

3 Essentials Keeping Families Strong as Many Fall Apart

“100 years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove ... but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.”

The above words appear on a sign in front of Atlanta's Scottish Rite Children's Hospital. They're consistent with the heart of Jesus that should beat in all of us for the well-being of children. This has become increasingly important with the current breakdown of two-parent households and the dramatic decline of the nuclear family.

The brutal realities are chilling: In 1970, 10 percent of all births were out-of-wedlock. Today 40 percent are in this category! Whites are at 30 percent; Hispanics, 57 percent; African-Americans, 77 percent. Think of the repercussions of this horrific development for our children.

On one occasion, people brought young children to Jesus so He could interact with them, but His disciples rebuked them. Scripture records that when Jesus saw this “He was very displeased” with them saying, “Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God.” Use your sanctified imagination to picture the warmth of the next scene when “He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

I like to picture Jesus not interacting with the children in some religious way but playfully tousling their hair, giving them some high fives and maybe tickling them as they squirmed like little piglets.

Jesus loves the little children of the world. He also wants us to be an extension of His love in those children He brings

into our lives. We raised ours and now have the privilege of engaging with seven grandchildren, whom my wife and I thoroughly enjoy.

What can we do to help remedy the situation along with helping those around us see Holy Ghost showcase examples of loving families in a world where many are falling apart?

Seeing Children as God Sees Them

A young woman told me last week that she's been married 10 years without having any children. Relating some negative impressions from a relative and their child, it was apparent why she didn't want children. It was sad.

Some people see children as a bother. Others as an infringement on their careers and pursuit of the "good life." For others they're an interruption to a carefree lifestyle.

Scripture says that children should be viewed in three ways: "Look, children are a gift the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is a reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; he shall not be ashamed when he speaks with the enemies at the gate" (Ps. 127:3-5).

1. Children are a gift.

The Hebrew term for this means "assignment." Do you see your children as a divine assignment and yourself as the responsible steward? You have the glorious opportunity of shaping the destiny of another human being. What a high calling in God!

2. Children are a reward.

Imagine the grand architect of the entire universe loves you so much so as to make you a co-laborer with Him in the creation of life itself. And as Bible teacher Howard Hendricks reminds us, "Children are given not just for what you do for

them, but for what they can do for you.”

3. Children are like arrows.

Why arrows? Because in order to be effective, they have to be pointed in a certain direction. An arrow shot into the air at random is useless. Only as it flies toward its target does it serve a purpose. As parents, we have the marvelous opportunity of uncovering our children’s unique gifts and calling, and then guiding them into their divine destiny in life.

One of our sons is a public relations manager for a Fortune 500 insurance company. He also frequently serves as a political adviser and commentator. Another is a lead pastor and worship leader in a thriving local church. Then there’s our very evangelistic daughter (wonder where that came from) who has served in Michael W. Smith’s Nashville Rocketown youth outreach and now as a program manager for “I Am Second” national initiative.

Early on we decided to prioritize the training of our children according to Scripture. We chose to lower our standard of living in order to enhance our quality of life. We made it a priority to have regular devotional times, consistent family dinners and family nights and monthly date times with each of the children to keep their emotional tanks full.

3. Non-negotiables

The family in America is in serious trouble yet it is absolutely critical to the survival of our nation. Sixty-one million innocent little babies have been barbarically dismembered through abortion. Growing darkness is descending upon this world, yet in the midst of it God intends people to be drawn to Him through our light.

“For the darkness shall cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord shall rise upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you. The nations shall come to your light” (-3a).

I am convinced from my 46 years in ministry that God is emphasizing three essentials for the Christian family to flourish in a hostile, post-Christian society.

1. Authority of the Word of God

In our increasingly humanistic and secularistic society, the sacred Scriptures (not opinion polls or non-Christian authorities) must retain their preeminent position as our guide for every facet of life.

2. Active relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ

Successful parenting entails more than simply acquiring a set of techniques. It is not enough to know biblical principles; one must be vitally and uncompromisingly related to the person who enables us to walk in them.

3. Authentic commitment in a strong Christian church

The family is not meant to exist as an island in a sea of separatism but as a life-giving organism within the supportive environment of a genuine local church. Doing life together with other like-minded, devoted followers of Jesus, strengthens us and reinforces beliefs amidst the inevitable difficulties that all families face. New Testament Christianity is not merely a meeting to attend but a life to be lived!

Here's the Deal

Running parallel to the increase of sin and the disintegration of the family in society is the restoration of the family in the Christian church. These are serious times but Scripture assures us, "Where sin increased, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20b).

So as the flood waters rise, make sure you're securely anchored in the ark with Jesus and His body, an authentic New Testament church. "A prudent man foresees the evil and hides

himself" (Prov. 22:3a).

Hold on! There's some exciting but challenging times ahead.