



For Families Under Stress

*Find Strength
in God's Word*

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY
Sharing God's Word with the World

For Families Under Stress

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Introduction

Life seems to move at a much faster pace these days. And family stability is coming under increasing pressure from a variety of economic, educational, and emotional factors. The Bible can be helpful in eye-opening ways for people concerned about families who are trying to cope with the stresses of life together today.

In this booklet you will find a helpful collection of Scripture passages that speak clearly and forcefully to families dealing with difficult conditions. These passages reflect Jesus' teaching that God's kingdom comes into our lives, not in those times when everything seems rosy, but precisely when everything seems to be falling apart. As you read these passages you will be reminded that God's powerful presence may always be counted on, especially at those points in life where people feel the most pressing need and anguish.

The passages assembled in this booklet start at the Bible's beginning in Genesis and end at the Bible's conclusion in the book of Revelation. Together they

remind families living in stressful times of how God created us and of God's final promises that await us. Some passages are related to the unexpected changes that occur in our lives, some illustrate different kinds of families, and some help us to see God's direction for renewal of family life. A final group of passages helps us see how God welcomes us all through Christ, and how we can all enjoy our membership in God's family.

So, read and rejoice that God believes in you and can be counted on to stand by you and everyone in your family in times of difficulty. And use the study questions at the end of each chapter to help you reflect on what you have read.



Chapter 1

God Comes to Families Under Stress

God will always keep surprising us. And families living with stress can find God's presence to be extremely powerful. God's Word proclaims the promise of this Good News to us. When we look at Bible families and our families today, two common elements stand out: the great variety of forms family life takes on, and the great variety of stresses with which families cope. It is often in the struggle with stress that God is most powerfully present with us.

Human Beings Are Created in God's Image: Male and Female

Male and female are blessed by God for the purpose of having children and taking responsibility for God's creation around them.

God said, “Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures.”

So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. God gave them his blessing and said:

Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth.

I have provided all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes. These will be food for animals, both wild and tame, and for birds.

God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good! Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day.

Genesis 1.26-31

God's Loving Purpose for People and Families Becomes Distorted

Adam and Eve had two sons, named Cain and Abel.

Abel became a sheep farmer, but Cain farmed the land. One day, Cain gave part of his harvest to the LORD, and Abel also gave an offering to the LORD. He killed the first-born lamb from one of his sheep and gave the LORD the best parts of it. The LORD was pleased with Abel and his offering, but not with Cain and his offering. This made Cain so angry that he could not hide his feelings.

The LORD said to Cain:

What's wrong with you? Why do you have such an angry look on your face? If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling. But you did the wrong thing, and now sin is waiting to attack you like a lion. Sin wants to destroy you, but don't let it!

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go for a walk." And when they were out in a field, Cain killed him.

Afterwards the LORD asked Cain,

"Where is Abel?"

"How should I know?" he answered. "Am I supposed to look after my brother?"

Then the LORD said:

Why have you done this terrible thing? You killed your own brother, and his blood flowed onto the ground. Now his blood is

calling out for me to punish you. And so, I'll put you under a curse. Because you killed Abel and made his blood run out on the ground, you will never be able to farm the land again. If you try to farm the land, it won't produce anything for you. From now on, you'll be without a home, and you'll spend the rest of your life wandering from place to place.

"This punishment is too hard!" Cain said. "You're making me leave my home and live far from you. I will have to wander about without a home, and just anyone could kill me."

"No!" the LORD answered. "Anyone who kills you will be punished seven times worse than I am punishing you." So the LORD put a mark on Cain to warn everyone not to kill him. But Cain had to go far from the LORD and live in the Land of Wandering, which is east of Eden.

Genesis 4.2b-16

The Holy Family Experiences the Stress of Being Refugees

Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus were living in a house in Bethlehem when some visitors from the east came to worship the child born to be King.

After the wise men had gone, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him."

That night, Joseph got up and took his wife and the child to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod died. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "I called my son out of Egypt."

When Herod found out that the wise men from the east had tricked him, he was very angry. He gave orders for his men to kill all the boys who lived in or near Bethlehem and were two years old and younger. This was based on what he had learned from the wise men.

So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet Jeremiah had said,

"In Ramah a voice was heard
crying and weeping loudly.
Rachel was mourning
for her children,
and she refused to be comforted,
because they were dead."

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph while he was still in Egypt. The angel said, “Get up and take the child and his mother back to Israel. The people who wanted to kill him are now dead.”

Joseph got up and left with them for Israel.

Matthew 2.13-21

Ruth Chooses to Stay with Her Mother-in-Law

During a famine in Judah, the family of Naomi went to live and work in Moab. Both of Naomi's sons married Moabite women and settled there. When, however, Naomi's husband and both sons died, she decided to return to her homeland where she might find the support of relatives. One of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, chose to go with her and care for her:

When Naomi heard that the LORD had given his people a good harvest, she and her two daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab and go to Judah. As they were on their way there, Naomi said to them, “Don't you want to go back home to your own mothers? You were kind to my husband and sons, and you have always been kind to me. I pray that

the LORD will be just as kind to you. May he give each of you another husband and a home of your own.”

Naomi kissed them. They cried and said, “We want to go with you and live among your people.”

But she replied, “My daughters, why don’t you return home? What good will it do you to go with me? Do you think I could have more sons for you to marry? You must go back home, because I am too old to marry again. Even if I got married tonight and later had more sons, would you wait for them to become old enough to marry? No, my daughters! Life is harder for me than it is for you, because the LORD has turned against me.”

They cried again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth held on to her. Naomi then said to Ruth, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods! Why don’t you go with her?”

Ruth answered,

“Please don’t tell me
to leave you
and return home!
I will go where you go,
I will live where you live;
your people will be my people,
your God will be my God.
I will die where you die
and be buried beside you.
May the LORD punish me
if we are ever separated,
even by death!”

When Naomi saw that Ruth had made up
her mind to go with her, she stopped urging
her to go back.

Ruth 1.6-18

A Persistent Mother Seeks Jesus’ Healing for Her Daughter

Jesus left and went to the region near the
city of Tyre, where he stayed in someone’s
home. He did not want people to know he
was there, but they found out anyway. A
woman whose daughter had an evil spirit in
her heard where Jesus was. And right away
she came and knelt down at his feet. The

woman was Greek and had been born in the part of Syria known as Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to force the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said, “The children must first be fed! It isn’t right to take away their food and feed it to dogs.”

The woman replied, “Lord, even dogs eat the crumbs that children drop from the table.”

Jesus answered, “That’s true! You may go now. The demon has left your daughter.” When the woman got back home, she found her child lying on the bed. The demon had gone.

Mark 7.24-30

Pause and Ask Yourself...

- 1. How is God at work in the difficult struggles that families have?**
- 2. In what important ways are families in some of these passages like our families today? In what ways are they different?**





Chapter 2

God Is Present When Families Face Unexpected Changes

Families live with serious stress because of unexpected changes. This happened to families in the Bible. It certainly happens to families today. When unexpected changes are devastating, we often feel that God is nowhere to be found. People in the Bible share these frightening feelings. Yet, the Bible also shows us how God's hidden hand is most powerfully at work in these very times of unexpected change. Now, as then, families under stress from change can be a vibrant witness to God's presence.

When the Familiar Family Structures Fall Apart

In a new and strange home, Ruth finds that she has to gather grain as a beggar in order to make ends meet for herself and her mother-in-law.

One day, Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me see if I can find someone who will let me pick up the grain left in the fields by the harvest workers.”

Naomi answered, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So right away, Ruth went out to pick up grain in a field owned by Boaz. He was a relative of Naomi’s husband Elimelech, as well as a rich and important man.

When Boaz left Bethlehem and went out to his field, he said to the harvest workers, “The LORD bless you!”

They replied, “And may the LORD bless you!”

Then Boaz asked the man in charge of the harvest workers, “Who is that young woman?”

The man answered, “She is the one who came back from Moab with Naomi. She asked if she could pick up grain left by the harvest workers, and she has been working all morning without a moment’s rest.”

Boaz went over to Ruth and said, “I think it would be best for you not to pick up grain in anyone else’s field. Stay here with the

women and follow along behind them, as they gather up what the men have cut. I have warned the men not to bother you, and whenever you are thirsty, you can drink from the water jars they have filled.”

Ruth bowed down to the ground and said, “You know I come from another country. Why are you so good to me?”

Boaz answered, “I’ve heard how you’ve helped your mother-in-law ever since your husband died. You even left your own father and mother to come and live in a foreign land among people you don’t know. I pray that the LORD God of Israel will reward you for what you have done. And now that you have come to him for protection, I pray that he will bless you.”

Ruth 2.1-12

When You Feel Like a Foreigner to Your Own Family

Save me, God!
I am about to drown.
I am sinking deep in the mud,
and my feet are slipping.
I am about to be swept under
by a mighty flood.

I am worn out from crying,
and my throat is dry.
I have waited for you
till my eyes are blurred.

There are more people
who hate me for no reason
than there are hairs
on my head.
Many terrible enemies
want to destroy me, God.
Am I supposed to give back
something I didn't steal?
You know my foolish sins.
Not one is hidden from you.
LORD God All-Powerful,
ruler of Israel,
don't let me embarrass anyone
who trusts and worships you.
It is for your sake alone
that I am insulted
and blush with shame.
I am like a stranger
to my relatives
and like a foreigner
to my own family.

My love for your house
burns in me like a fire,
and when others insulted you,
they insulted me as well.

I cried and went without food,
but they still insulted me.
They sneered at me
for wearing sackcloth
to show my sorrow.
Rulers and judges gossip
about me,
and drunkards make up songs
to mock me.

But I pray to you, LORD.
So when the time is right,
answer me and help me
with your wonderful love.
Don't let me sink in the mud,
but save me from my enemies
and from the deep water.
Don't let me be
swept away by a flood
or drowned in the ocean
or swallowed by death.

Psalm 69.1-15

When You Feel Abandoned in Sickness by Family and Friends

You, Lord, know every one
of my deepest desires,
and my noisy groans
are no secret to you.

My heart is beating fast.
I feel weak all over,
and my eyes are red.

Because of my sickness,
no friends or neighbors
will come near me.

. . .

You are the LORD God!
Stay nearby
and don't desert me.
You are the one who saves me.
Please hurry and help.

Psalm 38.9-11, 21, 22

When, Like Jesus, Your Feelings of Isolation Cause You to Cry Out

*Jesus, in his agony on the cross, was drawn to
the words of the Psalmist to express his feeling of
abandonment.*

My God, my God, why have you
deserted me?
Why are you so far away?
Won't you listen to my groans
and come to my rescue?
I cry out day and night,

but you don't answer,
and I can never rest.
Yet you are the holy God,
ruling from your throne
and praised by Israel.
Our ancestors trusted you,
and you rescued them.
When they cried out for help,
you saved them,
and you did not let them down
when they depended on you.

Psalms 22.1-5

Even While Dying, Jesus Creates a New Family

After the soldiers had nailed Jesus to the cross, they divided up his clothes into four parts, one for each of them. But his outer garment was made from a single piece of cloth, and it did not have any seams. The soldiers said to each other, "Let's not rip it apart. We will gamble to see who gets it." This happened so that the Scriptures would come true, which say,

"They divided up my clothes
and gambled
for my garments."

The soldiers then did what they had decided.

Jesus' mother stood beside his cross with her sister and Mary the wife of Clopas. Mary Magdalene was standing there too. When Jesus saw his mother and his favorite disciple with her, he said to his mother, "This man is now your son." Then he said to the disciple, "She is now your mother." From then on, that disciple took her into his own home.

John 19.23-27

Pause and Ask Yourself...

- 1. What are some of the unexpected changes your family or the families you know have had to face?**
- 2. How have they dealt with them? What resources did they use?**



Chapter 3

Both Pain and Joy Are the Experience of All Kinds of Families

The Bible illustrates no perfect family which experiences only joy and no pain. In the following passages you will encounter all kinds of families. Under stress they share both pain and joy. Among the most difficult things we discover in Scripture is the fact that following Christ can not only resolve, but cause, stress in family life. But the way we respond to the mixture of joy and pain is our calling of love.

A Young Widow Takes the Initiative to Form a New Family

After their move to the land of Judah, Ruth continued to live with her mother-in-law and to provide support for them both by gathering grain in the fields. But she saw the need for a more secure family structure.

One day, Naomi said to Ruth:
“It’s time I found you a husband, who will
give you a home and take care of you.

You have been picking up grain alongside
the women who work for Boaz, and you
know he is a relative of ours. Tonight he will
be threshing the grain. Now take a bath and
put on some perfume, then dress in your best
clothes. Go where he is working, but don’t let
him see you until he has finished eating and
drinking. Watch where he goes to spend the
night, then when he is asleep, lift the cover
and lie down at his feet. He will tell you what
to do.”

Ruth answered, “I’ll do whatever you say.”
She went out to the place where Boaz was
working and did what Naomi had told her.

After Boaz finished eating and drinking
and was feeling happy, he went over and fell
asleep near the pile of grain. Ruth slipped
over quietly. She lifted the cover and lay
down near his feet.

In the middle of the night, Boaz suddenly
woke up and was shocked to see a woman
lying at his feet. “Who are you?” he asked.

“Sir, I am Ruth,” she answered, “and you are the relative who is supposed to take care of me. So spread the edge of your cover over me.”

Boaz replied:

“The LORD bless you! This shows how truly loyal you are to your family. You could have looked for a younger man, either rich or poor, but you didn’t. Don’t worry, I’ll do what you have asked. You are respected by everyone in town.

It’s true that I am one of the relatives who is supposed to take care of you, but there is someone who is an even closer relative. Stay here until morning, then I will find out if he is willing to look after you. If he isn’t, I promise by the living God to do it myself. Now go back to sleep until morning.”

Ruth 3.1-13

Two Sisters Learn and Serve in Different Ways

The Lord and his disciples were traveling along and came to a village. When they got there, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down in front of the Lord and was listening to what he said. Martha was

worried about all that had to be done. Finally, she went to Jesus and said, “Lord, doesn’t it bother you that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!”

The Lord answered, “Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10.38-42

Children Are Examples of the Kind of Faith God Seeks

Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them by placing his hands on them. But his disciples told the people to stop bothering him.

When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, “Let the children come to me! Don’t try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God.

I promise you that you cannot get into God’s kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does.” Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.

Mark 10.13-16

The Priorities of Faith and Family Can Come into Conflict

Jesus is aware that following him can lead us into conflict, for following Jesus comes before even the most important family responsibilities.

Don't think that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came to bring trouble, not peace. I came to turn sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law. Your worst enemies will be in your own family.

If you love your father or mother or even your sons and daughters more than me, you are not fit to be my disciples. And unless you are willing to take up your cross and come with me, you are not fit to be my disciples. If you try to save your life, you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will surely find it.

Matthew 10.34-39

Along the way someone said to Jesus, "I'll go anywhere with you!"

Jesus said, "Foxes have dens, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man doesn't have a place to call his own."

Jesus told someone else to come with him. But the man said, “Lord, let me wait until I bury my father.”

Jesus answered, “Let the dead take care of the dead, while you go and tell about God’s kingdom.”

Then someone said to Jesus, “I want to go with you, Lord, but first let me go back and take care of things at home.”

Jesus answered, “Anyone who starts plowing and keeps looking back isn’t worth a thing to God’s kingdom!”

Luke 9.57-62

Jesus’ Disciples Leave Work and Family to Follow Him

While Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers. One was Simon, also known as Peter, and the other was Andrew. They were fishermen, and they were casting their net into the lake. Jesus said to them, “Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish.” Right then the two brothers dropped their nets and went with him.

Jesus walked on until he saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat with their father, mending their nets. Jesus asked them to come with him too. Right away they left the boat and their father and went with Jesus.

Matthew 4.18-22

Partnership and Authority in Marriage

The New Testament reveals two differing approaches to marriage. There is praise in one passage for a relationship based on mutuality and equality between wife and husband. In another, there is praise for a relationship based on authority and responsibility, in which Christ and the church are a model for husband and wife.

Husbands and wives should be fair with each other about having sex. A wife belongs to her husband instead of to herself, and a husband belongs to his wife instead of to himself. So don't refuse sex to each other, unless you agree not to have sex for a little while, in order to spend time in prayer. Then Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7.3-5

Honor Christ and put others first. A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord. A husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head and the Savior of the church, which is his own body. Wives should always put their husbands first, as the church puts Christ first.

A husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He made the church holy by the power of his word, and he made it pure by washing it with water. Christ did this, so that he would have a glorious and holy church, without faults or spots or wrinkles or any other flaws.

In the same way, a husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself. A husband who loves his wife shows that he loves himself. None of us hate our own bodies. We provide for them and take good care of them, just as Christ does for the church, because we are each part of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother to get married, and he becomes like one person with his wife." This is a great mystery, but I understand it to mean Christ and his church.

So each husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself, and each wife should respect her husband.

Ephesians 5.21-33

Pause and Ask Yourself...

- 1. Do you know families who have some of the different relationships and ways of life that you see in the passages above?**
- 2. How do these passages remind you of pain and joy that is shared in your family or in families under stress that you know?**
- 3. How can the priorities of faith and family be balanced?**





Chapter 4

God Offers Direction and Renewal for Family Life

The Bible shows what God does to offer direction and renewal for families under stress. Most obvious is the Bible's emphasis on particular qualities in our family relationships: humility, unity, respect, high moral standards, and active forgiveness. In the following passages we are reminded that when we fail in our expression of any of these qualities, it is God's forgiveness that is the first vital step in our renewal.

One Woman's Experience of the Fruits of Family Loyalty

God worked through another relative, Boaz, to bring new hope and family unity into the life of Ruth and her mother-in-law. Ruth not only became a fully accepted foreigner, but the great-grandmother of King David!

Boaz told the town leaders and everyone else:

“All of you are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi the property that belonged to Elimelech and his two sons, Chilion and Mahlon. You are also witnesses that I have agreed to marry Mahlon’s widow Ruth, the Moabite woman. This will keep the property in his family’s name, and he will be remembered in this town.”

The town leaders and the others standing there said:

“We are witnesses to this. And we pray that the LORD will give your wife many children, just as he did Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob. May you be a rich man in the tribe of Ephrath and an important man in Bethlehem. May the children you have by this young woman make your family as famous as the family of Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.”

Boaz married Ruth, and the LORD blessed her with a son. After his birth, the women said to Naomi:

“Praise the LORD! Today he has given you a grandson to take care of you. We pray that the boy will grow up to be

famous everywhere in Israel. He will make you happy and take care of you in your old age, because he is the son of your daughter-in-law. And she loves you more than seven sons of your own would love you.”

Naomi loved the boy and took good care of him. The neighborhood women named him Obed, but they called him “Naomi’s Boy.”

When Obed grew up he had a son named Jesse, who later became the father of King David. Here is a list of the ancestors of David: Jesse, Obed, Boaz, Salmon, Nahshon, Amminadab, Ram, Hezron, and Perez.

Ruth 4.9-22

Traditional Wisdom About Aspects of Family Life

Many of the hundreds of familiar maxims and traditional sayings in the book of Proverbs reflect the wisdom and experience of generations of families.

The importance to children of their parents' example

Good people live right,
and God blesses the children
who follow their example.

Proverbs 20.7

The value of loving correction

If you love your children,
you will correct them;
if you don't love them,
you won't correct them.

Proverbs 13.24

Don't fail to correct
your children.
You won't kill them
by being firm,
and it may even
save their lives.

Proverbs 23.13,14

Correct your children,
and they will be wise;
children out of control
disgrace their mothers.

. . .

If you correct your children,
they will bring you peace
and happiness.

Proverbs 29.15,17

The value of instruction

Teach your children
right from wrong,
and when they are grown
they will still do right.

Proverbs 22.6

*The value of mutual respect
between the generations*

Pay attention to your father,
and don't neglect your mother
when she grows old.
Invest in truth and wisdom,
discipline and good sense,
and don't part with them.
Make your father truly happy
by living right
and showing
sound judgment.
Make your parents proud,
especially your mother.

Proverbs 23.22-25

Grandparents are proud
of their grandchildren,
and children should be proud
of their parents.

Proverbs 17.6

If you cheat your parents
and don't think it's wrong,
you are a common thief.

Proverbs 28.24

Protecting one's family from trouble

Fools who cause trouble
in the family
won't inherit a thing.

Proverbs 11.29a

Discovering true security

If you respect the LORD,
you and your children
have a strong fortress
and a life-giving fountain
that keeps you safe
from deadly traps.

Proverbs 14.26,27

Appreciating the wisdom of women

A woman's family
is held together
by her wisdom,
but it can be destroyed
by her foolishness.

Proverbs 14.1

*Wisdom and understanding as the
foundation for your home*

Use wisdom and understanding
to establish your home;
let good sense fill the rooms
with priceless treasures.

Proverbs 24.3, 4

**God Gives Instruction About How to
Live Responsibly**

God said to the people of Israel:

I am the LORD your God, the one who
brought you out of Egypt where you were
slaves.

Do not worship any god except me.

Do not make idols that look like anything in the sky or on earth or in the ocean under the earth. Don't bow down and worship idols. I am the LORD your God, and I demand all your love. If you reject me, I will punish your families for three or four generations. But if you love me and obey my laws, I will be kind to your families for thousands of generations.

Do not misuse my name. I am the LORD your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name.

Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day — not you, your children, your slaves, your animals, or the foreigners who live in your towns. In six days I made the sky, the earth, the oceans, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That's why I made the Sabbath a special day that belongs to me.

Respect your father and your mother, and you will live a long time in the land I am giving you.

Do not murder.

Be faithful in marriage.

Do not steal.

Do not tell lies about others.

Do not want anything that belongs to someone else. Don't want anyone's house, wife or husband, slaves, oxen, donkeys or anything else.

Exodus 20.1-17

Some Rules for Christian Living

A wife must put her husband first. This is her duty as a follower of the Lord.

A husband must love his wife and not abuse her.

Children must always obey their parents. This pleases the Lord.

Parents, don't be hard on your children. If you are, they might give up.

Colossians 3.18-21

When Family Loyalty Leads Us to Seek Preferential Treatment

Jesus used the request of the mother of James and John regarding her sons' future status to teach a basic principle for all relationships: Whoever would be first must be servant of all.

The mother of James and John came to Jesus with her two sons. She knelt down and started begging him to do something for her.

Jesus asked her what she wanted, and she said, “When you come into your kingdom, please let one of my sons sit at your right side and the other at your left.”

Jesus answered, “Not one of you knows what you are asking. Are you able to drink from the cup that I must soon drink from?”

James and John said, “Yes, we are!”

Jesus replied, “You certainly will drink from my cup! But it isn’t for me to say who will sit at my right side and at my left. That is for my Father to say.”

When the ten other disciples heard this, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called the disciples together and said:

“You know that foreign rulers like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over everyone they rule. But don’t act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be the slave of the rest. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people.”

Matthew 20.20-28

When Family Security Is Threatened

Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce underscores the spiritual dimension of marriage and calls for the highest standards of those two lives which have become one.

Some Pharisees wanted to test Jesus. So they came up to him and asked if it was right for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus asked them, "What does the Law of Moses say about that?"

They answered, "Moses allows a man to write out divorce papers and send his wife away."

Jesus replied, "Moses gave you this law because you are so heartless. But in the beginning God made a man and a woman. That's why a man leaves his father and mother and gets married. He becomes like one person with his wife. Then they are no longer two people, but one. And no one should separate a couple that God has joined together."

When Jesus and his disciples were back in the house, they asked him about what he had said. He told them, "A man who divorces his wife and marries someone else is unfaithful to his wife. A woman who divorces her husband and marries again is also unfaithful."

Mark 10.2-12

When We Want to Blame Others, But Really Need to Look at Ourselves

Jesus walked out to the Mount of Olives. Then early the next morning he went to the temple. The people came to him, and he sat down and started teaching them.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses brought in a woman who had been caught in bed with a man who wasn't her husband. They made her stand in the middle of the crowd. Then they said, "Teacher, this woman was caught sleeping with a man who isn't her husband. The Law of Moses teaches that a woman like this should be stoned to death! What do you say?"

They asked Jesus this question, because they wanted to test him and bring some charge against him. But Jesus simply bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger.

They kept on asking Jesus about the woman. Finally, he stood up and said, "If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!" Once again he bent over and began writing on the ground. The people left one by one, beginning with the oldest. Finally, Jesus and the woman were there alone.

Jesus stood up and asked her, “Where is everyone? Isn’t there anyone left to accuse you?”

“No sir,” the woman answered.

Then Jesus told her, “I am not going to accuse you either. You may go now, but don’t sin anymore.”

John 8.1-11

When We Experience Gratitude for the Faith Passed On to Us by Our Family Over the Generations

Paul, knowing both Timothy’s mother and grandmother, wrote to his young friend and co-worker:

Night and day I mention you in my prayers. I am always grateful for you, as I pray to the God my ancestors and I have served with a clear conscience. I remember how you cried, and I want to see you, because that will make me truly happy. I also remember the genuine faith of your mother Eunice. Your grandmother Lois had the same sort of faith, and I am sure that you have it as well. So I ask you to make full use of the gift that

God gave you when I placed my hands on you. Use it well. God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.

2 Timothy 1.3-7

A Christian Family Serves God and Church

Priscilla and Aquila serve by opening their home for meetings:

Greetings from the churches in Asia.

Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church that meets in their house, send greetings in the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16.19

by receiving and working with God's servants

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where he met Aquila, a Jewish man from Pontus. Not long before this, Aquila had come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Emperor Claudius had ordered the Jewish people to leave Rome. Paul went to see Aquila and Priscilla and found out that they were tent makers. Paul was a tent maker too. So he stayed with them, and they worked together.

Every Sabbath, Paul went to the Jewish meeting place. He spoke to Jews and Gentiles and tried to win them over.

Acts 18.1-4

by teaching and correcting believers in the faith

A Jewish man named Apollos came to Ephesus. Apollos had been born in the city of Alexandria. He was a very good speaker and knew a lot about the Scriptures. He also knew much about the Lord's Way, and he spoke about it with great excitement. What he taught about Jesus was right, but all he knew was John's message about baptism.

Apollos started speaking bravely in the Jewish meeting place. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to their home and helped him understand God's Way even better.

Apollos decided to travel through Achaia. So the Lord's followers wrote letters, encouraging the followers there to welcome him. After Apollos arrived in Achaia, he was a great help to everyone who had put their faith in the Lord Jesus because of God's kindness. He got into fierce arguments with the Jewish people, and in public he used the Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 18.24-28

by taking risks in ministry

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila. They have not only served Christ Jesus together with me, but they have even risked their lives for me. I am grateful for them and so are all the Gentile churches. Greet the church that meets in their home.

Greet my dear friend Epaphroditus, who was the first person in Asia to have faith in Christ.

Romans 16.3-5

Pause and Ask Yourself...

- 1. How is God's direction and action for renewal reflected in families dealing with stress?**
- 2. What tools are available for families willing to see beyond their immediate problems?**
- 3. The Bible describes many qualities of our relationships with family members. Which, if any, are also qualities of our relationship with God?**
- 4. What kinds of opportunities for service does the Bible describe?**



Chapter 5

Through Christ All Are Members of God's Family

As family members who continue to struggle under stress, our final identity is the one we have through Christ: we are members of God's family. This identity is God's own gift. The Bible often says God is like our father. Sometimes it depicts God in mothering images. In some cases God is said to be like our husband. And we are even described as members of Jesus' family. The ultimate promise is that everything will be made new, and that even death will be conquered when God's resurrection family is complete.

Like a Kind Father, God Gives Good Things to His Children

Jesus said:

Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened

for you. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks. Would any of you give your hungry child a stone, if the child asked for some bread? Would you give your child a snake if the child asked for a fish? As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask.

Matthew 7.7-11

God Rejoices Like a Loving Father Over His Returning Child

Jesus also told them another story:

Once a man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his

pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called one of

the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"

The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."

His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

Luke 15.11-32

Like a Protective Mother, God Nurtures and Comforts Us

The LORD has promised:

"I will flood Jerusalem
with the wealth of nations
and make the city prosper.

Zion will nurse you at her breast,
carry you in her arms,
and hold you in her lap.
I will comfort you there
like a mother
comforting her child.”

Isaiah 66.12-13

God's Steadfast and Caring Love Sets the Example for Our Parenting

The people of Israel moan
and say to me,
“We were like wild bulls,
but you, LORD, broke us,
and we learned to obey.
You are our God—
please let us come home.
When we were young,
we strayed and sinned,
but then we realized
what we had done.
We are ashamed and disgraced
and want to return to you.”
People of Israel,
you are my own dear children.
Don't I love you best of all?
Though I often make threats,

I want you to be near me,
so I will have mercy on you.
I, the LORD, have spoken.

Jeremiah 31.18-20

Like a Loyal Spouse, God Forgives Wrong and Renews Love

The LORD All-Powerful,
the Holy God of Israel,
rules all the earth.
He is your Creator and husband,
and he will rescue you.

You were like a young wife,
brokenhearted and crying
because her husband
had divorced her.
But the LORD your God says,
“I am taking you back!
I rejected you for a while,
but with love and tenderness
I will embrace you again.
For a while, I turned away
in furious anger.

Now I will have mercy
and love you forever!
I, your protector and LORD,
make this promise.”

Isaiah 54.5-8

We Are Part of Jesus' Close Family

Jesus taught that true dimensions of his family go far beyond the immediate circle to include all who do what God wants.

Jesus' mother and brothers came and stood outside. Then they sent someone with a message for him to come out to them. The crowd that was sitting around Jesus told him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside and want to see you."

Jesus asked, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Then he looked at the people sitting around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who obeys God is my brother or sister or mother."

Mark 3.31-35

God's Home Is with His People. Everything Is Made New!

At the outset of his vision of a restored creation, John writes:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and so had the sea. Then I saw New Jerusalem, that holy city, coming down from God in heaven. It was like a bride dressed in

her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband.

I heard a loud voice shout from the throne:

God's home is now with his people.
He will live with them, and they will be
his own. Yes, God will make his home
among his people. He will wipe all tears
from their eyes, and there will be no
more death, suffering, crying, or pain.
These things of the past are gone
forever.

Then the one sitting on the throne said:

I am making everything new. Write
down what I have said. My words are
true and can be trusted.

Revelation 21.1-5



God's Blessing For Your Family

*All members of God's family are loved by God.
Love ties everything together.*

God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.

Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful. Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other. With thankful hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks to God the Father because of him.

Colossians 3.12-17

Pause and Ask Yourself...

1. How are families struggling with stress living symbols of God's loving presence in our world?
2. What can you learn from the examples in Scripture of God's caring nature and how can this help your family deal with stress?
3. How does God's final promise of conquering death help to strengthen families who are now struggling under stress?



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