

# Building a Resilient Church Culture: Part 6 – Healthy Families

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[ 0 : 00 ] This week, we will think together about the need for healthy families. Healthy families. Now, as you will see, I have chosen the particular text I had you join me in! Because we will see Joshua deciding to lead his family in the way of God, regardless of what the larger society decided to do.

But I'm going to do something odd, because we're not going to look at the text until my conclusion. Which I don't normally do. So I usually just get up and read the text, and then talk about the text. But in order for us to get a clear picture of the significance of the family, we're going to have to do some biblical theology together. We're going to have to do kind of a flyover of the scripture. And then it helps us to understand why it's so important that Joshua makes this decision. So, you can do what you want with Joshua 24, if you want to put your ribbon bookmark in it, or the finger. And if you want to try to join me, you're welcome to. But I'm going to move pretty fast for the sake of our time together. Okay. The Bible teaches that a primary purpose of the family is to help humanity understand three massive truths.

[ 1 : 24 ] Number one, God's triune nature. Number two, the gospel. And number three, the beauty of the church.

In the family, God has embedded pictures of himself, of his plan of salvation, and of his redeemed people. Now, I can't just make a claim like that to you without showing you where we find it in the Bible.

So, where is that in the scripture? Well, we'll need to start with the biblical connection between marriage and having children. Recall one of the first things that God does for Adam.

He creates a helper suitable for him. Right? He says it's not good that the man is alone. Amen? Men. Right? So, God creates for him a helper suitable for him.

Right? Brings them together into a new family unit. He presides over that first marriage. And he gives to them a command found in Genesis 1.28.

[ 2 : 27 ] Be fruitful and multiply. Have children. And this was not just a pre-fall ordinance. God tells Noah the same thing after the flood in Genesis 9.7.

Be fruitful and increase in number. Multiply on the earth and increase upon it. Good job, Christ Family Church. You're fulfilling the mandate.

I love it. At this point, it is important that we are clear. Some are blessed with the gift of singleness. 1 Corinthians 7.7.

Some in God's mysterious providence are unable to have children. But for the rest, it would seem families with children aren't optional.

It seems to be the normative pattern that we see coming out of these commands in the Bible. I believe that the procreative mandate still matters, at least in so much as not having children should not be the normative thing.

[ 3 : 34 ] It should be less normative than having kids and many of them. Why is God so insistent that humans multiply?

Well, the answer is found when we consider that he created Adam and Eve in his image. Genesis 1.26-27. They're meant to show forth something of who he is.

Not perfectly, but some measure of our God. So he wants his image bearers to multiply because he wants more of his image spread throughout the world.

We go forth as image bearers. And he decided to graciously share the privilege of creating humans made in his image with us.

He didn't have to do it this way. Bruce Ware writes, It is as if God said, I created the first and original pair of human beings in my very image, and I could continue creating them unilaterally so that you would have no part to play.

[ 4 : 42 ] But instead, you are not to bring about human beings. You are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with my greatest of all creations, humans made in my very image.

So we're invited to procreate as being image bearers of God, as being creators of image bearers. You see what's happening there. Kostenberger, in his book, God, Marriage, and Family, which I would commend to you, said, This is remarkable. God commanded Adam and Eve and us to bear and multiply his image in part by procreation.

But God was not finished. He also gave the multiplying family massive significance in the history of redemption.

We see this most immediately in the family of Abraham, whose lineage, his family, God used to point to his plan of salvation for the nations, for the whole world to be blessed through the family of Abraham.

[ 5 : 46 ] We also see it in the New Testament, especially as Paul shows how husbands and wives resemble Christ and the church. And there are more portraits embedded in the family.

Portraits that display, as we'll see in a moment, God's triune self, the gospel, and the church. So let's look at each of those individually. Number one, the family presents a portrait of God's triune self.

Specifically, the family provides us with a portrait of the father-son relationship within the Trinity. This is why Paul could write in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 14 and 15, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

The relationship between heavenly father and son is the ultimate reality. The relationship between earthly fathers and sons and parents and children generally are small, at times distorted, but yet meaningful pictures of this ultimate reality.

Now, it's not an absolute analogy. I know this to be true. The relationship of the heavenly father to the son is unique. For instance, the son was eternally begotten, not created in time like our children are.

[ 7 : 16 ] But for all the differences, the analogy remains. In the Bible, we cannot get around the fact that the essential relationship between these two members of the Godhead is as father and son.

We see this repeated again and again and again. And so, examples. God the Father, twice from heaven, spoke audibly and declared Jesus as his beloved son.

At his baptism and at his transfiguration. Matthew 3, 17 and chapter 17 and verse 5. Jesus at age 12 referred to his father's house.

Luke chapter 2 and verse 49. Later to his disciples, Jesus explained his relationship with the father in terms of a human son copying his dad.

John chapter 5, verse 19 says, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise.

[ 8 : 25 ] So, all that said, here's the point. It is difficult to speak of the Trinity accurately without speaking of God the Father and God the Son. Consider the enormous implications for our families and our church in understanding that God intends to project his image in part through parent-child relationships.

If we get our minds around this, it's going to do some things for us. First, it's going to keep us from viewing children as idols. Some of us are tempted to worship our children, to put them at the center of everything that we do.

Fathers and mothers or even singles who put children on pedestals need to be reminded that God did not give families the divine image so that we can worship them, but so that we can worship him. Your identity is not derived from your children, how well they do or how poorly they do. By all means, let's build up our homes, but as a means of glorifying God, as displaying this relationship within the Trinity.

Also understanding this keeps us from viewing children as tools. Others will argue that children and families are important because they are the building blocks of society and the church.

[ 9 : 52 ] And it is true, families are used by God as secondary means for keeping the church and the world from just flying apart. But that's not the whole story.

They're secondary means. Families are not simply social glue. They are an actual display of our triune God. Thirdly, it keeps us from viewing children as obstacles. Still others may be tempted to think that having children is not that important and can be a barrier to godly ambition and valuable Christian service. Treat them as a burden to the mission of God. But if parent-child relationships are commanded and bear witness to God's very nature, then nothing could be further from the truth. Children are not obstacles to ministry. They themselves, their very presence is a ministry. Sometimes that's hard to wrap our minds around. Fourthly, it keeps us from overlooking children. [ 11 : 02 ] Without a theological understanding for the role of children, many of us simply overlook them. If we're single, we view them as someone else's responsibility and unimportant to our life as Christians and our life as a church.

I don't think we're guilty of that. Perhaps some of us are tempted to it. If we're parents, we may simply view children as little more than objects of evangelism. They're meant to do more than that, although they are those things that are meant to help us see the nature of our triune God. Secondly, the family presents a portrait of the gospel. The family also provides a profoundly personal picture of our salvation. In salvation, God adopts us. Don't you love the doctrine of adoption? We were not gods and then we are made gods. He makes us his sons and daughters. God referred to Israel as his firstborn son in Exodus chapter 4. [ 12 : 13 ] And the people of Israel were encouraged to sing of God's fatherly compassion. Psalm 103 verse 13. But Israel as a son merely pointed to Christ the true son.

The good news is that Christ came to effect our adoption and to make us fellow heirs. Sons in the son. Paul wrote in Galatians chapter 4 verse 4 and following. But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave, but a son. And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Ladies, you want to be sons in this biblical language. And you are, right, heirs of God. [ 13 : 21 ] The perfect son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was not ashamed to call us brothers. Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 11. So he taught his disciples to pray to our Father in heaven.

Matthew 6 and verse 9. And reminded them not to be anxious about food and clothes because your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Matthew 6, 32. He also promised them that his Father would not abandon them as orphans. John chapter 14. Rather, we have been adopted in Christ.

Parent-child relationships are no accident or small part of God's plan. They are designed to teach us by analogy of our precious relationship to God, our true Father in Christ. You may have heard me read this quotation before, but I think it's a good one that needs to be repeated. J.I. Packer once wrote, If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his Father. [ 14 : 39 ] If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

End quote. Our culture knows that Christians refer to God as the Father and to Jesus as the Son, and they are watching us.

In a time of great family turmoil, it is more rare now to meet a young person with a healthy, functional family than with a disjointed, dysfunctional family. We're going to welcome college students back soon. It's rare when a college student comes from a really healthy, vibrant Christian family. It's more normative that they don't. So how our families function matters a great deal. Husbands and fathers, much of this charge falls to us.

[ 15 : 41 ] We are to display the divine love of our Heavenly Father in the way we serve our families. Men, let's make complementarianism attractive.

Let's not let anybody argue against the complementarianism that exists in our fellowship. Consider a few implications for our families and our church in understanding that God intends to teach us something of the gospel through parent-child relationships.

First, it keeps us from being complacent. God is not satisfied with our current state, but actively works to conform us to the image of His Son.

Romans 8.29 God's purpose is that, like Jesus, we would imitate Him. Ephesians 5.1 Paul says, Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

God calls us to instruct and to disciple our children. We are to call them to conform to righteous and wise living and teach them concerning the good authority of God.

[17:01] That's at least in some measure what we do when we invite children to be part of our gathering together. We are saying to them, The world does not revolve around you. We come together and there is a greater authority that resides over us and our lives.

I was really grateful as we were just getting ready to start. And those moments are always chaotic and people are getting in here and we kick off with a song. And James Knight, who's a six-year-old, ran past me.

And he didn't say it for me to hear it, but he said, Church is starting! Hooray! Praise God, right? He's been sitting in here and he's excited to be sitting in here with us.

We are meant to be growing up our kids in this way. And parents, it is a long-term thing, a long-term work that we are doing together. Having this picture also keeps us from being impatient.

We must be patient with our children as God is patient. And I am thankful for this. Psalm 103 and verse 13 says, As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

[18:18] God is endlessly patient with me as he views me in Christ. If we display the gospel well in our parent-child relationships, it will be consistent, but careful, and compassionate, and kind.

It also promotes formal and informal adoptive practices. Because our adoption in Christ is precious to us, we ought also care about, participate in, and support adoption.

I'm so thankful for the many people in our fellowship or have come through our fellowship that have adopted. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing. Such a display of the gospel.

And I say formal because we need to welcome children into our homes and declare to them, you belong to us with all the formality of the legal process, and no one's taken you away.

And I also say informal because there may be children and adults for that matter. We talked about adopting college students during the announcements who need to be told, you belong to us, even though circumstances won't allow or just aren't necessary.

[19:34] They're just people that we give ourselves to that they might know that they belong. I want to say so much more about this, but time will not permit me. I'll conclude this point by simply saying, what a blessing it is to be part of God's family.

The love we have for our children, biological or otherwise, the privileges they have as our children, the care we show to them, is an imperfect, but a marvelous picture of what we have in Christ through the gospel.

Thirdly, the family presents a portrait of the beauty of the church. Finally, the family draws an equally stunning portrait of the church.

Peter calls the church the family of God, 1 Peter 4, 17. Paul calls the church God's household in 1 Timothy 3. How is it that we belong to the same household?

Because being united to Christ brings us into this household. Ephesians 2, verses 1-10. It means that we've been united to one another.

[20:43] Ephesians 2, 11-20. As we have seen, we've been adopted as brothers and sisters. Paul tells all Christians to love our fellow church members as siblings.

He consistently refers to members of the church under his care as brothers. The word for brothers here is gender neutral. It means siblings.

Right? I'll start calling you, hey, sibling. He also writes to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 9 and 10. Now about brotherly love, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. That would be my encouragement to you today as I've seen you all love each other so well.

Do so more and more. Paul also commanded the Romans in Romans 12, well in verse 10, to love one another with brotherly affection.

[ 21 : 52 ] Because of the great horror of sin, I know that not all families are united in the kind of love that we all long for. We don't really have, some of us, this analogy beautifully portrayed in our upbringing.

But the analogy still holds true. You love your family. Even when your family is difficult and uncomfortable, you work out those differences and you work through the discomfort, not just to tolerate one another, but to love one another, to have affection for one another, to seek the highest good of the other because they're your family.

And maybe why this analogy is so clearly used of the church. The family is the first and foundational institution created by our Lord.

And it is the foundation of any healthy church. I don't know that we're going to really get our minds around what a healthy church should look like if it's not full of healthy families.

Healthy families will certainly be indispensable if our church is to be resilient in the years to come. I suggest to you that this is why the enemy is so bent on destroying the family.

[ 23 : 15 ] This is the front line of attack in our nation. If he can get at the family, he can get at the church. And he has. And he does.

Let's not let that be so amongst us. On your bulletin this morning, the historic, quote, 17th century English pastor Thomas Risley said, quote, the lack of religion in families is the decay of churches. The degree of piety in families directly determines the strength and prosperity of the church. And Christ's kingdom. So the family is important.

And it displays these beautiful things. The triune nature of God. The gospel itself. The beauty of the church. And so let me read Joshua chapter 24 verse 14 and 15.

And remind you before I read, beloved, that this is God's word to us written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

[ 24 : 25 ] Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your father served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord.

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father 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. This chapter closes out the book of Joshua. Israel has accomplished their quasi-conquering of the land of Canaan. But because of their disobedience to conquer it on God's terms, they're about to encounter much trouble and will share much of the land with these Canaanites here, a group of them called the Amorites.

Joshua here calls them to choose whether or not they will serve the God who has delivered them time and time again or the worthless idols of the people of the land.

[ 25 : 34 ] The simple point to be made is this. For us to build a resilient church culture and to continue in the work of building as a resilient church culture, heads of households will have to decide who we will serve.

We will have to decide not to bow at the feet of cultural norms, leading our children to worship the idols of this land. And we will have to decide to lead our children to the worship of the Most High God who is the only one worthy of our worship.

So let's continue to be about the work of building a resilient church culture by God's grace and to God's glory by working on, taking up, thinking about clear mission, robust theology, accurate histories, sacrificial hospitality, and healthy families.

Let's pray. Let's pray.