



It's amazing how many TV shows and movies over the past 50 years have been about families. Whether they're designed to be funny or sad, whether it's a serious docudrama or a silly sitcom, family-related shows capture our attention. But even though they may entertain us and portray what's really happening in our society, the models on display don't always represent the truth and equip us to handle life. I think we'd all agree on the definition of family values in our society. Some of that might be good because, let's face it, we all can't look like the Cleaver family. But there's also been an erosion of biblical truth when it comes to how we think about the family.

Need some examples? For starters, more people believe marriage is obsolete and so less people are getting married. More people are living together before they get married. Almost half of all adults live together before marriage. More unmarried couples are raising children. Among those who do get married, less are choosing to have children and the divorce rate is higher than ever. More single women are getting pregnant and raising children. And, of course, with the legalization of gay marriage, more gay couples are raising children as well.

In light of this, for the next couple of months we're going to examine what the Bible has to say about the family. We've called this series "Building a Home: One Room at a Time" because we're going to go from room to room and examine things like marriage, motherhood, fatherhood, parenting, sibling relationships, communication and conflict resolution, hospitality and even homosexuality. This morning we're in the family room and laying the foundation for all we'll say in the next ten weeks.

I remember well the family room in the home I grew up in. So many things happened there. It was there our family huddled to watch the first moon landing. I remember receiving a fishing rod for my 18th birthday there. I remember fights with my brother. It was there I'd sit in the living room and listen to my mom and dad kiss or fight or whisper in the kitchen. I remember gathering there in disbelief the day my mom died. Family rooms are often the place where all these different experiences are lived out. But the family room is also like the control center where time-tested values get hammered out.

How to Build a Home

Solomon said it best centuries ago.

By wisdom a house is built,

**and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures**

(Proverbs 24:3–4)

Solomon pictures the building, establishing and furnishing of a home. He's not so much talking about a physical structure built with hammer and nails, but about families and relationships and the core values they live by. To build a family and a real home takes a lot more time and skill than building a house. And it's a process. You're never quite finished with it.

Solomon says solid and stable families are built with three things—wisdom, understanding and knowledge. First, he says wisdom builds a home. Wisdom in Proverbs isn't intellectual. It's not about stuffing your head with facts and figures. Wisdom is the skill to see and live with discernment. It's an accurate view of life that's informed by reality. Wisdom starts with being in right relationship with God. Proverbs says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (9:10a). That doesn't mean being frightened by him. The right kind of fear is reverence for him. It's holding God in the highest regard. It's a sense everything we do is to be governed by him. So building a home begins with our personal relationship with God. It begins with the vertical. It begins with your prayer life. It begins with being in the Word. That's why the best thing any of us can do for our family is to know, love and obey God. And, by the way, part of that is being real—admitting mistakes, saying you're sorry, asking for forgiveness, knowing you and everyone else in your family is a work in progress. All that is wisdom.

But that's not all. The next thing he says is understanding establishes a home. Understanding is the ability to bring together knowledge. It separates out the facts and then brings it all back together into a coherent whole. Understanding provides the capacity to respond with insight, gaining a full awareness of a situation so there can be more than just a surface reaction. Think of how important that is in a family. As a parent or a husband or even as a child, we all tend to overreact to situations. We often fail to take all the variables into account.

But there's one more thing. Solomon goes on and says knowledge fills a home ("*...through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures*") Now we're going beyond just architecture and talking about filling the rooms of a home.

Knowledge is the willingness to learn with perception, by becoming acquainted with the facts, and grasping their proper significance so ignorance is dispelled and truth is pursued. Through knowledge a home is filled to overflowing with riches that can never be destroyed.

Can you imagine what those “riches” are? Let me just give you three suggestions to whet your appetite. First, companionship. No one is meant to go through life alone. We’re meant to live in community. We’re meant for lasting, deep, intimate relationships and while that can be challenging at times that’s part of what a family gives us.

Second, character. Part of what a family does is it builds our character. It refines us, molds us, and shapes us into better people. If you’ve been married for long think of how your marriage has shaped your character. We all know what it’s like to look in a mirror. Well, when you get married you move from looking into a regular mirror to looking into a lighted make-up mirror! You see all the flaws. Then when you have children, you turn the light on even brighter and see even more flaws! But that’s also part of the process of the transformation of our character.

Third, legacy. We all have this sense that our lives here on earth are temporary and fleeting. We want to leave something. We want to pass something of ourselves on. A family, particularly children, allow us to do that. I love how Psalm 127 puts this, *“Children are a heritage from the Lord... Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them”* (Psalm 127:3-5). These are just a few of the treasures that fill the home of those with wisdom, understanding and knowledge. It takes skill. It doesn’t happen overnight. It’s the work of a lifetime.

There’s one important question: When it comes to the family, where do we get this wisdom, understanding and knowledge? We get it from God’s Word, the Bible. It’s not that we can’t learn from other sources, but this has to be our foundation. And so, I want to talk about what the Bible says about the family. I want to focus on the foundational truths and then in coming weeks we’ll unpack what this looks like. But let’s start with the foundation and build our family on these truths. Remember what Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount? *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock”* (Matt. 7:24-25). That applies to the family. What does it mean to build your family on the rock-like foundation of God’s Word?

Foundational Truths About the Family

I want to divide this up into three sections: The origin of the family, the purpose of the family, and the functioning of the family.

The origin of the family

The Bible is clear the whole idea of the family originated with God. Go all the way back to Genesis. On the sixth day of creation God created the human race. Humans were set apart as unique in that we were made in God’s image. Part of that’s seen in the fact that he made us in two distinct genders. Genesis 1:27 says, *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”* But that’s not all. The very next verse says, *“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”* I love how it says God blessed them. I wonder how he did that. Part of the blessing came in the mandate he gave them—to be fruitful and multiply. He tells them to fill the earth. Fill it with what? Fill it with more humans; more people; have babies. I wonder if without the blessing of God they’d even be able to do that.

Later in Genesis 2 we see all this in more detail. We learn the man was created first and then later God came along and said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him”* (Genesis 2:18). And you know what happened. First, God paraded all the animals before Adam and he named them but it says, *“But for Adam no suitable helper was found”* (Genesis 2:20b). Then God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and he took one of his ribs and fashioned it into a woman. Then he brought her to the man and when he saw her he said, *“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man”* (Genesis 2:23). That’s another way of saying, “Okay, God, now we’re talking!”

By the way, the writer of Genesis in no ways demeans the role of women, but rather he esteems her. She was created in God’s image, just as the man was. The word “helper” means she was a fitting complement to assist him. Not only would she end his loneliness, she’d be especially endowed by God to help him in fulfilling his calling of subduing the earth. That word “helper” in no ways means she was some kind of hired hand, but rather she was an indispensable life partner. God himself is called the “helper” of his people throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 118:7).

The next thing the writer says in Genesis is: *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united (cleaves) to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame”* (Genesis 2:24-25). There are three principles from these verses that serve as a foundation not just for

marriage but for family. First, there's the principle of severance: leaving father and mother is essential. I often tell couples preparing for marriage how important this is. It's not always easy to leave father and mother. It's not easy for you and it's not easy for them. I've been on both sides of this and I get it. There must be a severing of emotional and physical dependence. If you don't leave you'll never cleave. That's the second thing: the principle of unity and permanence. Marriage was meant to be a lifelong, one flesh commitment. That's not just a physical thing, but it's a unity that should be displayed in every aspect of life. Finally, there's the principle of intimacy. They were naked and without shame. Again, this isn't just talking about the physical. There's an emotional intimacy; a freedom to be who you are.

There's one thing I should mention before we go on. All of this was seriously messed up through what we call the Fall. When sin entered the world, the family suffered. What was the first thing Adam and Eve did? They saw they were naked and covered themselves up. No more shame-free intimacy. Not only that, they hid from God. The One who was their life-giver and friend was now someone to run from. And then all of that gets played out in the lives of their children as one son murders another and asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Every one of us here has brokenness in our family. It may come out in a marriage, in a relationship with a sibling or a parent or a child. I think we often fall into the trap of comparing our family with other families, and we always seem to fall short. But don't be fooled. There are no perfect families. We're all broken. We're all still dealing with the effects of the Fall.

So that's the origin of the family. Isn't it interesting that before God said anything about government or about the church or even about our work, he created the institution of the family. The family is the foundational institution of our society.

The purpose of the family

This leads to the second thing foundational to family life—the purpose of the family. Have you ever wondered why God created the family? One reason is to meet our basic need for companionship and community. Part of being made in the image of God is we were made for relationship. God is a Triune God. God himself has always existed in relationship. God is love and there can't be love apart from relationship. From eternity past, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit existed together as one. Marriage and family is an extension of that.

Another purpose of family has to do with children. Beyond procreation, the purpose of the family is to provide a place for the care, nurture, protection and education of children. I'm sure there was quite a learning curve for Adam and Eve in this. Imagine what they felt like when their first baby was born. Remember, this had never happened before. They must have looked at their baby

and then looked at each other and wondered out loud, "Now what do we do?" Birth pain is intense but brief compared to the challenge of raising a child to maturity. Of all living creatures humans have the longest maturation period. Children require endless amounts of parental guidance, care and attention. And yet, at the same time, there's so much joy in having and raising children. Can you imagine life without children?

In Zechariah 8:5 God declares his jealous love for Israel, despite the fact they're in exile. God promises to personally return to Jerusalem and dwell there. He says two things will happen there. First, *"...men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age."* That's a beautiful picture, the elderly sitting in the streets with their cane just enjoying life. But that's not all. God says, *"The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."* Isn't that great? Playing children—giggling, squealing, laughing, spilling—aren't a nuisance, but an evidence of God's presence.

One more purpose of the family. The family exists to display or reveal God. We know artists by their most important creations: Michelangelo by the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Beethoven by his Fifth Symphony, George Lucas by *Star Wars*. Each masterpiece reveals something of its creator. The same is true of God. We catch a glimpse of the Artist at work when God made the family. Both marriage and parenthood reveal God's character like nothing else in creation. Your family may be the only "church" unbelievers ever see. The love between a husband and wife provides a glimpse of Christ's passionate devotion to us as his bride. We see this most clearly in Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5. He says the husband/wife relationship is a pattern of the church's relationship to Christ. In Ephesians 5:32, after discussing a couple's responsibility toward each other, he says, *"this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church."* Marriage displays the love relationship between Jesus and his church.

Parenthood also displays God. For example, Jesus encourages us to confident prayer based on the fact no earthly father would give a child a snake when he asks for a piece of fish (Luke 11:11). So the whole experience of parenthood offers a compelling picture of God's tenderness and patience toward us as his children. I can't tell you how many times it's helped me to remember my Father in heaven loves me and cares for me even more than I love my own children.

The functioning of a family

Finally, God's wisdom, understanding and knowledge are seen in what the Bible says about the proper functioning of the family. We see this first in the husband and wife relationship. The Bible calls for the marriage relationship to be characterized by mutual submission, respect and trust. *"Submit to one another*

out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). It calls for mutual fulfillment in sexual union (1 Corinthians 7:3-4) as well as a mutual monogamy (Hebrews 13:4). The Bible calls a wife to be responsive to the headship role of her husband; to respect him as the church does towards Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24). It calls a husband to the deepest and most sacrificial love for his wife as Christ loved the church. Peter says he's to be considerate of her and to honor her *"as a co-heir of the grace of life"* (1 Peter 3:7).

Then there's the functioning of parents and children. Parents are responsible to teach their children about God. That's not the church's job or the school's job; it's our job. The most foundational command to parents comes out of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates."* Parents are also called to train and discipline their children. King David was a great king, but he was lacking as a father. His sons were a problem. One of them was Adonijah. In 1 Kings 1:6 we're told David *"never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'"* David was passive, but Proverbs tells us repeatedly, *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die"* (Prov. 23:13).

In keeping with this, children are to obey, honor and learn from their parents. The fifth commandments says, *"Honor your father and your mother..."* (Exodus 20:12). Colossians says, *"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord"* (3:20). Proverbs 1:8 says, *"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and don't reject your mother's teaching."*

It's interesting to think of Jesus as a part of a family, although he never married. When he was 12, he was found in the Temple debating with the scholars. His parents were upset but he told them he had to be about his father's business. Then it says, *"he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them"* (Luke 2:51). Throughout his life Jesus modeled both an appreciation for his family and distance from his family. There were times when his devotion to God's will put him at odds with his family. He made it very clear that anyone who wants to follow him has to put God first, even before family. But at the same time, he

talked about honoring our parents and when he was on the cross he honored his mother by making provision for her care.

One of the ways we can apply this is to think about how as a family we can meet the needs of others who don't have a family. Repeatedly in the Bible we see how God cares for widows, orphans and those without family (Exodus 22:21-24). In the Old Testament families would consume the offerings they made in the special feasts they celebrated in Jerusalem. These feasts would be a celebration of God's goodness. Those without families (widows, orphans, servants, and foreigners) were invited to the feast even though they came with empty hands. In other words, those with families became a blessing to those without a family. In the New Testament, we're told to show hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:3). Hospitality is so significant church leaders had to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2). Even a single adult like Jesus enjoyed the hospitality of Martha and Mary.

So there you have it: you want to build a home? You want to establish your home? You want to fill the rooms of your home with treasures? Then get wisdom, understanding and knowledge from God's Word. Build your house on that rock-like foundation, rather than the changing tides of popular opinion.

For some of you this may seem like a huge project, like remodeling an old dilapidated house. You hear all this and it just seems overwhelming; like an impossible standard. Maybe you're aware of how short your family falls. Maybe the level of brokenness in your family makes you feel that though this may work for some you could never have a family that even comes close to what I've described. Let me encourage you. Don't quit. God's grace never runs out. No, change won't happen overnight and you'll never have a perfect family. It will always be a work in progress. But you can make progress. And God can heal broken marriages and families.

At the very end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi anticipates a day when a family intervention will take place. He says the One coming will *"turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents..."* (Malachi 4:6a). That One has come. We celebrated his death and resurrection last week. He's alive today and one of the things he loves to do is put families back together.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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