

## THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY

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Sterling UMC  
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Deuteronomy 5:1-22

This morning we are beginning a new series of messages called, "Building Strong Families."

When I say the words, "Family Values", what comes to your mind? Most of us think of it as a political ping pong ball that constantly gets batted back and forth. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats invented family values, but they continuously seem to play tug of war with them. If you read the newspaper or watch CNN or FOX News the phrase is everywhere. But if you ask 100 people you'd probably get 100 different answers.

For years we have been in a values vacuum. We've been in a permissive society where basically, anything goes and now we're reaping the results. Every 30 seconds there is a divorce in America. Every fourth child born in America is born to an unwed mother. Our children have become increasingly vulnerable to things like drugs and alcohol and premarital sex. Everybody says we need to get back to family values but nobody is defining them.

Conservative pundit and politician William Bennett once said in a speech, "It's now politically correct to believe in family values, but it's not politically correct to get specific about them." Because then, all of a sudden, you start dividing people up. I mean there are a lot of different kinds of families. When you look on television whose family values are you going to follow? Ozzie and Harriet? the Cleavers? The Bunkers? The Simpsons? The Waltons? The Cosbys?

People say, "We've got to get back to traditional family values." You've got to go back a whole lot further than Ozzie and Harriet to get to that.

This morning I want to begin this series by sharing with you what I believe is the foundation of a strong family. This is not some secret discovery; it's not some new fad or formula. Thousands of years ago God gave 10 values for family living, God's Big Ten. They're called The Ten Commandments. These are not values that are fads that are going to last only as long as a political campaign. These are God's Family Values that last for all eternity.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7a (GN) tells us, "Never forget these commands that I am giving you. Teach them to your children." Do your kids know the Ten Commandments? How many of you would say I try to live by the Ten Commandments? Most of you, if not all of you, would raise your hand. What if I said, name them. How can you live by them if you can't name them?

They are not the ten suggestions; they are the Ten Commandments. They're not optional. God says, you do these things and things will go fine in your life. If you don't do them, you're going to have real problems.

Well right at the top of the list of those 10 commandments, we find what I believe is the foundation for a strong family, the foundation of strong and stable life for that matter. It's the very first command, and I don't believe that is by accident. God intentionally put the first one first because it's the most important one.

We find it in Deuteronomy 5:7 (NIV), "You shall have no other gods before Me."

What's the principle? Put God first. In my life and in my family. God says, I demand top priority. I'm not going to play second fiddle to anything. He deserves to be number one in your life.

Now what does it mean to "have no other gods before Me"? Well we have to remember that the word "gods" is written with a small "g". He's not talking about "the God"; He's talking about little gods.

What is a god? A god is anything that dominates your life, anything that controls your life. Can a career be a god? You bet it can. Can another person be a god? Yes. Can golf be a god? Can money be a god? Absolutely! Even good things that God has created for us to enjoy, become gods when you give them first place in your life. God says, "That's wrong. I deserve first place in your life." This is the foundation -- put God first.

Today, in America, families are dropping like flies. They're falling apart faster than we can put them together. Why is this? Because they're built on the wrong foundation.

Today I want to look at the foundation of putting God first in my family, in my life. Now every time God gives a principle, He gives a promise. We find that promise in Proverbs 3:6 (LB), "In everything you do, put God first and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success."

There's one of the great promises of success. Do you want to be successful? Put God first. You want a strong family? Put God first!

So how do I do it? What does it mean to put God first? Well this morning I have a little acrostic for you. I took the word F-I-R-S-T and I'm going to give you five ways to put God first in your life and your family.

#### F - FINANCES

Put God first in your finances. Let's start with the most difficult one. Proverbs 3:9-10 (LB) "Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income and He will fill your barns to overflow." God says give Me the first part back and I'll bless all the rest. God has said that money is the number one test of your priorities.

Why is that? Well your checkbook reveals what's really important to you. Not what you say is important, but how you spend your money. What does your checkbook reveal about the priorities in your life? The way you spend your money says what's first in your life.

How do we put God first in our finances? It's called tithing. Deuteronomy 14:23(LB) says, "The purpose of tithing is to teach you to put God first in your lives." What's tithing? Tithing is a spiritual discipline where we give back to God the first 10% of what he has given to us. God says that the first 10% of all I make goes back to Him.

There are probably a few of you who do this on a regular basis. Some of you may have even taken up the challenge that Tom issued a few weeks ago to tithe for Holy Week. I am willing to bet that those of you who tithe can testify to the spiritual blessing that this practice has given you. I'd also be willing to say that you would also testify that when you give a tithe in faith and trust that somehow God provides for all your needs with the other 90%.

Why is tithing so important? God says that if I'm not tithing God is not really first in my life. If He's not first in your finances He's really not first in your life.

#### I - INTEREST

If God's really going to be number one, you put Him first in your interests. That means in my fun times, my play times, my amusements, recreation, hobbies, pass times.

1 Corinthians 10:31(GN) says, "Whatever you do, do it all for God's glory." Does that include going on vacation? Yes. You can eat to the glory of God, you can play golf to the glory of God, you can go sailing to the glory of God, you can collect stamps to the glory of God. In everything you do, you put God first.

You can tell what a person's priorities are seeing what they get excited about. What gets you excited? That's what's important to you. I can go to a Redskins game and get excited and they call me a fan. But if you get excited about the Lord, they call you a fanatic.

What do you talk about the most? I know people who can talk for hours on end about football, or politics, or their favorite TV program. But they couldn't talk three minutes about the Lord. Ephesians 5:19 (LB) says, "Talk with each other much about the Lord." If He's first in your life you're going to make God a part of your conversation. You won't be ashamed to talk about Him because He's first.

#### R - RELATIONSHIPS

If you want God first in your life you're going to have to choose your friends carefully. Proverbs 27:19(LB), "What a man is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses." Why is that? Because you become like the people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with people who take God lightly, you will tend to become a

casual believer. But if you spend time with people who are committed and take God and His word seriously you will become a stronger, more committed Christian. Whoever you spend time with that is what you're going to be like.

Those of you who are parents, let me ask you who or what type of people are you exposing your children to? If you're serious about building strong values in your kids then you ought to seek to surround them with people who model the kind of behavior you want your kids to have. Hopefully that's you. Hopefully that is people from here at the church. If we don't provide models for them they're going to get it from their friends at school, or from TV, or God only knows where else.

Proverbs 12:26(NKJV) says, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray." He's cautious. The truth is if you really want God first in your life there are some relationships that are dead wrong for you.

### S - SCHEDULE

Put God first in your schedule, in your time. Ephesians 5:16-17(NIV) says, "Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do."

How do I put God first in my schedule? You do not have time to do everything. Selection is the name of the game. Ask God to help you prioritize your schedule.

Let me suggest something else. Make a daily appointment with God. If God is going to be first in your family, in your life, you need a daily appointment with God. Start with ten or fifteen minutes. It doesn't matter when you do it, as long as you do it. And I believe that if you do it you will find the rest of your activities and schedule will be much smoother.

Even Jesus felt the need for daily prayer. If He felt the need for it we need it too. The Bible says, "Very early in the morning...Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place where He prayed." (Mark 1:35 NIV) Maybe you would even want to take some time to do this together as a family. You can get so busy that you forget God. Schedule a daily appointment with God.

### T - TROUBLES

When you face unexpected problems and pressures, when you have a crisis, who do you turn to? God says, "Turn to Me first when you've got a problem." Many people, when they're in a tight situation, prayer is the last resort, not the first option. They do everything they can physically to try to correct the problem then they say, "I guess now all we can do is pray." Prayer should not be your last resort; it should be your first option. Make God your first resort in a crisis. He says He is an ever present help, a refuge in time of need. God is waiting. He commands us to turn to Him first.

In Psalm 50:15(NIV) God says, "Call upon me in your day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will honor me." God says, Put Me first, even in the tough times. Some

people get embarrassed and think, I don't talk to God much when times are good and I don't want to bother him with my problems. God says, "Bother Me. It's no bother. I can handle yours and every other person's problems at the same time. Bring it to me. Don't carry it all yourself."

This brings up an interesting point. How do you know when God's first in your life? You stop worrying. Worry is the warning light that God is not first in my life at this particular moment. When I start worrying, it says, I'm playing God, I'm assuming responsibility He didn't intend for me to have. When God is not first in any of these five areas we begin to worry about it. When He's not first in my finances I worry about them. When God is not first in my relationships, I worry about them. When God isn't first in my problems, trials, troubles, I worry about them. When God isn't first place in my schedule, I worry about my schedule. But when I stop and do a priority check. "God, You be number one in this area, You handle it, You're in charge." I take a deep breath and relax.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV) "Seek first the kingdom of God [put Him first in every area of my life] and all these other things shall be added unto you." Jesus said that right in the middle of a sermon on worry. It's the antidote to worry. Put God first.

This morning I would like to issue a challenge to all of us as individuals, and especially to all of our families. I call it the Joshua Challenge.

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15 (NIV)

Will you accept that challenge? Are you willing to say today, "As much as it depends on me, from this moment forward, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"