

# discipleship essentials

## Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Leader's Guide

### FAMILY LIFE

#### LESSON 7: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Family Life. This series of lessons looks at spiritual leadership in the home as it pertains to building a healthy Christian family. It begins with a framework for understanding the Biblical basis for family and moves on to some challenges faced by families such as preparation for marriage, managing finances, leading one's children, and building good communication with your spouse. This series of lessons takes the view that spiritual leadership begins in the home – and both men and women have specific roles in this regard. These lessons present God's best design for families, while recognizing that in today's world families can come in many forms. The lessons will benefit those who are married, those who have the role of a parent, as well as young people who desire healthy relationships in the future.

### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who teach the foundations for marriage and family, and how to develop strong relationships within them.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# FAMILY LIFE

## LESSON 7: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to discuss challenges that the family faces in our modern world, and what the Bible teaches about dealing with them.

### LEADER'S NOTE

It is amazing that wherever you are in the world, some things are the same: the need for love and acceptance, the problem of greed, power and worldliness. Regardless of our culture or language, our families face many of the same challenges! In many places, family is not always upheld and celebrated, and in fact it may be under attack. Jesus warned us that in this world we will have trouble. This lesson examines some of the most common challenges facing the Christian family today. These challenges may apply to some of your participants more than others. Feel free to choose those topics which most affect your community. While it may seem overwhelming to deal with all these problems, keep the tone of the lesson hopeful. Families that have endured many struggles can be encouraged as they face future challenges with God's help and the guidance of His Word.

## INTRODUCTION

*Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.*

- ❖ Do people around you aspire to traditional marriage and family patterns, or are more people choosing to go their own way and live as they please?
- ❖ What are some of the things that work against your family and make it difficult for you to bear the image of God together?
- ❖ What topics cause arguments between parents and children? Do you feel this is a new problem in this day and age, or have parents and children always argued?
- ❖ What threat is a happy, God-honouring family to Satan? Why would it be a priority of his to destroy families?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **Facing Challenges Together:** As Christians, we will all face challenges from a multitude of sources. It is often said that we each deal with opposition from the world, the flesh and the devil. This is true also of family units facing struggles and challenges.
  - **The World:** The priorities of the world are different from those of the Christian. Collectively, the world does not create a culture of peace and love but rather of power, greed, and selfish ambition. This results in ruin and conflict, taking advantage of the poor and powerless. The Christian family is constantly up against a worldly culture that has a very different set of values (1 John 2:15-16, John 12:43, Ephesians 4:17-20).
  - **The Flesh:** Our own sinful nature is often seen most clearly by those closest to us. Our issues with anger, pride, deceit or laziness are obvious to those in our own family. We sometimes fall back into old sinful habits, even as we are being renewed by God (1 Peter 2:11, Romans 7:18).
  - **The Devil:** Because families should be a demonstration of God' love and grace and a vehicle through which the Gospel is passed to the next generation, the forces of evil are working toward their destruction (1 Peter 5:8).

We must be aware of challenges to our family, and be resolved to face them together. It can be tempting to isolate families from the world around us in order to insulate our children from its harmful influences; however, it is impossible to bear witness to those around us if they can't see how we live! Therefore we must walk the fine line of being in the world, but not of it!

- Consider these verses:
  - o Romans 12:2
  - o John 17:14-15
  - o John 15:19
  - o James 4:4
- ❖ **Challenges Facing the Christian Family:** Each of us is called to bear Christ's image. It isn't an easy life, but it is a fulfilling, joyful, purposeful one! A Christian family should be different than a worldly family. If we are walking in obedience to God rather than the ways of the world, different choices will be made. It is wise for a Christian family to be prepared to face opposition and even persecution for the way they live.
  - The following challenges have been noted by Christian leaders around the world, and affect almost everyone. As you seek to lead your family well and engage in spiritual leadership with others, be prepared to teach God's response to each of these challenges.



**TASK:**

*Optional class participation activity:* Divide the participants into 9 groups if there are enough of them. There should be a minimum of 3 members per group. If you are preparing this ahead of time, you could provide materials so that each group can work on a presentation outside of class time, allowing for more intensive research. Each group should:

- o **Read** one of the assigned 'challenges' and accompanying verses.
- o **Research** any supplemental material you (the leader) can provide, such as statistics from your community, newspaper or journal articles, or case studies.
- o **Present** the problem, how the problem manifests itself in Christian families in your community, and what God's Word says about it.
- o **Suggest** possible solutions a Christian family could utilize.

*Alternatively, you as a teacher can present the following material yourself. You would have to do some research into statistics, case studies and examples in your own community.*

**TEACH:**

- ❖ Consider the following challenges facing families today. For each challenge, we examine the effects on a family, what God's Word says, and propose some questions for group discussion.

<b>WORLDLY INFLUENCES</b>		
<p>The religion of the people around us can easily seep into our lives. Even when people deny they are practising religion, it is true that superstition, spiritism, atheism and humanistic values are all a part of worldly religion. Rites or ritualistic practices are evidence that the world's values have crept into our homes.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>If we place our trust primarily in political systems, superstition, rituals, luck, aspects of other faiths, or even in science, our children will do the same. God demands that we trust Him with our whole heart. Children must see that our trust is in the power of God. If they see inconsistent living in us, they will lose faith in us and in God. God will not tolerate being second-place in our life to anything. Turning to something else to solve problems when we should turn to God is also idolatry.</p>	<p>Colossians 2:8-10</p> <p>Jeremiah 10:2-4</p> <p>1 Timothy 4:7</p> <p>Deuteronomy 18:10-12</p>	<p>Consider the habits of your daily life. Do you rely on any powers other than God? Are you fearful of spirits or demons? Do you consult horoscopes or calendars or rely on luck? We need to trust God alone for the wellbeing of our family rather than tradition and worldly culture. Teach your family to make choices that honour God, even if it means ridicule and pressure from family and friends. If you can still honour God with the celebration of a festival or cultural practice, then it is alright. Consider carefully where your heart is.</p>
<p><i>What are some examples of worldly practices that have seeped into family life in your community?            To what idols do families intentionally or unintentionally bow down?            Can a Christian family adhere to any part of their former religious beliefs?            How does the worship of political systems, government, science or humanism display itself in the life of families?</i></p>		



<b>MATERIALISM</b>		
<p>In our world today, goods are produced quickly and cheaply, and it seems there will never be an end to novel products. The pursuit and accumulation of wealth and possessions as our main goal in life is called materialism. Chasing after material success and worldly importance is idolatry, and is sin in God's sight.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>It is fine to admire nice things or useful tools, but when we desire to have something because someone else has it, we are coveting. Children and youth are prone to compare themselves with others as they try to find their place in the world. Making the most money, having the newest toys and striving to be better than others can tear a family apart. Children resent parents, and parents resent one another as they seek things which will never satisfy.</p>	<p>Colossians 3:5, 4:2  Exodus 20:17  1 Timothy 6:10  Acts 20:33-35</p>	<p>In order to combat a fixation on material things, you must value and treasure family, community, and the love of God. Demonstrate that you value people for their character, not what they possess. Spend time 'counting blessings' and recognizing the spiritual gifts God has given to you. Your family can give to charities and missions, demonstrating that money is a tool for God's purposes rather than something to be hoarded. Use your time and money to serve others.</p>
<p><i>What did you covet as a child that your family was unable to afford? How do families express a focus on the material in their desires for their children, such as whom they will marry, what job they will have, or what they will accomplish? How can a family regularly remind themselves of their spiritual blessings? How can charitable giving and serving others together as a family combat materialism?</i></p>		

<b>FINANCIAL PRESSURES</b>		
<p>Families often struggle under financial pressures. The pressure to find work and make more money can be overwhelming. The pressure of paying off debt, making ends meet, and providing for our families can cause individuals to make poor choices and resent each other.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>When parents are stressed about money, they can make choices they would not normally make. This may include removing children from school and making them work, or requiring adult children to support their parents instead of setting up their own families. Fights over money can drive a husband and wife apart. Sometimes a person has to move far away from his family in order to find work. These struggles are real, and affect families around the</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:5  Ecclesiastes 5:10  Matthew 6:31-33  Matthew 6:19-21</p>	<p>We should first trust God to provide for us. Secondly, we should work with our hands and find ways to be productive with our time and talents. Thirdly, families must work together to create a spending budget they can stick to. Fourth, they should follow wise financial planning principles. They must communicate and work together as a team. It may require moving the whole family in order to find work, being content with a smaller house, or making</p>



<p>world. The worst danger comes when financial stress tears a family apart and individuals resent one another, rather than working together for the benefit of all.</p>		<p>other sacrifices. Remember that time together is important to family unity! Focus on what God has given you, and trust Him to provide for your basic needs.</p>
<p><i>What financial pressures do people in your community experience? Is it difficult to make enough to live on?          What is the result on family unity when financial pressures are extreme?          How can a family work together to solve financial problems?          How can a family demonstrate reliance on God to meet their needs?</i></p>		

**DEVALUING OF MARRIAGE**

Fewer and fewer people are marrying, and in many parts of the world as many as half of all marriages end in divorce. Instead of experiencing sexual intimacy within the safety of marriage, many people experiment outside of marriage. It is harder to find marriage partners when marriage isn't esteemed. This devaluing of marriage causes children to be born out of wedlock, rampant disease and heartbreak, and many more problems.

<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>There are many reasons why people might choose to simply live together rather than be married, including fear of commitment, lack of funds, and casual attitudes toward sex. Some people are simply disillusioned with marriage. This causes instability in society – children do not know their fathers, fathers are not committed to their families, and children grow up without a secure family environment. As a society devalues marriage, it can be harder and harder to find a marriage partner. Divorce is common. In some countries same-sex marriages and polygamous marriages are allowed, which are unbiblical. Devaluing of marriage often harms women and children – the most vulnerable members of society.</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:4            Matthew 5:32            1 Thessalonians 4:3-5            1 Corinthians 7:2            1 Corinthians 6:9-10</p>	<p>The first thing a couple can do to combat the devaluing of marriage is to hold to a Biblical model of marriage. This includes remaining pure and virtuous until marriage and faithful after marriage. Honour others' marriages and teach young people to do the same. If you are married, be a good example to your children of a loving marriage. Advise children about suitable marriage partners, and encourage them to think about marriage as good for society rather than a loss of freedom. Husbands and wives should be careful to speak well of one another and their marriage around their children, and to continually work on strengthening their marriage. Married or single, each of us should value marriage because God ordained it. Even if we have not valued it in the past, we can begin to do so today.</p>

*What causes people in your community to devalue marriage? What are the results?  
 Are people you know hesitant to make commitments? What do we gain by commitment?  
 What stresses are put on children when they grow up without a traditional family model? How can the Church help children in this situation?  
 How can the Church encourage a positive view of marriage? How can it offer grace to those who have been hurt?*



<b>ABSENT FATHERS</b>		
<p>One side effect of the devaluing of marriage is absent fathers. This can occur when a man and a woman make no commitment to one another, but have a child together regardless. Children grow up without knowing their father and without the financial, emotional and protective support a father can provide. Less commonly, women may abandon their roles as mothers, which is equally destructive.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>Absent fathers create a crisis in our world. Children and young adults need the example of a father. A father provides identity and protection for his family, without which children may look to their peers or more destructive influences for identity. Without the income of a father, an abandoned mother has the extra burden of earning more money, leaving her with little time to care for her children. Living without a father can cause emotional and behavioural issues in children, and damage their self-esteem and ability to succeed. They can view themselves as being of little worth to their father. This can even harm a child's ability to trust God, their heavenly Father! Fathers have a vital role to play in the family unit – without them, the family is broken.</p>	<p>Proverbs 4:1-9            Genesis 18:19            Proverbs 13:24            1 Timothy 6:11            1 Corinthians 16:13</p>	<p>God can bring healing and mend the hurts caused by an absent earthly father. But it is so much better for children to learn about God and how to live a godly life from their father. Teach young boys to be responsible, to care for siblings, to work hard, and to honour their commitments. Church elders should teach men that commitment to family is important, and they should chastise those who abandon this responsibility. If young men are without godly examples of good men and fathers, the church can provide such examples. Men of God should disciple, train and teach young men. If your family is without a father, rely on God your heavenly Father, seek out other men who can be an example to your children, and teach responsibility to your children.</p>
<p><i>What percentage of families in your community have absent fathers?            Even if fathers are physically present, what other ways do fathers sometimes neglect their responsibility? What are the effects on the wife and children?            What can a church do to help fathers be responsible leaders of their family?</i></p>		

<b>YOUTH REBELLION</b>		
<p>Parents often complain about youth who are rebellious and disobedient. This is not a new phenomenon! The very first children – Cain and Abel – were rebellious too! Most children go through a period of rebellion as they become more independent, resisting parental restrictions. Severe rebellion can destroy a family.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>When children refuse to obey their parents and even engage in sinful practices, it brings extreme stress on a mother and father. Sometimes youth</p>	<p>Ephesians 6:1-4            Proverbs 22:6</p>	<p>Biblical wisdom on this topic is that parents should train a child up in the way he should go, be faithful in discipline, but not provoke children to</p>



<p>will leave the Church and turn their back on God. In some societies, youth are seen as independent when they can financially contribute to the family. Other societies see youth as independent when they are no longer reliant on parents. In both cases, youth may rebel, either refusing to contribute to the family, or by continuing to rely on it without responsibility. When youth do not respect and honour parents, the family balance is thrown off, causing strained relationship and preventing the family's ability to bear the image of God.</p>	<p>Proverbs 13:24                  Hebrews 12:9-11                  Luke 15:11-32                  Ecclesiastes 11:9                  Psalm 119:9                  1 Corinthians 15:33</p>	<p>anger. We must love our children, seek to protect them, and encourage them to be exemplary in their conduct and faith. We must be consistent with discipline as we teach them right from wrong. When children strongly rebel, we may have to let them go for a time and then welcome them home with forgiveness. If a child is willfully sinning, we do not have to permit them to stay with us – this also is discipline. Pray that this child would love the Lord and return to Him. Ultimately, some children will sin and leave the Church. We will not have to feel guilty if we have loved them, disciplined them, and taught them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.</p>
<p><i>Is there anything a parent can do to protect their child from rebellion and sin in their youth? What can a parent do if their child is rebellious, denies the faith, and chooses a life of sin? How do children learn to be rebellious – or is it a natural behaviour?</i></p>		

**BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE**

Many families struggle to keep a balance between work and family life. In their pursuit of financial security, they neglect to spend time together enjoying one another. Families are a gift, and are meant to be celebrated and cherished. When families neglect one another and put work first, children suffer and do not feel valued.

<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>When parents are working too much to the exclusion of family, children are left to raise themselves. They do not receive discipline, instruction, care and love. They may go looking for security elsewhere, and will not value the teachings of their parents. Parents need to provide more than food and shelter for children – their time and presence is so important! Children need an example to follow, and an intimate relationship with their parents. On the other hand, we must not neglect work – it is a gift from God! Careful balance is the key.</p>	<p>Genesis 2:15                  John 6:27                  Proverbs 23:4                  Ecclesiastes 3:1-8</p>	<p>Parents must take the lead and ensure that quality time is spent together as a family. It may include regular meals together, and special family celebrations, such as birthdays. Discipline is much more effective if it occurs within a loving relationship. Providing for your family's needs is important, but just as important is time together. Supporting your children emotionally and spiritually is vital. Money cannot replace a relationship with you.</p>

*Is balancing work and family life difficult for you? Was it difficult for your parents? What distractions prevalent in the world today diminish a family's time together? What is your favourite family activity? What is the advantage of families working and playing together? Does your culture encourage families to spend quality time together? Does your church?*



<b>ADDICTIONS</b>		
<p>Addictions can take many forms: drugs, alcohol, gambling, lust, and every one of them destroys lives and families. God desires that we be self-controlled, sober minded, and controlled by His Spirit, not by destructive substances or behaviours.</p>		
<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God's Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>There is no doubt that addictions can tear a family apart, but sometimes they are kept secret. Alcohol and drugs abuse the body God gave us. These addictions waste our money, they change patterns of behaviour, and sacrifice the wellbeing of family members. Purchasing more of these addictive substances often robs children of the necessities of life. It is a selfish behaviour often brought about by stress, and usually requires intervention of some kind to correct the behaviour.</p> <p>Children learn from an addicted parent to rely on substances rather than on God to help them, and as a result are more likely to become addicts themselves. Substance abuse affects our ability to provide, care for, and connect with family members.</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 10:13</p> <p>1 John 2:16</p> <p>1 Corinthians 15:33</p> <p>Romans 12:2</p> <p>Proverbs 20:1</p> <p>Proverbs 6:27</p> <p>Ephesians 5:18</p> <p>Proverbs 23:29-35</p>	<p>If you have an addiction, get help. Rely on God, your church and any medical professionals available. It is a spiritual problem as well as a physical one. Addictions come in many forms. There is a proper place for the use of medicine, and in some cases alcohol. But if your need for that substance affects your behaviour, it is an addiction. Some families decide to completely abstain from all addictive substances. They believe that even a small portion is like playing with fire.</p> <p>When children are raised with a strong sense of identity and purpose, and feel the love and acceptance of their parents, they are far less likely to turn to addictions to cope with the realities of life. Know your children, and maintain a good relationship with them. Pray for them. Warn them about the dangers of falling into addictions. It is sometimes difficult for people to admit they have an addiction. If you have suspicions, confront them with grace and love.</p>
<p><i>What are the most common addictions in your community? What is the result on the families involved? Why do you believe people become addicted to substances? What would you do to help someone dealing with an addiction? How can the Church help these families? Some Christians choose to avoid all alcohol, all forms of gambling, and all drugs not prescribed by a doctor. Yet, Jesus drank wine. What do you think is a good response for Christian families to have? This is controversial. Do you talk about drugs, alcohol and other dangers with your children? How can parents warn their children?</i></p>		



**ANTI-CHRISTIAN CULTURE**

We do not live in a world that always welcomes followers of Jesus Christ. In some countries, it is acceptable to be a Christian as long as your faith is kept quiet. In other places, it may cost you your life!

<b>How this Affects a Family:</b>	<b>What God’s Word Says:</b>	<b>Protecting Your Family:</b>
<p>As parents, it is important for our children to see us living our faith. The fear and stress of living differently from those around us can cause families to come apart, or to have members leave the faith. This can cause resentment, pain, and sorrow. In some situations children will face persecution for their beliefs at a state-run school. We live in a world that often does not tolerate our different values, and yet we must live differently and be light in a dark world. Children are sometimes torn between wanting to fit in with their peers, and the faith of their family.</p>	<p>2 Timothy 3:12  1 Peter 4:12-14  1 John 3:13  Proverbs 29:27  John 15:18-25  Matthew 5:16</p>	<p>Acknowledge that the world will not always accept those who follow Jesus Christ. The world turned their back on Him and killed Him. They will continue to persecute His followers.  It is necessary to teach children how to speak wisely with those outside the faith. Pray for yourself and your family, fellow believers, and for those who are persecuted around the world.  We must teach children the values taught in Scripture and to trust the Word of God, because they will be faced with other ideas from those outside the faith (perhaps those at school or neighbours).  Talk about what is happening in the world and how it is contrary to God’s values. Compare and contrast what they hear from others to what is taught in the Bible. Pray that they will seek God and follow Him, not the world.</p>

*In what ways do you experience a world that is set against the followers of Jesus Christ?  
How does persecution manifest itself in your community? What is the effect of this on families?  
Where might children encounter anti-Christian teachings? How can parents prepare their children for this?  
Why is it difficult to live in the world, but not be of the world? What is the difference?*

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ Which of the issues discussed is the greatest challenge facing your family?
- ❖ How can the Church equip families to face these challenges together?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that each participant might diligently work to keep their family together, be an image bearer of God, a light to the nations, and a witness to the truth. Pray that they would not succumb to the world, the flesh or the devil, but diligently pursue God.*