

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 7: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

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

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 7: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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. While it may seem overwhelming to deal with all these problems, Christian families can be encouraged as they face future challenges with God's help and the guidance of His Word.

GETTING STARTED

1. 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?

2. What are some of the things that work against your family and make it difficult for you to bear the image of God together?



STUDY

❖ **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!

- What do the following verses tell us about the harmful influences of the world, and what we should expect to face as a family? Write down what you learn.

Romans 12:2	
John 17:14-15	
John 15:19	
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.

- For each challenge, write down what you learn from the Bible and answer the questions.



WORLDLY INFLUENCES

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. 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. If they see inconsistent living in us, they could lose faith in us and in God.

Colossians 2:8-10	
Jeremiah 10:2-4	
1 Timothy 4:7	
Deuteronomy 18:10-12	
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? (They may not be literal idols, but can be anything that is honoured more than God.)	
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?	

MATERIALISM

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. 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. In order to combat a fixation on material things, you must value and treasure family, community, and the love of God.

Colossians 3:5, 4:2	
Exodus 20:17	
1 Timothy 6:10	
Acts 20:33-35	
What did you covet as a child that your family was unable to afford?	



How can a family regularly remind themselves of their spiritual blessings?
How can parents help children value people for their character rather than what they possess?
How can charitable giving and serving others together as a family combat materialism?

FINANCIAL PRESSURES

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. 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.

Hebrews 13:5	
Ecclesiastes 5:10	
Matthew 6:31-33	
Matthew 6:19-21	

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?



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.

Hebrews 13:4	
Matthew 5:32	
1 Thessalonians 4:3-5	
1 Corinthians 6:9-10	

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?

How can the Church encourage a positive view of marriage? How can it offer grace to those who have been hurt?

ABSENT FATHERS

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. Children need a sense of security and identity. Less commonly, women may abandon their roles as mothers, which is equally destructive.

Proverbs 4:1-9	
Genesis 18:19	
1 Timothy 6:11	
1 Corinthians 16:13	

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?



YOUTH REBELLION

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. When children refuse to obey their parents and even engage in sinful practices, it brings extreme stress on a mother and father. Sometimes youth will leave the Church and turn their back on God. 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 anger. We must love our children, seek to protect them, and encourage them to be exemplary in their conduct and faith.

Ephesians 6:1-4	
Hebrews 12:9-11	
Ecclesiastes 11:9	
Psalm 119:9	

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? Is it natural or a learned behaviour? Are there ways in which you model rebellion to them?

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. 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. Quality time spent together is of tremendous worth – even more than money.

Genesis 2:15	
John 6:27	
Proverbs 23:4	
Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8	

Is balancing work and family life difficult for you? Was it difficult for your parents?

What distractions in the world diminish a family's time together?



ADDICTIONS

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. Alcohol and drugs can abuse the body God gave us. These addictions waste our money, they change patterns of behaviour, and sacrifice the wellbeing of family members (such as when alcohol is purchased instead of providing for children's needs). 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. Addictions cause physical, spiritual, mental and emotional problems that often need trained intervention to overcome. Pray that your children won't yield to the temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13	
1 John 2:16	
Proverbs 23:29-35	
Ephesians 5:18	

What are the most common addictions in your community? What is the result on the families involved?

What would you do to help someone dealing with an addiction? How can the Church help these families?

Do you talk about drugs, alcohol, and other dangers with your children? How can parents warn their children about them?

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! 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. 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, because they will be faced with other ideas from those outside the faith.

2 Timothy 3:12	
1 Peter 4:12-14	
1 John 3:13	
Matthew 5:16	

In what ways do you experience a world that is set against the followers of Jesus Christ?

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?

SUMMARY

- ❖ As Christians, we will all face challenges from a multitude of sources.
- ❖ Challenges come from the world, our own sinful desires, and the devil who opposes all that is good (such as family).
- ❖ Some of the specific challenges facing a Christian family include worldly influences and anti-Christian culture, financial pressures and materialism, devaluing of marriage, absent parents, youth rebellion, addictions, and the difficulties involved in balancing work, family life and even ministry.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1.

Which of the issues discussed is the greatest challenge facing your family?

2.

How can the Church equip families to face these challenges together?