

LESSON ESSENTIALS

FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 7: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The family is a God-given, God-blessed unit that He intends to use in great ways for His kingdom; therefore the attack against the family is more intense in many ways than the attack against the individual. By reviewing God's design for the family, we can more clearly anticipate and guard against the challenges to our families.

Whenever you put several sinners in a home together you are bound to have some conflicts between personalities and desires. However, beyond the expected individual disagreements within a home, there is a greater set of challenges on the family unit coming from outside influences that are seeking to undo your family.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

The Bible clearly teaches us that in this world we will have troubles (John 16:33). We are to expect challenges and difficulties because of both our own sinful nature and the sinful nature of the world around us. We also know that our struggle is actually against spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12) not the personal or circumstantial issues that we can see. This should give us great comfort as we face the challenges in our families, because we know that we are not resisting them on our own, but rather the Holy Spirit will defend us on our behalf.

You may be very aware of the kinds of challenges facing your family. Communication problems, rebellious children, parenting struggles, financial difficulties, and so many other issues threaten to drive family members away from each other. The temptation is great to live like several individuals under one roof instead of as a tightly knit family. But this kind of individualism in a home undermines the Lord's good purposes for the family, and is actually seen as a success in the eyes of our enemy.

It is important to understand the kinds of negative influences that the family must resist. These are true of all individuals – all Christians – but they apply to families as well. First, the Bible instructs us in the parable of the Sower in Mark 4 and also in Ephesians 2:1-3 about some of the ways that people can fall away from, or be challenged in, their faith. It is usually summed up by the phrase “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” The temptations and values of this world, the lustful desires of our own sinful flesh, and the direct attack of the devil are real threats to the people in your home and to your family as a whole.

We all have one common enemy: the devil who seeks to steal kill and destroy (John 10: 10). Indeed, he is prowling like a lion looking for individuals whom he can devour. However, we need to be on guard that he is also seeking families to devour.

It is crucial to understand the value of the family. Just as a marriage represents the relationship between Christ and the Church, so the family functions as a small church within the Church. The structure and function of the family mirrors the body of Christ and as such is a target for the attacks of the enemy.

Our enemy knows the power and influence of the family on the watching world, and he seeks to undo that. When our families are godly with peaceful interactions, living out the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the world sits up and takes notice. The kingdom of God advances, in part, by families acting like the Church in their neighbourhoods, living out the truth of God's Word and going out to make disciples of those who are in their sphere of influence and by discipling godly children.

In a church, unity is critical. In a family, unity is also critical. There are stern warnings to Christians to ensure that they continue gathering in

groups, to 'do church' together so that they can be taught from the Word, they can worship, they can serve, they can hold each other accountable, and more. The family needs to 'gather together' as well, and when the father of the family takes on his role as leader in the home, the family will grow in godliness just as the church does when it gathers.

When the family unity begins to fall apart and members no longer receive acceptance and identity from their family, the values of the world creep in; when selfishness and the lust of individual's flesh takes precedence over the greater good, then the enemy has succeeded in weakening one of the Lord's greatest institutions. Like a lion separating the sick or weak prey from the protective herd, so the enemy would seek to tear apart our families, keeping the individuals in our home alone and unprotected. This not only destroys the individual and the family, but as a result weakens the Church.

Some of the challenges that families face are struggles with worldly influences, financial pressures, devaluing of marriage within society, divorce, absent fathers, addictions, and persecution from society for your faith. These external forces are destructive but parents who lead their family would do well to shepherd their children into safe pastures and keep watch over them.

The Church is stronger when families are strong. Our enemy knows that. And so we ought to be diligent as families to guard and protect our home, intentionally spending time together, praying together, worshipping together, serving together, and studying the Word of God together. Spiritual leadership of any kind begins with strengthening the home. If you care for the spiritual needs of others, be sure to care for your family just the same. Watch for anything that would tear it apart.

Having this kind of aim and focus will help your family resist outside influences, and will help your family overcome the varied challenges that they face. It will also remind you to take up the Great Commission as a group, instead of only as individuals. The intention of the Lord is not that families would isolate themselves and hide from the challenges and the attacks against it; the Lord intends that families would be strong in the strength of the Lord and would go out, reflecting the beauty of His Church, and making disciples of all nations. What a privilege!

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IN REVIEW

- Families face similar temptations and challenges that individuals face, but our enemy attacks the family with a different motivation than he does the individual.
- The Christian family is a picture of the church within the Church.
- Family unity is crucial in order to protect the individual members of our family, but also in order to protect the strength of the Church.

