

## **FAMILY LIFE**

Families are universal. You find them in every nation, culture, and people around the world. Everyone on earth comes from a family.

Most of the social training, understanding of the world, and Christian influence that a person receives in life will take place in family settings. It is in family settings that learning takes place by example and is shaped by the lessons of everyday life.

Satan also knows this and uses it for his purposes. He knows that broken homes produce broken kids. He uses the power of example and family relationships to pass on his design of sin and destruction to mankind.

But God created us for relationships – relationships with Him and relationships with one another. (*Mk 12:30-31*) Family relationships are some of the closest relationships we will ever have in this life. It is here that our Christian life is lived out every day. And it is here that we pass on to our children either the image of God or the image of Satan.

### **PART 1 – ELEMENTS OF A GODLY FAMILY LIFE**

The most important element above everything else is love. Jesus said, “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (*Jn 13:35 NIV*) And if we do not love the people we live with every day, then do we really love at all? All of our family attitudes and actions should be motivated by love.

This starts with the relationship between husband and wife. When God made Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, he put them in a Garden where they were free to enjoy His creation and the company of one another. It has been pointed out that God did not make the woman from Adam’s head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be walked on by him, but He made Eve from Adam’s side to be alongside him as his helper and friend. It was only after they sinned and God punished them that the husband was to rule over the woman. (*Gen 3:16*) This was far from God’s original plan and it has brought much suffering and abuse to women throughout the ages.

But in Christ we are made new and our hearts are changed to become like God’s, with a desire to show His love to the world. It is true that the husband is still the head of his wife (*1 Tim 2:15*), but as a Christian, the way that he rules is completely changed. The husband especially is called by God to love, protect, and provide for his wife. The husband who rules over his wife in harshness and abuse does not know God. Rather, God calls the husband to something much higher: To use his position and authority as a servant of Christ to love and bless his wife, and to restore to her the wonder and fulfillment that God originally intended when He put man and woman on the earth.

The Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (*Eph 5:25-33 NIV*) This is a high calling indeed, but it is one that brings much joy to the heart of God and will result in much blessing to everyone involved. For just as Christ laid down his life for the Church in order to present her to himself as a radiant bride, so a husband should lay down his life for his wife so that she too is a radiant bride who shines with the love and light of Christ. (*Eph 5:25-33*) In fact, it is so important that husbands treat their wives with consideration and respect that the Bible says the husband’s prayers will be hindered if he doesn’t do it. (*1 Pet 3:7*) This is important to God, and He is watching.

But the wife must also understand that men are different from women and have different motivations and responsibilities. Men have a masculine nature that wants to achieve and be successful, and to be respected by other men. It is important that the wife understand her role as a helper to her husband as he fulfills his responsibilities to provide for his family. She must respect him, and leave final decisions in his hands as the one who will give account to God. (*Eph 5:22-24, 33*)

The wife should develop true beauty— not the outward kind with makeup and jewelry, but rather, as a daughter of God her beauty should be that of the heart — the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that in God’s sight is very precious. (*1 Peter 3:4*) She should not be a gossip or a busybody, but should be self-controlled and pure, making it her aim to care for her children, make a pleasant home, and fulfill the responsibilities that are typical of a wife and mother. (*1 Tim 5:13, Titus 2:3-5*)

### **Some Keys to Marital Happiness**

How can this be accomplished? Here are some important keys:

1. Both husband and wife must both be committed to Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives.

Marriage is a spiritual union that is made up of three strands: The husband, the wife, and the Lord. It is God who created marriage, and only when our spirits are born-again by His Spirit can we live the life of love that comes from God. If you have not already repented of your sins, and committed your life to Christ, do so now, and ask Him to come and live in you so that His Spirit will be your spirit.

2. Understand the differences between men and women.

God made men and women different for a reason. Women tend to be more relational, emotional, and compassionate. This is why they makes good mothers, because they provide a warm, gracious, nurturing atmosphere where children can grow and thrive. Men tend to be more logical, practical, and unemotional. This is why they usually spend their days out of the home in activities involving work, risk, and competition.

If we expect that as husband and wife we will do everything together, we will soon become very frustrated and angry at the differences. God designed men for

one thing and women for another. It is important that we let men act as men and women act as women. Each should carry out their individual responsibilities apart from each other, but then come back together at the end of the day to reunite in closeness and fellowship as they eat, sleep, and share their lives with one another until the next day when they separate once again.

### 3. Communicate.

God's design is that we should have relationships of love and trust. But without communication there can be no such relationship with another person. (*John 15:15*)

The failure or refusal to communicate to another person sends a message of rejection, not love. It's like saying, "I don't have to tell you what I am doing because you are of no value". When this is done deliberately it is evil. So let us avoid it at all costs.

To communicate effectively, think of what the other person needs to know. Don't think only of yourself and what you want to share, and don't expect others to know what you are thinking. Imagine yourself in their place and include them in your life by telling them what you are doing, what you are thinking and planning, and what they need to know. When we make it a point to tell our family members our thoughts and plans, it communicates that they are important and included in our lives-- and that is felt as love and acceptance in their hearts.

And be sure to allow them to communicate back. Jesus was Lord, yet he lived and ate with the disciples as a friend. (*Jn 15:12-15*) Do we do the same with our families, or do we rule over them with fear? Let us follow the Lord's example. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Let us start this with our own spouse and children. (*Phil 2: 3-11, I Jn 4:20*)

### 4. Learn the languages of love.

Everyone, everywhere is looking for love, acceptance, value, and belonging. But not everyone gives and receives love the same way. Author Gary Chapman has found that there are five main ways that people express love to each other. They are:

- a. Giving Gifts
- b. Encouraging Words
- c. Spending Time together
- d. Acts of service
- e. Physical Touch

It is important to understand that for any person there is usually only one or two of these ways that really touch their heart. This will vary from person to person depending on their culture, personal upbringing, etc. but definitely there is a way.

The problem is that most people tend to show their love in the same way that they like to receive it, and this can lead to trouble if it is not the way the other person wants to receive it. So if you love your spouse and children, it is vitally important that you discover the “love language” that most touches their heart and then show it to them that way. If you don’t, your sincere efforts to love them will be wasted or misinterpreted. Your efforts can even create strife instead and no one wants that.

If people feel loved by you, they will listen to you, learn from you, want to be with you, and follow your God. But if they don’t feel it from you, they will look for love somewhere else, and you will be the one who feels rejected, belittled, or left behind. So make it a point to learn their love language.

#### 5. Make forgiveness a way of life.

The greatest key to marital harmony is forgiveness. Jesus said that if your brother offends you 490 times in one day, and each time repents, you must forgive him. (*Mt 18:21-22*) And if God has forgiven us our great sins, how can we do less to each other? (*2 Pet 1:9*) The parable told by Jesus in Matthew 18:23-35 shows what happens when we refuse to forgive each other. Like the person in the parable, if we do not forgive, we too will end up in a prison, only ours will be mental and spiritual.

Many times, the only way to solve a problem in relationships is to simply release the matter into the hands of God the way Jesus did on the cross. (*Luke 23:34*) This means releasing the person who has offended us whether they acknowledge their guilt or not. Many times the offending person will not see what we see; but if we cling to the injustice it will only bring us more misery. As a result, many of these injustices are not worth hanging onto.

But even for major offenses, Jesus surely knows all that has been done to us. And surely each offender will one day give an account to God in either in this life or the next, so no one is getting away with anything.

If people do not repent of their sins they will face God’s wrath on Judgement Day so it will be far better for everyone if they would repent now. But we hold a powerful key. Jesus said, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (*Mt 18:18 NIV*) Thus, by forgiving the people who hurt us, we unlock the power of heaven to work in their lives and bring them to repentance. And in the end, that is a much better conclusion. But if we refuse to forgive, the power of heaven is bound, and the other person will not see their sin, and you will never receive the apology or restoration that you seek. For everyone’s sake, it is better to forgive.

These are some of the most powerful principles of relationships and spiritual authority in the universe. It is the essence of what Jesus did for us on the cross

before we ever repented or confessed our sins to Him. And if these are the keys that unlock the power of heaven in all of our relationships, how much more should we be sure to practice them in our own homes with our spouse and children. There are no relationships on earth that will ever be closer than these, and there is no place where our influence to pass on Godliness will be greater than with our own families. Let them see Christ in you in matters of relationships and forgiveness. It will guide them, their children, and grandchildren, for time and eternity.

### **Some tips for resolving conflicts:**

1. Always settle conflicts in private, not public.
2. Avoid arguing when tired.
3. Avoid wild emotional statements, and don't get bogged down in technicalities.
4. Be humble and apologize if you were wrong. No problems are ever resolved through pride.
5. Don't just say "sorry", say, "I was wrong, will you forgive me?" This requires a response from the other person that will release the offense in their heart and yours.
6. Affirm your love for each other.
7. Always remember: The battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, and forces of darkness that want to rule over your souls. (*Eph 6:12, 2 Cor 10:3-4*) If you need to rebuke them, do so! Don't let spirits of anger or strife rule over your wife or children. You have authority over your home and family. Verbally command evil spirits to leave and forbid them to influence your family members.
8. Have nothing to do with divorce. Statistics in America have repeatedly shown that everyone loses in a divorce. It will curse you, your spouse, and your children for generations. It is clearly forbidden in the Bible (*Mal 2:13-16, Mt 19:3-9, I Cor 7:10-11*) as is remarriage after divorce. (*Rom 7:2-3, Mt 5:31-32, I Cor 7:10-11*) If you want God's blessings on you, your spouse, and your children, pray, repent, apologize, and ask for help from others, but do whatever it takes to be reconciled to your spouse and children, and create an environment where love is shared among you in humility and forgiveness always.

“Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity...for there God commands a blessing. (*Psalm 133*)

## RAISING CHILDREN

“Behold, children are a gift from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward.” (*Psalms 127:3*)

One of the great blessings of being married is the ability to produce children. What a tremendous miracle it is when God takes the union of a husband and wife and forms a little baby without any further help from anybody. To see the incredible design and perfection of a newborn child has surely caused many to marvel at the works of God.

But raising that child to glorify God is the responsibility of the parents, and how they interact with that child in the next 12 years will often set the child’s course for lifetime.

Thankfully, the task is not hard. Most parents will raise their children in the same way that they themselves were raised. It is simply a process of imitation. But this can be good or bad depending on the parents’ culture. If a culture has been terrible influenced by Satan, the same ways will be passed on naturally to the child. If the parents’ culture has been influenced by God, then the ways of God will often be passed on to the children to a great degree. It is possible to improve this ratio, however, by understanding and implementing some basic concepts:

First, do not overlook the power of the spiritual life. Children need to be born-again just like anyone else. The redemption of Jesus Christ is for everyone. It is a grave mistake to wait until the child is 14, 21, or some later age so they can choose to accept Christ on their own. The Bible says,

“Let the little children come unto me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (*Lk 18:16 NIV*)

“The promise is for you, and your children, and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (*Acts 2:39 NIV*)

As the parents of your children, you have an opportunity to influence and lead your children to Jesus Christ like few others will. As they grow older they will have to make their own choices and decisions so why leave them out of God’s plan of blessing to face temptation alone? Children are very capable of asking Jesus to come in to their hearts and genuinely receiving the Holy Spirit. It is God’s desire that all people should be blessed by His presence in their lives and be able to live out the life of Christ. So take the time to tell them about Jesus and invite them to ask Jesus into their hearts. And if they say yes, lead them in a prayer to do so, and baptize them soon after. Godly offspring is clearly God’s desire (*Mal 2:15*) and part of your inheritance in Christ. By all means, make use of it.

It is also a mistake to just teach children Bible stories with no commitment or response from them. This only feeds the mind – if even that. Instead, they need to be born again spiritually so they can receive the Word of God into their hearts, hear God’s voice, and do what is right in His eyes. All youth ministry must be predicated on this precept. Without the new birth, we will never see the fruit of God in their lives.

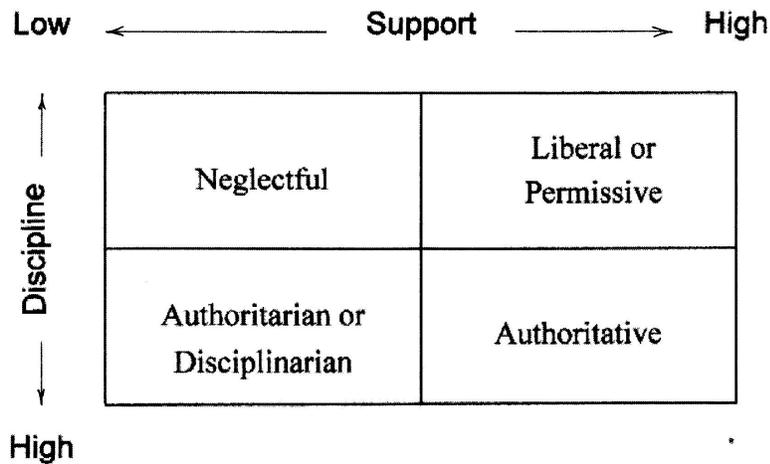
Then, having laid a true spiritual foundation, follow it up with daily reading of the Bible, prayer, and worship in your home. Talk about the Lord with your kids and make Him a natural part of your life. Your children will imitate your example and do the same. God intended to be regularly involved with people on this earth. Let it be that way in your house. (*Josh 24:15*)

### Parenting Styles

There are two main issues in parenting:

1. The degree to which we support and nurture our children, and
2. The degree to which we discipline them.

Putting these two elements together produces four main parenting styles as follows:



#### 1. Neglectful (No Support and No Discipline.)

If a child is raised like this, they will probably fail in life. This is the case of street kids. No one cares about them. They do what they want, when they want; and they get no help from anyone. They are often prey to evil men who lead them into sin and slavery and they often die young.

#### 2. Authoritarian (High Discipline, but Little or no Support)

A child who is raised like this will often be very achievement-oriented in life. He will do well, stick to the rules, and be successful outwardly, but will usually be lacking in compassion, or even the ability to express emotion. Living with such a person will often be very hard and filled with lots of rules which tend to be administered harshly. Both that person and their children will often suffer from a low self-image that is always trying to

please or impress other people. And for some children, the harshness is too much and they stop trying to be good completely.

### **3. Liberal or Permissive (High Support, but Little or No Discipline.)**

This is the other extreme. The parents of these children provide everything. The children's wishes are never denied, and all of their sins are covered up. The children are never held accountable to the rules, and soon begin to think they are superior, gifted, or elite. Children raised like this become terrors to the earth as they do whatever they want with no sense of shame or guilt. Because of their high self-image, they often become very rich and popular, but are often lacking in morals and self-restraint – many times to their own destruction.

Sadly, most people are raised in styles 2 and 3 above. A child raised in an authoritarian environment will sometimes react to such harshness and raise his child in permissiveness instead, only to have his kids suffer the opposite result. His children might view the permissiveness as being a lack of care and join a highly disciplined group or cult instead. And in so many other ways, generations tend to swing back and forth between these two common methods.

There is a fourth way, however:

### **4. Authoritative (High Discipline and High Support. )**

This is the rarest of the four types of parenting, but it is the one that produces the most successful children in actual experience. Children raised in this environment have their parents nurture and help them get established in life, but are also held accountable to God's standards with clear consequences for wrong-doing. Children raised like this often rise to high levels in society, and have a good self-image without being proud or arrogant, and they use their position and influence to help others and achieve Godly goals. They walk in self-restraint while still being friendly, and emotionally free. These people are the most rare in life, but they are closest to God's design for Mankind. They are the essence of what it means to be noble or honorable, and this should not surprise us, for God commands parents to use *both* discipline and support in raising their children:

“If any man does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (*1 Tim 5:7-9 NIV*)

“He who spares the rod hates his son,  
but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.” (*Prov 13:24 NIV*)

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right...Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (*Eph 6:1, 4 NIV*)

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,  
but the rod of correction will drive it from him.” (*Prov 22:15*)

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” (*1 Thess 2:11-12 NIV*)

“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (*Heb 12:9,11 NIV*)

The biggest key to this kind of parenting is the ability to administer correction without becoming emotional, harsh, or angry about it. This requires that the parents’ hearts be whole and grounded in the love of God. As discussed in a previous chapter, this is one more reason why a revelation of God’s love and being healed in our own hearts are so essential in living out the life of Christ on this earth.

### **How to Discipline Children:**

The key elements to discipline are fairness, restraint, and consistency.

First, never discipline your child for something if you haven’t told them is wrong in advance. If it is the first offense, and you’ve never discussed it before, make this time a learning time. Explain the situation, why their offense was wrong, and what they should do in such a situation the next time, but do not punish them or get upset because it would be unjust to punish them for something they didn’t know was wrong. But if it is the second offense, or you have previously explained the situation to them, then it is very important that they suffer a consequence. If there is no consequence, your rule will be little more than a suggestion. Kids who are raised without consequences for wrong-doing become adults who think there are no consequences for wrong-doing. It is important that you discipline your children so that they will have the ability to say “no” to temptation. Some people who have been raised without discipline seem completely unable to do this and the devil leads them at will.

To discipline children, first avoid harshness, condemnation, shame, or public embarrassment. Talk to them in private. Second, make sure your emotions are in control. Never discipline your children in anger. Man’s anger does not accomplish the righteousness of God. (*Jas. 1:20*) Always approach discipline as something you *have* to do, not something you *want* to do. If you are angry, put off the discipline until you have cooled down. Then proceed like this:

State the facts of the situation to them and ask if the facts are correct. Listen to their answer, and if they are guilty, remind them that you had previously said not to do it and that now you have to punish them.

The method used in the Bible verses above is a rod (a light stick about a foot long). Do not use your hand because in the Bible hands are used for blessing (*Num 8:10, Mk 10:13*) and your children need to be afraid of the stick, not afraid of your touch. Some cultures have done away with the Biblical method, thinking it to be too harsh, (and certainly some have used it that way) but God's wisdom is still the best. *The key is to use the stick with fairness and love, not harshness.*

Have the child kneel next to a bed or chair and bend over. Take the stick and rap them two or three times on the fully-clothed buttocks just enough so they will cry, but not so hard that it would cause physical injury. *Then drop the stick and immediately hold them in your arms until they stop crying.* In this way you communicate to them that you still love them, even though you don't like what they did. This is the key to administering discipline with love.

Then drop the matter, never to bring it up again. The child needs to know that once the discipline has been applied, the matter is over *forever*. Rejection and shame serve no purpose and can harm a child for a lifetime. A successful adult is governed by natural self-restraint coupled with a good self-image. This is produced in them when they are children through the combination of love and discipline. It cannot be achieved by guilt, shame, or rejection.

It is important for the parents to be consistent in their discipline, however. Don't threaten to punish them if you aren't going to follow through. If you have forbidden something, then calmly apply the punishment when the rule is broken – every time. If you are consistent with your discipline the bad behavior will soon stop. But if you are not disciplined, your children will probably not be disciplined either. They will soon learn that your words can be ignored at will. Instead they should learn that your yes means yes, and your no means no. (*Mt 5:37*). If this is established when they are small, they soon learn to obey you immediately, and there is rarely a need for any kind of punishment. Child-raising like this becomes peaceful and delightful – a joy to all who behold it.

### **Some Practical Tips for Raising Children**

1. Never quarrel in front of your children.

This creates great fear and instability in their hearts. Hold all disagreements until you can discuss them in private.

2. Treat all your children the same.

Don't show favorites, don't ridicule any, and don't allow anyone to ridicule or abuse anyone else. The pain from these emotional wounds can last a lifetime.

3. Never lie to a child.

When they discover you've lied to them, their trust in you can be lost forever. The pain of having been lied to can be devastating, and if it happens too many times, you will condition them to lie too. To maintain a relationship of love and trust, you need to be credible -- especially when you tell them about God.

4. Treat your child's friends with hospitality.

Make your house a friendly place for them to congregate. That way you will also have influence on the lives of your children's friends and will know what they are doing when they are together. But if your house is not a friendly place for them, they will stay away, you will have no influence, and you will never know what your children are doing when they are with their friends.

5. Establish mutual respect and tolerance for each other's generation

Each generation has its likes and dislikes, and styles and fads. Although for most of history the culture of each generation was passed on faithfully to the younger ones, the modern world is changing too fast for this. It is therefore very important that there be understanding and respect for each other, even though outward actions may vary. And it works in both directions too. How you treat your own parents is the model your children will have to treat you. *(Lev 19:32)*

6. Always answer your child's questions.

These may come at inconvenient times, but always make use of them. It will help maintain a good relationship between you and your child and will allow you to pass on your world view to them. Always stop what you are doing to take advantage of situations like this. The opportunity to discuss their question may never come again.

7. Concentrate on their good points.

Encourage them when they do something right, and support them as they grow into adulthood.

8. And in every situation, pray.

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective". *(Jas 5:16 NIV)*

Remember, Godly offspring is something God wants you to have *(Mal 2: 15)* so His ears will be attentive to your prayer.

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." *(Mt 21:22 NIV)*

## RAISING TEENAGERS

Finally, a word should be said about raising teenagers because this is very different from raising small children. At this age, if you have raised your children well, the need for discipline should be rare. The emphasis now changes to viewing them as intelligent, responsible adults and giving them the responsibility to act accordingly. This does not mean letting them do whatever they want. Rather, the emphasis is on integrating them into the adult world and holding them to the standards expected of adults.

It is unfortunate that in the western world today, young people are held back from participating in the adult world until they are 18 or 21. Biologically, emotionally, and spiritually they change into adults at puberty around the age of 12 or 13. From that time on they do not want to be treated or included with small children (and it would be a grave mistake to do so.) Instead they are programmed by God to do adult things at this age, and if the adults around them will not let them, they will find a way to do it secretly. This is the cause of much teenage rebellion and delinquency.

Jesus, at the age of 12, went to the temple with his parents and amazed the teachers of the law with His wisdom and insight. (*Luke 2:41-52*) The Jews to this day initiate their sons into manhood with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony at the age of 12, and any synagogue can be formed by ten men over this age. Many primitive societies around the world have also recognized this age as the transition to adulthood and hold a ceremony, after which the young men are no longer included with the children, but go hunting, start a family, and spend their days with the men. As much as possible, our families, and churches today must do the same if we are to pass on our values to our children.

The best way to do this is to give them real responsibility for things that matter. Let them plan and make decisions for projects at church or in the community. Assign them to teach Sunday School classes, let them serve on church committees as full voting members, and enlist them to share the Gospel or minister in various outreaches. If they are Christians, they are capable of hearing from God and carrying out His will in these ways. And their own experiences will soon become a better teacher than all of our classes with them.

Depending on a young person's upbringing and the temptations of the culture in which they live, there are occasions where a young adult may not always do what is right. When correction is necessary, we need to use the same methods we use for other adults, not the methods used when they were children. Assigning extra work, letting them suffer the natural consequences of their actions, holding them to certain standards, and application of other penalties are some examples. However, three things are always necessary:

- (1) The consequences should fit the offense,
- (2) The application of them must be consistent, and
- (3) They should be delivered in a non-emotional, non-abusive way.

Affirm your love and support for your son or daughter while being matter-of-fact about the penalty being imposed. This approach of “consequence only”, without the degradations of anger and abuse, will train them to be Godly while still maintaining your authority and their self-esteem.