

LIVING THE WORD

The God-Filled Family: How God Can Transform Our Families

This week we begin a new series on the family as part of our “Family Month.” In this series we will consider some of what it means to have families that are shaped by the presence of God. We don’t need anyone to tell us that family life is a challenge in this world. Marriages are struggling. Kids are facing pressures from all kinds of harmful and destructive influences. Parents are longing for help to raise their kids to be healthy and happy. Homes are sometimes filled with tension and stress and anger, when what we really want is peace and love and joy.

We can’t solve all those problems in a few lessons, but hopefully we can point each other in some helpful directions. As a guide, we will be using a section from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:17-5:21). In this section, Paul talks about living the kind of life that is filled with God’s Spirit, with a renewed attitude and a new self made to be like God. What if our homes could be remade in God’s image! We hope this study will help us grow in that new reality.

Sunday, Aug. 9: A Family That Speaks What Is True and Good

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body...Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:25,29 Today’s New International Version)

When Paul begins to describe the new life shaped to be like God, the first thing he talks about is how that impacts what we say to each other. Because followers of Jesus all “are members of one body” (more literally in Greek, “are parts of each other”), then we have to tell each other the truth. How much more should that be true in a family that is being filled with the presence of God? As God fills us, honesty should become part of the fabric of our relationships.

Honesty may be “the best policy,” but we all know it isn’t always easy. From the time a couple begins dating, we are tempted to hide our true feelings from each other out of fear of rejection. When our spouses ask us “What’s wrong?” (seeing in our body language that there’s clearly a problem), we coolly respond, “Nothing”—but we all know it isn’t the truth. Kids try and cover up misconduct to avoid consequences, and they are often tempted to lie to their parents who love them more than anyone else on the whole planet.

And when we do talk to each other, what comes out of our mouths is too often harmful rather than helpful. The Greek word Paul uses for “unwholesome” talk can describe rotten food—a striking image of what our words can be. I may say I’m a “Christian,” but I need to ask myself if the way I speak to my family sounds like Jesus Christ. Our homes need to be places where each family member feels encouraged not disheartened, built up not torn down, helped not hurt.

Changing the way we use words in our families will take nothing less than the power of God. But it won’t likely be some miraculous force that overwhelms us and forces us to change. A new way of communicating with each other will emerge as each one of us is increasingly filled with God’s life-changing presence.

Next Week: A Family That Freely Forgives (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)

Questions to discuss with your family and home church:

1. What influences (societal, spiritual, etc.) compete with God to fill our lives and homes?
2. What is it about being “parts of each other” that is incompatible with not being truthful with each other?
3. In 4:15, Paul says we must “speak truth in love.” What is an example of speaking truth that is *not* done in love? When we know that the truth will be hard for someone to hear, how can we speak truth in a loving way?
4. Why would people who are “parts of each other” not give “rotten” things to each other?
5. What do you think of when you think of “rotten speech”? What kinds of things might we say to each other that could be described as “rotten,” “foul,” or “unwholesome”?
6. What kinds of things can we say to each other that build each other up and impart grace?

Wednesday, Aug. 12: A Family That Shares with Others

“Those who have been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.” (Ephesians 4:28)

On Wednesday nights this month, we are going to focus on another aspect of life in a God-filled family—a God-filled attitude toward money and possessions. We’ll not only look at what Paul says about this subject, we’ll actually join together as families and do something for others. What Paul says here turns our culture’s view of work upside down. People usually think of work as a way to make money to get things for themselves. When we are primarily motivated by the desire to get things for ourselves, we can be tempted to steal (in 5:5, Paul says that greed is idolatry). Instead, Paul says that the God-filled people work so we can share with those in need.

Questions to discuss with your family and home church:

1. What are ways we might be tempted to steal without committing armed robbery?
2. How does it impact our view of work to be motivated by having money to give away?
3. Pray together that God would shape us into people who speak what is true and good and who work to help others.