

FAMILY: DISTINCT AND OBEDIENT

Crystal was scrolling through photos of her family's most recent gathering on Easter. She smiled at the photo of her 88-year-old Grandma Ruth sitting with all the grandchildren and eating their candy. *Grandma Ruth loves sweets*, she thought to herself with a smile. In another photo, it seemed that Grandma was whispering something to the kids. All of the grandchildren's eyes were wide open. Crystal wondered what Grandma Ruth could've said to capture their attention in that moment. She always had the most interesting stories to share about the family.

Crystal glanced up from her phone at her twin boys, who were watching a video, and she recognized a scene from the Gospel of Matthew. *Now that is new!* Her sons barely attended church, and she had a hard time getting them to Sunday school.

"What's that?" She asked. The boys paused the screen.

One offered, "Grandma Ruth says our family's faith has kept us strong. She told us about this new video series all about Jesus. I guess we wanted to know more about God." The other sibling offered silent agreement.

Crystal could hardly believe that's all it took. Just goes to show, Grandma Ruth can persuade them of anything. Without saying another word to spoil the moment, she took a seat next to her boys.

1 Why are family relationships so meaningful in our lives?

2 What are your roles in a family, and how does your commitment impact others?

3 Who would you say has shown a Christlike example? It can be a family member or someone unrelated to you.

³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: ⁵ And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶ And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷ And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸ And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹ And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Love God

God did something dramatic, miraculous, and unparalleled when He rescued His people from a life of slavery in Egypt. But for a generation, the tribes of Israel wandered in the wilderness, often grumbling that God's provision was not enough, that God's promises were not sufficient. The generation that came out of Egypt passed away, as a result of this hardheartedness.

But after forty years, Moses finally brought the people to the edge of the promised land. Moses himself would soon die on the border. So there, east of the Jordan River, a young community assembles to listen to his parting words—the last sermon of a wise and aged preacher. Moses will look back upon the covenant with God, sharing the most essential things for them to remember. He wants his people to walk faithfully with their Creator to receive the blessings that God has for them, not the shame that comes from abandoning these ways.

At the center of the relationship between Israel and her God are the requirements of covenant, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17). The first of these Moses interprets for his listeners: “The LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4; compare Ex. 20:2–3). They must understand and operate as if God alone is worthy of worship. It is the central instruction of the Law, what Jesus would later call the first and greatest commandment: love God with undivided attention, with clarity of purpose, and with intensity of effort (Deut. 6:5; compare Matt. 22:37).

The command to love God interprets every relationship, every situation, and every task that God’s people shall do. Moses makes a short list of times and places when instruction from God should be on the peoples’ lips. If you have the attention of children, Moses says, use the opportunity! Tell what God has done and what it means to serve Him. Make it ordinary conversation for travel times, meal times, and when you rise (v. 7). In other words, always.

Moses says to put reminders of the commands of God in all the places you pass, as a constant prompt (v. 9). Even more personally, Moses says to place reminders on hands and heads. Whenever people look at one another, they shall remember that *loving God* is the central imperative for all of life together.

1 Why does Moses preach before Israel enters the promised land?

2 What makes loving God the first and greatest commandment?

3 What might be some modern equivalents of reminders on gates and doorframes?



After Moses’ parting words, the Israelites cross the Jordan River to enter the land of promise. They ford during peak flood season, experiencing for themselves God’s miraculous parting of the waters to leave a path of dry ground (Josh. 3:9–17).

Bill Rice

³ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

⁴ And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? ⁶ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

⁷ They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

⁸ He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Love One Another

If the command to love God is central—the first and greatest commandment—then family relationships are an ideal context to practice this imperative. For the people we encounter on a daily basis, we should be visible reminders of what it means to worship God.

But during the era of Jesus’ ministry, experts in the Law of Moses disagreed about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In the same sermon where Moses had taught the love of God, Moses contemplates circumstances when a husband discovers “something

indecent” about his wife and seeks a divorce (v. 1). For some Jewish teachers, this provided a universal excuse for a husband to turn his wife out “for any and every reason” (Matt. 19:3).

The Pharisees test Jesus with this thorny topic, hoping to catch Him in an inconsistency that they might use against Him. But Jesus, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), responds to a question about marriage by pointing back to the creation of men and women. Since God created two genders, “male and female,” Jesus says this should tell us everything we need to know about *how many* marriage partners to seek (Matt. 19:4). Serial divorce and remarriage—exchanging one partner for another on a whim—is inconsistent with the design of God. Jesus says, “What God has joined together, let no one separate” (v. 6). He reconciles this prerogative with the Law of Moses by explaining that Moses’ permitting of divorce was an accommodation, not a sweeping loophole for husbands (or wives) to depart from the central task of *loving God* through their relationships.

The firm stance that Jesus takes against divorce is a compassionate call to be merciful and forgiving of one another, to seek reconciliation. Jesus teaches that “Love your neighbor as yourself” is like the command to love God, together summarizing all of the Law and Prophets (Matt. 22:39–40). The relationships between husbands and wives are not an exception to the general pattern. Family life becomes an ideal place to face our own inadequacies and need for God. When we put God at the center of all that we do, shared life with others is where we must practice what we preach, making faithfulness to God a habit and visible sign to others.

1 In the time of Jesus, what made some people think that divorce for any reason was permissible?

2 Why does Jesus point back to the creation of male and female?

3 Is it easier or harder for family members to demonstrate sacrificial love for one another? Why?

It Begins at Home

My daughter often gets asked, “What was it like, being a pastor’s kid?” I’m sure the curiosity comes from stereotypes of “very religious” families. I happen to think my husband and I were just doing our job, like any set of parents are called to do.

First, as her parents, we modeled what it means to love God first and have a personal relationship with God. Our children watched us as we prioritized time with God, reading and praying. They knew we had a nonnegotiable commitment with the heavenly Father.

We embraced the concept of “writing Scripture on the doorpost” through regular family time, reading God’s Word and challenging one another to memorize it too. We impressed God’s Word on our children’s hearts in random moments of the day. For instance, the way to school was for prayer, thanking God daily for delivering us to our destination safely and with everything that we needed.

Our home wasn’t perfect. As parents, we could have done a better job of settling disagreements in front of the children, instead of in private. Learning to resolve conflicts is part of being a family. But I’m proud that we modeled giving. Despite our limited finances, our family prayed for those in need and gave generously toward their needs, as God provided. Our children learned to share the same spirit of generosity and to trust that God would meet all their needs. For a time, we expanded our family by allowing another couple to stay with us. As we told the kids, “It isn’t all about us!”

After forty years of a covenant relationship with God, we still have opportunities for growth as a family. But we continue to draw strength from one another. God put us together for a reason, and we are so thankful.

1 What are some habits you would hope to see in a family of believers?

2 Why is it necessary to have a covenant relationship with God before making one with others?

3 If you have a covenant relationship with God, how does family make it easier, or harder?

Family Faith Conversations

In the midst of everyday life, God often creates moments for parents (or spiritual parents) to impart truths to their children. These moments can have profound impact on the formation of young believers.

Recall a time that a parent, grandparent, or other mentor shared a particularly meaningful truth about God. What were the circumstances? How did it impact your Christian walk? Briefly summarize the encounter or write a short prayer of thanks to God for the way it impacted you.

Key Text

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. —Deuteronomy 6:6–7 KJV

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. —Deuteronomy 6:6–7 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of April 27 through May 2

- Mon.** Jeremiah 29:3–7—Seek the Welfare of the City.
- Tue.** 1 Peter 2:4–12—God’s Own People.
- Wed.** 1 Timothy 2:1–8—Pray for Those in Authority.
- Thu.** Psalm 33:10–22—God Is Sovereign over the Nations.
- Fri.** Philippians 3:17–21—Our Citizenship Is in Heaven.
- Sat.** Jonah 3:1–5—A Season of National Repentance.

Next Week: Jonah 3:1–5; 4:6–11

We will talk about our hesitations to share the gospel. Is there a missionary or a ministry leader who would appreciate an unsolicited note of encouragement?