



FAMILY ROLE MODELS

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PREFACE

When you hear the words “role model” what comes to mind? Do you think of someone who once influenced you or continues to influence you? Does the name or face of someone you once poured into come to mind? Maybe your mind goes to thinking of those who may be less fortunate and deemed in need of someone to look up to.

Have you ever considered when someone goes from needing a role model to becoming a role model themselves? How do we define when we have reached an echelon of life where we are now able to have influence over another? This is such an interesting thought! This moment may often be defined by reaching an age requirement, time availability, or heart for a certain age group, but is that really all that being a role model needs or takes?

When we can acknowledge that we are sinners, living in a sinful world, we will discover that we are all in need of someone to look up to and influence our lives. In 2 Timothy 2:2, we read, ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*** Due to us all being sinners, we are all in need of teaching and training. The Bible provides many examples and lessons we can learn from those who lived in a sin-filled world (just like ours) and the choices and decisions they made. As men, women, parents, siblings, and children, there are instructions and lessons we can learn by turning to God’s Word. We can then take these instructions and invest in others. Hebrews 10:24 says, ***“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”*** Our hope and prayer throughout this book are that as a family and as a church we see the Word of God transform our lives to better reflect the hope and love that lives inside of us as believers.



LESSON ONE

THE ROLE OF A MAN

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

What role does each of the following fulfill in your life?

- Waiter
- Police officer
- Pet
- Car
- Detroit Lions

We all have expectations about what many things ought to be. Whether it is people, objects, or sports teams, we all have an expectation that a role is met. In some cases, our expectations of what that person, object, or team ought to be can be unrealistically too high. There are also times our cynical nature can kick in and our expectations can be low. While discussing the theological benefits of being a Lions fan could be beneficial, our focus for the next month will be on the roles that God has put on men, women, parents, siblings, and children.

1. Why do “roles” sometimes feel intimidating?

2. Can you think of some areas in the Bible that talk about “roles?” Do you feel the biblical roles taught are still in place today?

Galatians 3:28 says, ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”***

3. How could someone use this verse to argue that “roles” are hurtful and no longer in place?

One could quickly conclude that since we live in the post-crucifixion and post-resurrection of Jesus era, we are no longer viewed as different. Some could say that in the above verse that is what Paul is getting at. The Bible has to be taken into context as a whole and within the original audience that each letter or book was written.

Some truths that every believer must hold are:

- The Bible does not contradict itself. In this case, if a person runs with Galatians 3:28 proving there are no roles, we negate other verses that discuss the roles of men, women, children, siblings, parents, slaves, pastors, and so on.
- Context is necessary to understand what the Bible is trying to say. Paul knew there was a difference between Jews, Gentiles, Greek, men, women, and children but all had an equal ability to now come to Christ. The differences in the roles and functions of each of us are different.

4. In your opinion, do roles change the worth of someone?

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5. So speaking of “roles,” how would our current American culture define what it means to be a man?

6. Why is it easy to allow culture to define the roles we have within the family?

In 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, we read, ***“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.”***

Each of these statements is found in Paul’s final exhortation to the church at Corinth. When Paul says ***“act like men,”*** he is specifically talking about maturity. He is telling the church that they cannot continue to live an immature, little child faith. He also reminded them, ***“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways”*** (1 Corinthians 13:11). Paul’s challenge to the church in Corinth was to grow up spiritually and start living like mature believers.

7. What can distract a believer from maturing? Why is it easy for a man to get distracted by some of these things?

All of these verses are not speaking specifically about how a man should act differently than a woman. None of these examples is

gender-specific. This was done purposely because the first step towards being a godly man is that man must be first established in his love for Jesus Christ. Without that truth, the specific role of a man would make no sense at all.

8. Why is a genuine relationship with God essential to see obedience to God's plan?

Ephesians 5:23-33 says, ***“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”***

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9. What is countercultural about these verses?

10. What specifics do you read in this passage that speak of what a man's role is meant to be in the family?

Sadly, there are some who falsely represent the church who have grossly and sinfully misused this passage. Some of you reading this now have felt that misuse. Some of you have been abused by the church and as a Pastor, it hurts my heart to even think of these things. This is why we feel it is of the utmost importance to properly teach these verses.

In a world where roles are being thrown out the window, we as Christians must understand what the world is saying. Let me firmly and clearly say this passage of Scripture **REJECTS** the thought that the role of a man is to be domineering and abusive. God's Word says, ***"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered"*** (1 Peter 3:7).

Here the Bible speaks of the great tenderness and love a husband is to have for his wife and his family. A common misconception is that the Bible teaches toxic masculinity and chauvinism. God's Word was written two thousand years ago and instructs men of God to love their wives with understanding, grace, and honor. God's Word has always condemned the type of abuses some people have suffered.

Sadly, the fallen sinful flesh of a man (humanity, not gender-specific) leads to the thought that a man's role is to dominate and control women. To lead with a heavy-handed authority is not the role that is spelled out in Scripture.

John MacArthur pointed out, "Paul's point here was that a husband best shows Christlike headship by voluntary, loving sacrifice and service on behalf of the wife - which is as much a form of submission as the wife's allegiance to her husband's leadership and the children's obedience to their parents."

- Man's role is to lead in love ***"as Christ loves the church."***

11. What did Christ do to love the church? How does this apply to the husband?

- Man's role is to lead by loving ***"their wives as their own body."***

12. What does it look like for a man to love his wife as if his own body?

A man will protect his bride against any threat to her virtue. He will never knowingly lead her into any kind of sin. He would never deliberately provoke her or exasperate her so that she succumbs to anger or any other temptation.

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- Man's role is leading by nourishing and cherishing.

13. How does a man show that he is nourishing and cherishing his wife?

A man should constantly be speaking the encouragement that is only found in God's Word into her life. A man should never take for granted the amazing creation from God. A man should never take for granted God's sovereignty. A man should praise God for the amazing person God had created and ordained to be joined as one flesh. A man should praise God for sending him his wife.

Roles are a hard discussion. This topic can easily create an opportunity for the devil. We have to come to the realization in life that all have sinned, all have struggles, and all should be striving to become who God has made them. It is of the flesh that we are critical of others. Please resist the self-righteous attitude that can come when we are confronting issues. Throughout the month, I would like to encourage anyone who is not in the "hot seat" to please use these guides as a great conversation starter to help a person get to where they need to be as a follower of Christ.

GRIT MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 1

Kyle Wendel

Grit? Grit is a word that we often do not use to describe many people. Oftentimes, the word grit is only used in the context of sports in our society. We look at a player who can power through adversity or an injury as someone who shows tremendous grit. We look at these players and we see physical and mental toughness displayed.

One moment that clearly sticks out in my mind is the day that the Detroit Lions quarterback, Matthew Stafford, finished the game with a separated shoulder on the final drive. It was his rookie year in 2009. If you have not watched it before, go to YouTube right now. The Lions were down 37-31 with eight seconds on the clock. They had to score a touchdown or they would lose. In the next play, Stafford got hit and his shoulder was separated - an injury that kept him out for multiple games. You could clearly see he was in immense pain as he was helped off the field. Stafford somehow managed to get back on the field for the final play of the game and was telling the coach that he could still throw the ball if needed. The ball was snapped, and Stafford proceeded to throw the game-winning touchdown with a separated shoulder. Even the commentator could not stop talking about how Stafford showed real grit at that moment. It was an incredible moment to watch and one of the few moments that you really loved being a Detroit Lions fan!

Grit is shown in many different ways. It can be in a sports moment and it can be shown in everyday life. We see many stories in the Bible where Christians showed grit in many different ways.

Grit is also described as steadfastness and endurance. Steadfastness is the determination to remain at your post come what may. Endurance

is the determination to keep moving toward your desired goal despite external challenges and internal weariness.

One of the stories that sticks out to me is Noah. Noah was warned by the Lord that He would flood the Earth. God then commanded Noah to build the Ark that would save him and his family from this coming destruction. A detail that we often overlook is that it took Noah somewhere between 55-75 years to build the Ark. Is that not crazy? We often overlook how long this would have taken. I get tired of doing a house project when it takes me more than a couple of days. Noah showed great steadfastness and he and his family built the Ark over those many years!

Another detail that we often forget is that Noah was mocked while he spent all those years building the Ark. Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). Noah warned the people that the flood would be coming and no one listened. It is so sad to see so many people reject Noah and reject the Lord. However, Noah never gave up. He showed tremendous endurance through these struggles. Imagine devoting all your time to obeying the Lord and no one listens to you. Imagine that you even get mocked as you do it.

Men, we are called to lead in this same way. We are called to show grit. We are called to never give up and to work hard at following the Lord. It is not easy. It is something that will take tremendous steadfastness and endurance over the years. The world is constantly going to be trying to pull you away from leading your family or others. The world will try to sell you lies and pull you out of leading. We have a high call from the Lord to lead our families as men of God. We cannot do it on our own. We need the Lord to provide and help us through it all. We must show grit as we grind through the world trying to hold us back. We must rely solely on the Lord for our grit as leaders.

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Do not give up men. This journey is hard and long, but it is also short in comparison to eternity. Do not lose hope. Lead as the Lord leads you.

***“Therefore, my beloved brothers,
be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord
your labor is not in vain.”***

1 Corinthians 15:58

COURAGE MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 2

James Mann

The world we live in is a scary place for men. This idea of being a man and doing the things we are called to do by God is looked down upon by society. When we are being who God has called us to be, we are persecuted by those who are living in the world. Being a Christian male in the 21st century is not for the faint of heart or for those who are too afraid to stand strong. Now is the time where men must stand and be courageous, not because we are anything spectacular, but because we serve a spectacular God who has given us a calling that we must uphold.

In Daniel chapter 6, we see a man who is being challenged by society. Daniel is told that he can no longer honor his God due to a king who is standing by his word and sly subordinates enforcing this rule. Many of the things that we must do to honor God are being challenged by our current society. Daniel did not falter at this and neither should we. Daniel knew full well that if he was to stand against the orders of the governing body, he was going to be thrown into the den. This was no surprise to him. Similarly, we know that standing up for the things we are called to do will make us an outcast. We are not going to be liked by everyone. We will lose people in our lives that we care about. Some of us look at this and decide that it is not worth it to be courageous. We defy the commands of our God in order to appease those around us.

Daniel was thrown into the pit for his transgressions against the king. He was expected to be eaten alive. Daniel was loved by the king, and he was hoping that Daniel's God would protect him. Sure enough, that is what happened. Those who opposed Daniel were thrown in the pit once he was released, but they were not as lucky.

God protected Daniel from harm's way, and He will protect us as well. When we are courageous and make sure that our courage is rooted in God, we are showing the world that there is Someone that is stronger than the world around us. We are showing that society does not have a hold over our God.

My favorite part of this passage is the closing:

***"I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion
people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel,
For he is the living God,
enduring forever;
his kingdom shall never be destroyed,
and his dominion shall be to the end.
He delivers and rescues;
he works signs and wonders
in heaven and on earth,
he who has saved Daniel
from the power of the lions."***

Daniel 6:26-27

God used one man's courage to change a kingdom. If we stand strong in courage and be the men that we are called to be, God will use us to change the world around us. Instead of becoming part of the status quo, we will set the bar for the godly men around us to be courageous.

LEADERSHIP MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 3

Mitchell Holmes

The concept of leadership is an interesting one in our culture. There are many styles and theories as to what makes a good leader. Some say the best style is to be authoritative and set every goal and expectation with little room for follower input. Others would rather be pace-setters and lead by example. Some would rather coach and let people lead themselves while offering gentle input and wisdom from afar. As men, we are expected to be leaders of our households. In 1 Peter chapter 3, we are told that as men, we are expected to spiritually guide and direct our families and set the course of action and goals for our spouses and children to strive towards.

Regardless of your style of leadership, this is not going to be an easy task. Moses is one of the most famous and beloved leaders in all of the Bible and likely, all of Earth's history. Moses was God's "guy" for many years and He used Moses to perform many miracles and lead His chosen people through many difficulties and hardships. Moses' resume includes: causing the plagues in Egypt, splitting the Red Sea, conjuring food and water in times of struggle, being present at the creation of the Ten Commandments, and more. It is hard to look at Moses as anything less than an incredible leader and a superhero of biblical and historical proportions. However, Moses had many struggles that can be easily forgotten or overlooked. Moses was far from perfect and I want you to take heart in the fact that even the "best" of the Bible had issues and messes just like you and me.

Moses struggled with anger issues and a speech disorder and his story began with cold-blooded murder. However, the thing about Moses that gives me the most comfort is that Moses needed help.

Certainly, there were times that he knew what to do and did so boldly, but there were also times in which Moses needed guidance, wisdom, and direction from those around him. Early on in the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, Moses started acting as a judge for the people; he would hear cases of disputes and would offer advice and make rulings. In Exodus chapter 18, we see that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, offered some advice to Moses, ***"Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God'"*** (Exodus 18:17-19). Jethro saw that Moses had good intentions at heart but would soon burn himself out by trying to hear every case in the entire camp. He advised Moses to appoint chiefs over the people who would help Moses deal with the daily disputes of the people.

A more famous example comes in Exodus chapter 17 when the people of Amalek fought with the Israelites. Moses appointed Joshua to lead the military while Moses was atop a nearby hill. While Moses was there, any time that he would lift his staff, the Israelites would prevail over Amalek and any time he grew weary and lowered his hands, the Amalekites would prevail. As I am sure you can imagine, Moses grew weary quickly. In verses 12 and 13, we see Moses needed help from Aaron and Hur, ***"But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."***

These stories serve as an incredible reminder and a great reassurance to me that even Moses needed assistance from those around him.

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There is no shame in recognizing that we all make mistakes and at times we do not know what the correct decision is. As men who can be stubborn and hard-headed, it can be a struggle to say the words, "I need help." Yet, I hope that you come to the realization that wanting what is best for your family and your spouse has to take priority over your pride as a man. There is immense strength in humility and no one, especially not those who care about you, is going to fault you for seeking out help when you need it. As a leader, there will come a time where you must make the conscious decision to put your pride aside and seek out the help of those around you in order to lead effectively, as God has called you.

LOVE MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 4

Patrick Bicknell

This family month we are looking at the roles of males, females, parents, and children. Our primary focus is to look at what the Bible says about each of these roles. When it comes to the role of men and how the world says men should live, compared to how the Bible says men should live, is very different. One of the ways men are taught to live within Scripture is that they are told to love. This love is different from how our culture defines it. Within our culture, love is about ourselves and what others can give us. It is about loving someone as long as they reciprocate that love back to us. However, the Bible talks about a much different kind of love, and a beautiful example of this comes in the parable of the prodigal son.

The father within this parable gives two amazing pictures of how we are to love as men. Most of us know the story. The son wanted his father's inheritance and wished to leave him, so he went into a far country and squandered his money. He then realized the mistake that he had made and wished to go back to his father. As the son was heading back to the father's home, he had this whole speech planned out. He was going to apologize, acknowledge his sin, and ask to be a servant within his household. However, as he was walking up to the house, the Bible displays this awesome love that the father has for his son. Luke writes, ***"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him"*** (Luke 15:20). The parable continues to mention that the father told his servants to kill the fattened calf and to throw a party for his son that returned. What is amazing about the love that this father displayed is that he had no clue that the son was about to apologize

to him. The Bible mentions nothing about the father having any idea why the son was returning. All Scripture tells us is that he saw his son and he felt compassion. As soon as he saw his son, he felt love. He ran to him, embraced him, and kissed him. At that moment, what the son had done before did not matter to him. By taking his inheritance early, the son was basically saying, “You are dead to me and I want nothing to do with you.” Yet, the father had forgiven him and loved him unconditionally.

There is also one more great example of love within this story that we should all strive to follow. Later on in the parable, the father's other son is mentioned. He is described as being angry, wondering why this son that ran away got a party when he had never had a party thrown for him. He brought this complaint to his father and the way in which his father responded is wonderful. Scripture says, ***“And he said to him, ‘Son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”*** (Luke 15:31-32). The father, as most of us would not do, stays calm. He does not get angry at the way his son was reacting. Instead of lashing out at him, he lovingly cared for his son and reminded him that everything that he owned the son had been able to enjoy. He does not get mad at the son for being selfish and prideful but instead helps the son to feel the love that he should have for his brother. The father in the parable of the prodigal son displays perfectly how we ought to love as men. We should all strive to love unconditionally and in a genuine, caring way.

COUNTING THE COST MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 5

Keaton Washburn

For the Christian, the idea of self-control is often thought of as a virtue, something to be desired. For many non-Christians though, the idea of self-control is ludicrous. To be self-controlled means to deny oneself of what one desires. For the person who is only living for themselves, they live to gratify their desires. The idea of self-control for that person makes little sense.

As we continue our series on role models, we are going to look at a snapshot of a man who understood what it meant to be self-controlled. More than that though, he understood why God calls men and women to be self-controlled and was blessed because of his obedience. The story of Joseph is located in Genesis chapter 39. At this point, he had been sold into slavery by his brothers and his master was a man named Potiphar. It seemed that everything Joseph touched flourished and God was blessing his work.

Please read Genesis 39:6-10.

As Joseph was carrying out his duties, he began to be tempted by Potiphar's wife. Verse 10 tells us that "**day after day**," she spoke to him, tempting him to lie with her. Each day, Joseph resisted. Keeping in mind his responsibilities, the trust of his master, and his desire to obey God, Joseph did not give in. Speaking of Joseph's actions here, Allen P. Ross says, "The way of wisdom is to consider the cost of sin." Joseph knew this. Ross continues to say, "Joseph did not yield to temptation because he was convinced God had something marvelous for him to do. Joseph would not throw away God's blessings for the pleasures of sin." He knew what God had called him to do and did not want to lose that.

How many times do we choose to give in to temptation and lose a blessing that God has for us? The peace that God promises to His children is often squandered because we continually choose to give in to that particular sin we have not ever confessed. Sometimes we give up the promise of answered prayer. In 1 Peter 3:7, it is very clear that if a husband is not living with his wife ***“in an understanding way,”*** his prayers will not be answered. The wise person considers the cost of their sin. Do you consider the cost of your sin?

“LITTLE CHRISTS” MODELED

THE ROLE OF A MAN, DEVOTION 6

Mitchell Holmes

Being tender-hearted is hard for many of us. I do not think it is a stretch to say that being kind and gentle to those around us goes against our very nature at times. In a society that places so much emphasis on the importance of yourself and making sure your needs are met, it can be tough to look at those around us with compassion and love. When I am driving and I get cut off by someone who is in a rush and endangers me and the other people on the road because of their selfishness, the first thing that comes into my mind is not tenderheartedness. It is a hard thing for us to do.

As Christians, we are called to be “little Christs,” that is to say that we are commanded to be the best examples and the best pictures of Jesus that we can be. Jesus was the most tenderhearted person to ever walk the Earth. The examples and demonstrations of His compassion are innumerable in the Bible.

John chapter 8 shows us one such example of Jesus being tenderhearted and graceful. A woman that had been caught in adultery is brought before Jesus. In the Hebrew law at that time, this meant that the woman deserved the death penalty. In verse 7, we see Jesus respond, ***“And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”*** Jesus did two things in this statement. He called out the Pharisees by essentially saying “she is no more a sinner than any of you” but He also offered this woman mercy. Jesus is tenderhearted and kind enough to forgive this woman’s sinful act and not look at her as anything less than a creation of God. He spoke with gentleness when He forgave her and He was kind in the way that He told her to give up on her sinful ways.

For men, it can be difficult to speak tenderly, to speak gently. Our culture has taught us to be rigid, unwavering, emotionless, guardians. That is not the attitude that Jesus wants us to have. At times, we have to be firm but at our core, we are expected to be tenderhearted and loving to those around us. Do not let society fool you; emotions are not weakness. Being kind, being gentle, and being tender is not being passive, it is being loving and as 1 John 4:19 says, ***“We love because he first loved us.”***

FAMILY ROLE MODELS



LESSON TWO

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN

PASTOR RYAN STORY

I was taught something early on in ministry, and that is to love the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 reads, ***“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*** Similarly, Paul writes in Ephesians that the only offensive weapon within the armor of God is ***“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”*** (Ephesians 6:17). The Bible is a sharp sword that is living, active, strong enough to pierce soul and spirit, and strong enough to discern the thoughts and intentions of the deepest part of our hearts. I picture a sword that is so sharp that it cannot even be sheathed in any scabbard, for the scabbard would be cut as well. I was also taught that one does not use the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, as a personal weapon against someone.

1. What are some ways that a person might use the Word of God in an incorrect manner?

While the Bible does talk about utilizing truth for rebuking, instruction, and direction, we must never void grace, mercy, and long-suffering with those who are trying to conform to living a holy, righteous, God-honoring life. If you are reading this lesson and are looking to use the content within this lesson to cut someone, specifically a woman, please close this book and take a moment with the Lord. If you have an antagonistic spirit within your heart and you are looking to argue about the following lesson, again this might not be the lesson for you. Sin makes living a life for Jesus difficult enough, we do not need to be God's people who are swinging the Bible around like a katana. I pray that you know my heart as I write this. In the most humble and grace-filled way, we are going to have to look to Scripture to find

the truth. If you feel cut, attacked, or called out, I pray you take that feeling to the feet of the One who can show you the truth, Christ our Lord.

2. Do you have a woman in your life who you would deem as a role model who reflected Christ? Why would you select her?

As the church, the Bride of Christ, we struggle with many things. From the moment the church was formed, the church has been in a culture war within itself, and with the surrounding influences of the world. The church we see in Acts chapter 2, located in Jerusalem, has many similarities and many differences to the church found in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome. As history proceeded the church seen during the Crusades, the church that came out of the Protestant Reformation, the first church that started with the Pilgrims in our country, to even The River Church today all fought the battle of culture. One common issue was the contextualizing of the culture around it. Paul and Peter had tension over pork. Sadly, the church gets so caught up with arguing over methodologies, we are blind that horrible influences take root inside the church. Paul tells Timothy, ***“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”*** (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Unfortunately, gender roles are one of those areas that are being diluted and attacked by the culture of our world, and that sin is seeping into the church and wreaking havoc on God’s people.

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3. Why is it so easy for the church to fall into the snare of all the issues Paul states in 2 Timothy 4:3-4?

4. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “woman’s role?”

For us to get into the proper way of understanding the role of women we have to build on a few truths.

Genesis 1:26-27 says, ***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”***

- God made man and woman purposely in His image and likeness.

I hope you see the difference in God’s choice of wording for creating humanity. For the rest of Creation, God spoke and said, ***“Let there be.”*** For the creation of humanity, God said, ***“Let us make.”*** The beauty of the intentionality of God is on display with every person who has ever lived. God does not make mistakes. To be human is to be an image-bearer of God. God created you exactly how you are meant to be. Sadly, sin has destroyed this foundational truth. To be human means we can only be one of two genders, male or female.

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To refuse this truth means we are looking at God's Word and saying it is a lie. When we look at God's Word and say it is a lie, we are saying He is a liar. When we say the Creator of the universe, the Savior of the world, the Bringer of Life is a liar, we undo the very essence of any relationship we can have with the Lord.

5. How should we treat the special creation that is the image of God? How does sin cause us to treat others?

Sin brings separation. The devil loves when people, especially the church, are not united under the authority of God. Our issues in the world stem from our inability to view people from the lens that God sees us. Sin causes us to focus on our self, our needs, our wants, our desires, and our opinions. That sin causes us to hurt people. Hurt towards women is not always the abuse from a male. Women hurt women in the same way that men hurt men. Sin causes hurt. When we live in sin we are unable to hold to the truth that we are all created equally in God's image and likeness.

- Male and female are equal.

From this point on we are going to have a fork in the road. You will either look at Scripture and say, "Yes, I agree," or you will look at the following points and want to combat them with the idea of "what about." At the center of this fork is our view on the word "equality." This is where our kingdom of self-living will collide with the Word of God centrality of the Kingdom of God.

Last week we discussed Galatians 3:28 that says, ***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male***

and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” If we determine that this verse is discussing equality, we run into a massive theological problem. This verse is talking less about equality and more about unity. I am hard pressed to find any verse that discusses the “equality” of men and women. Daniel Akin has noted, “Of course the mere absence of a word is not determinative. The word Trinity is nowhere in the Bible, but the doctrine clearly is. As to equality, it is an appropriate term to describe the fact that men and women share equal value, dignity, and responsibility before God. However, in Western culture equality has also been an important political term, signifying equal rights; and rights are a dubious category in biblical thought. The New Testament church is not portrayed as an egalitarian community in the political sense, but a well-functioning family in the kinship sense.”

6. Why do we fight so hard for “equal” in our society? Why do we not strive for unity in our families and our churches?

Equality in terms of our being created in the likeness of God exists inside of Scripture, but it is in step with the understanding that males and females have different roles. We cannot turn equality into the goal we are striving for. The church, more specifically our families, needs to strive for unity within the Body of Christ, not equality.

- There are roles in the home.

Genesis 2:18-25 says, ***“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought***

them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

Males and females have different roles within the family. We use Adam and Eve as our base study because, outside of Jesus, they are the only two humans to walk on this Earth, and for a time not experience the destruction that sin brought into this world. God’s designs are perfect.

7. What did God see that was not good? Why was Eve specifically created?

The biggest hurdle we face here is in the term **“helper.”** Helper does not entail inferiority. Daniel Akin also pointed out, “God’s creation of Eve as a helper suitable to or corresponding to Adam implies a differentiation of role, which places man in the role of initiator or leader, and the female in the role of supporting, assisting, and adapting to his need.” Sin causes us to look inwardly and only focus

on our wants, needs, desires, and outcomes. However, God did not purposely design the women to be a helper with just housework in mind. Within the marriage, both men and women are meant to be the ambassadors of Christ and are motivated by His love (2 Corinthians chapter 5). A husband is meant to lead his wife closer to Jesus, not motivated by authority but motivated by the love of Christ to see his wife reconciled to Jesus. Likewise, a wife is given the role to help her husband to be reconciled to Jesus, only motivated by the same love of our Savior. Jesus called the Holy Spirit ***“the helper”*** (John 15:26) with no sense of snide or cynicism. He said it because Jesus knew the monumental importance the role of a helper has on a person’s life.

To truly be a helper as God designed, then a wife must be obedient to the Word of God.

Ephesians 5:22-23 adds, ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”***

8. Thinking back to the analogy of God’s Word being the sharpest sword ever created, then why are these verses so sharp?

Submission is not meant to be a “dirty word.” Nor is it meant to be used as an authoritarian term used to keep a person in line. Submission must be viewed not just as the duty of wives alone but as an essential part of a Christian lifestyle. Jesus submitted to His parents, paid taxes, and submitted to the will of the Father. Jesus modeled submission, and He was a man. We cannot pluck Ephesians

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5:22-23 out of thin air without knowing the context of Ephesians 5:21, which says, “**Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” A wife’s submission to her husband is “**fitting to the Lord**” (Colossians 3:18) and moreover demonstrates a reverence for Christ, rather than a chauvinistic political system.

We cannot fix issues in our family if we do not align ourselves with a proper understanding and application to the Bible. There are many nuances about the roles a woman can have within the household, and God willing I have another opportunity to dive into God’s Word and write another lesson. There are two closing questions: one for men and one for women.

9. Men - How are you ensuring that the truth found in the Bible is properly applied in your marriage? How are you helping your wife conform to the person Jesus instructs her to be?

10. Women - How are you embracing your God-given role? What areas of sin do you need to repent of to walk in step with God’s Word?

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LESSON TWO | THE ROLE OF A WOMAN

CONTENTMENT MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 1

Brianna Grunwald

“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.” Luke 1:5-7

Based on those verses, both Elizabeth and Zechariah were **“righteous before God.”** In both their marriage and the way they were living, they chose to honor and glorify God. Elizabeth was 88 years old and could not become pregnant. An angel came to Zechariah and revealed that they would bear a son named John. In verse 18, Zechariah asked the angel Gabriel how he can know for sure that they would have a son. Zechariah began to question the validity of the prophecy that the angel was giving and was then made mute because of his doubt.

Think about a time where you were really excited to get something and it fell through. For me, it was the time that I was searching for a new car. I found a beautiful white Jeep Liberty; it had a tan interior, heated seats, a sunroof, and not a single scratch or dent on the exterior. I was so excited that I had finally found “the” car. I withdrew the cash and set up an appointment to take it for a test drive. My heart was at peace knowing that I was going to get a reliable car in just a few days. An hour before I was supposed to test drive this car, I called the dealership and they informed me that within the past hour somebody else came and bought the car. My heart sank. I was

instantly filled with panic and fear because I did not have a running car. The car my heart was set on had vanished.

The biblical idea of contentment is being at peace with where God has placed you. It is being satisfied or pleased. It is choosing to trust in Jesus even when things do not go our way. Even though Elizabeth and Zechariah both wanted to conceive a child, they had to remain content and confident in God's timing. There are many instances where we, especially women, plan every last detail of something. When those plans change, our worldly view of peace and contentment is thrown out the window.

Proverbs 19:21 says, ***“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”***

Elizabeth and Zechariah desperately wanted a baby, but they could not have one. We later see in Luke chapter 1 that the Lord graciously blessed them with their son, John the Baptist, who then went on to do great things in the name of Jesus. However, throughout their marriage, they had to remain steadfast in contentment knowing that they may never conceive a child. Contentment is not a standard based on our own plans and expectations of how life should go. Contentment is not being satisfied or pleased with what the world has to offer. Contentment is being at peace in any circumstance. It is trusting in our Heavenly Father's ultimate plan regardless of the storm circling around us.

ENCOURAGEMENT MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 2

Katrina Young

One of the most challenging areas of Scripture for me to read and apply is Proverbs chapter 31. When comparing myself to the woman described here, the passage painfully highlights all the areas that I fall short. Do not get me wrong, I can fill my days with a million things and check off quite a few as the day goes on. However, even with the checklist of accomplishments, it is easy to feel unfulfilled. The “Proverbs 31 Woman” seems to have the ability to keep all things in balance and then laughs at what tomorrow will bring (verse 25). Who is this woman that seemingly can do all things and then some, and yet, have joy in all that she does?

A simple Google search provides a description of a virtuous woman as one who leads her home with integrity, discipline, and more. All the virtues she practices are aimed at making her husband's life better, teaching her children, and serving God.

I am convinced multitasking is God's gift to women. However, trying to meet the needs of our family and juggling day-to-day life we tend to lose sight of our priorities. The woman in these verses has her household in order. I think it is important to note that modeling yourself after her should not be to become an expert at all things homemaking but to model ourselves after her character. Everything about her focuses on her relationship with God, her husband, and her family.

It has been said, “Scripture doesn't change because the times do.” My daily list of tasks may not include the spinning of fabric and I am thankful for that. Yet, when my heart and priorities line up with what

God has called me to do, He gives me the strength to accomplish the tasks set before me every day. Proverbs 31:25 says, ***“Strength and dignity are her clothing.”*** The answer to who this woman is can be in all of us that embrace God's call on our lives. When I rise early to spend quiet time with my God, it is similar to the statement, ***“She dresses herself with strength”*** (Proverbs 31:17). My heart is prepared to show His love, His character, and His strength throughout my day, the virtues of a “Proverbs 31 Woman.”

DEDICATION MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 3

Emilou Irwin

“And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked for him from the Lord.’” 1 Samuel 1:20

When I think of Hannah, I think of dedication. She prayed for a baby for years and her heart was sad. She had dedication while praying to the Lord, waiting for a son, and being dedicated to Elkanah. Sometimes we have to wait years for something we think should happen now. Yet, the saying is true, “It is all in God’s timing.” If we try to do it in our timing it is not going to be good and will definitely not be what God has intended for us.

I think something for me that I have had to be dedicated to and have patience for is my two jobs. While working my way up in my retail position, I have had to be loyal and dedicated. Here at the Holly nursery, I had been volunteering every week on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights ever since we moved back in 2014. I loved it in the nursery because of all the sweet little babies. Every Sunday, I was dedicated to them. I realized that one of my callings from the Lord was to run a church nursery. I thought I had my opportunity when we went to help start-up, and be dedicated to, a new location. I was so excited. I had that passion and a love for it. Long story short, that was not God’s timing for me and it was not His will. I received an offer to come back to The River Holly and run the nursery. I gladly accepted it. I now know that it was God’s timing for me.

In 1 Samuel 1:19, we read, ***“They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house***

at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.”

She continued praying before the Lord, she poured out her soul before the Lord, and they worshiped before the Lord. These three things will give you the strength to be dedicated to whatever it is that you are praying for. These steps will bring the thing that you are striving for. For me, it was having love for the children of God. I had to be patient and dedicated to them. It was these precious children that God allows me to take care of and teach. So I ask you the question, “What is it that you are dedicated to?” If you are not there yet, “What is it that you have the dedication to pray for, pour out your soul for, and worship God for?”

OPPORTUNITY MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 4

Katie Pettibone

The Old Testament is filled with stories about men and women who God chose to work in His glory. In the book of Judges, the Israelites are on thin ice almost constantly for disobeying God. It seems that each time a new Judge comes along, the Israelites fall into the complications of the world again.

In one of the earlier chapters of the book, a Judge named Deborah talked to a military leader named Barak after the Israelites cried out to God to save them from the Canaanites. Deborah expressed to Barak that God intended to help the Israelites win their next battle; however, the death of Sisera, a Canaanite general, would not be Barak's honor but a woman's. Barak then left and proceeded to do as Deborah had said. He sent his army of 10,000 to Mount Tabor, which led Sisera and his army near the Kishon River, where the Israelite military took down the Canaanites.

Judges 4:17-23 records, ***“But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, ‘Turn aside my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.’ So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. And he said to her, ‘Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.’ So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, ‘Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’” But Jael, the wife of Heber, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the***

peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died. And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, 'Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.' So he went into her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple. So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel."

Just how Deborah prophesied to Barak, the death of Sisera happened because of a woman named Jael. The death of someone is something that is not usually a celebration. However, Jael's case is a little different from the norm. To many people's surprise, Jael was not an Israelite, but she is assumed to be an Israelite sympathizer. This means she had strong feelings for the Israelites at this time, and it is easy to say that she disagreed with the mass torment they were going through.

Once Jael saw Sisera, she saw the opportunity to save the Israelites (for the time being) and take the burden into her own hands. Jael is not perceived as a murderer but a hero in the eyes of the Israelites. For the next 40 years, the Israelites live in peace and harmony because of these events.

Looking into this story, we can learn from Jael's intentions. Jael was not hesitant, nor did she question why Sisera was at her tent. Instead, she immediately accepted that she was given this task. In the world today, it is hard not to question everything before we take part in it. For example, a job opportunity arises, and we begin our pros and cons list of taking it. This can also go for things such as what church to attend or what growth community to join. It is easy to forget that Jesus calls all who are saved to spread the Gospel.

Matthew 28:19 states, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”***

The opportunity to go out and talk about the Gospel is always there. It is a hard thing to do in this world, being that there will be people who disagree with you. However, it only takes one conversation to plant a seed. Take, for instance, the parable of the mustard seed found in Mark 4:30-32, ***“And he said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’”***

After being saved, we are all called to go out and make more disciples. All it takes is having one conversation to do that. Jael was not fearful nor hesitant when she knew she was placed to do something for the Israelites. Much like her, do not be hesitant or afraid, for the Lord will be with you! Great things will come from sharing the Good News, and Christ’s mission will be fulfilled!

SUBMISSION MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 5

Sydney Kimball

If you are anything like me, upon hearing the word “submission” you experience an involuntary feeling of discomfort or disgust. Over the years, biblical submission has been so misrepresented that women oftentimes describe it as feeling like a doormat or feeling as if they are less valuable than the men in their lives.

Most of us feel opposed to the idea of submission for a reason. We have seen or heard the horror stories of women who have experienced anything other than a life of God-honoring submission. In addition, the Bible tells us that one of the results of the original sin is our desire to have the role of our husbands, the role of leading the home. Genesis 3:16 says, ***“To the woman [God] said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.’”*** We must fight against our desire to seek after the role of our husbands. God did not intend for us to bear the weight of leading our home. God designed us for something perfectly suited for us!

Submission, when carried out properly according to God’s design, is voluntary and intends to show support and a willingness to help the person to whom they are submitting. The good news for women is that we have clear instruction as to how we can honor God’s design for submission. Within the Bible, He also provides us with the story of Jesus’ mother Mary and in her, we find an example that we may try to mimic in our own lives. Mary, between the ages of 12-14, was visited by an angel of the Lord and was told that she had found the Lord’s favor and would conceive a son named Jesus. Mary responded with

obedience and honored what the Lord was requesting of her. Luke 1:38 (NIV) says, ***“I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’”***

Mary did not see the Lord’s request as a burden. She was honored to be able to contribute to God’s ability to carry out His will. She saw submitting to the Lord as service to Him. Submission is all about providing help and support. Instead of viewing submission as something to be feared or rejected, we are to start seeing it as something we are willing and excited to be entrusted to do. We are able to stand in support of the visions, dreams, and plans of others. Whether it be our husbands, government, or the Lord, we are called to affirm their leadership and support them through our words and actions. We as women get to be the encouragement and positive voice that gives strength and confidence to those leading us in vision, action, or plan. We are not weaker or less than, we simply have a different role. We do not bear the responsibility of leading but we are expected to stand in love and in support of those who God did entrust us with that responsibility. Both leading and submitting come with challenges; however, we can rest in the fact that God’s design is perfect, and if we were designed to submit then He has given us all the tools we need to succeed at our role!

WORSHIP AND SERVICE MODELED

THE ROLE OF A WOMAN, DEVOTION 6

Sydney Kimball

The holidays are a time of year that should be cherished; however, oftentimes we end up dreading them instead. Our minds are so preoccupied with stress, that we forget to enjoy the little time we have together with our whole family. We may spend our day preparing the perfect meal or spending weeks of our time and a plethora of our money attempting to find the perfect gift for each of our loved ones. For each of us, the holidays look slightly different but overall, whether we like to admit it or not, we spend too much time and energy on the superficial things that we miss out on the things that carry more importance. By the time the holiday season is over and we finally get a chance to stop and reflect, we realize that we never stopped to take a second and enjoy it. Our priorities are way out of line.

The same can be said of our spiritual lives. We spend so much time doing, that we fail to remember what we are doing it for, or more importantly Who we are doing it all for. We are called to serve and worship the Lord but if our minds are focused on the what and not the why then we have missed the whole point. The driving force behind our worship of the Lord and our service for the Kingdom must come directly from our love for God. Our mindset must be because we love Him we want to serve Him well and because we love Him we want to worship Him for all that He is. He gave it all for us so therefore we should be inspired to serve and worship Him with joy and fervency.

In 1 Samuel 12:24, the Bible tells us, ***“Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.”***

In Luke chapter 10, we see two sisters, Mary and Martha, who love Jesus with all of their hearts but the way they go about serving and worshiping Him differs greatly. Luke 10:38-40 (NIV) records, ***“[Jesus] came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.”***

Martha served the Lord practically. She prioritized cooking Jesus the perfect meal and ensuring that her home was presentable when He arrived. Mary simply sat at Jesus’ feet and marveled at all He told her. Ultimately, Jesus clarified where both of the sisters’ priorities should lie.

In Luke 10:41-42, Jesus informs the sisters of His observation, ***“‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”***

It is imperative that we note Jesus’ distinction. He did not condemn Martha for her diligent work but showed her that sometimes there are more important things than physical labor or preparation. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and learned more about Him and the Scriptures. She had a more clear understanding of the Gospel due to what she prioritized. Martha’s heart was in the right place but she allowed herself to get caught up in what she was doing, instead of why or Who she was doing it for.

Some of the best advice I ever received was from a mandatory chapel in college. A guest speaker, Stacey Foster, said, “Do not allow your doing to validate your being. Allow your being with God to validate your doing for God.” That message changed the way I looked at

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service and worship. It was then that it became clear to me that my identity as a recipient of the free gift of salvation by the grace of God needed to be my motivation behind any act of service or worship in my life. From that day forward I approached service and worship very differently and my hope is that today can be that day for you!



LESSON THREE

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

I will never forget waking up at 6 a.m. one morning when I was a young high school student. I believe the only reason why a high school student would voluntarily be up that early is for food, and that was exactly what I was in search of. I was heading to the kitchen to eat a quick morning snack and go back to bed. The sun was not yet risen so it was still pretty dark. This moment was so rememberable because I remember turning the corner and seeing a person down on a floor in the corner of the room on their knees. Startled, it took me a second to realize who it was. It was my mother. She was up early in the morning on her knees praying. I knew who she was praying for. As a forty-year-old man, because of the amazing example my mother set for me, I sure do believe in the power of prayer.

1. What attributes would you say best define a “good parent?”

For those of you who are single, married without children, or no longer have children in the home, I want to encourage you not to bail on this lesson. Studying the Bible in its entirety is so important to growing in our walk with Christ. If we only pick parts that apply to us we lose out on growing. Picking and choosing what truth we think we best need is never a good way to study. Equally important, we have a God who is our Heavenly Father and He uses a parental relationship to help us understand His love for us. Lastly, the church is family. As a family, we are called to love, pray, teach, and serve the children in our church family.

There are many bad examples of parenting in the Bible.

- David over pampered Absalom.
- Eli failed to discipline his sons.

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- Rebecca's favoritism of Jacob caused a spiral of sin for the next two generations.
- Jacob's favoritism of Joseph and his helicopter parenting of Benjamin almost brought ruin to their whole family.

There are also many good examples of parenting in the Bible

- Hannah dedicated Samuel to the Lord after God's grace gave Hannah her son.
- Naomi allows Ruth to accompany her to Jerusalem and helped in the meeting of Ruth and Boaz.
- Jairus seeks out Jesus to heal his daughter.
- Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois taught the importance of knowing Jesus to a young Timothy.

I heard of a Pastor speaking at a conference referencing a meeting that he had with a well-known biblical scholar. The speaker told of how he was so inspired by this man's work. In their meeting, he asked, "How did you manage to be so prolific." The scholar answered under his breath, "I sacrificed my son." Their conversation continued, and the Bible scholar told of the story about his son. The scholar was broken and begged the speaker not to follow in his footsteps.

Parenting is hard, Tony Merida says parenting is like "wet cement. We have a short time to teach and mold them." So what does a good example look like? Let us look at the Word of God to direct us in being biblical parents.

Ephesians 6:4 says, ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."***

This is just one verse but it is packed full of guidance every parent should utilize. I just want to focus our attention on three words:

- Bring
- Discipline
- Instruction

Bring is such a simple word but the depth of its meaning is amazing.

2. What is the difference between sending and bringing?

Imagine a very busy seven-lane highway. You are standing at the crosswalk with your 5-year-old child. The crosswalk light turns white, at this moment there is a very distinct difference between the word send and bring. No parent would ever run to the other side and shout back to their child, "Come with me." Also, while cars are driving by, and the clear presence of danger is evident, no parent would push that child out into the traffic and say, "Go." The moment that light says, "Walk," you would grab their hand, hold it tightly, and walk right next to them along that path.

- Bring them along - as you grow in the Lord
- Bring them along - as you love your spouse
- Bring them along - as they see you interact with the church
- Bring them along- as they see you mess up and sin but repent and turn back to the Lord
- Bring them along- to a place where they can grow in their own relationship with Jesus

3. From these illustrations what are a couple of ways that you could improve in bringing along your child?

As parents, we need to resist the urge to think that God gave us our children so we could rule them. God in His sovereign wisdom did not give you your children so you could rule them with an iron fist. God gave you your children so you can bring them to a place in their life where they can begin their own relationship with God. Our role as parents is not to lord our authority over our children, we are meant to bring them a place where they see the realness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing in this universe that is not God's. We are merely stewards and ambassadors that are meant to best reflect the will of our Lord.

Discipline is by far the scariest word of the three. However, the word points us to steering, protecting, and directing our children to follow the Lord.

Proverbs 29:17 says, ***“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.”***

4. How do you (or did you) handle discipline from an authority figure?

To understand discipline we have to understand what true discipline ought to be. Discipline is not meant to be used to create moral, well-behaved, perfect angels out of our children. Too often parents focus on addressing the “fruit” of their child’s sin. Parents focus on external

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

behaviors when a parent ought to be focused on disciplining the child's "root" sin that is ruling their heart.

5. Do you get more frustrated with your child when they break your laws or God's laws?

As parents, we discipline our children, not because they break our laws and rules, we discipline because they break God's. Now, when a child is disobedient, the sin that is ruling their heart is in control of their life, sin breaks God's heart. God has put you as a parent in your child's life more to attack and lead your child to God's discipline. I believe the best way to begin having this mindset is to start with prayer.

6. How can your prayer life change when it comes to discipline and children?

Instruct literally comes from the truth of Proverbs 22:6, ***“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”***

Loving your child does not mean you excuse the foolishness that rules their hearts. There is a time for discipline; however, we must take the opportunity to instruct our children. Too often we think that growth comes from one grandiose moment. True instruction is filled with little moments. Please remember, “More is caught than taught,” with children. Make sure you are taking every possible moment to

LESSON THREE | THE ROLE OF PARENTS

instruct your children about the amazing grace of God. They need to learn how to live for Him, how He loves us, and how to live a life obedient to His calling on our lives.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 commands, ***“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”***

7. What are ways that have worked well for you when it comes to teaching children the Word of God?

8. What does God command parents to teach their children?

9. When and where does God tell us to teach that?

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

10. What are ways the church (people, not programming) can help with this?

GRACE

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 1

Kyle Wendel

How easy is it to get upset with your children when they do something wrong? How easy is it to be upset when your child is not following the Lord in the way you desire? I somewhat understand this feeling now. My daughter is now two years old and we daily go through the struggle of teaching her right and wrong. She has been a great child so far, but there are still times that she does wrong. As parents, it can become easy to get upset with your child when wrong is done. When your child continues in disobedience or doing something you do not want them to it can become difficult to think of grace. Very often as parents we forget to show grace in our words and actions.

In Acts chapter 20, we see the story of Eutychus. Eutychus' story is short and quick. Eutychus is a young man who was listening to the Apostle Paul teach in an upper room. Paul was teaching for an extended period of time. Eutychus was sitting on the windowsill and falls asleep while Paul is teaching. Imagine falling asleep during Paul's teaching! Eutychus then falls into a deep sleep in the window and falls out the window! Paul and the people in the room go outside to find Eutychus dead from falling out the window that was about three stories up.

You would think that Paul would use this example to warn others to take God seriously. How often have you ever heard during a youth message that you could die on the bus ride home from the event? Paul could have easily used this moment to teach the urgency of the Lord or the seriousness we should have when it comes to listening to the Word. Instead, Paul shows grace. Paul could have come hard

at the rest but instead showed grace to Eutychus and the people around him.

Acts 20:10 says, ***“But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, ‘Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.’”***

Paul then by the power of the Lord raises Eutychus from the dead and embraces him. Paul could have scolded Eutychus after this moment but instead showed him love and grace. How easy is it for us to turn to scold someone else before showing grace?

The story of Eutychus is a story of how the Lord shows grace to us. We have fallen away from the Lord and have fallen asleep to Him. We continue to ignore and not listen to God. God could easily wipe us out for our sin and that is what we would rightfully deserve! Instead, God continually shows us grace every day by giving us another chance to turn to Him daily! God ultimately shows His grace to us in Jesus Christ. God gave us the amazing gift of salvation that we do not deserve through Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. How often do we forget this amazing grace that has been shown to us?

I want to challenge parents, including myself, to think through the lens of grace more often. God wants to show us His grace. As followers of Christ, we are called to be like Him. If we look at Jesus' life, He was continually showing grace to those that He was around. How often do we react as Paul does with Eutychus when our children do something wrong? Paul's reaction is a picture of Christ. Paul cared more about Eutychus rather than what Eutychus did wrong. Paul used that as a teaching moment to show God's love, mercy, and grace. What if we incorporated this concept more into our parenting? We could use these moments when we get frustrated with our children more as a teaching moment instead of getting upset and

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taking the chance to yell. We could incorporate showing God's grace in the way we parent.

***"For from his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace."***

John 1:16

FORGIVENESS

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 2

Patrick Bicknell

The role of parenthood has taught me many things since I became a father almost four and a half years ago. I have learned a deeper meaning of love, I have experienced the joy that I did not think was possible, and overall I have received one of the greatest blessings in my life with my son. I also have learned a new level of anger, confusion, and forgiveness that I would have never experienced without my son. Just the other day we were playing in the living room with some of his toys. It was very sweet, we were laughing and having a good time. About 20 minutes into playing, he came up to me and, very gently, gave me a hug. Just as I was about to say, "I love you, buddy," he slapped me in the mouth just about as hard as a 4-year-old could. I was enraged, but I also knew that I am trying to teach my son about Jesus. First of all, the most important job I have as a father is to raise my son up to be a man that hears the Gospel, loves Jesus, and surrenders his life to Him as Lord and Savior. One way, if not the most important way, I can do that is to model forgiveness to him.

The story of the prodigal son is one that I often run back to when it comes to how I should teach my son forgiveness. In this parable, the son asks for his inheritance, or his share of property that would be coming to him when his dad died. In this story, he seeks the inheritance early so that he could leave his father and do what he wants. This alone would be enough to break my heart. The son is essentially saying to the father, you are as good as dead to me and I want nothing to do with you. He is basically saying, "I want the money that will come to me once you are dead." Most of us would have a hard time forgiving our children if they were to do something of this caliber to us. However, as we read later on in the parable, it

says, ***“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to celebrate”*** (Luke 15:24).

What is amazing about what the father does here is that before the son could get the planned apology that he had for the father out, he was already embracing him and telling his servants to get a party ready because his son had returned. This shows that the father was not waiting for an apology and he was not waiting for his son to return the money. He had already forgiven his son in his heart and when he saw his son returning all he could do was rejoice.

My question is then, as parents, how can we forgive in this way and model this forgiveness for our children? We must always remember the cross and how God has forgiven us of everything. Romans 5:8 says, ***“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** While we had done nothing to receive forgiveness from God, Christ died for us so that forgiveness of all our sins may be possible. Remembering this is the way that we can forgive not only our children but also everyone in our lives.

HOLINESS

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 3

Kyle Wendel

The past two years of my life have been amazing. My wife and I had our first child, Amelia. Life has been a roller coaster of ups and downs but those ups quickly outweighed the downs. Nothing beats seeing your child smile or hearing your child laugh.

One thing I have learned as a parent is how children are like sponges. They absorb everything. Your child is watching you more than you will ever realize. They see and hear everything you do. Every word you say, your child hears. It makes you think harder about the words you choose to say around them, right? We try to be careful around children to make sure they do not say words they should not, but what about our actions?

Not only are our words important, but as parents, our actions are just as important. We have a high calling as parents to lead our children in many ways. One of those ways is holiness. Your children are watching and learning from your actions. Do you portray holiness to them?

Now obviously you will never be perfect, that is not what I am saying. I am also not saying to act fake in front of your children. They will find out if you are being fake. I am calling you to be genuine with them. Take them along your walk of faith with you. Show them how to follow the Lord genuinely in their lives. Be honest, open, and vulnerable with them. Holiness is found when you are totally devoted to the Lord with everything in your life.

One story we see in the Bible about holiness is in the book of Joshua. The Israelite army was a force to be reckoned with. They had the Lord on their side going into battle. The Lord was their strength and key to victory. Without the Lord, they would not win. God gave them specific rules to not keep the plunder from the people they defeated. They were called to obey the Lord and He would be on their side in battle.

The Israelites were winning battle after battle in the name of the Lord. Then there was an Israelite man named Achan. Achan decided one day that he would take some of the plunder from the next battle and hide it. He buried his sin in secret so that no one would know that he was hiding anything. In doing so, he disobeyed the Lord and thought he could get away with it.

The Lord, however, knew exactly what was going on. You cannot hide sin from the Lord. In the next battle, the Israelites went in thinking the Lord was on their side, but He was not. They lost. They wondered how they could lose if God was on their side. God pointed out the sin that was in the camp and that they lost because of it. One man's sin caused the whole army to fail. It was not just the sin though, it was the hiding of sin. Sin has an impact on ourselves and those around us. We must realize this as parents. We cannot continue in sin and think it is okay. We cannot hide in our sin either.

We are called to be holy. This does not mean we can be perfect, but we are called to be set apart. We are called to be faithful and obedient to the Lord as followers. We must raise our children to know what genuine faith in the Lord is. We must show them in our actions how to be holy and surrender everything to the Lord. Show them how to go through struggles and surrender to the Lord. Show them how to get help and accountability where needed. Show them how to love the Lord with everything we have.

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

Children are like sponges. They soak it all up. They learn from your actions and words. Make sure we are setting our examples in the Lord, and not ourselves.

***“As obedient children,
do not be conformed to the passions
of your former ignorance,
but as he who called you is holy,
you also be holy in all your conduct,
since it is written,
‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”***

1 Peter 1:14-16

RIGHTEOUSNESS

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 4

Mitchell Holmes

If you know the story of Samuel, you know the story of his upbringing. He was dedicated to the Lord by his mother at birth and was raised in the temple, serving under the priest, Eli. When I think of a character that represents righteousness well, Eli does not come to my mind. Eli himself was not an unrighteous man but he did not have a firm grasp on his household and it caused an issue in his family for generations to come.

In 1 Samuel 2:12-14, we read, ***“Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.”*** While this passage may not seem like a huge deal, this was a major offense to the Lord.

Eli’s sons were demanding more of the meat than what should have been given to the priesthood. They were also demanding the meat be offered to the Lord improperly so that they could cook it in a way that they enjoyed. The sons of Eli blatantly disrespected God and intentionally broke His law and customs. Verse 22 tells us that Eli was aware of what was going on and it was not until he was approached more than once (***“he kept hearing all that his sons were doing”***) that he finally decided to rebuke them and verbally condemn them for what they were doing. At that point, however, their sins were so far gone that Eli should have done far more than verbally rebuke his sons.

After this, a man of God came to Eli and informed him that the Lord has rejected Eli and his house according to verses 34 and 35, ***“And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.”*** Because of the sin of Eli’s sons, they lost the blessing and the priesthood that had been promised them.

Parents, do not be like Eli. Do not be mild and gentle in your household. Please hear me; I am not saying that you should be a dictator, but when the time for correction comes, be firm and be unwavering in what the Lord commands of us. Raise up your sons and daughters in righteousness, do not be passive when they are in sin and when they are struggling. Ephesians 6:4 says, ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*** I am not a parent yet. I can only hope to understand what it is like, or the difficulties that arise when trying to raise a child. However, being firm in Scripture and raising them to be righteous people in the instruction of the Lord is what we are commanded to do in the Scripture. Based on what we know, Scripture does not return empty.

SCRIPTURE

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 5

James Mann

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” Ezra 7:10

I want to start this off with a series of questions. Are you and your spouse the people who primarily disciple your children? Are you raising your child with a focus on teaching them how to grow in their relationship with the Lord? Do you find yourself taking the easy way out and not making your child's spiritual growth a priority because there does not seem to be enough hours in the day? Do you expect your child's time at church to be the main place where they learn about God?

There might be some of you that after reading this list of questions, are getting frustrated with the writer of this devotional. I am not a parent yet, but becoming a dad, God willing, is the aspect of life that I look forward to more than anything in this world. Sadly, many parents in this world look at their child as a job. Some days you may wish that you could clock out of this job for a few weeks and just get away. Being a parent is one of the greatest gifts from God and we should not look at it in any other light.

Parents are called to raise their children to have a desire to learn about God and bring them closer to Him. It is all too common today that parents view that as the job of the church. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that is the job that God gave you. We should feel blessed that God trusts us enough to give us children to raise. The concept of getting to raise a child and be the one that teaches them about God is such an exciting thing. I have heard the excuse so many times that parents just do not have the time to do that. I am going to

be extremely blunt. If you have enough time for your child to be in sports, then you have enough time to train your child in the things of the Lord. If not, we need to check our priorities and reframe them to godly standards instead of worldly standards. Worldly standards breed worldly children, which then become worldly adults lacking a relationship with the Lord.

Ezra set his heart on the concept of learning the things of the Lord and teaching them to an entire nation. For us to effectively teach our children, we must do what Ezra is doing and first set our heart on learning the things of the Lord before we teach them. We must be equipping ourselves with the Scriptures to then equip our children. The enemy is going to attack our children. It is the terrifying truth. It is our job as their parents to give them every tool possible to fend off the attacks of the enemy and keep them standing strong in the Lord.

WORSHIP

THE ROLE OF PARENTS, DEVOTION 6

Patrick Bicknell

Another important aspect to parenting, and to those who wish to follow Christ, is our worship. We must be careful that we are worshiping in truth and worshiping how God has called us to within Scripture. As parents, our children are oftentimes looking up to us and will try to copy and follow what we are doing. Something that my son picked up this past summer was spitting. I thought maybe he had learned to do it himself, but what I realized is that every time I would spit, he would spit on the ground, too. The way he learned to do this was by watching me. He wanted to be like his daddy and follow in what I was doing.

In the same way, we set the standard for how our children will worship God; for better or worse. An incredible role model within Scripture that teaches us how to worship and who sets the standard for generations to come is Abraham. Abraham as it is recorded all throughout the Bible is the father of Israel. He is the one that God chose to make His covenant with. God told him He would make him a great nation, that He would bless him and his offspring, and that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. He set the standard for how the Israelites, and even us today, would believe and worship God with our lives.

Paul talks about this in Galatians chapter 3 where he writes, ***“Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham,***

the man of faith" (Galatians 3:6-9). Paul writes that all of those who share in the faith that Abraham had are blessed. He is showing us how Abraham was setting the standard for generations to come, that God was to be worshiped by faith, believed by faith, and followed by faith.

In the same way that Abraham set the standard for generations to come, we need to raise our children up worshiping God properly. The way in which our lives display our love for God, oftentimes, will dictate how our children worship God. If we are sacrificing our lives to God as our spiritual worship as Romans 12:1 says, then there is a good chance that our children will want to follow in our footsteps. We need to make sure that we are raising our children up to not only understand how to worship God, but how to properly worship God. It starts in our own lives. We need to be the standard in our homes; being the example that our children need to see. They are going to be told by the world many lies about how to worship God. If we teach our children from a young age what the Bible says about worshiping God then we will help guard them from the deception of this world.

FAMILY ROLE MODELS



LESSON FOUR

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS

PASTOR RYAN STORY

We root for the individual. In one of the more anticipated NFL games this season, we got to witness the Tampa Bay Buccaneers take on the New England Patriots. For those who do not know, the former quarterback of the Patriots was U of M's own Tom Brady. This was the first time Tom Brady would play against his former team. The new quarterback for New England was rookie quarterback Mac Jones. On one media day, reporters kept asking Jones about what it would be like to play against the former quarterback of his team. The reporters kept pitting Brady against Jones. Jones' response was, "It is not like one person versus one person, so I think that a lot of it is eleven on eleven, and that is what goes into it, and that is how they are going to look at it. That is how every team looks at it."

1. Why are we so fascinated with rivalry?

While Jones was not attempting to preach the Bible in any capacity, I do believe that he was onto a foundational truth that we as the church must hold onto. We are not meant to do life alone. Within God's sovereign purpose, He has placed you in the marriage you are in, with the children you have, with the family you have, with the job you have, and with the friends you have. There is not one aspect of your life that is not in line with God's purpose.

Throughout Family Month, there are people who feel, "That does not apply to me." Sadly, the topic of the family can invoke feelings of loneliness, hurt, or isolation. Also, there are people who only view the truths that we went over as something that only applies to their direct family. The amazing truth that we get to wrap up our family roles study on is the beauty of siblings.

2. What kind of relationship do you have with your siblings?

Throughout the New Testament the word “brother” is used to describe a fellow follower of Christ. Ephesians 1:5 reads, ***“He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”*** So any person who has professed that Jesus Christ is Lord has been adopted into Christ. Church is less of a weekend activity or religious experience, rather it is a family get-together.

3. What do your family get-togethers look like?

No family is perfect. No person is without sin. No family is without its tensions, drama, and issues. But for us as a church, we ought to function more like a family, however, we struggle to do so. The reason we struggle to function as good siblings within our biological family and struggle to function as a good sibling inside our Christian family is rooted in the issue of individually. The individual we most often root for is ourselves. In order to be the best sibling you ought to be, inside the family of faith and outside, we have to know two important truths from the Bible and apply them properly.

Genesis 4:1-5 records, ***“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’ And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the***

fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”

4. What were Cain and Abel's roles?

5. Why did God regard Abel's offering but not Cain's?

Genesis 4:5-7 continues, ***“So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.’”***

- God purposefully created us differently.

6. What did God tell Cain when his face fell?

God never told Cain that his offering would permanently be unacceptable. God gave Cain an option by saying ***“if.”*** If Cain gave a proper sacrifice, God would have accepted it. Go read Leviticus chapter 2, the entire chapter is on bringing a grain offering to the Lord. God does not create rivals. He knew what Cain had to offer, He knew what Abel had. Sadly, Cain was not in the right and God tried to save Cain from the impending destruction that is to come.

7. Why are there rivalries in our relationships with our siblings (inside the church or biological)?

Have you ever been more focused on what you do not have, or more focused on what another person has and it destroys the value of what God has actually blessed you with? Sin creates a toxic heart when we look at what we do not have as a slight against us rather than grace from God. Good siblings celebrate the differences between us, rather than compare and compete against one another.

8. When the Bible says, ***“in the course of time,”*** how long do you think Cain’s sin sat in his heart? How does unrepentant sin ruin our relationship with others?

Genesis 4:8-9 adds, ***“Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’”***

The phrasing that Cain uses in response to God is ironic. Able was a keeper of livestock, a shepherd. Cain’s heart has been fully corrupted by sin. Cain’s response reveals a much larger issue we can have dwelling in our hearts.

- We are not responsible for others actions but we are responsible for our own.

In Cain's attempt to love God, his jealousy drove him to murder. Jude 1:11 says, ***"Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion."*** Cain's heart was only focused on himself, his gain, and his standing with God. Cain was unable to look out for his brother.

We are not responsible for how others live their life. Romans 2:6-8 says, ***"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury."*** Only the Lord can change a person's lifestyle, but that does not give us the right to abandon those who have abandoned God.

James 5:20 says, ***"Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."***

9. Are you more focused on the hurt that a sibling has caused you, or are you more grieved by the hurt they have caused themselves in their walk with God?

If you would like to do a fun Bible Study, go read all the ***"one another"*** statements through the New Testament. It becomes really hard to make a person a rival when you are praying for, serving, loving, encouraging, and forgiving that person.

LESSON FOUR | THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS

We create rivals out of people because they take away from our self-focus. The sin in our hearts makes us focus inwardly so much that we are willing to murder another. The family was never designed to operate in this way. The family was meant to be a collection of people who love and support one another while ensuring the focus of everyone was to be on Christ. We will not be the families we ought to be or the church we ought to be if we are ruled by self-interest.

10. How can we repent from our rivalry mentality and start living in the way God desires us to live?

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

CONSEQUENCES MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 1

Keaton Washburn

One thing about me is that I have a brother and a sister. I am the oldest of the three of us, with my siblings both being four years younger than me because they are twins. My parents were Christians long before any of us were born and all three of us had the privilege of being raised in a loving, Gospel-proclaiming church with loving parents who consistently pointed us back to Christ. We are in no way a model family, but through lots of prayers and the grace of God, each of us three siblings is still following Christ and are active in our local churches!

Being the oldest sibling, I got many things before my siblings did. I was the first to get a phone, Gameboy, freedom to hang out with friends, and the ability to stay up later, to name a few. If you have siblings, you understand the jealousy that comes in from the younger siblings when the older one is given or allowed to do something that the younger ones cannot. It usually leads to frustration and jealousy. For me though, growing up, I remember a reverse type of jealousy that I felt. I had to wait until I was almost 16 years old to get a phone but my siblings got a phone as soon as they turned 15. I got a “dumb phone,” while they got an iPhone first. In my mind, it was not fair! This sibling jealousy is not something new. It has manifested itself in families for thousands of years.

We see it from the very beginning in Genesis chapter 4 in the lives of Cain and Abel, two brothers. Genesis 4:1-6 tells us that Cain and Abel were bringing their offerings to the Lord; their way of worshiping God. Abel brought his best and Cain brought leftovers. Insignificant as that may seem, it was a reflection of their attitude towards God.

Abel sacrificed his best because he knew that was what God deserved. Cain did not give up much in his offering, just his leftovers. The Lord was pleased with Abel's offering, but not Cain's. This made Cain angry. Verse 7 gives us God's words to Cain about this, ***"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."*** Between siblings, it is easy to be jealous. God had a very stern warning for Cain. He tells him that because of his jealousy and anger towards his brother, ***"sin is crouching at the door."*** The power of sin is that if it is not dealt with it will manifest itself in sinful actions that have real-life consequences. In the life of Cain, his sin that festered because it was not dealt with, led him to murder his brother.

One warning to believers today through the story of Cain and Abel is that envy and jealousy have to be dealt with, confessed, and ripped out. A sin that is left ***"crouching at the door,"*** is prey for the evil one to take hold of. What is crouching at your door because you have not dealt with it and confessed it?

TRANSFORMATION MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 2

James Mann

It is intriguing to look at the list of disciples that the Bible gives to us. It is something that is often overlooked, but a couple of these disciples were actually brothers. One of these pairs is James and John. I first want to point out that they are known as the ***“Sons of Thunder,”*** which is hands down one of the coolest nicknames in the Bible. We also know that these two brothers were the second group of brothers that were brought into Jesus’ following.

Matthew 4:21 records, ***“And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.”***

When I think of Jesus’ disciples, I do not often think about their downfalls, other than Judas. In Luke 9:51-56, James and John actually get rebuked by the Lord. When a Samaritan village rejects the message of Jesus, we see these brothers basically saying that it is better to burn the entire village in a righteous fire than to let them live. Jesus points out their wrong ways and they move on to the next village, leaving the village intact.

As an only child, it has always been fascinating for me to watch siblings. When siblings are close, they can either do amazing things or become toxic. In this instance, we are seeing these two brothers bouncing their anger off of one another and wanting to end the existence of an entire village. Have you and your siblings or your brothers and sisters in Christ ever become a blockade in furthering the Kingdom of God?

The important thing for us to do is to check ourselves and our relationship. A sibling gives us the ability to have someone to grow with towards the Lord. It can be someone to hold us accountable and push us further than we can push ourselves. My church brothers have been a crucial group in my life to push me closer to God. The brothers we see here in Luke chapter 9 grow together. In Acts 12:2, we see James become the first martyr (someone to give their life because they professed their faith when they were told not to). John, James' brother, became known throughout church history as the apostle of love. This shift from the ***"Sons of Thunder"*** to "The First Martyr" and "The Apostle of Love" did not just happen overnight. These two brothers were not only blood relatives, but they were brothers in arms for the Kingdom of God. I hope that we can all look at their example, see their growth, and be encouraged. It is a blessing to have someone you can run the race of life alongside. No matter where our relationship stands with our siblings, whether blood or in Christ, we can push towards Him and be used for amazing things together.

FORGIVENESS MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 3

Patrick Bicknell

In my family, I am the youngest of three. If anyone reading this is the baby of the family, then you already know where I am about to go with the opening of this devotion. When I was asked to write a devotion about siblings for our family month book I immediately thought back to all the times when I was younger when I was bullied by my two older siblings. Now, sure, as I look back on those memories I probably remember them a bit more dramatic as most babies of the family do.

Today I have a great relationship with my two other siblings, but the hurt that comes within the sibling dynamics of a family is very real. Whether it is from teasing when we were younger, or a deeper hurt that our siblings can cause us, one of the most important things that siblings must learn is forgiveness. Anyone who has siblings, and especially those of us who have older siblings, probably were able to finish that last sentence before they finished reading it. Forgiveness of our siblings is something that is essential to keeping a healthy relationship with one another.

One of the best pictures in the Bible that displays the real, raw, struggles within siblings, and how forgiveness can mend those relationships comes in Genesis. What I love about this story is that it destroys the objection that some people have when they are told they need to forgive, “But you don’t know what they did to me.” Now, that is probably true. I probably do not know what some of the people reading this have experienced from their siblings, but Joseph did.

In Genesis chapter 45, at the climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers, we see a beautiful picture of forgiveness and trust in God.

Before this happened, Joseph's brothers had done some of the cruelest things that siblings could do to one another. It first began with jealousy of Joseph, which then turned into them plotting to kill him. Instead of killing him, they decided to sell him into slavery and lie to his father that he had died. From there Joseph became a slave, went through imprisonment, was falsely accused of crimes, and experienced some of the worst things that can happen to a person. Now most of us when we read through those chapters of Genesis we think, "How could he forgive them? I know that I wouldn't!" Even now your sibling might have done something to you that you are telling yourself that there is no way that you can forgive them. The response that Joseph gives his brothers when they first see him after all of those years is incredible. He says, ***"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life"*** (Genesis 45:4-5).

The reasoning for Joseph's forgiveness had nothing to do with himself or his brothers, but it had everything to do with God. He had realized that what happened to him was horrible, but that the God he trusted in was much bigger than his pain. He knew God had a much better plan than the plan of those who had plotted to destroy him. This response is coming from someone who had every right to hold a grudge against his siblings, yet he chose to forgive because he knew that God had a much greater purpose for the pain. That is how we ought to act towards our siblings. If we are going to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, call ourselves Christians, and believe in Romans 8:28 (that "all" things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose), then forgiveness is not just a suggestion. It is essential.

SIBLINGHOOD MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 4

Mitchell Holmes

If you are at all like me, you appreciate the shortness of the book of Jude and how swiftly it gets to the point. The entire book is only twenty-five verses long and yet, there is much to be learned from it. Perhaps the most interesting thing when reading through the book of Jude is how it begins.

Jude 1:1-2 says, ***“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.”***

The book opens in standard fashion for letters at that time, by identifying the author, identifying the intended audience, and making a greeting. However, the way that Jude identifies himself as the author of the letter is of particular interest to me. Jude, the author of the book, identifies himself by name, and then he calls himself a “servant” of Jesus Christ and brother of James. If you are unaware, James is the brother of Jesus, which means that Jude is also the younger brother of Jesus. As I read this in the opening to Jude’s letter, I could not help but scratch my head curiously. Why would Jude not introduce himself as the brother of Jesus? Why would Jude not want people to pay a little bit more attention to what he has to say just because of who his family was? Why not give a subtle name drop to perk a few ears and get people’s attention? I believe that the answer lies in the third word of the book - servant.

Jude was completely and totally in servitude to his brother, the Messiah. Jude did not want to draw attention to himself and cause

people's eyes to avert from Jesus. Jude was content and happy to remain humble and direct people back to Jesus. What a beautiful picture of servitude and an incredible example of brotherly love. For Jude, the sacrifice on the cross and the Gospel message was more important than his blood relation to Jesus.

If I were in Jude's shoes, my competitive nature would have caused me to handle the situation very differently. I would have viewed the situation as me being stuck in my sibling's shadow. I would have attempted to turn eyes to look at me. For Jude, the opposite was true. Now, the circumstances are different because Jude was step-sibling to the Son of God, but I believe the principle can be applied and put into practice in our own lives today.

Romans 12:10 says, ***"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."*** It is important to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven is more important than anything else. Our first and top priority is to the Lord and His message. I challenge you not to let sibling rivalry get in the way of the Gospel. Build one another up and support each other. We are more effective ambassadors for Christ when we have someone that is supporting us. Do not let jealousy destroy you. Do not let pride overcome you. Outdo one another in showing honor and remember Jude for his humility and surrender to Christ.

SISTERHOOD MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 5

Sydney Kimball

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3-4

We as humans are naturally egocentric. We often view ourselves as the center of the universe without even realizing it. I believe that our nature provides a perfect explanation for why we struggle to avoid conflict with our siblings. Take Rachel and Leah for example, these two young sisters were constantly after what the other had. Individually, they are so focused on what they were each lacking in comparison to the other that they were always at odds with one another. At first, Rachel and Jacob plan to be married but her father, Laban, tricks Jacob into marrying Leah instead. After seven years of hard labor, Jacob earns the right to marry Rachel, too. Unfortunately, Rachel experiences infertility issues while her sister births four of Jacob's children. As one may assume, Rachel grew more and more envious of what her sister, Leah, had been blessed with and Leah despised the favoritism that Rachel received from Jacob.

How many of us can relate? If you grew up with siblings you know as well as I do how difficult and frustrating it can be to feel like you are competing against them for love, attention, or resources. However, we can learn a lot from how Rachel and Leah eventually overcame their differences in order to help one another gain what they desired.

One night, the two sisters decided to strike up a deal that would benefit them both. Despite their previous tensions, Rachel requests

Leah's sons mandrakes (a root known to remedy infertility) in exchange for granting Leah a night alone with Jacob. At the very least the sisters were able to compromise in order to obtain what was truly important to them. They had to take their focus off of themselves and their needs and had to look to the others. By ***“look[ing] not only to [their] own interests, but also to the interests of others”*** they were able to help one another and both came out better because of it.

After this deal was made, God finally answered Rachel's prayer and gifted her with a son. Leah was able to receive the attention she had been longing for from Jacob. Both sisters won but only after they decided to help each other win. They had to realize in order to obtain what their hearts were seeking after, they first had to look to needs other than their own.

We must apply this practice in our own lives. Our flesh tells us to only look out for ourselves but the Lord tells us to ***“count others more significant than [ourselves]”*** and exemplify selflessness by caring about others and their needs more than our own. This moral principle can be applied to any relationship but when it comes to family, people to whom you are bonded for life, it is all the more important to work diligently to protect and nourish those relationships by putting this principle into action.

RECONCILIATION MODELED

THE ROLE OF SIBLINGS, DEVOTION 6

James Mann

The dynamics behind sibling relationships are quite intriguing. At one moment, they can be attacking one another and the next, they are protecting one another. Working in children's ministry, I have seen on multiple occasions one sibling making fun of the other. As soon as someone else joins in, the sibling that was just terrorizing the other snaps at the person making fun of their sibling. I have heard the response. "They're my little brother; only I get to make fun of him" more times than I would like to admit. Sometimes these spats last for moments before they are embracing one another and making up. Other times, it creates a barrier between the two that lasts a lifetime.

Jacob and Esau were brothers in the book of Genesis. During this time, Esau, being the older sibling, was to receive a birthright from their father, Isaac. Jacob decided he would deceive his father and trick him into giving the birthright to him instead of Esau. This birthright established the eldest as the head of the family and leaves everything to them in the passing of their father. This deception caused Jacob and Esau to be mortal enemies. In Genesis 27:41, Esau goes as far as to say, ***"The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*** This causes Jacob to flee from his home and family for over twenty years. I know it is crazy for us to read stories like this and be amazed by how long this feud went on for but think of your own life and relationships with siblings, whether blood or siblings through Christ. Many of us can think of at least one relationship that we have fled from. Maybe for some, it has not quite been twenty years but for others, it may have well surpassed twenty years.

As we read on through the passages, we see Jacob go through many different scenarios. Eventually, in Genesis chapter 32, Jacob finds out that his brother, Esau, is coming to meet him. Jacob asks for God's guidance and blessing in their reunion.

This raised a question in my mind; do we pray for those that we are feuding with? Are we asking for the Lord to guide us in our attempt to reconcile our relationship with our siblings? Often, the answer to those questions is no. Sometimes we just expect things to work out on their own, and for others, we completely write these people out of our lives. We need to remember God can do miraculous things. I have looked at many relationships thinking, "There is no way this relationship can be fixed." In Genesis chapter 33, a brother who once wanted his brother's head greeted his brother with an embrace, kisses, and tears. This all came from reliance on the Lord. The brothers and sisters that come into our lives are gifts from God and when hardships come in those relationships, we should turn to Him.

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “we don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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