

Building Strong Families

This Sunday is Mother's Day. In honor of Mother's Day, I plan to share a few biblical thoughts about what the book of Proverbs says about building strong families. How do we build strong homes and families? The Bible says, *"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain"* (Ps. 127:1). In addition, Proverbs 24:3-4 adds, *"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."*

Such wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. If our house is going to be built on a strong foundation and our families flourish, we must model and teach the wisdom and Word of God. *"Love the Lord your God... These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them upon your children"* (Deut. 6:5-7). This is God's foundational truth. A family can possess many things. Yet, unless the home has a spiritual foundation, built on the Word of God and the good news of life in Jesus Christ, a family has nothing that lasts. Without the foundation of the Lord, our families crumble and crack. But with a solid foundation, we are strong with hearts and children who are grounded in God's ways.

Secondly, strong families are ones where affirmation is expressed. William James noted, "From cradle to grave, one of the deepest needs is to be appreciated." For every, "No, what are you doing?" there should be many more, "Good job," "Well done," and "That's great" coming from our lips. Yet, affirming our children and others in the family is more than appreciating one another. A familiar Bible verse is, *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it"* (Prov. 22:6). The Amplified Bible gives us an interesting insight into the meaning of this verse. It reads, *"Train up a child in the way he should go (and in keeping with his individual gift or bent) and when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Prov. 22:6 Amplified Bible).

Psalm 139:13 begins with the words, *"For you."* The word *"you"* is greatly emphasized denoting that it is the Lord, and only the Lord, who is the Creator. *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb"* (Ps. 139:13). If we are going to affirm one another in the context of our family, we must know one another. Our children arrive in our arms, longing to be known, nurtured, and loved as they have been uniquely made by God. Isn't this true for all of us? To affirm one another in the family is to work at knowing the personality, temperament, talents, and strengths of each other as they have been uniquely made, and seeking to bring out the best in them.

Third, if we are going to build strong families, affection must be demonstrated. The Apostle Paul shared a poignant word with the church of Thessalonica that is applicable to our families. Paul, writing of his affection for the church, says, *"We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us"* (1 Thes. 2:7-8). Paul could have

employed any one of 7 or 8 Greek words that would have communicated the idea of affection and yet, he chose a word which is used as a term of endearment taken from the nursery. This word creates a picture of a father holding his beloved child with tenderness and firmness. It is the kind of affection needed in our families, both strong and tender. Sadly, as the years pass, work increases, pressures mount, and demands compete for our time, this kind of affection can quickly wane. Positive verbal and non-verbal communication, gentle touching, and hugging are just some of the ways to demonstrate affection.

Lastly, and consistent with the principles of affirmation and affection in the family, we must practice understanding, if our families are to be strong. *"The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out"* (Prov. 20:5). Our children's, spouse's, and sibling's deepest thoughts and potential are like treasures on the ocean floor. They can be covered up by debris, never to surface, or they can be gently raised to the surface where their thoughts, dreams, and potential become real and visible. The practice of understanding calls us to be available and involved with one another. It demands our time, emotional energy, and money. It calls for our priorities to be reorganized and our schedules to be restructured. What in our schedules is more important than our child's ballgame or school play? What will give a greater return than the investment in our children's spiritual life? Even more importantly for those who are married, what can be more important than making time for our spouses?

We all want our families to be healthy and strong. Consider and put into practice God's wisdom for a strong family. Build a spiritual foundation, express affirmation, demonstrate affection, and practice understanding.

Great Peace in the Lord,
Eddie