

Week One - Family Blessings

There are always a number of things people give thanks for and at the top of those lists is almost always, "family." In fact, statistics show that 4 out of 5 people put thankfulness for family above items they own, friends, or even their own health! Why do we appreciate "family" so much?

Another poll this year discovered that 9 out of 10 American parents believe that a strong family bond is fostered through shared family time. Contrast that with the fact that the average American family spends just 37 minutes of quality time together per day and that figure is startling. Apparently, we value family yet spend little time investing in it!

It is not a mistake that we inherently realize the value of family. God created the family unit as an incredible blessing for us way back in the second chapter of the entire bible. Family was the very first of His institutions. Notice that, even though there were only 2 people on the earth at this time, God even explained Adam and Eve's relationship in the context of "family."

Therefore a man shall leave his father & his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:20-24, ESV)

Families begin when a man and woman leave their own families to cleave to each other and become one flesh. When Adam was alone, there was an absence of "family." But, with Eve on the scene, a new relationship could begin for them both. They became the first family.

Two becoming One is the cornerstone of what makes up a family (leave, cleave, one flesh). And from this point on, "family" would make up the foundation of every society on the planet.

The statistical significance of a strong family unit is hard to ignore. Research consistently shows that families who actively practice their faith tend to experience higher levels of happiness. The Journal of Marriage and Family shows that families who regularly pray together show a significant drop in the divorce rate. Another study conducted by the Barna Group found that families who regularly engage in spiritual practices, such as prayer, Bible reading, and attending church, report higher overall levels of satisfaction in life.

If God intended for families to be the foundation for society, it goes to follow that as families thrive, society will follow. Unfortunately, we too often see this in the reverse. We have seen what the collapse of the smaller family unit begins to do to a larger society. Again, this is nothing new.

Genesis begins with a single family unit (Adam and Eve and kids) but ends with a large nation. Each family unit expanded into a clan, then a tribe, then a nation. By the second book of the Bible, Exodus, a new era was about to begin. The strength of the nation would tighten and grow - balanced on the foundation of each family unit. But, by the time the nation of Israel would enter the Promised Land, the security of larger clans and tribes were being scattered apart. Dividing up meant each person would be heavily called upon to rely again on their family units for primary support, learning, and protection.

This stress of scattering tribes meant that more responsibility would fall to the parents in each family unit to transmit the faith to the next generation. This, in a way, forced families to go back to the basics and the individual family unit became critical again. In fact, it was so important to God that He included how families should function in the 10 Commandments themselves! Children would help society function when they honored their parents. Parents would help society function properly when they raised their children God's way (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

According to God's plan, especially in a changing and stressed out world, the greatest blessing I can give to my family is to pass on my faith. That has always been God's ace to play. Family, done God's way, offers the best hope for society.

Family is God's deal. It is His invention. It is His blessing. It is meant to be the foundation of strong nations. And deep down, we all know it...because it is regularly the first thing for which we give thanks.

PRAYER

Each day this week, choose one of the following topics and make it central to your prayer time with God

1. Thank God for three special things that you have experienced through your family relationships this year.
2. Pray that God would use you in your family as a point of encouragement this week. Ask Him for special opportunities and watch for them.
3. Express gratitude for your family and the blessings you share.
4. Thank God for the unique qualities and contributions of each family member.
5. Pray for unity and harmony within your family. Ask for the grace to resolve conflicts and strengthen your relationships. Pray that love and understanding prevail in your family interactions.
6. Request spiritual growth and guidance for your family. Pray that each family member may deepen their faith, find purpose, and experience spiritual fulfillment.
7. Ask for God's wisdom and guidance for your family members in their daily decisions, whether related to work, education, or relationships. Pray that they make choices that align with God's plan for their lives.