

“Family is not an important thing, it’s everything.” Michael J. Fox (**picture**). “Being a family means you are a part of something very wonderful. It means you will love and be loved for the rest of your life.” Lisa Weedn (**picture**). “It didn’t matter how big our house was; it mattered that there was love in it.” Peter Buffett (**picture**). “Everyone needs a house to live in, but a supportive family is what builds a home.” Anthony Liccione (**picture**). Families are a lot different today than they were 50 or even 25 years ago.

Did you hear about the man who rushed into a toy store late one evening to buy a Barbie doll for his daughter who had a birthday the next morning. The saleswoman said, “Well, you have several to choose from. This is the *Tennis Barbie*; it’s \$20. The *Ballet Barbie* and *Beach Barbie* are \$20 each. We have a new item – the *Divorced Barbie* and she sells for \$265.”

The man asked, “But why is the *Divorced Barbie* so much more expensive?” The clerk said, “Oh, because she comes with Ken’s house, Ken’s car, and all of Ken’s furniture!”

The family today is under extreme pressure. Yet, marriage and family are God’s design and God’s plan. This morning we’re breaking from our series in Luke. With Mother’s Day, we want to focus on the family and share some practical insights not just for Moms but for the whole family. All of us want to be successful with our families, but what does that mean?

Let’s look at a great passage of scripture on what’s vital for a family. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, the nation of Israel had moved into the Promised Land. They’re preparing to set up homes as permanent places rather than living in tents. Their leader, Joshua, issued a strong challenge to them, Joshua 24:15, “*And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

In many homes you’ll see a plaque that says, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” It needs to be much more than just a plaque. It needs to be the basis of our entire lives. So, have you made it a priority in your home? This morning let me share **Ten Healthy Habits of a Successful Family**. As we work through them, ask yourself if your family has these habits. If these aren’t things you’re habitually doing, let me encourage you to make them habits for your family.

Have you seen the TV game show “*Family Feud* (**picture**).” We could subtitle this message “*Family Fuel*.” These ten habits will give energy to your family. The top ten habits for are...

10. Children are disciplined with love and consistency. Firm yet loving discipline keeps order in the home. There’s chaos when the kids rule. This means boundaries are established and consequences are explained. Choice making is taught as a skill and children are allowed to suffer the consequences of bad choices. Dad and Mom also commit to not disagree about discipline in front of their children.

Discipline is necessary in every area of life, but especially in the home. Children are born with a sinful, rebellious nature. Yes, I know your children and grandchildren are perfect, but we all know that everyone else’s children are sinners and rebellious?

You never have to teach your kids how to disobey and say, “NO!” You have to teach them to be obedient. Proverbs 22:15 says “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child...*” In healthy families limits are clearly explained to the children. They know the consequences if they violate those limits. If the child trespasses beyond the limits, they’re corrected.

One of the worst things a parent can do is to promise consequences and not follow through. It teaches a child that they can get away with breaking the rules. If a child has violated the rules, it’s a good idea to send them to their room for a few minutes before following up with correction. That accomplishes two things. It allows the child to think about what they’ve done wrong and anticipate correction. It also allows the parent to cool down so correction can be applied with love and with a calm explanation.

Affection isn’t enough. Love also disciplines. Healthy Christians or even good citizens can’t be produced in homes where children are not taught to respect their parents. Permissive homes where parental authority is absent produces adults without healthy boundaries. Discipline is instructing where the lines of acceptable behavior are and then enforcing them within a framework of love and affection.

Children learn to follow patterns that produce satisfactory results that they’re going to need for the rest of their lives and to enable them to have a healthy relationship with their Heavenly Father. The end result of good discipline is that it benefits children. They learn to have self-discipline. A loving parent inflicts temporary discomfort on his/her children to spare them the long range disaster of an undisciplined life.

9. Money is managed wisely and discussed openly. Money problems can tear a marriage or family apart. Children need to learn how to have financial discussions and make financial decisions. There is no “his” or “her” money. It’s “our money.” As believers, we realize it’s all “God’s money.” Godly parents teach their children about the importance of giving, generosity and worship with their finances. They want their children to know they they’re givers and one reason that they may not have as many “toys” as some of their friends is because their family worships God with their money rather than worshipping their money.

It’s important to limit debt to a home or car. It’s important to avoid buying on credit. If you use credit cards, you should pay the full balance each month. If you find you can’t pay the full bill on your credit card, the card needs to be put in the drawer or destroyed.

The debt trap ensnares too many families. Strong families work hard to keep a handle on their finances. Someone said that *“the only reason some families don’t own an elephant is that they’ve never been offered an elephant for no money down with easy monthly payments.”*

8. Everyone shares household tasks. Everyone in the family pitches in. Successful families share household chores. Most families are a two parent working family. For that to succeed everyone needs to have responsibilities around the house. It’s important to wisely divide up the chores when running a household and share the responsibilities of life as a family. It teaches children life skills in the process. Mom is not everyone’s maid. Kids do yard work, help with laundry, learn to clean and cook, etc. You’ll have to put up with some whining, but the end result is worth it.

We wrongly think of the “traditional family” as a working dad and a stay-at-home mom. If moms can stay home when their children are small, that can be a blessing. But stay-at-home moms are modern invention. The woman in Proverbs 31 worked outside the home. She was in real estate, and bought and sold property. She planted a vineyard with her earnings, yet also maintained a great home. I’m certain she had help from her family, or she couldn’t have done it.

Throughout most of history, women have worked outside the home. The main difference today is that they either kept their children with them as they worked, or extended family members kept them for them. Even stay-at-home moms work hard and need lots of help to keep the house running.

One pastor was doing marriage counseling. The husband and wife were arguing because the husband thought his wife should do all the household tasks. It was beneath him to do the dishes or clean. “That’s the woman’s job.” After listening to him, his pastor asked, “If I could show you in the Bible that it says a man cleans the dishes, would you do it?” The man said, “Sure preacher but I don’t think it’s in the Bible.” This pastor turned to 2 Kings 21:13 where God said, *“I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.”* He didn’t like it, but later his wife smiled and told the pastor, “He’s helping me with the dishes now!” In healthy families, everyone shares the household tasks.

7. The family has learned to cope with adversity. One of the most mysterious statements about Jesus appears in Hebrews 5:8: *“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.”*

How did Jesus learn obedience through suffering? He didn’t have to cleanse his soul from sin, but His human holiness had to grow through exercise, just as muscles grow stronger by exercise. God uses affliction to purify us and help us grow spiritually. God will stop at nothing to make His people holy and be like Jesus.

If Jesus was completely holy yet had to suffer to learn obedience, don’t you think that we too need to suffer in order to purge away sin and grow in His likeness? Sin clings to us more stubbornly than stains to our clothes. Our Heavenly Father knows how urgent it is to get those stains out. As William Gurnall (**picture**) wrote, *“God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well that He had rather see a hole than a spot in His child’s garments.”*

Materialism deceives us into thinking that our greatest goals in life are physical, financial and emotional well-being. When afflictions come, we may question whether God is truly loving or good. Yet, God loves us so much He will stop at nothing to make us holy after the likeness of His Son.

Because our world is sin contaminated, everyone and every family has to deal with adversity. It’s how a family deals with problems that makes them stronger and more spiritually healthy. Suffering teaches us to not take anything for granted. Adversity makes us more sensitive to others and strengthens our relationship with God and each other.

Dealing with adversity doesn’t mean the family members ignore the problem, or flippantly say, “Praise the Lord,” acting as if it’s not there. They face their problems and depend on God’s grace to help them live with it. They’re survivors, spiritually thriving in the midst of life’s pain.

6. Family members laugh together. It’s important to laugh as a family. A sense of humor helps you overlook each other’s faults and lightens up tense situations! Make it part of your family DNA. Learn to laugh loud and long, and try to

always keep your sense of humor. Proverbs 17:22, *“A cheerful heart is good medicine.”* In other words, laughter is healthy.

A psychologist observing the behavior of sailors aboard an atomic submarine which was submerged for weeks at a time, noted that as tension increased so did a kind of earthy humor. Instead of choking up on their feelings of fear and boredom, the sailors broke the tension with humor. Instead of putting a cork on their abhorrence of the situation and stewing it into a hostility, they teased each other in a good natured way and in doing so shared by laughter their common feelings

Commenting on laughter, Dr. Alex Kataria writes: *“Laughter exercises your entire body causing you to feel relaxed and pain free. When you laugh, it is like taking a drug, yet there is no such thing as an overdose or, ‘laughter toxicity,’ It should be evident from studies that ‘A laugh a day keeps the doctor away.’”* Studies show children laugh an average of 400 times a day, yet adults laugh an average of 15 times a day. Your home will be a better place if there’s more laughter.

5. Each person is treated with respect and kindness. In a healthy family, kindness permeates the atmosphere. Sarcasm, digs and harsh words aren’t allowed. It begins with how the parents treat each other. Husbands and wives don’t speak disrespectfully to each other and don’t tolerate their children being disrespectful to them, their siblings or other adults.

A homeless man was looking for a handout one day in an old English village. He was nearly starving so he stopped by a pub bearing the classic name, *Inn of St. George and the Dragon*. “Please, ma’am, could you spare me a bite to eat?” he asked the woman who answered his knock at the kitchen door. “A bite to eat?” she growled. “For a sorry, no-good, foul-smelling beggar? No!” she snapped as she slammed the door.

Halfway down the lane, the homeless guy stopped, turned around and eyed the words, *St. George and the Dragon*. He went back and knocked again on the kitchen door. “Now what do you want?” asked the woman angrily. “Ma’am, if St. George is in, may I speak with him this time?”

Too often we’re like dragons with each other in our homes. Ephesians 4:32 must permeate our homes. *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* If you want a healthy family, treat each family member with kindness. Kindness is love with its work clothes on. It’s treating the other person the way you’d like to be treated. There are millions of people who need a little kindness. A great place to start sharing kindness is within your own family.

We’ve lost civility and courtesy. Did you know that the word *“courtesy”* comes from the behavior of people who used to live in the royal court? There was a code of conduct that included kindness and helpfulness. Men stopped, took off their hats and bowed when approached by a lady. They never let a lady open a door for herself. Their protocol of kindness gave birth to our word *courtesy*. Have you ever heard the phrase *“common courtesy?”* Maybe at one time it was common, today it’s sadly uncommon. We need to practice courtesy in our homes and everywhere else. Healthy families show kindness, respect and common courtesy with each other.

4. Time for family activities is a priority. Healthy families know the importance of spending quality time and a large amounts of quantity time together doing things as a family. It means we place a higher priority on making memories rather than material things. If given a choice of a family vacation or a new piece of furniture, take the vacation. Your children aren’t going to reminisce about some chunk of furniture when they’re adults. Memories are priceless and timeless!

Taking trips together is important, getting together with friends and distant family. Parents, you’ll only have your children at home for a few years. Invest time, lots of it, in your family while your kids are at home.

Frustrated individuals seem to always fight the clock. They stay up late, sleep as late as they can and rush frantically to school or work, gulping down breakfast, using every second on their cell phone as they speed to work or taking the kids to school. They think that they’re so busy they have to rush everywhere. They work long hours each week and complain that they don’t have enough time for their family.

Parents, do you love your children? Give them the gift of your time. Husbands and wives give each other the blessing of time. Many spell love *“T.H.I.N.G.S,”* healthy relationships spell love *“T.I.M.E.”* It’s the gift that keeps on giving. Husbands and wives give each other your time.

One little boy had a Dad who was always busy working. One day the boy asked, “Dad, how much money do you earn in an hour?” His impatient dad said, “I don’t know, I guess I make about \$50 an hour, but don’t bother me now.” After a couple of weeks of doing odd jobs, the little guy approached his Dad and said, “Dad, here’s \$25. Can I buy 30 minutes of your time so we can play together?”

Please understand you will never find time for your marriage or family time, you have to make family time. Unless you make it a priority, other people and activities will rob you of your family time.

3. The family eats and talks together regularly. I can't overemphasize the importance of family meals. In a time when fast-food places abound, you'll find that strong families still sit down together to eat and talk. Family meal time means no phones, TV, radios, no noise...just you. That way you can actually listen and ask each other about the days' events. Most family communication takes place during mealtimes. But you must choose to spend time communicating with each other.

If you want to strengthen your family, you may need to make some changes. For example, if your family eats in shifts, or if the television is blaring during mealtime, you will want to work on getting everyone together and turning off the TV and putting away the phones.

To add to your family health and sense of community, periodically invite guests to join your family. It's a vital component of friendship and adds to your social well-being. When you host others for a meal, you're teaching your children how to share and give hospitality. They learn to share their home and possessions, act as hosts/hostesses and bond with people other than family. They also experience the exchange of resources and effort that happens when we feed people and they often in return feed us.

Try not to worry about what you serve, or whether your house is clean enough or your children "well-behaved enough." Just invite people over and wing it. Hospitality isn't some burden or social obligation. It's messy, chaotic, soul-affirming...and fun. Just like life!

2. Love is expressed every day. I can't overemphasize the importance of sharing love with each family member every day. Show affection to each other. No one gets to the end of life regretting that they hugged, kissed or even snuggled too much. Make it a habit to say "I love you" every day.

Jane and I talk on the phone half a dozen times a day. Nearly every time we part or hang up the phone, we say "love you." Warning: It becomes a habit and you have to be careful not to accidentally say it on the phone when you're talking to a salesperson or acquaintance of the same gender!

It begins with a husband and wife who love each other and aren't ashamed to show their kids that they're in love. The greatest thing a Dad can do for his kids is to love their Mom. It instills a security in them. The marriage has top priority even over the demands of children.

Obviously, some families are more demonstrative than others. Dads, Moms, your kids need to see you showing affection to each other, but they also need to feel your arms around them.

An old man got on a bus one February 14th, carrying a dozen roses. He sat beside a young man. The young man looked at the roses and said, "Somebody's receiving a beautiful Valentine's Day gift." "Yes," said the old man. A few minutes went by and the old man noticed his young companion was staring at the roses. "Do you have a girlfriend?" he asked. "I do," said the young man. "I'm going to see her right now, and I'm going to give her this Valentine's Day card."

They rode in silence for another 10 minutes and then the old man got up to get off the bus. As he stepped into the aisle, he suddenly placed the roses on the young man's lap and said, "I think my wife would want you to have these. I'll tell her that I gave them to you." Then, he left the bus quickly. As the bus pulled away, the young man watched as the old man walked into a cemetery. Tell your family members "I love you" every single day.

1. Jesus Christ is the glue of the family. Families worship together and pray together. Jesus is not just a welcome guest in the home; He is the Lord of the home. I could have used a word other than "glue." I could have said Jesus is the center or the heart of the home, or even the foundation of the family, but I like the word *glue*.

Christ must be the center. The wheel is a good diagram. Christ is the hub; each member is one of the spokes. Your Christianity isn't tucked into Sunday, but lived out every day. Worship and church attendance on Sundays shouldn't be an option. It should be as much of a part of the weekly routine as going to school or work. We need the power of worshipping together to make us better in our marriages and families.

Going to ball game or sleeping in won't help you learn to be more godly, loving or kinder to each other. Worship and being with God's people will.

Take a moment and look at these ten habits again. You can have all of the first 9, but if Jesus isn't the Lord of your life and your home, then the few years you enjoy as a family on earth will be the extent of your family time together. On the other hand, you may be lacking in some of the nine, but if Jesus is Lord of your home, your family can still thrive and be effective.

Conclusion: In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (**picture**) tells the story of a golden goose. There was once a farmer who bought a golden goose. A week later the golden goose laid a golden egg, and the farmer was ecstatic! He cashed the golden egg in and had a wild time. The following week he found the golden goose

laid another golden egg! Again he cashed it in and spent the money. This happened week after week until one week the farmer just couldn't wait till the end of the week to get the golden egg...so he killed his golden goose and took the golden egg out of it. He had another wild time with the money. But the next week he realized there was no golden egg, for he had killed his golden goose. The moral of the story is: *Never kill your golden goose.*

Your family is like your golden goose. It's the most valuable earthly treasure you'll ever have. The only thing that can add more value to your family is when Jesus is the Lord of your home.

I challenge Dads and Moms today to make a fresh commitment to Christ. I challenge families to follow the example of Joshua and say, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!*"