

LIVING THE WORD—Week 2 (Aug. 16-22)

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

In our new series on the family we are considering some of what it means to have families that are shaped by the presence of God. As a guide, we are 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. 16: A Family That Freely Forgives

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 4:30-5:2 Today's New International Version)

Paul's discussion of the God-filled life presents a series of contrasts between the old way of life and the new way of life—not falsehood but truthfulness, not stealing but generosity, not impurity but righteousness, not foolishness but thanksgiving. Another such contrast is between anger and bitterness on the one hand and forgiveness and love on the other. It is a contrast in how we treat each other and how we respond to mistreatment.

Several words are used to describe the attitudes we want to put away. “Bitterness” refers to a state of intense resentment and animosity harbored against someone. We must work hard to keep seeds of bitterness from growing in our homes. As feelings of animosity grow, emotions can erupt in expressions of anger and rage. “Brawling” does not mean physical fights (though such fights would also be excluded by these verses), but refers to shouting matches. “Slander” can refer to any kind of abusive speech, whether insulting and denigrating language directed at others or harmful attacks spoken behind their backs. “Malice” refers to hateful, mean-spirited feelings toward another. Paul says the new person must put away all such feelings.

In contrast, we should be kind to each other (treat each other graciously, do good to each other) and harbor feelings of compassion (tenderness, affection). Paul raises the bar even higher—“follow God's example”! The model for how we treat each other is the way God treated us in Christ. God did not respond to our wrong behavior with malice or hostility, but with forgiveness and grace. Jesus does not treat us with self-centered bitterness, but with self-sacrificing love.

If anger, bitterness, and hostility are frequent intruders in our marriages, if we see them growing between parents and children, then we need to prayerfully look at what is happening in our hearts. Such feelings can arise from fear, insecurity, pain, selfishness, or frustrated expectations. When God fills our hearts, we can begin to find healing. God in us will help us treat each other as he treats us. When my security is found in God rather than in others, I am less threatened by their conduct and better able to treat them with kindness. When I know God's grace toward me, I am better able to forgive someone who has hurt me. When I am walking in the way Jesus walked, I am better prepared to respond with compassion for the pain someone else is feeling rather than react out of my own pain. That is God's example.

Next Week: A Family That Practices Purity (Ephesians 5:3-14)

Questions to discuss with your family and home church:

1. What are some examples of people treating Jesus with anger, slander, or hostility?
2. What are examples of Jesus showing people compassion, forgiveness, and love?
3. Why do you think Paul uses so many words to describe the problem of anger in our relationships with each other?
4. What are some reasons why family members who love each other might find themselves in a shouting match?
5. Why do you think we sometimes find ourselves more upset at what our spouses or children do than at what others around us do?
6. What does it mean to “be angry, but do not sin”? Are there some valid reasons for feeling anger in a relationship? How can I be angry without sinning?
7. How does nurturing feelings of compassion help us avoid sins of anger? How can we nurture compassionate feelings?
8. Pray together that God would help us follow the example of Jesus in our homes.