

# SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES

## POWER IN THE LOVE OF FAMILY

When you take a family photograph, it hardly ever seems to come out perfectly. There are always flaws. But that's just the way families are. As humans, we fail to measure up to the ideal in many ways.

However, God has given us a picture of His ideal family, one that goes far beyond outward appearances, and even reflects His special relationship to His people. The human family even serves as a picture of God Himself. So it's important to look at your family from God's perspective to discover the best He has in mind for you.

### THE FAMILY: THE IMAGE OF GOD

A family begins with a man and a woman, each created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). This means that, spiritually, God must have both male and female characteristics. For example, God has fatherly characteristics. He gives us good gifts, as an earthly father would (Luke 11:11-13). He also has motherly characteristics. He comforts us as a mother comforts her child (Isaiah 66:13).

But a family consists of more than just a mother and father. There are children too. God's first commandment to Adam and Eve was to *be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 1:28). Man was to share in the creative act of bringing children into the world.

The family, in other words, is there to show people what our heavenly family will be like. A family is an example to believers and unbelievers alike of the love and acceptance we have from God.

### A FAMILY MEANS LOVE

A family should be a place where you can go, no matter what you've done wrong, and still be loved. The prodigal son left his home, squandering all his riches. Yet, when

everyone else had turned away from him, his father still welcomed him home with open, loving arms (Luke 15:11-24). This is an example of the *everlasting love* of God (Jeremiah 31:3).

But love means more than acceptance, more than affection—it means discipline. The book of Hebrews tells us that God chastens, or disciplines, those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). In the same way, love is something that needs to be expressed verbally. God often tells us in His Word that He loves us: *God so loved the world* (John 3:16) and *He first loved us* (1 John 4:19). If God didn't tell us He loved us, we wouldn't know.

But words alone are not enough. God demonstrated His love by Christ's dying on the cross for us. To really show our families that we love them, we need to die to our own selfish desires and put them before ourselves—as Jesus put us before Himself on the cross.

### ENDURING LOVE

Remember what it was like when you first fell in love? Gazing endlessly into one another's eyes, holding hands under the stars—yet often the romance gets lost as married bliss becomes a monotonous repetition of the humdrum of daily existence.

But it is our commitment which makes love endure. The world likes to tell you that the wonderful feelings are most important, but God talks of commitment.

In today's world, we are besieged with all kinds of pressures that can produce family conflicts. The world encourages divorce and separation rather than resolution of conflict. Satan is working harder than ever to destroy our families through these conflicts. Yet the Bible promises us that we can *submit therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you* (James 4:7).

Loving one another through Jesus and applying

His Word in our lives will resolve the conflicts that our families face. It is not our responsibility to change others—that belongs to God. However, it is our responsibility to fulfill our Christ-like role as a spouse, parent or child and be personally committed to doing our part in the family.

## HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES

The family unit begins when *a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24).

This is a show of the man's commitment to his wife. Thus, they become one flesh. How two people become one is a great mystery in life. And this mysterious union reflects the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32).

So when husbands are told to love their wives, they are told to do so in the same way that Jesus loves the church. In the same way, the husband serves his wife by giving his life for her. This doesn't mean he becomes her servant, rather, he serves her by loving her—encouraging her to become the best woman of God she can be. He admires her talents and abilities and praises her (Proverbs 31:28). This creates an atmosphere of mutual respect.

## HER CHILDREN RISE UP AND BLESS HER; HER HUSBAND ALSO, AND HE PRAISES HER.

—PROVERBS 31:28

## LOVE ENCOURAGES SUBMISSION

*Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Note first in this Scripture verse that the head of Christ is God. Jesus, while on this earth, willingly submitted to the Father. He said that He didn't come to earth to do His own will, but rather the will of His Father (John 6:38). Jesus' authority came as a result of His submission to the Father (John 17:2).

In the same manner, a husband's authority comes from his submission to his head, which is Christ. The woman, like Christ, willingly submits herself to the husband,

not because she is forced to, but because she chooses to, recognizing this is God's will for her life (Ephesians 5:22).

## WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

The relationship between the husband and wife sets the stage for how children will behave in a family. If the mother shows respect for her husband, the children will respect their father. If the husband reverences his wife, the children will honor their mother.

An example is a great teacher. And teacher is the role that God gave us with our children. *You shall teach them [the words of God] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them ... when you lie down and when you rise up* (Deuteronomy 6:7).

## MAKING YOUR HOME A HAVEN OF JOY

To make your family more like God's family, take a long look at what is preventing you from having this ideal relationship. For many families, it's just a lack of communication. But you can shift schedules and plan to do some things you'll all enjoy. And don't forget to pray together. Share your thoughts and feelings about God and what He's doing in your lives. Read and meditate on God's Word, applying its principles to your family life.

For serious problems—alienation, behavior problems in your children, and the like, seek out a Christian counselor or minister who counsels family problems and resolve together to work on the problem. And whatever stands in the way, do not let it deprive you of the closest fellowship you can realize this side of heaven, the haven of your family.

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