

# THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Dowlen Road, February 8, 2009 AM

## INTRODUCTION:

We talk a lot about families at Dowlen Road. Last Sunday night we had a special study for young people and talked about the need to connect with their parents. Hardly a month passes around here without a reference being made to some aspect of the family relationship – marriage, parenting. Sometimes we have special sermon series or entire classes devoted to the husband/wife relationship or how to raise our kids. We talk about families all the time. With all the relationships we have in life and all the different facets there are to being a Christian, why do we give so much attention to this one? What is it about families that causes us to be so focused on them and concerned for them? Let me give you three reasons.

## FAMILIES ARE GOD'S IDEA.

- A. Perhaps the most important reason we talk about family is because God has so much to say on the subject.
  - 1. The family was His idea. He brought together that first couple and formed the first family (Genesis 1:18, 21-24).
  - 2. Its no surprise to find His word filled with instructions about family. He defines the roles we each play – husbands, wives, dads, moms, kids (Ephesians 5:23-6:4). He gives each of us important responsibilities. He talks about the permanence of marriage – the key relationship that binds the family together (Matthew 19:1-9).
- B. God has a lot in mind for your family. You cannot preach the Bible without talking about it.

## FAMILIES ARE VITAL.

- A. They are vital for our children.
  - 1. The family provides the setting in which a child is nurtured and brought to maturity (Ephesians 6:4). From the instruction of his father and mother a child learns what he must know to become not just a responsible adult, but a devoted servant of God.
  - 2. When family life begins to unravel, there is a resultant impact on children. For example, divorce devastates kids. Dr. Judith Wallerstein studied the children of divorce for fifteen years to determine its long-term impact. She found that children of divorce face a higher risk of depression, poor grades, and substance abuse. They have greater struggles with intimacy. They have problems fitting in with their peers as young people and problems with relationships as adults. In fact, Wallerstein argued that "...the whole trajectory of the child's life changes" after divorce.
  - 3. We have people in this crowd who understand better than I do the terrible impact divorce has on a child. You have lived it. You understand how vital families are for the growth and development of children.
  - 4. When the fabric of family begins to unravel, we destroy the setting necessary to grow healthy children.
- B. They are vital for our congregation (Ephesians 6:4).
  - 1. Paul's concern is not simply with raising kids who will be good citizens. His primary concern is that our children grow up to serve the Lord.
  - 2. But notice that it is within the family – Paul speaks here to fathers – that the bulk of this spiritual preparation is to take place. These things we do when we come together (Bible class, sermons, etc.) are at best small supplements to the great bulk of teaching that should be going on at home. We are losing a lot of kids because parents have reversed these roles. They are depending on the church to do their teaching and offering a small supplement at home.
  - 3. As a congregation, we cannot rise above the work that goes on at home. If we raise our children to be dedicated disciples who give themselves to the Lord's work, then our work will move forward dramatically. But if our kids learn at home that the Lord and His work really isn't that important, the work of God will be hampered. When the spirituality of our families begins to diminish, so does the work of our congregations.
- C. They are vital for our culture.
  - 1. There is an old adage that says, "As the home goes, so goes the nation." Another says, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."
  - 2. Both reflect the same fundamental thought. What we do in our homes extends far beyond our little family unit. Homes are the building block of our society. What happens within the four walls of our house impacts the world. Dr. Paul Popenoe (the father of modern marriage counseling) observed that "No society has ever survived long after its family life deteriorated."
  - 3. If our culture is to survive, we must have strong, stable families. With so much at stake, it is not difficult to see why it is so important for us to spend a lot of time talking about families.

## FAMILIES ARE UNDER ATTACK.

- A. God has a plan for families.
  - 1. He intended for a man and woman to marry – and to stay married for the rest of their lives (Matthew 19:3-6). He intended for this couple to raise their children and teach them to serve Him (Ephesians 6:4).
  - 2. Society refers to this picture as the traditional family. And yet, the traditional family is becoming a relic of the past. Since 1970, the number of kids growing up in a family modeled after God's plan fell from 40% to 24%.
- B. This dramatic cultural shift away from traditional families has not come without a price.
  - 1. When we stop following God's plan there will certainly be negative consequences. We should have expected it.
  - 2. Dr. Wallerstein argued that "radical changes in family life (are) silently altering the social fabric of the entire nation." So many of the problems that trouble our society are rooted in the decline of our families.
  - 3. On March 5, 2001, fifteen year old Andy Williams took a revolver to school and began randomly shooting. Two died. Thirteen were wounded. Amid the talk that followed about bullying and gun control, there was another part of the story that did not receive a lot of attention. Andy came from a broken home. His parents divorced when he was five. His mother essentially abandoned him. He rarely saw her.

His friends said that his dad never had time for him, not even willing to give him a ride home when it was raining outside. To suggest that his home life played no role in this tragedy is to deny the obvious. It was at the core of the problem. This is just one example.

4. We are suffering as a society because we have shifted away from God's plan for our family.
5. I remember preaching about this and after this lesson talking with a man who had made some bad choices and destroyed his family. I told him that I felt bad because I did not want to cause him more pain. We sympathize with those who suffer the pain of family break up, especially when they are innocent victims. But I will never forget his reply. He urged me to keep talking about it so that other families would be spared the pain he endured.

- C. But what is worse is that many in our culture argue that this shift away from the Bible model is no big deal.
1. They argue that the traditional family is a relic of the past and not all that important to modern society.
  2. Rather than defining family in Bible terms, our culture has decided that a family can be whatever you make it.
    - a. There are people who argue that divorce is no big deal, that at times it is even better than staying together.
    - b. For some it has become fashionable to have children outside of marriage. Feminist tell women they don't need a husband to have kids.
    - c. Others are opting to avoid the divorce problem by simply "living together" without bothering to marry.
    - d. Homosexuals are attacking God's plan by arguing that they should have a right to be married. They argue that having a mom and dad is in no way superior to having two dads.
- D. Let's be honest about where all of this is coming from. These arguments represent man's effort to justify what he wants to do.
1. The evidence is overwhelming that the decline in family life is ripping apart the very fabric of our culture. We will destroy ourselves if we do not fix our families.
  2. But we do not need that latest census data to tell us this. Any time many departs from God's plan, there is going to be trouble!

**CONCLUSION: BUT THERE IS GOOD NEWS...**

- A. If it is our departure from God's plan that got us into trouble, then returning to His plan can get us back on course.
- B. This is why we continue to talk about families.
- C. Max is going to tell you about some things we are planning to help our families in coming weeks.