

Series: Soul Life	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: The Family Life - Love	Date: 12.06.2020
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<i>Everyone in a family has needs, dreams, and a unique calling which demand “sacred care” from those who will walk with them across a lifetime in their role as a family member. When we begin to see our family as our “First Church,” we can care for one another with the backing of heaven. They will only follow those who model Jesus well, how do we do that in our family lives?</i>			

This is our second week in this series, *Soul Life*. Today we’re asking the question, *How’s Your Family?* Scripture has a few thoughts about family relationships. Although not an exhaustive listing, here are a few from the New Testament book of Ephesians...

Firstly for husbands & wives, *“However, each one of you [husbands] also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph. 5:23).*

Then for kids, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1).*

And finally, a great verse for parents, *“...Do not exasperate your children...” (Eph. 6:4).*

These are topical studies, so we’re not necessarily expositing word for word, rather we’re taking a birds eye view of family relationships in light of Scripture. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you, mull these thoughts over & take action where you feel God’s leading.

The concept of family is touchy. Some of us don’t have great families, or maybe none at all. If you’re in one of those situations, think of your faith family, this church. We also know the definition of family has been, and will continue to be, challenged in our lifetimes.

In the Christian context we speak of the family in the traditional sense - father, mother & children, and beyond with extended family relations. The family in the Christian context can easily become an idol, something which takes the place of Jesus. We’ve all met Christians whose whole Christianity is stuck on the concept of guarding the Traditional Family Value, missing the greater call of God in Scripture to reach the nations for Christ. We agree with the traditional model, yet, it’s when family overtakes all else becoming the central goal in faith, that we’re on shaky ground. Families are to be a model of Christ to the world, a spiritual incubator preparing us for ministry in life.

I’m to seek first His kingdom & all else will be added. As I seek His Kingdom first, I encourage my family along the way to do the same for themselves, and as a unit.

This may be hard to understand, but Jesus comes before my wife & kids, but Jesus calls me to love my wife & kids toward Him - and wouldn't call me to forsake them. I expect them to have the same outlook. I’m to be a good father, husband & model in their lives. So they’re very important, albeit secondary to my allegiance to Christ. It’s within this dichotomy, when I’m following Jesus strongly, then & only then, am I the best husband & father I can be. My family should observe I’m personally enthralled with Jesus & His

directives. They should see me as a broken man, in need of Jesus, walking in conviction & principle. And vice-versa, if they're walking strongly with Jesus, they're the best wife, mother, child, brother, or sister they can possibly be. Therefore, our first concern is internally walking with Jesus as we spoke of last week. I can't expect that of them without me striving towards it myself.

I have one close friend whose family's a mess. He's constantly trying to fix them, all the while his own life's in shambles. They have no respect for him, nor do they follow him, although almost everything he says to them is correct, because he doesn't model conviction himself. You want your kids to enjoy & be devoted to Christ, then enjoy & be devoted to Jesus yourself! Go to church regularly. Involve yourself. Attend a community group. If they won't go, you go! Model until it makes a difference. You can't force something on them you don't passionately follow yourself. It doesn't matter how right you are, if you're not willing to live it out.

How many parents say their kids are going down the wrong path & wish they'd be interested & devoted to a local church - but rarely go themselves! It's much more about what we live, than what we say - our words are only given power when they're modeled. The church is involved in your kids spiritual development, but as parent you're their spiritual authority, primary model & teacher in life. So, we can't think we can drop the kids off & have this magically happen when mom & dad don't model it themselves.

I'm not talking about faking it. I am referring back to last week - when we're personally internally focused on Jesus, obeying his directives, finding joy in them, devoted to the local church & the kingdom directives which he calls us to - that's attractive & demanding of respect. If you can't submit to authority in church, your kids won't be able to either, no matter what you say. If you say they should go to church, but only occasionally go & complain about it yourself, your words are emptied of power. If you never say no to your kids for the sake of ministry, ministry will not seem important to them. This of course is in balance. Attention to them is part of your calling, yet they need to see ministry outside the family is sometimes more important than their felt need in the moment. And better yet, invite them into ministry with others.

If you constantly exasperate your children on small insignificant things, they'll not listen when you demand the more important. What's more important, that they have a nose ring, or walking with Jesus? What's more important that they wear ripped pants, or that they're in love with, and active in the faith community? Too often we as parents take the moralist route exasperating our kids, teaching them faith doesn't have answers & just a restrictive set of rules. Many of our rules are personal preference, when our kids have different preferences. Let them fail. Let them live. Let them explore & be themselves, then walk them through it, leading them to Jesus! Be there to pick up the pieces.

We're convicted by Scripture, to tend carefully to our families. When a family member looks into our eyes, would they understand we're devoted to Jesus? And that devotion means your role as father, husband, mother, wife, child or parent is important because it's important to Jesus. That the love of Christ births a love & devotion in you towards

them. Would they know you love & accept them in Jesus, or do they think you just have a list of demands you want them to acquiesce to before they gain your approval? How does that communicate grace to them?

Ephesians 5:21 speaks to the marriage relationship by directing us to *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. Which I think we can extend to the parent/child dynamic given other directives we find on Christian relationships in Scripture.

I have a good friend who models this well for me. He's a father & husband. Has two girls, both just out of college. I've watched them grow over the years. He oversees a large ministry. He's far from perfect, yet he's taught me not to hide that from my family. He wears his need for Christ openly in front of his wife & kids. They see him fail, he doesn't hide it. They see him repent. Otherwise, how else would they know how to live that way themselves? He doesn't shelter his children, but lets them face life & then walks through it with them.

They watch as he pursues God's kingdom first, and follow as he does; many times he challenges them to be involved. They see his frustrations & struggles in ministry, as well as his joys. He models. If all his faults & sin were hidden from his kids, they'd have a false model to shoot for, being overcome with guilt & feeling they can never measure up. But when Dad models brokenness & neediness before Jesus, they see they don't have to be perfect, but rather consistently repentant. They can operate on principle & courage, rising again after any failure, developing the ability to make wise decisions.

His daughter, being an actress, has been confronted with doing nude scenes as a Christian. Instead of him just telling her she can't, he led her through the conversation, asking her what that would mean to her witness & faith, and left the decision to her. It's impressive to know she went to him first before anyone else with the question, which speaks of his model & the respect she holds for him. A living model practicing repentance & belief which we ended with last week. In short, when family members are practicing healthy inner habits we spoke of last Sunday, then they naturally will love & encourage one another towards Jesus. Not in controlling moralistic ways, but in healthy grace filled ways. Remember, no one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. No one will follow what you say, until they see you live what you say.

Your Family's A Divine Treasure (Ps. 127:3): We must see family as a treasure, for us to serve, steward, invest in & love. Like the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-26, we invest in them. Learning the discipline of thanksgiving for family members is like putting on glasses to see each person differently. God changes families through loving family members.

My family has changed me. Stretched me. Blessed me. As I look at each one of them in their unique makeup, I identify different reasons why God put them in my life. All of those changes my family has given me have been in the positive - they make me a better man. Sometimes situations are trying, but they always tend towards the positive if handled under the guidance of Jesus.

Proverbs 31:10 says, *A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.* Or, Proverbs 18:22 *He who finds a wife finds what is good & receives favor from the Lord.*

Do you think of your wife in those terms? I hate those commercials on the radio by the local business owner who always begins his ads with a joke such as... “My wife said, you’re gonna be really unhappy, I’m gonna leave you!” And I said, “Well, which one’s it gonna be, am I gonna be unhappy, or are you gonna leave?” Terrible joke!

What if Apple developed a pair of glasses which every time you looked at one of your family members, instead of the negatives, it listed all the blessings & gifts they bring you in relationship? We live so closely we tend to focus on the negative, however, there’s a reason God has put them in your life.

I put on my new Apple glasses, and instead of negative messages popping up when I look at Kim, positive things pop up. How she drives me to appreciate nature, sunshine, flowers, gardening, brings a constant love of learning & exploration to our relationship, constantly takes care of me in a myriad of ways, serving & loving me physically through food, encouraging me in health, and bringing deeper ideas & thoughts to my ministry & life. How she makes me laugh, and how much joy it gives me just to see her happy.

Psalm 127:3 (NLT) says, *Children are a gift from the Lord, they are a reward from him.*

What if when I put on my glasses, instead of focusing on messy rooms, or homework undone, I could see in all my kids the joy which God has blessed me with in them? How they bring music to my world, crafts & a love of art, how they have such a great sense of humor, brighten my days & teach me so much about my deepening relationship with Jesus, and the Father’s love over me, by just being my children. How the responsibility of being their dad pushes me towards Christ-likeness every day of my life.

What role does a family have in nurturing our spiritual health over a lifetime? What gifts given by your family (or faith family) have most impacted you? Too often we focus on the negative tapes playing in our heads, instead of focusing on the blessing they bring.

At one point Kim & I weren’t doing well. I was a bear to live with. Kim will admit she has a struggle in showing compassion. I needed it, I wasn’t handling stress rightly. Her lack of compassion towards me compounded the issue. We were both at fault. A good friend of Kim’s wisely said to her, *“I am going to pray you have compassion on your husband.”* And she did. Kim’s heart changed & when she viewed me through the lens of compassion, we were both lifted up. A turning point in a dark time. Her compassion enabled me to look inwardly, and come to grips with how difficult I was being. I was then able to see her as the blessing she is.

Your Family Is A Discipleship School: Ephesians 6:2-3 says, *“Honor your father & mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father &*

mother, "things will go well for you & you will have a long life on the earth." Which speaks of discipling & being disciplined.

Across faith history, families haven't only been considered to be the central unit of society for the development of good citizens. Families were also seen as spiritual greenhouses in which character, identity & a faith were nurtured on a daily basis. We're currently losing this family model in America! Right now there's a great cultural current into breaking down the family & its influence, which is something the Christian must resist at all cost. Do we see our homes as spiritual training grounds, where we learn to love first, in order to better fulfill our calling to bless the nations outside?

How does family life bring a calling for Christ-like character in you in the modeling of Jesus? Think about Him who laid down his life for you, even in your sin. Who went to the cross, as everyone abandoned him. Think about what that means as you live out difficult growth moments in the spiritual incubator of family, when they hurt, or disappoint you. What did Jesus do when we hurt, abandoned & disappointed him? He went to the cross & we do the same for family.

All of us are children of someone. Honoring father & mother is more for you than them. A chance to step up to the self-sacrificial plate of the Christian life. To model Jesus to people closest to you, even when they know the worst about you & you them. Where else do we have such opportunity for that kind of growth?

I've been taught how to sacrifice in those times when I've had to lay down my desire to be right, or win an argument for the sake of relationship & peace in my family. It's taught me, I'm not always right. These people need more than just me being right, they need love, nurturing, and encouragement.

Mike Birbiglia has a great stand up comedy routine called, *My Girlfriends Boyfriend*, where he traces his meeting, dating & married life with his now wife, Jenny. He constantly says he doesn't believe in the idea of marriage throughout the routine. And although this illustration is about marriage, I think it's applicable across family relationships. He states in the beginning, *"I have a problem in relationships that when I believe I am right about something, it becomes a source of tension in relationship."* Because, he adds...*"I'm right."* And through it all, he speaks on how this comes up over & over again in their relationship & we can hear that sentiment coming out in parenting relationships as well.

He talks about how they argue, but she constantly ends each argument abruptly with the statement, *"That's how I feel."* Period. That's how I feel. Doesn't matter if he's right. Logic doesn't factor...it's how she feels! And he says, *"If you think I'm so wrong about everything why are you with me?"* To which she responds, *"Because you can't choose who you love."* True. You're born into your family. You fall into love. You don't choose, they're divinely given, but you *can* choose to love them well.

Although, in romantic relationships it is good to remember we have to choose well in finding another who shares our convictions, belief & faith in Christ. I remember my friends wedding as he & his bride stood before the pastor. The pastor said, "One day you will meet another person you could've also married. When you do, remember your commitment to your spouse today!" Our choice in a spouse has to share our beliefs, values & convictions in Christ - and the temptation is often that you feel you've fallen in love with someone, but in reality if they do not share these things, you will be inviting difficulty on the both of you if you wed - do not be unequally yoked. I will not do the wedding of a couple where one is not a Christian and the other is. Neither will I do a wedding when the couple is split between denominations, such as Catholic & Protestant, since they too need to share the same faith community.

Mike Birbiglia points out, you can't argue the statement '*That's how I feel*', but he learned something from it - *Surrender*. He learned, what she feels is important, she's not a mathematical equation, but a complexity of affection, needs, will & thoughts, and sometimes differing opinions. I'd say he learned Christ-like self-sacrifice - forced to love beyond his selfish need & desire to be right, or to win arguments. He learned wisdom, the ability to look beyond right & wrong, behind the curtain of a persons soul as to the deeper reasons why they do what they do.

He begins his whole routine pointing out how gymnasts will be doing a perfect floor routine, then fall & roll around, recover, stand up, holding their arms above their heads like nothing happened. And by the end of his routine he relates his relationship to his wife in the same way. He was going along so well, then love entered his life, he falls & rolls around uncontrollably, but in the end stands up in victory - happily married.

In conclusion, he says, "*I may still not believe in the concept of marriage, but I believe in her, and I've given up the need to be right.*" Sometimes being in a relationship is like that, doing so well, you fall & tumble around, be it with wife, husband, kids, or parents, but somehow you learn. God speaks. And we stand up with arms stretched over our heads together. You've created your opus!

Watch Mr. Hollands Opus, a movie about a high school band teacher dissatisfied with his job, wanting his whole life to write some great orchestra score & to be known by it. But he's just a band teacher, with a regular wife & a deaf child, whom he believes can't share in his music. You watch as he falls & tumbles around through life always writing his music on the side. At the end his wife & child bring together all his current & past students to play his score - and he realizes, that his great accomplishment is not his music, but his family & community. What if we could create such an opus with the gospel through our families reaching out to our community?

Maybe the falls & tumbles are a chance to learn - maybe being right, whether you're a kid, parent or spouse, isn't that important - and Mike may not realize it, but he *does* believe in marriage, because he did it, his words don't matter as much as his actions. All his logical arguments against marriage fell apart; he found it's not so important to be right, as it is to be committed to love & nurture his wife well. And...that IS marriage!

Your Family Is A Mission Field: Proverbs 22:6 says, *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

Why is it so important to God that we cultivate & model a living faith in our home? Why can't we get away with *faking it* in family life? Tending to our families isn't an easy task - it feels like falling & tumbling at times for sure. No matter how hard you try, you can't hide your faults in family - a prophet's never accepted in his own hometown. Unless the prophet goes to the cross modeling Jesus for their family first & foremost - then & only then might they be accepted because people respond to loving sacrifice.

Everyone in a family has needs, dreams, and a unique calling which demand *sacred care* from those who'll walk with them across a lifetime as a family member. When we begin to see our family as our *First Church*, we can care for one another with the backing of heaven. As a pastor I have to remember I also pastor my family. You may not possess that role, but a pastor is a paid teacher, disciple-maker & spiritual guide. In our family roles, that's what we do. I'm discipling my wife & kids, and they do the same for me.

Kids, and we are all kids, remember this term, 'Lead Up'. Although you're in the role of a child, you're still able to lead up to your parents. They'll not always be perfect, they'll not always make the right decisions, but you can help by leading up. Instead of getting upset, be obedient, become a solution, a voice of wisdom - you have the Holy Spirit in your life too & are commissioned with the task of loving your family members well in Jesus. Moms & dads have a lot of pressure, you may not be able to see why they're reacting the way they are, instead have compassion on your parent as people doing the best they can with what they have.

Each one of our family members has gifting, a calling, a life in Christ to which we're called to identify & nurture along. Some of the most cherished moments are those brief conversations with my kids or wife when it's evident they trust my judgment given they've seen me model faith, and we talk about some very important thing they're facing.

In conclusion...follow Jesus strongly, be a model, be enthralled with Him, focus on the important things, disciple, be discipled, be a listening ear, a compassionate loving directive force. Seek first his kingdom, inviting your family members into the journey of *faith*. Ask yourself, *"What's the greatest dream I have right now for one member of my family? How can I participate with God in the fulfillment of that dream in their lives?"* Petition the Holy Spirit to give you direction for yourself & them in this journey of faith as you tumble & fall together, because in Christ you'll eventually stand together hands held high in victory & more Christ-like as a result.

We're ending each sermon with a testimony from someone in our crowd. Today, that's Beth Munz...let me pray as she comes up.