

GROWING A HEALTHY FAMILY - Part 1

Proverbs 24:3; Ephesians 5:30-6:4

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Having grown up in the 60's, I have been highly influenced by the music and philosophy of the Beatles. Particularly in my teens and 20's, I believed that "All you need is love." That was supposed to work in the world, but in truth, it was love that got Jesus killed. And you would think that at least that philosophy of "All you need is love" would work in the home, but that seemed to be wrong as well. Now, having been through those child rearing years, it is now real obvious to me that we need more than love. I should have known that because the Bible tells us that in addition to love, we need wisdom and understanding. Proverbs 24:3, *"It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong."* Healthy families are not an accident. They are the result of wise actions and wise decisions made by wise parents.

Some parents do these things instinctively. I'm not one of them. I do not come before you as an expert in the field. Actually when I think of some of the things I've said and done as a parent, I would have been better off if I had been out standing in a field. Like many of you, these are things that I continually have to learn. And we need to learn how to grow a healthy family because we cannot grow a healthy family by accident. It takes wisdom and understanding.

If we look at the Bible, God's handbook for life, we find four things that we need to have a healthy family. We are going to look at the first two of those today, and the next two next Sunday. If we're going to get anything else done, we need to do at least these four things in order to be a healthy family. I'm not talking about being the perfect family. There can be no such thing as a perfect family because each family is made up of imperfect individuals. But we can have a healthy family. How does that work? How do we grow a healthy family? We have to ...

1. PREPARE YOUR KIDS FOR LIFE.

One of the goals of parenting is to prepare our kids for life. Often I have talked with parents, mostly mothers, who are distraught about their kids leaving home, whether for kindergarten or college or after school. And I ask them, "Isn't this what you raised them to do, to go away?" We raise our children to go out into the world. But before they go, we do our best to give them the best possible start by preparing them for life. God intends the family to be a learning center for life. We learn things in our family that we don't learn anywhere else. It is in the home that we learn the basics for life, like walking, talking, eating, using the TV remote. In return, our children teach us how to use the computer, program our DVD, and properly use a cell phone. We try to teach them things like getting up on time and cleaning their room, but I haven't seen a whole lot of success in that area, at least not in my house. But these are the basic skills that we teach our kids to prepare them for life.

The Bible gives us a model. Luke 2:52: *"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man."* There are four things that we, as parents, are supposed to work on to help prepare our children for life. First it says Jesus grew in wisdom. That's mental or intellectual growth. Second, He grew in stature. That's physical growth. Third, He grew in favor with God. Spiritual growth. And fourth, He grew in favor with man. That's social growth. Those are goals that we should lift up for each of our children or grandchildren, that they might have balanced growth, mentally, physically, spiritually and socially.

The Bible is very clear that the primary responsibility of raising children is to help them prepare for life. And we do that continually. It's part of the job description found in Deuteronomy 6:7 *"You must teach these commandments to your children and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk, at bedtime and the first thing in the morning."*

Notice how much this little verse tells us. It says "You." It does not say the government, or preschool, or grade school. It doesn't say some club or even the church. It says "You," as parent or grandparent. You are primarily responsible to prepare your kids for life.

“You Must.” This is not optional. It doesn’t say, “When you’ve got the time, and your stress is not overwhelming.” It’s not optional. It is expected.

“You Must Teach...” Parents are teaching all the time whether they realize it or not. When our kids are around us, we are teaching them. Sometimes we do it intentionally, but often our teaching is unintentional. Because they are watching every move we make, and listening to every word we say. We are their model, their example of how we are to live. We are constantly teaching. The only question is, "What are you teaching?"

“You Must Teach These Commandments” They are commandments, not suggestions. God didn’t give us ten suggestions. He said these are commandments we are to do. As parents there are three areas we especially have to be concerned about when we are raising children. These are three things that we cannot neglect.

1. Relationships. Relationships are important. In fact, our happiness is often determined by our relationships. If we know how to relate to people, if we know how to get along with people, we’re probably going to be happy a good percentage of our life. If we don’t know how to get along, if we don’t know how to relate to others, we’re going to be miserable most of the time. One of the most important skills a family teaches is how to relate. Of course, sometimes people grow up in dysfunctional homes and then we have to relearn how to relate to people because we never learned to relate to people in the right way. We didn’t learn how to resolve conflict. Often we will blow up, or shut up or run away. These are inappropriate reactions to conflict, so we have to relearn. So as parents we have to teach and model basic things about relationships.

Good relationships don’t just happen. We don’t just have a good marriage. It takes work, and patience. We don’t just have a good friendship. It takes time. Relationships have to be built. They are built on things like truthfulness, honesty, vulnerability, and trust. It requires communication. We cannot have a relationship without communication. We have to be authentic and real. Healthy relationships often require massive doses of forgiveness because we are going to hurt others, hopefully unintentionally, and sometimes we will be hurt ourselves. We have to teach our kids how to resolve conflict. They need to see not only when we as parents have a conflict, maybe with our spouse, but how to resolve it. We need to teach relationships.

2. Character. Character is formed in the home. What is character? Character is the sum total of our choices and habits. As we help our kids develop good habits, they develop good character. If they don’t develop good habits, they’re not going to have good character no matter what we say. It is what we do. Character is more caught than taught. We have to model good character.

3. Values. What’s really important in life? Whether we realize it or not, our kids are always picking up values from us. Just by watching us, they see and know what is really important in our life. It doesn’t matter what we say. What they see is how we spend our time and our money. They know that time and money are valuable. How we use those things shows what we value. Isaiah 38:19 *"One generation makes known Your faithfulness to the next."* Values about work, life, money, time, sex; values about people, the world, the future; how we feel about God. Those values are constantly being communicated and picked up by our kids.

A couple of years ago I had several trips planned for the confirmation class. There was one student who couldn’t make any of them because of a conflict with baseball. I thought that he ought to be able to make at least one of the trips and so I talked to his father about it. The father said that he had told his kids that they could be involved in any sport or activity, but when they do, they have to make a total commitment to it. So the son needed to keep that commitment to baseball. So I asked about the commitment to the church, because he was teaching his child that baseball is important, but church, that Christ is optional. In turn, the father got upset with me. But I wondered, *“In 10 years, if that child stops attending worship, will that father realize that that was the result of the lesson and the values he had taught his children.”*

What values are you teaching your children and grandchildren? Sometimes I’ve heard people say, *“I’m not going to impose my spiritual values on my kids. I’m going to let them decide for themselves.”* What a crock! What they are really saying is that God is not that important, that God, that Christ is merely an option. Then we

wonder why the younger generations have no stable foundations on which they can build a life. It is because they have been shown that there are no foundations on which a life can be built. And that's a lie. A lie that hurts our children. When parents do not expose their children to Christian morality, they leave a huge hole in their spiritual development; a hole that is filled by schools and television, video games and movies. Anyone who does not impose their values on their children is abdicating their authority and responsibility as a parent. And you don't have to take my word for it. You can see the results of it in all the world around us. For the sad truth is that television is the number one purveyor of values today.

Only 12% of grade school kids frequently talk to their parents, particularly their fathers, about personal concerns. When they become teenagers, only 8% of fathers talk to their teenagers about premarital sex. Only 15% of mothers talk to their teenagers about premarital sex. No wonder our teens are so sexually active these days. By the time a child is 18, he or she has seen over 100,000 sexual liaisons on television. Ninety-one percent of all sex on TV is portrayed as sex outside of marriage. I call that brainwashing. Over the course of one year, prime time TV depicts over 1400 incidences of sex, over 2300 incidences of profanity, over 8000 incidences of severe violence. It's a great source of mis-education. What's happened as a result? Just pick up the paper. We've got kids killing kids. Where did that come from?

One day we will stand before God to give an account of our lives. Parents will give an account of our parenting roles. Did we care enough to say, this is right and this is wrong, because most kids don't know right from wrong. Society certainly doesn't know the difference. But we do. So how well have you prepared your children for life? Rate yourself from one to ten. Ask yourself, "What am I teaching, or what have I taught my kids about money? Time? God? What am I teaching unintentionally by my lifestyle? Am I teaching workaholicism?" Be a parent or grandparent on purpose. Make a list of the values that are important, that you value. Then start intentionally sharing those with your kids. Don't just let it happen by accident. Because it's not true that all we need is love. We need wisdom and understanding.

2. PROTECT YOUR KIDS IN STORMS.

Notice that it says "Ain storms" not "Afrom storms." Our natural inclination is to protect them from storms, but that's not possible. Storms are going to flow into their lives. We can't and probably shouldn't protect them from storms. But we can protect them in the storms. Those of you with young kids might still be under the illusion that your love is enough to protect your child from all the evil that comes into life. Nice thought. Ain't gonna happen. But your home can be a place of protection in the storms of life.

Life is full of storms. Like a hurricane, they come in to batter us, bruise us and beat us up. We get dumped on and things don't go the way we planned. Life is very tough and we all need a place of safety, security, peace, and protection. God has planned that our homes be that place. Proverbs 14:26 *"Reverence for the Lord gives a man deep strength; his children have a place of refuge and security."* The home is supposed to be a place of refuge and security in the storms of life. In baseball the goal is to get home safely. And God has planned that for our families as well.

There are a lot different storms that we deal with in life. I wanted to mention three of them.

1. Change. This world changes so quickly. Relationships, jobs, health, communities, they all change, and sometimes they change very quickly. The storm of change comes into everybody's life. Whether a change is positive or negative, all change is stressful. So we need a place where that stress can be dealt with. Alvin Tozier says we need "Aislands of security" places that are stable, predictable, where we know it's going to be the same. A frightened child on a dark night might climb into the bed of their parents. Why? Because they have found it to be a safe, stable, protected place. It is a place where they can be safe in the midst of the storms of change.

2. Failure. Nobody wins all the time. Sometimes you get passed up for the promotion, or get cut from the team. Sometimes we fail the test. Failure comes to everybody. And it hurts. But failure is more bearable when we know that we are coming home to hugs, if we know that, when we get home, we're going to be soothed,

supported, and encouraged. That's what a family needs to do. In that way, we can be a shelter in the storm of failure. As it says in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 *"Two are better than one. If one of them falls down the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him."* Family is to be there in times of failure to help pick us up.

3. Rejection. Probably one of the toughest storms to handle. Everybody knows what it's like to feel criticized, ostracized, pushed away, not allowed to be part of the 'in crowd'. We all know what that's like. It starts when we are kids on the playground. Maybe you remember a playground incident even now. It is a reminder that kids can be ruthless and say the nastiest things to one another. They will pick on anything and everything. And when they pick on you, it hurts.

Our families need to be a refuge from such nastiness. We need to provide a positive counterbalance to all the negativity that the world throws at us. The real tragedy is that in many homes, rather than being a place of refuge, safety, and stability, many homes are the center of the storm themselves. Homes are supposed to be like the eye of the storm with all the violent world swirling out there while it is safe and calm in here. But many home are a bit off center and instead of the calm, we stand in the midst of the winds and the waves. That's not right. That's not what God has planned for our families. He warns against it in Mark 3:25, where it says *"A home filled with strife and division destroys itself."* So the place that was supposed to be a source of acceptance becomes the ultimate source of rejection. That's not right.

So how do we build a family that can be a shelter in a storm? There are four things that we need to do with our kids, our parents, our spouse, and all those we love.

1. Hear them. Listen to them. Don't be so quick to come up with a solution before they've even been able to sort out their feelings. Just listen to them. Hear them.
2. Hug them. Express affection. Hug, cuddle, tickle. All of those things that say, *"I love you. I care about you. You are important to me."*
3. Hope in them. Build up your family with affirmation. Make sure that you're giving the positive input to counterbalance the negativity of the world. And ...
4. Help them. Not doing everything for them, but helping them to deal with the tough times. Unhealthy families ignore their problems or they say, *"We can make it without help. We don't need anybody else's input. We're not talking to anybody about this. We can handle it."* Or worse, they say, *"What problem?"* Healthy families are willing to look at themselves realistically and say, *"We're having a tough time right now and we need some help."*

So whatever is going on in your life, be sure you do what it takes to build into your family a shelter in the time of storm. And then, evaluate yourself. Is your home a shelter? Are we affirming and supportive? Are we there for each other? Rate yourself from 1 to 10. And resolve to be proactive in transforming your home into a shelter for the storms of life.

We are halfway there. Two down. Two to go. We know that we need to prepare our kids for life. We know that we can keep our kids safe in the storms of life. That gives us a start to building healthy families. And we strive to build healthy families because that is the desire of God. And it is the desire burning within us. Armed with God's Word, may it be so in your life. Amen.