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## Forward

According to God's plan for Israel, the rearing of children was a vital part their obedience to God.

The laws were to be read to the whole assembly so that everyone, including the children, could hear them. Every seven years the entire nation would gather together and listen as a priest read the law to them.

There were no books, Bibles, or newsstands to spread God's word, so the people had to rely on word of mouth and an accurate memory.

Memorization was an important part of worship because if everyone knew the law, ignorance would be no excuse for breaking it. To fulfill God's purpose and will in our lives, we need the content and substance of his Word in our hearts and minds. For the Hebrews, this process began in childhood. Teaching our children and new believers should be one of our top priorities.

Our finest teachers, best resources, and most careful thought should be directed toward showing young believers how to follow God in all life's situations.

Children believe us if they trust us. Jesus said that people should believe in him with this kind of childlike faith. We should not have to understand all the mysteries of the universe; it should be enough to know that God loves us and provides forgiveness for our sin. This doesn't mean that we should be childish or immature, but we should trust God with a child's simplicity and receptivity.

## Chapter 1



**“The family” of humankind**

### **Genesis 5:3-5**

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth

And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters:

And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.

All human beings are related, going back to Adam and Eve. Mankind is a family that shares one flesh and blood. Remember this when prejudice enters your mind or hatred invades your feelings. Each person is a valuable and unique creation of God.

**Children follow parent’s example.**

### **Genesis 6:7-11**

And the Lord said, "I will completely wipe out this human race that I have created.

Yes, and I will destroy all the animals and birds, too. I am sorry I ever made them." But Noah found favor with the Lord.

This is the history of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless man living on earth at the time.

He consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with him. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth had become corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence.

Does this mean that God regretted creating humanity? Was he admitting he made a mistake?

No, God does not change his mind (1 Samuel 15:29). Instead, he was expressing sorrow for what the people had done to themselves, as a parent might express sorrow over a rebellious child.

God was sorry that the people chose sin and death instead of a relationship with him.

The people's sin grieved God. Our sins break God's heart as much as sin did in Noah's day. Noah, however, pleased God, although he was far from perfect. We can follow Noah's example and find "favor in the eyes of the LORD" in spite of the sin that surrounds us.

### **Ceremony of passing on family blessing.**

#### **Genesis 32:3**

Jacob now sent messengers to his brother, Esau, in Edom, the land of Seir.

The last time Jacob had seen Esau, his brother was ready to kill him for stealing the family blessing (Genesis 25:29-27:42).

Esau was so angry he had vowed to kill Jacob as soon as their father, Isaac, died (Genesis 27:41). Fearing their reunion, Jacob sent a messenger ahead with gifts. He hoped to buy Esau's favor.

### **Sharing spiritual experiences in the family.**

#### **Exodus 10:2**

You will be able to tell wonderful stories to your children and grandchildren about the marvelous things I am doing among the Egyptians to prove that I am the Lord."

God told Moses that his miraculous experiences with Pharaoh should be retold to his descendants. What stories Moses had to tell! Living out one of the greatest dramas in Biblical history, he witnessed events few people would ever see.

It is important to tell our children about God's work in our past and to help them see what he is doing right now. What are the turning points in your life where God intervened?

What is God doing for you now? Your stories will form the foundations of your children's belief in God.

#### **Joshua 4:21**

Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "In the future, your children will ask, him what do these stones mean?"

The memorial of 12 stones was to be a constant reminder of the day the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Their children would see the stones, hear the story, and learn about God.

Retelling your story will help keep memories of God's faithfulness alive in your family.

### **Sin' consequences passed to family members.**

#### **Exodus 34:7**

I show this unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Even so I do not leave sin unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations."

Moses had asked to see God's glory (Exodus 33:18), and this was God's response. What is God's glory? It is his character, his nature, his way of relating to his creatures. Notice that God did not give Moses a vision of his power and majesty, but rather of his love. God's glory is revealed in his mercy, grace, compassion, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. God's love and mercy are truly wonderful, and we benefit from them. We can respond and give glory to God when our characters resemble his.

Why would sins affect grandchildren and great-grandchildren? This is no arbitrary punishment. Children still suffer for the sins of their parents. Consider child abuse or alcoholism, for example. While these sins are obvious, sins like selfishness and greed can be passed along as well. The dire consequences of sin are not limited to the individual family member. Be careful not to treat sin casually, but repent and turn from it. The sin may cause you little pain now, but it could sting in a most tender area of your life later—your children and grandchildren.

## Chapter 2



### **Israelite festivals designed for family.**

#### **Leviticus 23:33-43**

And the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to begin the Festival of Shelters on the fifth day after the Day of Atonement. This festival to the Lord will last for seven days.

It will begin with a sacred assembly on the first day, and all your regular work must stop. On each of the seven festival days, you must present offerings to the Lord by fire.

On the eighth day, you must gather again for a sacred assembly and present another offering to the Lord by fire. This will be a solemn closing assembly, and no regular work may be done that day.

"These are the Lord's appointed annual festivals. Celebrate them by gathering in sacred assemblies to present all the various offerings to the Lord by fire—whole burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrificial meals and drink offerings—each on its proper day.

These festivals must be observed in addition to the Lord's regular Sabbath days. And these offerings must be given in addition to your personal gifts, the offerings you make to accompany your vows, and any freewill offerings that you present to the Lord.

"Now, on the first day of the Festival of Shelters, after you have harvested all the produce of the land, you will begin to celebrate this seven-day festival to the Lord. Remember that the first day and closing eighth day of the festival will be days of total rest.

On the first day, gather fruit from citrus trees, and collect palm fronds and other leafy branches and willows that grow by the streams.

Then rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You must observe this seven-day festival to the Lord every year. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be kept by all future generations.

During the seven festival days, all of you who are Israelites by birth must live in shelters. This will remind each new generation of Israelites that their ancestors had to live in shelters when I rescued them from the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God."

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering, was a special celebration involving the whole family.

Like Passover, this feast taught family members of all ages about God's nature and what he had done for them and was a time of renewed commitment to God.

## **Hebrews' emphasis placed on family worship.**

### **Deut. 12:12**

You must celebrate there with your sons and daughters and all your servants in the presence of the Lord your God. And remember the Levites who live in your towns, for they will have no inheritance of land as their own.

### **Deut. 12:18**

You must eat these in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose. Eat them there with your children, your servants, and the Levites who live in your towns, celebrating in the presence of the Lord your God in all you do.

The Hebrews placed great emphasis on family worship. Whether offering a sacrifice or attending a great feast, the family was often together. This gave the children a healthy attitude toward worship, and it put extra meaning into it for the adults. Watching a family member confess his or her sin was just as important as celebrating a great holiday together. Although there are appropriate times to separate people by ages, some of the most meaningful worship can be experienced only when shared by old and young.

## **Parent's immorality can destroy a family.**

### **Judges 8:31**

He also had a concubine in Shechem, who bore him a son named Abimelech.

This relationship between Gideon and a concubine produced a son who tore apart Gideon's family and caused tragedy for the nation. Gideon's story illustrates the fact that heroes in battle are not always heroes in daily life.

Gideon led the nation but could not lead his family. No matter who you are, moral laxness will cause problems. Just because you have won a single battle with temptation does not mean you will automatically win the next one.

We need to be constantly watchful against temptation. Sometimes Satan's strongest attacks come after a victory.

### **David failed to punish his son's wrongdoing.**

#### **2 Samuel 13:21-24**

When King David heard what had happened, he was very angry. And though Absalom never spoke to Amnon about it, he hated Amnon deeply because of what he had done to his sister.

Two years later, when Absalom's sheep were being sheared at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king's sons to come to a feast. He went to the king and said, "My sheep-shearers are now at work. Would the king and his servants please come to celebrate the occasion with me?"

David was angry with Amnon for raping Tamar, but David did not punish him.

David probably hesitated because

- (1) He didn't want to cross Amnon, who was his firstborn son (1 Chron. 3:1) and therefore next in line to be king, and
- (2) David was guilty of a similar sin himself in his adultery with Bathsheba.

While David was unsurpassed as a king and military leader, he lacked skill and sensitivity as a husband and father.

**Don't take its spiritual well-being for granted.**

### **Kings 1:6**

Now his father, King David, had never disciplined him at any time, even by asking, "What are you doing?" Adonijah was a very handsome man and had been born next after Absalom.

God-fearing people like David and Samuel were used by God to lead nations, but nevertheless they had problems in family relationships.

God-fearing leaders cannot take for granted the spiritual well-being of their children. They are used to having others follow their orders, but they cannot expect their children to manufacture faith upon request.

Moral and spiritual character takes years to build, and it requires constant attention and patient discipline.

David served God well as a king, but as a parent he often failed both God and his children.

Don't let your service to God even in leadership positions take up so much of your time and energy that you neglect your other God-given responsibilities.

Because David had never interfered by opposing or even questioning his son, Adonijah did not know how to work within limits.

The result was that he always wanted his own way, regardless of how it affected others. Adonijah did whatever he wanted and paid no respect to God's wishes.

An undisciplined child may look cute to his or her parents, but an undisciplined adult destroys himself and others.

As you set limits for your children, you make it possible for them to develop the self-restraint they will need in order to control themselves later.

Discipline your children carefully while they are young, so that they will grow into self-disciplined adults.

### **Helping your family to follow God.**

#### **Psalm 28:1**

O Lord, you are my rock of safety.  
Please help me; don't refuse to answer me.  
For if you are silent,  
I might as well give up and die.

## Chapter 3



**The family is one of God's greatest resources.**

### **Proverbs 11:29**

Those who bring trouble on their families inherit only the wind.  
The fool will be a servant to the wise.

One of the greatest resources God gives us is the family. Families provide acceptance, encouragement, guidance, and counsel.

Bringing trouble on your family—whether through anger or through an exaggerated desire for independence—is foolish because you cut yourself off from all they provide.

In your family, strive for healing, communication, and understanding.

## **Our spiritual family.**

### **Matthew 12:46-50**

As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers were outside, wanting to talk with him. Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, and they want to speak to you."

Jesus asked, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?"

Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!"

Jesus was not denying his responsibility to his earthly family. On the contrary, he criticized the religious leaders for not following the Old Testament command to honor their parents (Matthew 15:1-9).

He provided for his mother's security as he hung on the cross (John 19:25-27).

His mother and brothers were present in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

Instead Jesus was pointing out that spiritual relationships are as binding as physical ones, and he was paving the way for a new community of believers (the universal church), our spiritual family.

### **Mark 3:33-35**

Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?"

Then he looked at those around him and said, "These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

### **Philemon 1:16**

He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord.

### **Jesus' family missed point of his ministry.**

### **Mark 3:21**

When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them. "He's out of his mind," they said.

Jesus' mother was Mary (Luke 1:30-31), and his brothers were probably the other children Mary and Joseph had after Jesus (see also Mark 6:3).

Some Christians believe the ancient tradition that Jesus was Mary's only child. If this is true, the "brothers" were possibly cousins (cousins were often called brothers in those days).

Some have offered yet another suggestion: when Joseph married Mary, he was a widower, and these were his children by his first marriage. Most likely, these were Jesus' half brothers (see Mark 6:3-4).

Jesus' family did not yet fully understand his ministry, as can be seen in verse 21. Jesus explained that in our spiritual family, the relationships are ultimately more important and longer lasting than those formed in our physical families.

God's family is accepting and doesn't exclude anyone. Although Jesus cared for his mother and brothers, he also cared for all those who loved him.

Jesus did not show partiality; he allowed everyone the privilege of obeying God and becoming part of his family.

In our increasingly computerized, impersonal world, warm relationships among members of God's family take on major importance. The church can give the loving, personalized care that many people find nowhere else.

### **Jewish ceremonies celebrating a birth**

#### **Luke 2:21-24**

Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

Then it was time for the purification offering, as required by the Law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord."

So they offered a sacrifice according to what was required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby's birth:

- (1) *Circumcision.* Every boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3; Luke 1:59-60). Circumcision symbolized the Jews' separation from Gentiles and their unique relationship with God (see the second note on +Luke 1:59).
- (2) *Redemption of the firstborn.* A firstborn son was presented to God one month after birth (Exodus 13:2, 11-16; Numbers 18:15-16). The ceremony included buying back—"redeeming"—the child from God through an offering. Thus the parents acknowledged that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life.
- (3) *Purification of the mother.* For 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the temple.

At the end of her time of separation, the parents were to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The priest would sacrifice these animals and declare her to be clean.

If a lamb was too expensive, the parents could bring a second dove or pigeon instead. This is what Mary and Joseph did.

Jesus was God's Son, but his family carried out these ceremonies according to God's law. Jesus was not born above the law; instead, he fulfilled it perfectly.

## **The importance of honoring your family.**

### **Luke 2:49-50**

"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "You should have known that I would be in my Father's house." But they didn't understand what he meant.

This is the first mention of Jesus' awareness that he was God's Son. But even though he knew his real Father, he did not reject his earthly parents. He went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their authority for another 18 years.

God's people do not despise human relationships or family responsibilities. If the Son of God obeyed his human parents, how much more should we honor our family members! Don't use commitment to God's work to justify neglecting your family.

Jesus' parents didn't understand what he meant about his Father's house. They didn't realize he was making a distinction between his earthly father and his heavenly Father.

Jesus knew that he had a unique relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God's Son, they didn't understand what his mission would involve. Besides, they had to raise him, along with his brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55-56), as a normal child. They knew he was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind.

## **Jesus concerned for his family even at death.**

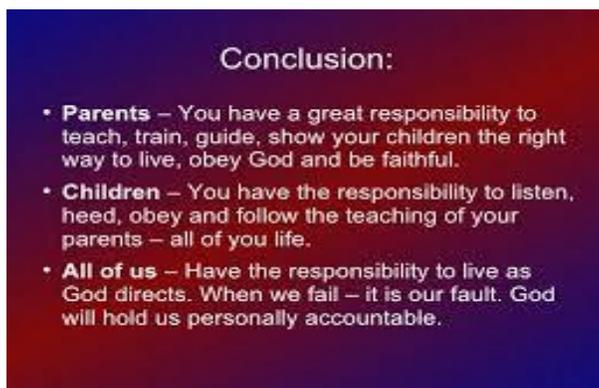
### **John 19:25-27**

So that is what they did.

Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Woman, he is your son."

And he said to this disciple, "She is your mother." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

## Chapter 4



### **How faithful parents can impact world.**

#### **Acts 16:1**

Paul and Silas went first to Derbe and then on to Lystra. There they met Timothy, a young disciple whose mother was a Jewish believer, but whose father was a Greek.

Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply over Mark. Paul didn't want to take him along because he had left them earlier (Acts 13:13). This disagreement caused the two great preachers to form two teams, opening up two missionary endeavors instead of one. God works even through conflict and disagreements. Later, Mark became vital to Paul's ministry (Col. 4:10). Christians do not always agree, but agreeing to disagree can solve problems and letting God work his will.

### **How to be a member of God's family.**

#### **Romans 2:28-29**

For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision.

No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. Whoever has that kind of change seeks praise from God, not from people.

To be a Jew meant you were in God's family, an heir to all his promises. Yet Paul made it clear that membership in God's family is based on internal, not external, qualities. All whose hearts are right with God are real Jews—that is, part of God's family (see also Galatians 3:7).

Attending church or being baptized, confirmed, or accepted for membership is not enough, just as submitting to circumcision was not enough for the Jews. God desires our heartfelt devotion and obedience. (See also Deut. 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4 for more on “circumcision of the heart.”)

### **Ephesians 3:14-15**

When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.

The family of God includes all who have believed in him in the past, all who believe in the present, and all who will believe in the future. We are all a family because we have the same Father. He is the source of all creation, the rightful owner of everything. God promises his love and power to his family, the church (Ephes.

3:16-21). If we want to receive God's blessings, it is important that we stay in contact with other believers in the body of Christ. Those who isolate themselves from God's family and try to go it alone cut themselves off from God's power.

### **Jesus adopts us into his family.**

#### **Ephesians 1:5**

His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

Predestined" means marked out beforehand. This is another way of saying that salvation is God's work and not our own doing. In his infinite love, God has adopted us as his own children.

Through Jesus' sacrifice, he has brought us into his family and made us heirs along with Jesus (Romans 8:17). In Roman law, adopted children had the same rights and privileges as biological children, even if they had been slaves.

Paul uses this term to show how strong our relationship to God is. Have you entered into this loving relationship with God? For more on the meaning of adoption, see Galatians 4:5-7.

### **Relationships are built at home.**

#### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise.

And this is the promise: If you honor your father and mother, "you will live a long life, full of blessing."

And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself at home, in our relationships with those who know us best.

Children and parents have a responsibility to each other. Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding and unfair.

Parents should care gently for their children, even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant. Ideally, of course, Christian parents and Christian children will relate to each other with thoughtfulness and love.

This will happen if both parents and children put the others' interests above their own—that is, if they submit to one another.

**Families are responsible to care for their members.**

**1 Tim. 5:3**

The church should care for any widow who has no one else to care for her.

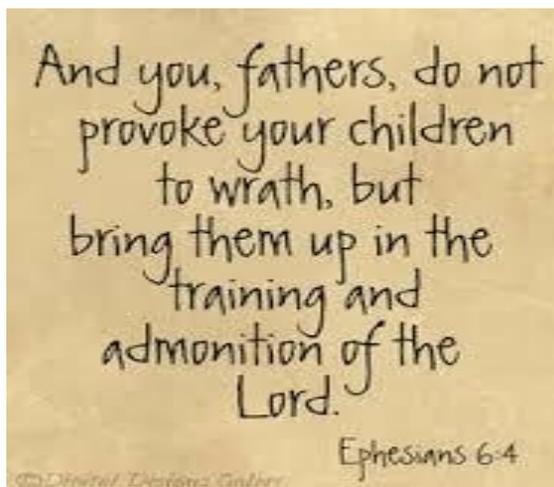
Paul wanted Christian families to be as self-supporting as possible. He insisted that children and grandchildren take care of the widows in their families (1 Tim. 5:4); he suggested that younger widows remarry and start new families (1 Tim. 5:14);

and he ordered the church not to support lazy members who refused to work (2 Thes. 3:10).

Nevertheless, when necessary, the believers pooled their resources (Acts 2:44-47); they gave generously to help disaster-ridden churches (1 Cor. 16:1-4); and they took care of a large number of widows (Acts 6:1-6).

The church has always had limited resources, and it has always had to balance financial responsibility with generosity. It only makes sense for members to work as hard as they can and to be as independent as possible, so they can adequately care for themselves and for less fortunate members.

## Chapter 5



**Paul's strong words for those who neglect their families.**

### **1 Tim. 5:8**

But those who won't care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have denied what we believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers.

Almost everyone has relatives, family of some kind. Family relationships are so important in God's eyes, Paul says, that a person who neglects his or her family responsibilities has denied the faith. Are you doing your part to meet the needs of those included in your family circle?

**Share the gospel with your family.**

### **2 Tim. 1:5**

I know that you sincerely trust the Lord, for you have the faith of your mother, Eunice, and your grandmother, Lois.

Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, were early Christian converts, possibly through Paul's ministry in their home city, Lystra (Acts 16:1).

They had communicated their strong Christian faith to Timothy, even though his father was probably not a believer. Don't hide your light at home: our families are fertile fields for planting gospel seeds.

Let your parents, children, spouse, brothers, and sisters know of your faith in Jesus, and be sure they see Christ's love, helpfulness, and joy in you.

**It is the man's responsibility to care for his family.**

### **Titus 2:6**

In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely in all they do.

This advice given to young men was very important. In ancient Greek society, the role of the husband/father was not viewed as a nurturing role, but merely as a functional one.

Many young men today have been raised in families where fathers have neglected their responsibilities to their wives and children. Husbands and fathers who are good examples of Christian living are important role models for young men who need to *see* how it is done. Be a faithful parent and please God.

## How to become a part of the family of God

### John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in.

Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice.

God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us.

When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable.

But eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life; eternal life is God's life embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin.

When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity.

Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

To “believe” is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us.

It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable, and relying on him for the power to change. If you have never trusted Christ, let this promise of everlasting life be yours—and believe.

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