

Relationships: family  
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Mother's Day - it's a perfect Sunday to talk about our relationship with our families. Aren't families complicated? I mean, our families are the people that we would die for one minute and strangle the next; am I right? We'll move heaven and earth to make the family reunion, but when we get there we wonder, "what am I doing here?" Then on our way home we're like, "Can't wait for next year!"

Honestly, I struggled this week thinking about what angle I should take with this sermon about family. Because on the one hand, family can be and is to many of you a great source of pride and joy. Saying you love spending time with your family is an understatement. You make every effort visiting the grandkids; your favorite times of year are holidays when your family gathers together. You fill your facebook home page with pics and videos of your kids playing T-ball or swimming. And we all get that, I think. God means for our family to be a rich blessing to us.

But we have a way of turning gifts into goals. And one of our favorite idols is family. An idol is anything, even good things like family, that we turn into an ultimate thing. There is a kind of devotion to family that's inappropriate and dangerous to our souls (even our family); there is a kind of devotion that is only due to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can so easily and readily give to our family circles. When we regularly say no to giving, no to serving, no to corporate worship, no to sacrificing for God's kingdom because it interrupts our time and activities with the family, something is out of balance; something is wrong with our affections. We'll talk more about the balance that we need to strike later (and it's really hard to find this balance), but we can't be blind to the temptation to bow at the altar of family.

But on the opposite extreme is disowning family. Now, if you don't understand why family members would become estranged, you're not thinking hard enough or you've been shielded from the ugly side of family dynamics. Oftentimes, family members know pretty intimate details about our lives. They know our weaknesses, failures, and insecurities. And that makes family incredibly dangerous. So, if they want to, our family members can really hurt us badly. And, unfortunately, some do.

Some of you have been the victims of harsh treatment by family members; no one has hurt you more. And sometimes, it's even necessary to step away from family relations because they are so toxic and damaging. So, don't think creating boundaries with your family is a bad thing to do. It must be done. Yet, while we need boundaries with family at times, we don't want to become bitter; we don't want to be apathetic where we no longer care about our families. I don't have the best relations with some of my family. I've often have felt guilty as I've struggled knowing what I should do about that. And I've need to fight my apathetic, uncaring attitude. That's falling short of God's call on our lives.

As I've implied already, family are many things to us, but I think the scriptures would have us believe that they are primarily our responsibility (REPEAT). They are a joy; they can be a headache, but more than both of those things, family are a responsibility. Let me show you this from one principle passage; I'll touch a few others, but let's go to 1 Tim. 5:3-8 as our text this morning (READ).

This is one of those passages that really digs into a particular challenge in the church. What should the church do with these precious women who find themselves alone and poor? Their husbands are now dead. They don't have many possessions and their wellbeing is at risk. What we just read was Paul's instructions about such things to the young pastor, Timothy. Paul says the church should rise up and meet the needs of those who are truly widows among them, and what he means by that is those who truly do not have any immediate family in their lives. But what if they do? What if these widows do have children or grandchildren? Paul says the first option for a widow is her family. Paul says in vs. 4, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them [who's them?... those children and grandchildren] first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God." So, it's pretty clear that Paul expects his fellow Christians to step up and take care of family members who are in a time of need. Don't expect the church to take care of your grandma; you take care of grandma. It's your responsibility.

I would argue that Paul is addressing this issue by stating a universal principle in the Christian life. Did you see it? Did you see the principle he appealed to in his command that the children and grandchildren of widows should take care of their grandma? I think the principle is found in the phrase *let them first learn to show godliness to their own household*. That isn't some narrow command that only relates to taking care of your elderly parents; that's a universal command that we should consider in light of our entire family. *First learn to show godliness to your own household*.

You can't be a follower of Jesus in public without first being a follower of Jesus at home. I mean, you can, but that's missing the mark and is actually a revelation of our rank hypocrisy (I'll explain that in a minute). God means for us to first practice our faith in the context of our families before we do so in other relationships or spheres of our lives. You can't show patience to your coworkers and not your kids. You can't make a point to speak kind, considerate words to people at church, but go home and constantly criticize your wife. If you do, you're missing the point; you're falling short of God's demands. First learn to show godliness to your own household.

Now, don't take that phrase *show godliness* the wrong way. Think of it: show godliness. How do you show your godliness? Too often in Christian churches and homes, we think showing godliness means advertising our faith. What I mean by advertising is displaying Bible verses on decorative signs in our homes. Sending our kids to Christians schools. Insisting everyone say Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays. Wearing certain clothes on Sunday

or making sure the family Bible is prominently displayed in the living room. Too often we think showing godliness is displaying these external, visible signs that we follow Jesus. That's not showing godliness. That's just decorating your home.

Showing godliness actually practicing righteousness from a heart of faith. It's counting the needs of your wife more significant than your own. Showing godliness is keeping self-control when the kids are getting a little squirrely. It's bearing with your husband's weaknesses; it's about honoring and showing grace to your inlaws. It's being the first one to say, "I am really sorry for what I said" after a family fight or offering forgiveness when you've been sinned against. That's showing godliness. It's putting your faith into practice where you actually look like Jesus.

I heard a little axiom a few years ago that I thought was gold that I want to pass on to you, especially if you are you a younger couple with younger kids as you think about establishing a solid Christian foundation in your home. The most spiritually damaging home is the one with a lot of Christian pretense, but very little Christian practice. And the most spiritually encouraging home is the one with a lot of Christian practice, but very little Christian pretense. Pretense is about show. A home that talks about Jesus, the Bible, the things of God, but never practices what it talks about is very dangerous to children. It teaches kids all the wrong messages about God and faith. It teaches kids that the Christian faith has nothing to do with how you live. It's just about posturing. It's just about the songs we listen to; it's just about who we vote for President; it's just about putting bumper stickers on our cars and not going to certain movies. Faith in God is just what you say, just what you think is true in your head. You just have to look a certain way and jump through certain hoops. But it's not real. It makes no demands in how a child lives their lives. It causes children to think that there are no sacrifices worth making for the kingdom of God. This might come out the wrong way because I do care what my kids watch on TV or listen to online, but I'm far more afraid of what my hypocrisy will do to their faith than what the media, what music, what liberal colleges might do to their belief in God. As Christian parents, we can be so concerned and nervous about what friends our children have, what music they listen to, what games they play, what college they go to and be completely unaware and oblivious to the reality that our fake Christian life is more damaging than all of those combined. What do I mean by fake Christian life? I mean saying Christ is important but denying that by how we live our lives.

If this is hitting home; if you're hearing this and thinking, "I think that's what I've done." It's not too late. You can repent today. You can confess to God today and receive his help. You can say you're sorry to your kids today and begin living authentically. I can't promise that's going to instantly change them, but at least you can look at yourself in the mirror with a clear conscience and know that you are giving them a true picture of godliness.

Now, that was somewhat of a detour (but an important one, I feel). We got there by noticing how Paul taught that families have a responsibility towards one another; our families are the first place we practice our Christian faith. He doubles down on that in vs. 8 by saying,

“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Those are really strong words, aren’t they? This responsibility we have towards our family members is fundamental.

This isn’t the only place we see God showing us that family are a responsibility. Let me just make some summary statements. Look up these passages in your own time to see them for yourselves.

- Deut. 6:4-7 teaches us that parents have the responsibility of leading their children in the ways of the Lord. Moms and dads are to spiritually nourish their children by modeling what it looks like to follow Jesus and also to teach them God’s word.
- Staying with the theme of children, Ps. 78 teaches that it’s our responsibility to tell our children the things that God has done. We are to pass on the stories of the works of God so they might set their hope in God, too, and keep his commands.
- Eph. 5 shows us that husbands have this duty to encourage and build up their wives in Christ. Paul states in this passage that the word of God should be a man’s primary tool in doing so. God will hold a man responsible for the spiritual care he provides to his wife; it’s his responsibility.
- What we read in 1 Tim. 5 shows us that we have a responsibility to provide food and shelter to immediate family, even extended family to some degree, so that their daily needs are taken care of.
- Kids, Eph 6 and the 10 commandments teach you that you are responsible to show your parents honor. You are not responsible for your parents needs; they are responsible for your needs. But in return, God tells you to honor and respect your parents. And possibly, one day, you will need to take care of them when they are old and you make all that money.

All of this reinforces to me the message of this morning’s sermon: families are responsibilities.

If this is true, that family is primarily a responsibility, it changes the way we think about our relationship with them. I would suggest that the primary cap you should wear in your family relations, then, is one of *servant*. If God is showing us in his word that family is a responsibility, then you should relate to your family members as a servant: one who is ready and willing to tend to the needs your family has. Let me briefly mention two ways this makes an impact in our family relations.

First of all, seeing yourself primarily as a servant to your family to fulfill your God-given responsibility will help guard your heart from idolizing them. When we idolize our families, we stop thinking about how we can serve them and start expecting them to serve us. And it’s really sneaky; we can develop these expectations and not even notice it. Here’s an example: Christmas is finally here and you’ve been planning for over a month. You are so excited because you’ll finally have your entire family home for the first time in years. You’ve told yourself: “This is going to be the best Christmas ever.” But it’s not. Before it even starts, things take a turn for the worse. Your daughters-in-law can’t stop fighting, your husband gets sick, and a snow storm keeps your youngest from coming home at all ruining your dream of having all the

kids and grandkids home. And deep down you are just angry. Angry at your daughters-in-law, angry at your husband, even angry at God.

What went wrong? I mean, sure, those things are going to make Christmas less enjoyable. But why are you angry? Why are you robbed of joy? Quite possibly, you expected your family to serve your desires rather than you remaining a servant to them. Like I mentioned before, oftentimes our families are a joy. And praise God for that. But we will avoid idolizing our families when we remember we are to be their servant fulfilling the responsibilities God has given to us.

The second impact remembering our responsibility to our families will help us remain focused on God's purpose throughout all of life. One thing I'm noticing is that serving my family changes with time. As Korby's parents and my mother get older, our responsibility towards them is changing. That's also happening with our children. Our responsibility towards our boys when they were infants and toddlers is different now that 3 of them are teenagers. And, someday - Lord willing - they will all be out of our house and our responsibility to them will be very different again. And the older they get, the less they need our help (or they need a different kind of help). And here's what I don't want to happen: I don't want to be lost; I don't want to feel useless because I'm refusing to change how I serve them. I want to make sure that my eyes are fixed on God's call in my life so that when my kids no longer need so much help, I'm still excited and ready to serve God's kingdom in other ways. I want to serve more within my local church; I want to make a greater impact in my neighborhood and in my community. My ministry needs to shift away from my kids to others that God has put around me.

I'll end with this: when I served at Big Springs Baptist over 15 years ago now, a man named Daryl was the Senior Pastor; he was a wonderful mentor to me. I remember him telling me, "I've told my kids not to expect much of an inheritance and not to expect me around when I retire." I asked, "How come?" And he said, "Because God still has work for me to do. My wife and I want to give more to global missions. We're going to be on the move serving in different churches; we won't have time to make every Tball game and choir concert. I'm going to spend as much of my time and my money on the work God as I can." You know, I really like that. Obviously, family is an important ministry; it's our most important. And at times, it requires laser-like focus and attention. But it's not our only calling; and family is not our greatest reward. Our greatest reward is God himself. Don't sacrifice the one for the other.

Key vs.: 1 Tim. 5:4

#### Questions for the week

- What do you do when a family member doesn't want to relate well to you, but you do want to relate well with them?
- What's the most important thing you heard today? Tell somebody.
- Begin praying for God's grace to help you with your family relations. Share what you are praying for with a friend.