

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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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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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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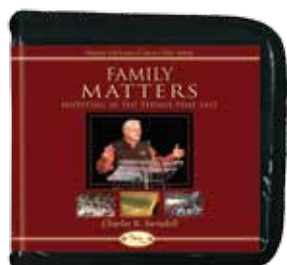
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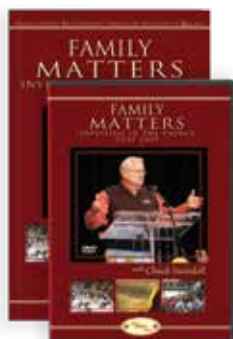
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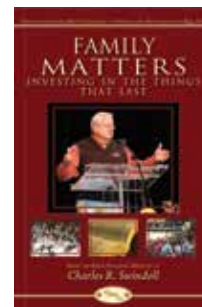
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