
Foundations for Families – Family context

2 Scriptural Principles – families; love

Reading – 1 John 4:7-11 *Keywords* – love; live; know; sacrifice for our sins

Families in Scripture

What are the qualities of good parents? There are some beautiful lessons to be learned by looking at examples of parents and families in the Scriptures. They are summarised below but the questions will help you to tease out some of the important elements.

Honour father and mother (Law of Moses)

‘Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.’ (Exodus 20:12)

There is a number of key ideas here. It is important that we honour – respect, admire – both our parents. The interesting thing here is that if all generations did this, there would be a longevity of peacefulness in our lives, no matter the stage of our life. The other key idea is that what we have is given by God. In other words, God gives us our land (house, environment) therefore we should show respect for the people who are responsible for providing some of this heritage for us. At the same time, we should show respect and admiration for our Heavenly Father.

A compassionate father

‘As a father pities his children so the Lord pities them that fear Him.’ (Psalm 103:13)

The context of this verse suggests that fathers (no need to be too specific here) – parents show compassion on their children when they do the wrong thing. (Have a look at verse 12). And what is the role model for this? God Himself. Just as He has compassion on us if we fear (read – reverence) Him.

Something to think about

- In what ways can we show direct compassion to our children in the circumstances indicated by these verses?

About wives and mothers

‘Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table.’ (Psalm 128:3)

The picture here is quite vivid. It indicates the importance of a wife in the family by being the centre of the house. While being fruitful undoubtedly refers to having children because of its context, other passages in Scripture also imply that being fruitful is showing a wonderful character. This leads to being an example for children who surround the table in the house.

The image of the olive plant is also picturesque. Children, as plants, need to be nurtured to grow and it is important to realise that eventually these also become fruitful in character and also possibly in terms of having children.

Interestingly, grandparents are mentioned in this Psalm (v.6). The whole Psalm is about God’s blessings. If we fear (reverence) God and walk in His directions, if we work for our living, if we have a wife of great character and children being nurtured, we will be very satisfied grandparents!

Incidentally, the first woman, was given the name Eve - which means, 'life-giving'. Most appropriate. And, what an example to the young Timothy his mother (Eunice) and his grandmother (Lois) were. Timothy, said Paul, had genuine faith, and this was shown first in Lois and then in Eunice. (2 Timothy 1:5)

About husbands and fathers

Husbands need to honour and respect their wives. In most instances, the vows that a couple make to each other during the wedding service include words similar to this. And, remember, a vow is a vow. It is/was made solemnly. The practical ways in which a husband can honour these vows are many. The prophet Malachi indicates that one important way is not to 'deal treacherously with the wife of your youth' (Malachi 2:15). This advice seems to be given to a husband of some years. It doesn't really matter, the point is made that the honour of a husband to his wife, and loyalty to each other, are vital.

The problem with our current society is that wives and husbands tend to move in and out of marriage (if they, in fact, do marry) and really deal 'treacherously' with one another. Despite some people who protest to the contrary, marriage break-ups affect the emotional stability of both partners, and especially children where there are some. Malachi says that one of the reasons for marriage is to have 'godly offspring' (not just 'offspring'). Having godly children is going to be easier to achieve where the parents are united in their approach to the wonderful task they have in front of them.

Something to think about

- What are the good experiences from our own life where we can observe the outstanding examples of the way in which children honour their fathers, and the fathers demonstrate they deserve that honour?

About husbands and wives

While Proverbs 31 speaks mostly about the characteristics of a beautiful and virtuous wife, there is one key verse that indicates the way in which a husband, and children, should respect the wife and mother. 'Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.' (v.28) There's quite a lot of instruction here. The children will want to see their mother happy or blessed, because of the beautiful person she is, but at the same time, they should. Similarly, the husband. He not only regards her happily but he openly praises her. In this way he is acknowledging her value for himself (he shows that he thinks about his wife) but he also sets an example for the children. These verses again illustrate the value of the family.

One of the great passages of Scripture relating to wives and husbands is in 1 Peter 3. This is a chapter that can be seen on the surface as being male dominated, at least in some ways. But a closer look shows that it is very sensitive to the relationship between the husband and wife.

What are the principles in this chapter? It starts with a statement about wives needing to be submissive to their husbands. There are many people in our society that won't accept this notion. But a close reading will demonstrate an important point. Firstly, the reason for submission is based on an important Scriptural principle explained in Ephesians 5. The relationship, says Paul, between a husband and wife is the same as between Christ and his ecclesia. Christ is the bridegroom who takes the responsibility for his bride, the ecclesia. Jesus took so much responsibility that he gave his life for his bride! In this chapter, Paul is giving the reason why the husband should be the partner that accepts responsibility in the family. Jesus took the lead and the responsibility. Part of the acceptance of responsibility is

that he case and nurtures us. . We show respect and love for him in return because of what he has shown us. His ecclesia, those baptised into him, need to submit to him. At the same time, he has shown unparalleled love for his bride. Despite the mores of our current society, God wants the relationship between a husband and wife to be based on responsibility and respect.

Something to think about

- In what practical ways can a husband and wife demonstrate mutual respect in their relationship, particularly with respect to decision making in a) normal domestic arrangements – budgets, for example, and b) with decision relating to the raising of children?

Parents - dedication to God

One of the things we will be looking at in the third essay is the purpose we have for our children. How important is it that we have a purpose for them? It's vital. We have seen how the Scriptures clearly indicate that we have a responsibility to nurture and respect our children. Despite some modern thinking, we must realise that it is not in the best interests of our children to let them be 'free spirits', to let them 'make their own decisions', certainly not in the childhood years. They need guidance and understanding. They need caring parents who will guide them within the framework of Scripture and who will respect that they need to nurture their children through the various stages of their development.

This ultimately means that parents should be dedicated to the service of God. There are a few verses that emphasise this and these are indicated below.

'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness ...' (Matthew 6:33). These are the words of Jesus suggesting that we need to pursue his Father's kingdom first. Is this selfish? No, not at all, because the point about God's Kingdom is that it will ultimately lead to what Paul indicates as a time when God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). We can unselfishly dedicate ourselves to searching for that time of oneness and greatness. If we do that, then we are providing a great example for our children.

Placing God first in our own lives sets a good example. King Solomon had a useful thought for us on this: 'The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.' Proverbs 20:7. He was convinced that children who see a good example from their parents will reap the rewards of that example in their own lives.

The Apostle John gave the key to setting the example when he indicated that God's command was to demonstrate love. 'And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.' 2 John 1:6. We obey God first and this demonstrates love - for one another, and especially for our children.