



STRONG FAMILIES

NICK STINNETT

(Joshua 24:15)

Think about it for a moment. If you faced a situation—a disease, a house ablaze, a tornado—that created within you the fear that you were about to die, what would be your last thoughts? Your job? Bank account? Prestige? Dirty dishes in the sink? Your upcoming vacation?

Probably not! You would be like many others in concluding that, next to your relationship with God, the bottom line of life is family. Our family is our most important responsibility, achievement, and legacy. We are confronted daily with evidence that the quality of family life is crucial to our happiness, emotional well-being, and mental health.

Healthy, happy families have six common characteristics.

COMMITMENT

Commitment creates the warm, loving environment in which family members grow. It offers a harbor that shelters family members from the destructive forces of fear, anxiety, and loneliness.

At the heart of commitment to the family unit is dedication to the marriage relationship. God sees the commitment of husband and wife to each other as so crucial to families that He robustly condemns any violation of that marital commitment (Mal. 2:13-16; Matt. 19:8, 9; Eph. 5:25, 28; Titus 2:4). Commitment means to be there and not abandon each other. But it goes further. It says, "We will do whatever it takes to love each other as we should."

APPRECIATION

Expressions of appreciation and affection permeate relationships in strong families. God has made it known that He wants to be appreciated and told of that appreciation. On one occasion, Jesus heard the

pleas of ten lepers who cried out for healing. All ten were healed, but only one came back to say thank you. Jesus was clearly pleased with the one who came back to show gratitude and just as clearly disappointed in the nine who did not (Luke 17:11-19).

Members of strong families express appreciation to each other by thanking each other for everyday things (as well as the big stuff), by seeing the good qualities in each other, by encouraging each other, and by sharing gentle humor and affection. They are sincere and lavish in their affirmations of each other.

COMMUNICATION

No one wants to feel all alone in the world. Elijah became despondent when he thought he was the only one who stood up for God. Feeling all alone carries a mixture of terror and despair. But God assured Elijah that he was not alone (1 Kin. 19:10-18).

Every person needs to know that he or she is part of a whole: Communication is the process through which this sense of belonging is related. Communication helps us feel connected to other people through the exchange of information. It also helps with solving problems and resolving conflicts in constructive ways.

TIME TOGETHER

Chances are, our best memories are of simple times shared with our family and

friends—times that probably did not require lots of money or elaborate preparations. Read in Ecclesiastes and hear Solomon's view that most of us waste time. Solomon tried pleasure, riches, fame, sex, and all the other pursuits common to mankind. He finally concluded that we should live simply, concentrating on those things that are truly important.

Members of strong families spend much time together playing, working, talking, having fun, and just hanging out together. They have resolved the current debate over quality time versus quantity of time. Families need both: Families need large quantities of good quality time to flourish. Many things demand our time; therefore, that time becomes a precious gift we give to our loved ones.

ABILITY TO COPE WITH STRESS AND CRISES

People in strong families still live in a real world. They encounter the same daily strains and frustrations as everyone else; they also experience the major crises of life such as serious illness, loss of a job, death, or natural disaster. They have an ability to deal with both stress and crises in ways that are effective. They manage to make it through.

People in strong families call on their commitment to each other and their good communication skills to help them work out ways to get through their difficulties. They pull together. They manage to see some good in the situation—no matter how bleak it may be. Sometimes, the only good in the situation is that they have each other to rely on. They rely heavily on their faith in God in difficult times.

SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

The importance of a spiritual center cannot be overstated when it comes to strong

families. Reliance upon a power above and beyond themselves is the glue that holds families together and makes them strong. Jesus talked about the importance of building our "house" on the right foundation (Matt. 7:24, 25). Spiritual foundations give meaning and purpose to life: freedom from anxiety, guilt, fear, and low self-esteem as well as a hopeful, confident outlook. Connections with other people who share our religious beliefs give support and encouragement during difficult times. Spiritual foundations offer many guidelines for daily living. Forgiveness, patience, kindness, honesty, and helping others are all taught as virtues. Families with strong spiritual well-being know that God is there watching, caring, loving, and guiding. They know they can turn to God at any time for guidance (James 1:5). When people believe in these basic truths and abide by them, their lives have direction and they can know what is right and what is wrong. They have learned the value of putting God's Word into practice. As James said, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of family life include:

- > Genesis 12:3
- > Exodus 20:12
- > Psalms 68:6; 107:41
- > Acts 16:33

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on family life at Psalm 127:3–5 on page 778. See also the personality profile of Timothy on page 1604.

passed. ¹⁸And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

¹⁹But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

²¹And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD!"

²²So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him."

And they said, "We are witnesses!"

²³"Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel."

²⁴And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"

²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

²⁶Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷And

Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God." ²⁸So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

DEATH OF JOSHUA AND ELEAZAR

²⁹Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. ³⁰And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

³¹Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

³²The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.

³³And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

SOUL NOTE



We Will Serve the Lord (24:14, 15) As the people began settling the Promised Land, Joshua told them that they would need to make a choice between their God and the gods of the land. His challenge to the families of Israel rings down through the centuries. All people must make this choice, beginning with parents who are responsible for their families. Joshua made his choice clear: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Effective leadership of your family begins with making that same choice and leading by example. **Topic: Family Life**

Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the LORD surrounds His people From this time forth and forever.
 3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest On the land allotted to the righteous, Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.
 4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, And to those who are upright in their hearts.
 5 As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, The LORD shall lead them away With the workers of iniquity.

Peace be upon Israel!

PSALM 126

A JOYFUL RETURN TO ZION

A Song of Ascents.

1 When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing, Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
 3 The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad.
 4 Bring back our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South.
 5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.
 6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.

PSALM 127

LABORING AND PROSPERING WITH THE LORD

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.
 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late,



Family Life

KEY PASSAGE

A SOLID FOUNDATION

(127:3-5)

God values families, calling children "a heritage from the LORD." Families are the foundation of society, the place where children are taught about faith in God and given love, nurture, and guidance. So why are there so many sad and separated families? Many families have ignored God in their family life, so He is not sought when the family faces troubles and difficulty. "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it," wrote Solomon (Ps. 127:1). Putting the Lord at the base does not guarantee a perfect family; it does, however, provide a foundation upon which to build and guidelines by which to make decisions and handle difficulties. The family with God as its foundation will offer a solid, stable, and loving home. And it's never too late. This kind of foundation can always be laid, even under an existing house. The structure can then be remodeled on the firmest possible footing.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about family life on pages 294, 295. See also the personality profile of Timothy on page 1604.

To eat
 For so
 3 Behol
 LO
 The fr
 4 Like a
 So are
 5 Happy
 ful
 They
 But sh
 gar

BLESSINGS

1 Blesse
 LO
 Who
 2 When
 ha
 You si
 wit
 3 Your r
 In the
 Your c
 All are
 4 Behol
 Who
 5 The
 And r
 Jer
 All the
 6 Yes, m
 chi

Peace



forgive
 was wi
 but da

GREETING

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ^a by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,

Timothy, a beloved son:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

TIMOTHY'S FAITH AND HERITAGE

³I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, ⁴greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, ⁵when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. ⁶Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.^a ¹²For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

BE LOYAL TO THE FAITH

¹³Hold fast the pattern of sound words

1:1 ^aNU-Text and M-Text read *Christ Jesus*.

1:11 ^aNU-Text omits *of the Gentiles*

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Family Life

TIMOTHY: A GODLY HERITAGE

(2 TIMOTHY 1:5)

Never underestimate the power of godly parents. In Timothy's case, a godly mother and grandmother had taught him about faith in the God of Israel.

Grandmother Lois influenced mother Eunice, and they both taught young Timothy. When the apostle Paul came to their hometown of Lystra with the Good News of the Messiah, Timothy's heart was ready to hear and accept the message.

An interesting side note to this story is recorded in Acts 16. Timothy's father was a Greek, not a Jew. It was unusual for a Jewish woman to marry outside of her faith, but Eunice had done so. Yet she had held fast to her faith, teaching it to her son. The father seems at least not to have worked against her, allowing his son to be raised with Jewish teaching, although Timothy was never circumcised, as all Jewish boys must be. Through all of these possible stumbling blocks, God fashioned a young man who would serve the great apostle in many capacities, eventually taking on leadership himself.

Lois and Eunice are two of the quiet heroes of the New Testament. They provided Timothy with a good family life and solid spiritual teaching. No matter what other situations may exist in a family, Christian parents can provide these two benefits for their children. Even if there is only one believing parent, he or she can work toward this end and pray that the other parent will be supportive. And believing grandparents can help. God is fashioning the leaders of tomorrow in the homes of today.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about family life on pages 294, 295. See also the key passage note at Psalm 127:3-5 on page 778.

her nakedness. ¹⁶You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. ¹⁷You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness. ¹⁸Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.

¹⁹Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her customary impurity. ²⁰Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her. ²¹And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. ²²You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. ²³Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is

perversion. ²⁴Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. ²⁵For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

²⁶You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you ²⁷(for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), ²⁸lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. ²⁹For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.

³⁰Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God."

MORAL AND CEREMONIAL LAWS

19 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'

"You shall be holy,
for I the LORD your
God am holy."

LEVITICUS 19:2

be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

³Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

⁴Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the LORD your God.

SOUL NOTE



A Sin Against God (18:22) This charge against homosexual relations appears in a section including rules against marital infidelity and bestiality. This is one of a number of passages in both testaments that, taken together and interpreted plainly, reveal that homosexual conduct is a great offense to God. It is called "an abomination." The Bible always regards it as a serious violation of God's plan for sexual expression.

Topic: Homosexuality

SOUL NOTE



Honor and Respect (19:3) Respect for parents goes along with respect for God. Even when fully grown, children should honor and respect their parents, even if they haven't always been examples of godly parenting. When a mother and a father show respect for their parents, they set a good example for their children. God highly regards parenthood and its responsibilities. Parents should model their devotion to God through godly respect for their own parents. **Topic: Family Life**

- 10 Luxury is not fitting for a fool,
Much less for a servant to rule over
princes.
- 11 The discretion of a man makes him slow
to anger,
And his glory *is* to overlook a
transgression.
- 12 The king's wrath *is* like the roaring of a
lion,
But his favor *is* like dew on the grass.
- 13 A foolish son *is* the ruin of his father,
And the contentions of a wife *are* a
continual dripping.
- 14 Houses and riches *are* an inheritance
from fathers,
But a prudent wife *is* from the LORD.
- 15 Laziness casts *one* into a deep sleep,
And an idle person will suffer hunger.
- He who keeps the commandment keeps
his soul,
But he who is careless^a of his ways will
die.
- 16 He who has pity on the poor lends to the
LORD,
And He will pay back what he has
given.
- 17 Chasten your son while there is hope,
And do not set your heart on his
destruction.^a
- A man of great wrath will suffer
punishment;
For if you rescue him, you will have to
do it again.*
- 20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction,
That you may be wise in your latter
days.
- 21 There are many plans in a man's heart,
Nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that
will stand.
- 22 What is desired in a man is kindness,
And a poor man is better than a liar.
- 23 The fear of the LORD *leads* to life,
And *he who has it* will abide in
satisfaction;
He will not be visited with evil.
- A lazy man buries his hand in the bowl,^a
And will not so much as bring it to his
mouth again.*
- 25 Strike a scoffer, and the simple will
become wary;
Rebuke one who has understanding, *and*
he will discern knowledge.
- 26 He who mistreats *his father and* chases
away *his mother*
*Is a son who causes shame and brings
reproach*
- 27 Cease listening to instruction, my son,
And you will stray from the words of
knowledge.
- 28 A disreputable witness scorns justice,
And the mouth of the wicked devours
iniquity.
- 19:16 ^aLiterally *despises*, figurative of recklessness
or carelessness 19:18 ^aLiterally *to put him to
death*; a Jewish tradition reads *on his crying*.
19:24 ^aSeptuagint and Syriac read *bosom*; Targum
and Vulgate read *armpit*.

SOUL NOTE



Fix the Faucet (19:13, 14) In our families we reveal our real selves. At times, actions and attitudes are at their worst at home. There is nothing worse than living in a family filled with turmoil, where a foolish child has broken a parent's heart or where grouchy spouses nag at each other like dripping faucets. The practical truths expressed in Proverbs are reminders of the importance of healthy family living. Family members should learn to treat one another with love and respect so that home is not a place of turmoil, but of blessing. **Topic: Family Life**

WALK IN WISDOM

¹⁵See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

¹⁷Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. ¹⁸And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another in the fear of God.^a

MARRIAGE—CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not

having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ³⁰For we are members of His body,^a of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*^a ³²This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²*Honor your father and mother,* which is the first commandment with promise; ³*that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.*^a

5:21 ^aNU-Text reads *Christ*. 5:30 ^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse. 5:31 ^aGenesis 2:24

6:3 ^aDeuteronomy 5:16

SOUL NOTE

The Feeling Is Mutual (5:21–26) The Bible teaches mutual submission in marriage. Wives should submit to their husband's leadership because that provides stability in the home. Husbands, however, should love their wives as Christ loved the church, meaning they would give up anything for the good of their wives. When husbands love this way, their wives will have no fear of submitting to them. When both spouses act in each other's best interest and live to please Christ, they will build a solid marriage and family. **Topic: Marriage**

SOUL NOTE

Bringing Them Up (6:1–4) Parents and children constitute a family—happy and content when there is respect and obedience, unhappy and resentful when there is anger and rebellion. Paul advised fathers (as the heads of the household) and children each to do their part in building a healthy family life. Children must obey their parents, understanding that rules are in place for their own good. Fathers, on the other hand, should make the rules carefully, not to provoke their children, but to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Parents and children all have responsibilities in a family. **Topic: Family Life**