

# Finding God with Our Families

M. W. Bassford, 1-23-11

There are many tragic passages in Scripture, but there are few that describe a greater disaster than Judges 2:7, 10. The generation described here, the generation that followed Joshua over the Jordan, was one of the greatest in Israelite history. They obeyed God's word, they trusted in His promises, and through Him, they obtained the victory and conquered the promised land of Canaan. Their record was one of nearly constant spiritual success.

However, in one crucial area, this great generation failed disastrously. They did a marvelous job of obeying God, but they did a terrible job of teaching their children about Him. As a result, when that generation passed on, they left behind a group that was nominally God's people but in reality didn't know Him. That new generation turned to idolatry and immorality, and soon the same God who had led their fathers to victory over the nations was using those same nations to punish them for their wickedness. It put Israel in a hole they never got out of until the reign of David.

Sadly, we see modern versions of this story occurring all around us in the Lord's church today. It reminds me of a congregation I visited several years ago. The members of that church sang, prayed, studied the Bible, partook of the Lord's Supper, and gave of their means, just as the Scripture requires. However, of all the people in attendance there, I might have been the only one under 75. Just like Joshua's generation, those Christians failed to teach their children to know the Lord, and the children were spending their Sunday mornings somewhere else.

Thankfully, we are blessed here with an assembly that is overflowing with children. Some preachers get upset when little ones kick up a fuss during the sermon, but I'm actually glad of it, because all of that squalling and fussing is a sign of life. It's also the sign of a priceless opportunity, the opportunity to teach our children to be righteous so that they follow in our footsteps after we're gone. Let's look, then, at finding God with our families.

## The Role of Men

If we want our families and our children to be righteous, the only way to accomplish this is by following God's plan for the family. In this plan, each family member has a divinely ordained role. First, let's examine the role of men. Above all else, God expects them to lead. We see an excellent example of this kind of leadership in Joshua 24:15. Men, if we want to be men of God, we have to take the stand that Joshua took. It's up to us to determine that we're going to be righteous and that our families are going to be righteous, regardless of what the world around us says or does.

This is not a culturally popular idea. Modern America doesn't like the idea that the husband is supposed to wear the pants, make the tough decisions, and lead his family to God. According to the world around us, men are just supposed to be overgrown boys, while their wives are the true backbone of the family. That way of thinking does no one any favors, least of all the women. I've seen marriages where the woman is the strong one, where she gets to make the decisions and run the show. Think those wives enjoy their marriages? No! In fact, they have to work to keep from despising their worthless husbands. The truth is that God's way works, whether it's the world's way or not. Let's remember that, men, and be the strong leaders for the Lord that our wives and children need us to be.

One of the main ways that our leadership should express itself is in love for our wives. Paul describes how this love should be in Ephesians 5:25. Just like Christ's leadership is the leadership of a servant, so too the leadership of the husband is supposed to be the leadership of a servant. The role of the man is not to boss everyone else around and get his way and get all the toys that he wants to have. That's not leadership. That's immaturity and selfishness. Instead, the true man of God sacrifices for his wife and family, day in, day out. He doesn't sneer that helping his wife with the household chores is woman's work. Instead, he pitches in and helps her to make her day easier. He doesn't come home from work and devote his attention to the TV or the computer. Instead, he spends time with his wife and shows her that she's most important. He's willing to spend Sunday afternoon watching the kids instead of watching the Bears game so that she can have some time to relax. He doesn't do all these things because she nags or guilt him into it. He does them because it's right to do them. He does them because he loves his wife as Christ loved the church.

Also, men are to lead by teaching their children about God. Paul explains in Ephesians 6:4. In so many marriages today, the husband sits at home on Sunday morning while the wife brings the kids to church. That's the opposite of God's plan. Nor is it God's plan either for Mom to be encouraging the children to do their Bible lessons on Saturday night while Dad is off tinkering in the garage. Instead, men, the responsibility for raising godly children is primarily ours, not hers. We need to make the effort to constantly teach them about God. Moses in Deuteronomy 6 describes how we're to instruct our kids when we lie down and when we rise up, when we're at home and when we're out on the road—in other words, all the time. Nor can this teaching be by word of mouth only. It has to be by example. Our children must be able to see our righteousness in the way that we speak, in the way that we treat them and our wives, in the way we work hard and provide for our loved ones. Above all, though, they must see that no matter how busy we

are, we always make the time to put God first. There can be no other activity in our lives that is more important than the assembly of the Lord's people, and no work that is more important to us than the Lord's work. Of course, none of this will guarantee that our children will become faithful Christians. There is nothing that will guarantee that. However, when we live in this way, we will have done everything we can to bring them up to be men and women of God.

### **The Role of Women.**

Just as the Scripture outlines the role of the man of God, it also describes what a woman of God is to be like. One of her most important characteristics is that she submits to her husband. Paul makes this point in Ephesians 5:22-24. Just as it is the man's responsibility to be the leader, it is the woman's responsibility to let him be the leader and to honor the decisions that he makes. This doesn't just apply to wise and wonderful husbands who always make the best decision. This applies to the husbands that women actually have in real life. Ladies, even if you think your man has nothing between his ears but solid bone, that does not give you the right to insist on having your own way. You married him, you picked him to be the head of your household, and now you have to be content with the results of the decision that you made. This applies even if your husband is not the man of God that he should be. You still have to follow him. The only exception is if he tries to get you to do things that are ungodly too. Other than that, the wife must submit.

The woman is also responsible for loving her husband and children. Paul makes the point that younger women must learn to do this in Titus 2:3-4. The Greek word for "love" here refers to a warm, familiar affection. In other words, even though the word can be a hostile place, the woman must be an oasis of love for her family. Sisters, when your husband comes home from a hard day at work beaten down with his tail between his legs, he has to be able to rely on you for a sympathetic ear, a warm word of encouragement, and a hug. Your children must be able to depend on you for patience and good humor, even when they've been screaming and fighting all day and part of you wants to throw them out the nearest window. They have to know that even when no one else seems to care about them, you still care. In short, the love of the woman is the sunlight that her family needs to flourish and grow to their fullest potential.

Finally, in those all-too-common cases where the husband is not willing to fulfill his responsibility to be the spiritual leader for his family, the wife must teach her children. We learn about two women of God who did this in 2 Timothy 1:5. Timothy's family situation wasn't the greatest. His mother and his grandmother were righteous Jews, but his father was a Greek, who, judging from what the Scripture says about him, never showed the slightest interest in spiritual things at all. Despite that roadblock, Lois and Eunice were still able to raise him to faithfully follow God.

Today, women in that same position need to have the faith and courage that Lois and Eunice had. This is not easy. In fact, I think it's one of the most difficult spiritual tasks that anyone can have. After all, God intends for the man to take this role, not the woman. This will take work. There will be a lot of struggles and setbacks. She may even have to deal with confrontations with her husband if he is hostile to the gospel. However, if she is willing to shoulder this burden that should not be hers, she can claim the joy of knowing that her children are faithful to the Lord just like she is.

### **The Role of Children.**

Of course, God doesn't intend for the parents to dedicate themselves to serving Him while the children get to run around and be little wild animals who do whatever they want. Instead, children are also responsible for being godly children. Within this, their first responsibility is to obey their parents. Paul tells us so in Ephesians 6:1. Kids, this means you. Obviously, you shouldn't listen to your parents if they want you to lie or miss church or do anything else wicked, but other than that, if they tell you to do something, you do it. You don't wait until they tell you to do it 50 times. You don't delay and drag your feet. You don't do it as badly and half-heartedly as you think you can get away with. Instead, you do what they say, to the best of your ability, all the time, and you do it because God wants you to. Because it's right.

In addition to this, children are also responsible for respecting their parents. This is the next point that Paul makes, in Ephesians 6:2-3. There's a big difference between obeying and honoring. Let me give you an example. If you want to go out with your friends on Friday night, and your parents say no, and you roll your eyes, and you groan, and you stomp up the stairs to your bedroom, and you slam the door, and you sulk for the whole rest of the night, that might be obeying, but it is not honoring, and it is not pleasing to God. The world around us likes to talk glowingly about teenage rebellion, and it's so cute, and it's just a stage that everyone goes through, but that's not what the Bible says. In God's eyes, rebellion isn't cute. It's not just a stage. Instead, it is a sin, and just like any other sin, it is enough to send you to hell. If you have been behaving rebelliously and defiantly to your parents, you need to apologize to them and to God.

Of course, respect isn't just about open defiance and resentment. Respect is about what goes on in your head too. The respectful child doesn't go around complaining about his parents to his friends. He doesn't look for ways to evade their restrictions when they aren't around. Instead, he honors their wishes and honors their authority. Just like all the other things we've talked about, this is not easy. Sometimes, it's terribly tempting to be disrespectful, to let that one snarky comment sneak out. However, if you discipline your words and thoughts to respect, you will please God.