

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

Elements of Family 1:

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September 2, 2012

Sermon in a sentence: Everything God intends for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing should be found at home, within our family.

Scriptures: Gen. 2:18-25; (John 15:16a; 1 Cor. 12:27; Rom. 12:5; Col. 1:24; Rev. 21:9;) Rom. 12:9-10; 1 Thes. 5:16-18; Col. 3:12-24

In our society, we use words that we often don't fully understand. Words like "family". What would your definition of family be? A quick Google search the other day yielded "About 417,000,000 results" in "0.20 seconds".

The 1st hit defines family as: "A group consisting of parents and children living together in a household"

The 2nd is similar, but a little more expansive:

- 1. A fundamental social group in society typically consisting of one or two parents and their children.**
- 2. Two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another, and reside usually in the same dwelling place.**

The U.S. Bureau of Census defines family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together".¹

¹ Quoted by Melanie Mallers,

<http://cccfc.com/uploads/Family%20Studies/FS%2010/chil dren%20view%20on%20family-final.pdf>. Accessed

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Others have weighed in with comments that speak of the significance of family, beyond the textbook definitions.

Desmond Tutu says: “You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.”

Barbara Ehrenreich, an American feminist and political activist says: “At best the family teaches the finest things human beings can learn from one another – generosity and love. But it is also, all too often, where we learn nasty things like hate, rage and shame.” Family seems to bring out both the best and the worst in us!

Well, we've heard from the adults. What do the children have to say? A psychology researcher asked 15 kindergarten age children: “What does family mean?” Here are some of their responses (verbatim):

- *“When someone be's nice to you.”*
- *“They let you have candy because that's being a family.”*
- *“When you love them and I play with my sister.”*
- *“Love.”*
- *“Kissing.”*
- *“Your mommy, daddy, and brother.”*
- *“Piggy-backs.”*

- *“My mom telling me I need a bath because I am dirty.”²*

As we can see, there’s no end of viewpoints on what family is and what family means.

The first account we have of a family in scripture comes to us in Genesis 2 as the Lord looks at Adam and observes that it is not good for him to be alone. In response to his need, God creates Eve to be his companion and helper.

When God brings her to him, Adam responds in a manner that gives us a wonderful insight into what family is all about, and how we should think about it.

“The man said, **“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”**” (Gen. 2:23 NASB)

So our first, basic understanding of family is that we are joined together by blood – bone of bone, flesh of flesh. Certainly, this is how a child comes into a family and they grow up with the understanding that they come out of, and are given life by their parents.

But the very next verse expands our understanding into what every man and woman experiences as they decide to enter into the life-long covenant called marriage:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen2:24 NASB)

This verse indicates that we can actually *choose* who our husband or wife will be, take our eyes off all others, separate ourselves from mother and father and begin an

² Ibid.

exclusive, new family together.

(We see this perfectly modeled by God Himself as He chose the Church to be His body and bride, eternally linking Himself to us!

“You did not choose Me but I chose you....” (John 15:16a)

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12:27 NASB)

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Rom. 12:5 NASB)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church.... (Col. 1:24 NASB)

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." (Rev. 21:9 NASB)

Here's the big problem we find in today's society, as exemplified in this quote from Pope John Paul II: "The great danger for family life, in the midst of any society whose idols are pleasure, comfort and independence, lies in the fact that people close their hearts and become selfish."

In other words, some people come to the place where they believe family is 'all about ME!' *My way, what I want, and if I don't get my way, I'm gone!*

This is why I believe God puts us into families from birth. As a little child is going through all the tantrums and turmoil of wanting her own way and not getting it, she just

has to learn to deal with it, because she's not yet old enough and bold enough to run away from home!

That's why it is so crucial for parents to be parents to their children, not pamperers and facilitators of bad behaviour. If we don't teach our children that the world doesn't revolve around them, they will grow up into spoiled teens and adults, without respect for anyone or anything. This also sets them up for very bad relationships in the future.

We are meant to learn the important lessons of submission and obedience, fairness and selflessness in the context of a family, where love reigns, and we are treasured by those who are close to us.

A parent, a teacher, a pastor, a boss, a coach, or whoever may be over us in a particular setting will not always be right, or treat us with kid gloves, the way we would want to be treated! In those cases, the lessons in understanding and forgiveness we learned at home as children will stand us in good stead.

At other times, the things those above us may say or do are absolutely right and necessary, and we need to receive correction with a humble spirit, and not 'throw a tantrum' or 'run away from home'.

The truth is, everything God intends for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing should be found at home within our family!

This is where we should learn about compassion, caring, unconditional love, truth and honesty, preferring others above ourselves, helpfulness, going the extra mile, self-giving, the value of time and attention, sharing dreams without ridicule, celebrating triumphs without jealousy, enduring defeats without shame, the blessing of

boundaries, the joy of companionship and the intimacy of lovers.

This is where we learn “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!” This is where we learn of the saving power of the name Jesus. This is where we pray for the daily infilling of the Holy Spirit to fulfill His mission in our world. This is where we pray for each other that the Lord will strengthen, uplift and preserve us until the day of His coming. This is where we study and discuss the Word of God so we can be formed in His image. This is what needs to happen in our homes and in our families.

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.” (Rom. 12:9-10 NASB)

“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thes. 5:16-18 NASB)

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they will not lose heart.” (Col. 3:18-21 NASB)

Consider the upbringing the young child Samuel received in his home in Ramathaim Zophim, under the love and care of his mother Hannah and his father Elkanah. He was a child born out of sincere prayer, with a father who was totally loving and supportive of his mother. Obviously he learned such respect for his elders that even when he heard what he thought was Eli’s voice in the middle of the night, he promptly jumped up and ran to him, with no thought of shouting “WHAAT??” from his bedroom.

We need to build families like this so that when we look at each other as spouses, when we send our children out on their own into the world, when our extended family gathers with us for special occasions, or whatever the situation may be, we will have the joy and pride of knowing we have built well, to the honour and glory of our heavenly Father.

It doesn't matter where you are today in the process of building a Christian family. As long as you are engaged in the process, you're headed in the right direction.

If things have been rough and you have given up, pick up your tools again today and get back to work. This is the most important activity for us to be engaged in, period!

It is crucial that we maintain and enhance our personal relationship with God, but He is looking to us for much more than just that. He has blessed us with spouses, children, siblings, other relatives and dear friends that He wants us to draw closer to Him.

The Lord is looking for us to establish and maintain thriving Christian families, because everything He intends for our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing should be found at home, within our family!