

1. 'A Godly Family'

A couple were going out for the evening and the last thing they did was to put the cat out. The taxi arrived, and as the couple walked out of the house, the cat shoots back in. So, the husband goes back inside to chase it out. The wife, not wanting it known that the house would be empty, explained to the taxi driver 'He's just going upstairs to say goodbye to my mother.' A few minutes later, the husband got into the taxi and said, 'Sorry I took so long, the stupid thing was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out!'

We're blessed to have many relationships in our lives but one the greatest blessings God has created for mankind, is the blessing of a family.

Today we're beginning a new sermon series about family and over the next few weeks we're going to try and understand what it means for husbands to love their wives. We're going to try and understand what it means for a wife to submit to her husband. We're going to try and understand what it means for children to obey their parents and the importance of having godly parents.

In society today, there seems to be a slow but steady breakdown within our families. A lot of people now choose not to get married and would rather just live together. Divorce is at an all-time high, kids are getting involved in gangs and knife crime and more and more of our young people end up being addicted to alcohol and drugs. I mean families are breaking down and our society is feeling the effects of that family breakdown.

And so, today we're going try and understand what a godly family looks like and why they're so important in today's world. Because you see loved ones, if the church can't show the world what a godly family is supposed to look like, then our society as a whole will just breakdown even more.

I'm not saying that Christian families are perfect and don't have their problems because they do. I'm not saying that Christian families don't break up and end badly because they do. What I am saying is that Christian families need to set the world an example of how to deal with any problems when they arise within the family.

Psalm 127:1 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.' Someone once said, 'a nation is only as strong as the families that make up that nation'. Notice that **Psalm 127** is called 'a song of ascents. Of Solomon'.

Now remember it was Solomon who was the one who built the Old Testament temple. Which tells us he knew what building something was all about, he totally understood everything which was involved in building something. Now unless you've been involved in building work, all you see is the end product, you see the completed work. But ask anyone who is involved in building work of any kind, and they will tell you it's really hard work.

The same principle applies to building a good marriage and a good family life, it's really hard work. When you speak to any couple and any family who've been together for many years, they will tell you that it hasn't been easy. They had to work at it, and they had to work hard at staying together and keeping their families together as one. It took Solomon twenty years to finish building the temple and as someone once said, 'Rome wasn't built in a day'.

In a world that looks for quick fixes to their problems, it's no wonder that many marriages and families breakdown so quickly. They don't want the hard work, they just get together and try to work things out as they go along. You see, anyone can organise a wedding, yes, there's some preparation involved but it really isn't all that difficult. But a successful marriage and raising a godly family is something which won't happen overnight, it takes hard work and time.

And the reason that most families fall apart is simply because God isn't the One directing the building work. **Psalm 127:1 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.'** You see, God is the One who is directing the labourers, He is the One who should be directing our families. And He has instructions on how to build a godly family within His Word which we're going to look at over the next few weeks.

And if everyone within that family listens to God's instructions and obeys His instructions, then the family will be able to stand against any problems which come their way. And the reason they can stand strong is because their family is built upon a solid foundation.

If you think about it, when Solomon built the temple, he built it out of rocks that were dug up from underneath the city of Jerusalem itself.

They would dig and cut out large stones, they would carve them and use them as the foundation for the temple. And if anyone should know the secret to having a good successful family it should be Christians. Because they understand that they're building their family on the solid rock of God's Word. And I believe if we really want to understand what a godly family should look like, we should go to the very first family we read about in the Scriptures.

Turn your Bible to **Genesis 2** and look with me at **Genesis 2:18**, the text says, **'The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'** If we learn anything from this verse it's simply this, if we want to have godly families, the foundation must be built upon God. Notice God says, **'I will make,'** in other words, God was the One who formed the first ever family. The first family was going to come into existence by the power and authority of God Himself.

Now let me ask you, **who has the authority in your family? Who makes the decisions in your family? Who gets to decide your family values and how you should live together?** It's a sad fact that many families in our society today turn to culture to determine what a family should be like. They look at how they were raised as children, they try to put into practise all the values and standards they were raised with into their families.

If mum and dad behaved in a certain way, very often they will behave in the same manner. If they were raised in a very strict household, the chances are, they will raise their children in a very strict household. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying here, this can actually be a good thing, if they've had a good example of family life.

Maybe you've been raised by godly parents and you've been surrounded by the Bible, a church family and God has been in the centre of your family. And if that's you, then God bless you but there are some of us who weren't raised that way.

I wasn't raised in a godly family, in fact none of my family were **'religious'** in any shape or form. Yes, we had values and standards as a family, but we were far from being a godly family. My dad was the ruler in our home and if you broke the rules, then you would know about it. Alcohol played a big part in our household and needless to say when I was younger alcohol became a big part of my life. I doubt very much that my parents thought that their behaviour would have such a big impact on their children when we grew up. I doubt very much that they knew that all the fighting and shouting when they argued, was actually setting us a bad example to follow for years to come.

Robert Orben says, 'who can ever forget Winston Churchill's immortal words: 'We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.' He goes on to say, 'it sounds exactly like our family holidays'.

And so, some families turn to their own experiences of how the family should operate, whilst others turn to the world of media. They read about and watch on TV how the so-called celebrity family looks like and try to follow their examples. They watch Coronation Street and EastEnders and think that's the way a family is supposed to function together. **'Let's spend more time together as a family in the pub, let's have an affair with the person next door'. 'Let's have same sex marriage, let's just live together and have kids.'** The media is feeding us with what they think is normal family behaviour and then the world thinks how come families and our society is breaking down!

Look again at what God says, **Genesis 2:18 'The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'** This is God talking here and He's the One who is establishing the institution of marriage and the family. He says, **'I will make,'** in other words, marriage is a divine institution, family is a divine institution.

Right from the very beginning we see that marriage and family was God's idea. And if it's God's idea, then surely, He would have instructed us on how families should function together. Yes, there are some great books and great counsellors in the world that can really help us. But the greatest source of help will always come from the One who designed marriages in the first place.

In His Word, we find everything we need to help us have godly marriages and families. And if we want to have godly families, we must understand that God and God alone, has the authority of how families should function together. Now remember God gave Eve to Adam and they were brought together as husband and wife and married.

Genesis 2:24 'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.' God says, I'm the foundation of marriage and the goal between a husband and a wife is unity. God says, there's a temporary relationship in the family life and there's a permanent relationship in family life.

Notice that word, 'leave', it means 'to depart from', in other words, when we're married, we're to leave our parents. But what does it mean 'to leave your father and mother'? It simply means, when you get married and have a family, you're putting together something which is new. You're putting together something which has never existed before. It's your family, it's your marriage and the goal in that new family and that new marriage is unity.

Now when our children grow up and find someone they would like to marry, this can be a really difficult time for us parents, especially the mum. Coming to terms that your child is old enough to take care of themselves, and they may not need to rely on you as much as they did before, can be difficult for some parents. But loved ones, us parents need to allow our children to leave the family home, we need to encourage them to leave the family home.

That word 'united' is an interesting word because it carries with it the idea of compatibility. In today's world people go online to find love and they usually go through some kind of compatibility check before they get matched up together.

We can just imagine it, can't we? You go online and you've found your match. You both love going for a walk, you both love eating food, you both like exercising, you both love being fussed over. And there you have it, you're a perfect match, you've found the springer spaniel of your dreams.

The truth is loved ones, compatibility is something which needs to be worked on because most people are complete opposites of each other. Couples learn to work together and try to develop that compatibility. They learn to talk to one another, they learn to negotiate with one another.

Jesus says in **Matthew 19:6** 'Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.' The word 'join' literally means to be glued together, to be stuck together. In other words, when a couple come together there's a bond that is formed that becomes so strong that it can't be broken without serious damage to both pieces. I guess we could call this commitment.

I don't know if you noticed a few weeks ago the government decided to make divorce a lot easier. The theology behind it was to try and remove the blame and guilt which couples have to go through to get a divorce. In their thinking, making divorce easier means it's less messy and less stressful for both couples, especially if there are children involved. I personally believe that the UK already has a high divorce rate and all this new legislation will do is make it even higher.

You see, loved ones, when couples get married, they exchange their vows, which usually goes something like this. 'Do you promise to love, comfort, honour and keep him/her. For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. And forsaking all others, be faithful only to him/her so long as you both shall live?' And when both couples openly declare those vows to each other and say, 'I do', those vows are a declaration of their commitment to each other.

The problem comes when couples have been together for a while, they forget about those commitments to each other. And let me tell you loved ones, for many married couples today, it doesn't take much for a marriage to end. They get bored with one another, so they get a divorce. The kids get into trouble with the police, and the stress of it all, drives the parents to get a divorce. The husband loses his job, the wife wants a better career, whatever the circumstances are, they're both moving in different directions. The children have grown up and moved out of the house and the couple are left on their own, only to discover they have nothing in common anymore and so they get a divorce.

When Julius Caesar landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions, he took a bold and decisive step to ensure the success of his military venture. Ordering his men to march to the edge of the Cliffs of Dover, he commanded them to look down at the water below. To their amazement, they saw every ship in which they had crossed the channel engulfed in flames. Caesar had deliberately cut off any possibility of retreat. Now that his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, there was nothing left for them to do but to advance and conquer! And that's exactly what they did.

You see, God's design for marriage is that both couples stay committed to one another and move forward together because there is no going back. Couples who marry need to be committed to each other, no matter what life throws at them. When they have children together, they remain committed to each other, but they're also committed to those children.

The point is that they're all committed to each other for the long haul. The whole family needs to be glued together and the way that happens is simply by learning to talk to one another, learning to live with one another.

And so, if God is the foundation and oneness is the goal, then we're truly on our way to having a long-lasting successful marriage. But the building work doesn't end there, **Genesis 2:25** 'Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.' Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was another verse after this one which said, 'and they lived happily ever after!'

Sadly, we know what happens next, and it's not a happy ending. In **Genesis 3**, we read about the first family and we read about how sin entered the world. We read about how Eve became a sinner and we read about how Adam became a sinner. In **Genesis 2** we read about how Adam and Eve were naked and felt no shame but in **Genesis 3** we find God calling out to them after they have sinned and look at Adam's response.

Genesis 3:10 'He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.' You see loved ones, one thing married couples often forget is that both couples are sinners. Whether you're a Christian couple or not, you're both sinners. Even if your kids are old enough to be Christians, they too are sinners. And that's because we all struggle with sin in different ways. The father may struggle with gambling, the mother may struggle with gossip, the children may struggle with alcohol or drugs. Most families struggle with selfishness and pride.

When Adam and Eve were confronted by God in **Genesis 3**, they played the blame game and didn't want to take any responsibility for their own actions. Adam blamed God for creating Eve in the first place, then he blamed Eve, Eve went on to blame the serpent. So were all sinners, we're all selfish, but notice what happened next.

Genesis 3:21 'The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.' This is a reference to the first ever animal sacrifice for sin and what we see here is a picture of grace. It's God's grace that covered their nakedness, it was God's grace which covered their sin.

The point is that God isn't only the foundation of the family and oneness is the goal in the family, but families built upon God's grace will truly help towards having a successful marriage. If every member of that family reminds themselves that they are sinners in need of God's grace. If every member of that family understands they need forgiveness as much as anyone else. Then the chances are, when difficult times come upon the family, grace and mercy will always win the day.

So, whether you're a father, mother or a child, you must be willing not only to stay committed to each other. But to always be willing to offer forgiveness when times get tough. God centred marriages and families last for a life time. Couples and families who are united and committed to each other last for a life time. Grace centred marriages and families last for a life time.

Let me finish by saying this, the world is in desperate need of an example of what a godly family looks like. And my prayer is that the families within this congregation will demonstrate that in their communities, at their work place and amongst their friends.