Fighting for the Family

Building a Home of Faith, Love, and Prayer

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Adapted from the Fighting for the Family sermon series

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A Note to the Reader

These chapters have been adapted from messages in the Fighting for the Family sermon series and related family messages. Spoken outlines, repetition, and references to a particular Sunday have been shaped into continuous prose. Scripture references remain with each chapter so that you can return to the biblical text. This collection includes the messages available for this edition; it is not a transcript of the entire original series.

The family is close to the heart of my ministry because our homes are where faith becomes visible. A household is built by the ordinary things we do over time: the way we speak, forgive, pray, listen, and turn toward one another. We cannot make a perfect family by force of will. We can, however, bring our imperfect lives to the God who makes all things new. My prayer is that these pages will help you seek his wisdom for your home and extend his grace to the people entrusted to your care.

Chapter 1 — Rebuilding the Foundations

Genesis 1–3

Jesus taught that a house must have a firm foundation. When we speak about strengthening families, we should begin where Scripture begins: with the God who made us. In Genesis, the creation of humanity is neither an afterthought nor an accident. Men and women bear the image of God. Our worth comes from him before we take on any family role, accomplish anything, or meet anyone else's expectations.

Genesis also tells us that human beings were made for relationship. God says that it is not good for the man to be alone. The woman is given as a fitting partner, and together they receive a shared calling to live before God and care for his world. Whatever questions Christians discuss about responsibilities in a household, we must begin here: equal dignity, a common dependence on God, and a calling to serve rather than dominate.

The first household, however, did not remain as it was made. Genesis 3 shows the entrance of distrust, disobedience, shame, and blame. Adam and Eve hide from God and turn against each other. The pattern is painfully familiar. When a relationship strains, we are quick to explain our own behavior and slow to own the harm we have done. We protect ourselves by accusing someone else. A home cannot be rebuilt while blame does all the talking.

The first step toward a stronger family is therefore honest repentance. We can ask, “Where have I resisted God? Where have I failed to love? What do I need to confess and change?”

That question is more fruitful than waiting for another person to become perfect. Accountability begins with the person whose choices I can actually bring before the Lord: myself.

But the story does not end with shame. Even after the fall, God seeks the people who are hiding from him. In the promise of Genesis 3:15 we hear the first note of hope that evil will not have the last word. The Lord also clothes Adam and Eve in their vulnerability. Judgment is real, but mercy is present. Scripture's long story leads us to Christ, who enters our brokenness and opens the way to forgiveness and new life.

Some homes carry wounds deeper than one conversation can repair. Trust may have been broken over many years. Rebuilding a foundation takes truth, time, and often the help of wise people outside the household. We do not have to pretend the damage is small in order to believe God can work. Bring the truth into the light. Ask for the grace to take the next faithful step, and let that step become part of a new pattern.

Chapter 2 — What Marriage Is and Isn't

Genesis 2:24

Genesis gives us a compact description of marriage: a man leaves his father and mother, is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Each phrase describes a relationship that must be tended. Marriage is more than a ceremony or an arrangement of duties. It is a covenant in which two people build a shared life.

To leave does not mean to stop honoring parents. It means that the new marriage becomes a primary earthly bond. A couple needs room to make decisions, establish a household, and grow in loyalty to one another. Good parents can bless that growth by giving their adult children space. A husband and wife can honor their families of origin while setting healthy boundaries around their own marriage.

To be joined is to keep choosing one another. Feelings matter, but they cannot carry the full weight of a lifelong promise. Trust grows through truthful speech, kept commitments, patience in conflict, and the willingness to hear what the other person is really saying. The differences that once seemed attractive may later become frustrating. Love does not require pretending those differences have disappeared. It calls us to learn how to live faithfully with another person who sees the world from a different place.

To become one flesh speaks of the deep union of married life. That union touches our bodies, our time, our money, our hopes, and the decisions we make together. It is meant to be marked by faithfulness and mutual care. Neither spouse becomes the other's property. Both remain people made in God's image, responsible to him for the way they treat each other.

Marriage is not a cure for selfishness. If anything, shared life reveals it. We discover how quickly we defend a harsh word, withhold attention, or demand that our own way prevail. That is why a healthy marriage needs new hearts as much as better habits. In Christ we can tell the truth, seek forgiveness, extend forgiveness where it is safe and appropriate, and begin again. A covenant grows strong through these repeated acts of grace.

If a relationship includes intimidation, coercion, or violence, the immediate need is safety. No appeal to marriage or forgiveness requires someone to remain in danger or conceal abuse. Seek help from trusted people and qualified local services. Repentance in such circumstances must involve accountability and lasting change, and reconciliation cannot be demanded from the person harmed.

Chapter 3 — Children, God's Special Gift

Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17

When people brought children to Jesus, his disciples tried to send them away. Jesus did the opposite. He welcomed the children, blessed them, and told the adults to receive the kingdom of God like a child. We must not miss the tenderness of that moment. In a crowd full of people seeking his attention, Jesus made room for those others considered too small to matter.

Children are a gift, but they are never merely extensions of their parents' ambitions. They are persons whom God sees and loves. Parents and churches honor that gift when we listen to children, protect them, teach them, and invite them into the life of faith. A child's questions deserve patient answers. Their presence in worship is a blessing, even when it interrupts our preferred quiet.

Discipleship happens in more places than a classroom. It happens when children hear us pray at a kitchen table, see us apologize after we have been wrong, and watch us treat a neighbor with kindness. They learn something about God from the way we speak about people who are absent and from the way we respond when life is hard. We cannot expect a weekly program to carry a calling that belongs to the whole community of faith.

Our aim is larger than polite behavior. The gospel tells children, as it tells adults, that they are loved by God and need his grace. We teach the Scriptures so that they may know the Lord whose story those Scriptures tell. We pray with them and for them, trusting that faith cannot be manufactured by pressure. We make room for questions and for growth at a pace we cannot fully control.

Not every person raising a child has a spouse beside them, and not every loving adult is a parent. Grandparents, guardians, teachers, mentors, and church members all have opportunities to welcome and bless the young. Jesus did not ask who had the perfect household before he took the children in his arms. He showed us what it means to receive them in his name.

Chapter 4 — Family Values That Hold

Matthew 7:24–27

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes two houses that face the same storm. One stands because it has been built on rock; the other falls because its foundation is sand. The difference is not that one household escapes difficulty. The difference is whether we hear his words and put them into practice.

Every family lives by values, whether we name them or not. Our calendars, spending, conversations, and decisions reveal what matters to us. If we say that faith is central but never make room to pray or worship, the pattern teaches something different from our words. Naming our values helps us examine whether our ordinary choices are forming the kind of home we hope to build.

In our family, we have tried to keep a few commitments in view. God comes first. We seek to treat others as we would want to be treated. We make important decisions with a concern for unity. We take the life of the church seriously. And we accept the responsibility to help our children know and follow Jesus. These commitments do not make us flawless. They give us a direction to return to when life becomes crowded or confused.

Putting God first is not a slogan that excuses neglect of people. It means allowing his love and truth to shape how we treat the people nearest to us. The golden rule becomes concrete when someone is tired, frightened, or difficult. Unity asks us to listen and seek a shared path rather than using our authority to silence another voice. Church life reminds us that our household belongs to a larger family, one in which we receive care and offer it to others.

A family's values should be spoken, but they must also be practiced. Ask together what habits are strengthening faith and love, and what habits are pulling you away. Choose one small act that puts a named value into action this week. Build on the rock through the ordinary obedience Jesus describes. Storms will come. His words can hold us as we face them.

Chapter 5 — Playing for Keeps

Ephesians 5:25–33

Paul calls husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. That is a demanding picture of love. It does not ask, “How much can I get?” It asks, “How can I give myself for the good of the one I have promised to love?” The cross leaves no room to dress up selfishness as spiritual authority.

A marriage that lasts requires more than the determination to remain in the same house. It needs a daily pattern of care. Honor your spouse in private as well as in public. Speak truth without contempt. Make time to hear the worries beneath an argument. Guard your faithfulness. Look for the places where your own conduct needs to change, rather than keeping a careful list of the other person's failures.

Forgiveness matters because two imperfect people will wound one another. To seek it honestly, we must name what we did, accept responsibility, and change our behavior. To offer it is to release the desire to keep punishing someone for a wrong. This can be difficult and slow. In ordinary conflicts, grace helps a couple repair what anger has damaged. Serious harm requires safety, accountability, and wise help; forgiveness must never be used to pressure a person to endure further abuse.

The picture in Ephesians also points beyond marriage itself. Christ's love for the church is the standard that judges our self-centeredness and the source of grace when we fall short. A spouse cannot be a savior. Only Christ can make us new. As we draw near to him, we learn to serve without keeping score and to honor a covenant through truthful, costly love.

If you are married, consider one concrete way to love your spouse well today. Perhaps it is an apology, a conversation you have avoided, a burden you can share, or a word of gratitude you have left unsaid. Faithfulness is lived in such choices. We play for keeps by making room for love to grow, one honest day at a time.

Chapter 6 — The Power of Praying Parents

Matthew 15:21–28

A Canaanite mother comes to Jesus because her daughter is suffering. She calls for mercy, and at first she receives no answer. The disciples want her sent away. Even Jesus' words about his mission to Israel present a difficult exchange. Yet the mother remains. She kneels and asks, “Lord, help me.” At the end of the encounter Jesus commends her faith, and her daughter is healed.

We should be careful about what the passage does not tell us. It does not explain the cause of the child's suffering or give us the mother's family history. What it does show is a parent bringing a child's need to Jesus with remarkable persistence. The daughter cannot be reduced to a lesson in someone else's failure. She is the person for whom this mother asks mercy.

Many parents know the ache of praying while an answer seems far away. A child may be ill, distant, angry, or in trouble. We cannot reach into another person's heart and make it change. We can bring that person before the Lord, seek wise ways to help, and continue to love. The woman's cry, “Lord, help me,” is a prayer we can carry when we have run out of more polished words.

For parents of grown children who have wandered from faith, prayer can begin with our own hearts. “Lord, change me.” Show me where I need to repent, where I need to listen, and where I have confused control with love. Then we can pray, “Lord, they are yours.” Our children are not ours to possess. Entrusting them to God does not mean withdrawing care; it means acknowledging the limits of our power and the reach of his mercy.

We can ask God to work in their hearts without dictating every step of their story. We can ask him to guide our responses, so that our help is genuinely helpful and our boundaries are honest. And we can remain ready to welcome them. The father in Jesus' story of the lost son leaves us with a picture of a door open to the child who comes home. Shame need not have the last word in a family.

Prayer is not a guarantee that every story will resolve on our timetable. The mother in Matthew 15 received a healing that day; other parents wait far longer and may carry grief they did not choose. Christ invites us to keep bringing that grief to him and to let the church carry it with us. Pray for your children, the children you mentor, and the children whose names no one else may be speaking aloud. The Lord hears the cry for mercy.

A Prayer for Children and Expectant Parents

Lord of life, we bring you children still in the womb and the people carrying them. Give them care, protection, and the support they need. Teach your church to offer practical help with compassion, especially where fear, poverty, illness, or isolation make a family vulnerable. Make us ready to welcome children and to stand beside parents, foster families, and adoptive families. Comfort those who have experienced loss, and surround those carrying painful memories with mercy rather than shame. Guide us to speak and act with truth, tenderness, and love. In Jesus' name, amen.