibility.

First, *freedom is found in following the truth*. One of the marks of a true disciple of Christ is a life plugged into the power of God’s Word. If we are true disciples, we allow Scripture to inform and direct every aspect of our lives. As Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). If we are living according to the Word of God, then we will come to know the freeing power of truth (8:32). And the first truth we must grasp is the truth of who we are.

Second, *freedom is found in dealing appropriately with anger*. Families can be irritating. And the easiest people to become angry with are the people living under our own roof. Sometimes anger is appropriate, especially if we’re dealing with issues of sin and righteousness (2:13–16). But we dare not let anger fester into bitterness, which is a sign that anger is controlling us. When we lose control over anger, the Devil has an opportunity to lead us to commit other sins.

Third, *freedom is found in being honest*. Christians are especially good at hiding behind a façade of piety, of “faking it,” when in truth we are not delighting or abiding in God’s Word. We are also good at justifying our anger. However, we’re called to complete honesty — “not to hide [ourselves] from [our] own flesh,” as Isaiah put it (Isaiah 58:7). When we are honest with God, honest with ourselves, and honest with others, bonds are loosened, and “the oppressed go free” (58:6). Rather than blaming others, we take responsibility for our actions and attitudes. Honesty shines forth the light of truth, leading to a speedy recovery (58:8). In fact, true righteousness “will go before” us, protecting us in our Christian walk, and the glory of God will protect us from enemies that sneak up from behind (58:8). Then, we’ll no longer be the cause of hurt in our family’s life; rather, we’ll be the cause of rebuilding and restoring family relationships (58:12).

Fourth, *freedom is found in asking for forgiveness*. Forgiveness is one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian life. Forgiveness requires us to be honest with ourselves about the truth of Scripture — that we are often wrong and must own up to our shortcomings. It also requires us to put aside anger and put on humility.

**Read Matthew 5:23–24. What, if anything, do you need to do to apply this Scripture to your life? If you need to make a confession and ask forgiveness from someone you’ve wronged in your family, what will you say? Plan a time to ask this person’s forgiveness.**



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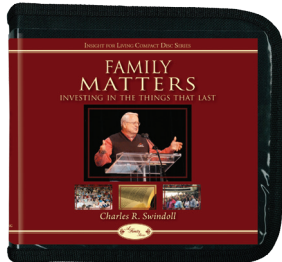
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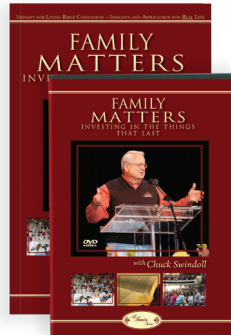
*Isaiah 58:1–12*



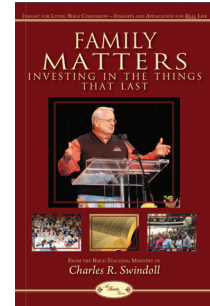
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MM04

# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Looking Ahead to Things That Last

Genesis 1:26–27; 2:18, 24



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Think hard about this question for just a moment: *what in your life will endure the test of time; what will withstand the ups and downs of the future?* Life is lived in the present, but there is a future coming, even if many live as if the future doesn't matter, as if the choices we make today will not echo into tomorrow. Each of us will leave a legacy after we've passed on to eternity. Memories of our life and our character, for good or for ill, will linger in the lives of our families and friends, making each choice, each word, each moment an essential one. So what legacy will we leave when today's future becomes tomorrow's present?



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. When Looking Back, These Things Matter

Regardless of age or level of patience, here are six enduring ideas that can bolster courage, inform wisdom, and strengthen character.

The first marker: *biblical principles are more important than traditional opinions.* Opinions are merely truths filtered through preferences, but convictions are rocklike and stand the test of time. Opinions are momentary, convictions are enduring, and biblical principles are eternal.

Our second landmark: *personal relationships are more valuable than individual accomplishments.* A poor man or woman, if he or she enjoys one true friend, is richer by far than the man or woman who can claim the world's power and possessions yet is alone.

The third guidepost: *domestic priorities rate higher than church programs.* It's easy to get out of kilter. Chasing the good, we often miss the best. While men's and women's Bible studies, Sunday school, AWANA, and youth events are all good, we mustn't let them rob us of our time with family.

The fourth marker: *positive reinforcement is better than negative reactions.* As parents, we should strive to say yes every chance we get. Positive reinforcement is much better than negative reactions.

Our fifth monument: *unconditional forgiveness is much preferred to lingering probation.* In the midst of a heated argument, it's easy to dig up old bones or worry over them. But that contradicts the necessity of unconditional



### Quotable

*Remember  
that only two  
things on this  
earth are eternal:  
human souls  
and the  
Word of God.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Looking Ahead to Things That Last

*Genesis 1:26–27; 2:18, 24*

forgiveness. Part of the forgiving process is forgetting—letting go and putting the past behind so there is no manure to fertilize grudges.

The sixth signpost: *mutual respect is of greater concern than chain of command*. We may not be able to get thousands of people to respect us, but if we can get a few to respect us, especially our immediate family members, that's a great place to start.

### 2. When Looking Ahead, These Things Last (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:18, 24–25)

Human bodies and souls will last into eternity, but these three aspects of human life will linger, if not into eternity (Matthew 22:30), at least until the present touches eternity.

The first feature requires us to stay strong in maintaining vital relationships because *the institution of marriage and family will last*. When God created the earth and everything in it, He pronounced the work of His hands as “good . . . very good” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The pinnacle of God’s handiwork was the creation of humanity. But when God saw that Adam was alone, He said, “It is not good” (2:18), because Adam couldn’t fulfill the purpose for which he was designed—to rule, to bear children, and to spread out over of the earth to make it blossom (1:26, 28). Adam needed a “helper suitable for him” (2:18)—one unlike the animals but just like him. So God formed Eve from Adam’s rib and joined them together in the everlasting bond of marriage (2:21–24).

The second facet relating to human life demands that we discern Scripture, because the truth of *God’s plan and requirements for domestic harmony will last*. With the marriage of a man and woman, God intends to create a new family. Each partner leaves behind the daily obligations of his or her previous home and begins a new home with new obligations. Cleaving to each other, the man and woman “become one flesh” (2:24), being completely transparent and self-sacrificing with each other physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally (2:25).

No enemy has waged war on marriage and family with greater ferocity than the enemy we call selfishness. Individuals so consumed with their own desires and pleasures would rather injure those they love than deny themselves anything. Perhaps the garden of Eden could bloom again if selfishness could be uprooted from the human heart, but as it is, weeds grow where roses and daisies once flourished.

The third aspect of human life challenges us to stay faithful to the right road because *the effects of our influence will last*. It’s been said that “the things we excuse in moderation, our children will excuse in excess.” Whether positively or negatively, the things we do and say today ripple into the future. Little by little, drip by drip, character is formed; and like the walls of a canyon, our spouses, children, and friends can read the layers and point to times when we failed or succeeded under pressure, gave in to or triumphed over temptation, and stumbled or remained surefooted in our walk with Christ.



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# FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

## Looking Ahead to Things That Last

*Genesis 1:26–27; 2:18, 24*



### A CLOSER LOOK

#### On Friendship and One-Fleshness

True friendship is a rare reward. The greatest friendship recorded in Scripture was between David and Jonathan, the son of King Saul. In fact, Scripture says that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself” (1 Samuel 18:1). So close was the bond between these two men that “Jonathan made a covenant with David,” recognizing David’s anointed authority as Israel’s future king (18:3). As a sign of their friendship—and Jonathan’s submission to David’s royal rule—Jonathan gave David his princely garments and armaments (18:4).

If two souls could be so tightly knitted together in manly friendship, as were the souls of David and Jonathan, what of the souls of husbands and wives? Marriage according to Scripture is between one man and one woman becoming one flesh for one lifetime. (See Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5–6; 1 Corinthians 6:16; and Ephesians 5:31.) The phrase “one flesh” captures the depth of intimacy that occurs when a man and woman are united in marriage. Next to a believer’s oneness with Christ, the one-fleshness of a married couple is the most intimate relationship humans can experience. Involving more than physical intimacy, the married man and woman share an emotional, mental, and spiritual bond unlike that between parent and child or among friends.

Adam and Eve were literally one flesh—she was fashioned by the hand of God from one of Adam’s ribs (Genesis 2:21–22), which is why Adam declared: “This is now bone of my bones, / And flesh of my flesh” (2:23). Married couples become one flesh by leaving their parents and cleaving to each other (2:24).



### LET’S LIVE IT

No matter what changes occur in our culture, at least three truths remain constant in the eyes of God: the institutions of marriage and family, His arrangement and requirements for domestic harmony, and the effects of family influence. Our investment in these three areas will ensure a legacy of faithfulness, discernment, and strength of character. The first question is: *Are you investing in these things that will last?* The second question follows: *Do those investments include a few people God calls “special”?*

**What eternal investments have you made in your marriage and with your children? How are you maintaining and watching over those investments?**



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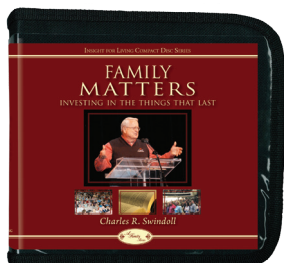
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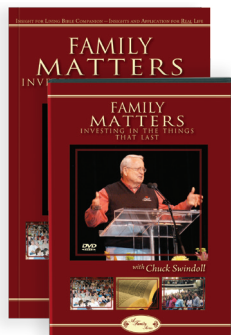
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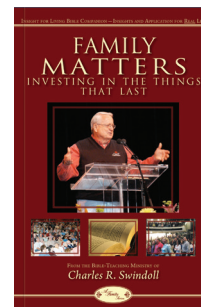
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