

# Broken and Blessed

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When family is good, it's really good. When it's bad, it's bad. So much of our personal happiness is bound up in the quality of our family relationships. How many siblings here have an ache because of strife with a brother or sister? How many marriages struggle with both partners aspiring for something far better but unable to get there? How many parents' hearts ache for a prodigal child or over strife among their children or with them?

I want to encourage you to look at your family's blessings and brokenness biblically. Your family is neither broken *nor* blessed; it is always broken *and* blessed. If you want a nearly perfect family, you want something family presently can never deliver. If brokenness is all you can see, you will never enjoy this precious gift from God. The blessing of family love is a remnant of creation and a foretaste of the new creation. The brokenness forces us to deal with the Fall, look to the cross, and holds out the possibility of the future glory to be experienced in the here and now. We are always broken and blessed.

## The Created Family (Genesis 2:24, 28)

Where did this concept of family come from? We read it in the Genesis account of creation.

*"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* (Genesis 2:24 ESV)

This verse summarizes the purpose behind God's later creation of Eve. It was to give her special status and significance. Her creation is detailed like no other. She is brought to Adam. What a moment for him! God establishes the family unit by explaining a basic human pattern of maturity where a son or daughter leaves their birth family to establish a new family. The unity of that family is "one flesh." So that explains Mommy and Daddy. What about children?

*"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the [earth].'"* (Genesis 1:28)

This is known as the creation mandate. It includes reproduction ("*multiply*"). Children grow up and leave the family unit of their childhood to create a new family with a spouse. If possible, they are fruitful with children who continue that generational pattern.

*"We may define 'family' as, primarily, one man and one woman united in matrimony...plus (normally) natural or adopted children and, secondarily, any other persons related by blood."<sup>1</sup>* (Andreas Köstenberger)

Why define family? Because that definition is under serious deconstruction and revision in our current culture. What is a marriage? What is a family? What is a man or woman? These basic identities and definitions are completely up for grabs in our society today. Are you confused? Looking for some answer in a perplexing world? The Bible provides wisdom in the chaos, an answer grounded in the eternal nature of God who made marriage and family in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, p. 93.

One more thing. After creating everything, God gives a divine assessment. *"It was very good."* (Genesis 1:31). The human family is part of that assessment and blessing. So, why are families so broken?

### **The Broken Family (Genesis 3-4)**

Genesis 3 is the story of Adam and Eve's sin. That sin destroyed their perfect relationship with God. No longer would they enjoy complete and whole fellowship with their Creator. Immediately they hide from him—literally in the bushes.

What can be missed here is how the Fall altered the family and the marriage. How?

- Eve leads, and Adam follows in the first sin. (Genesis 3:6)
- They hide from each other behind "clothing." (Genesis 3:7)
- Adam blames Eve and God for his sin. (Genesis 3:12)
- Cain is jealous of his brother Adam and murders him. (Genesis 4:1-16)
- Polygamy distorts God's family design. (Genesis 4:19)

The story from there is all downhill. In just two chapters God is commissioning Noah and preparing to wipe humanity out with a flood due to the corruption and sin.

The more I study the Bible, the more convinced I am of a theological reality we all live with but don't realize. The things in creation that God intended to most clearly express God's glory after the Fall, experience the most darkness, pain, anguish and brokenness. You don't cry when you drop a paper plate but if you drop Grandma's fine china there are tears in the room. Why? The more valuable something is, the more we feel its loss.

In creation, God's highest glory is embedded in the human soul, human sexuality, and human family. After the Fall, life is lost in death. Sexuality becomes something shameful and we wear clothes to hide our nakedness. And of all the pains we can feel, family and marital strife and brokenness are the deepest. If a friend leaves you, it's painful. If your spouse leaves you, it's shattering. Even after the Fall, these family relationships retain the glory of God's gift and purpose. Family is really important to us!

We love our families. It's instinctual. Their worth is why their brokenness hurts so much. Even a bitter feud with your sister reveals how important family is—why else would you fight about it?

### **Our Future Family**

We are skipping ahead in our timeline to the future. There is a future family that we should all be looking forward to.

*"And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son." (Revelation 21:5-7)*

This future family is the glorious outcome of our adoption by God in salvation. I don't have time to dive deep here but adoption is the gracious act of God to not merely forgive our sins

but to welcome us into his personal family forever. Human adoption uses that language—my forever family. Forever until death. Our real forever family is the family of God. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God." In Romans 8 God bids us to call him *Abba, Daddy*.

This present spiritual status of adoption will become a visible, physical reality in the new heaven and new earth. What a wonderful comfort it should be for the orphan who will have a father forever. The single or the divorced person will experience a perfect marriage forever with Christ. And eternity will be experienced with our perfected brothers and sisters. When it comes to family, for Christians, the best is yet to come.



We live in this in-between time, between the fall of the family and the full redemption and restoration of human family in the family of God.

### **The Present Family - Broken & Blessed**

My encouragement today is for you to see the blessing and curses of your family as part of a bigger story. How?

### **The blessings of family are remnant gifts from creation**

In this way, the experience of human family, especially a Christian family, tells the whole story of redemption. Marital intimacy is a reminder of when everything was great. A fun family movie night when everyone gets along echoes an ancient harmony. Family speaking words of honor, love, and respect sounds and feels noble and meaningful. The child dedication. The piano recital. Walking your daughter down the aisle. Singing together on the family road trip. When family is awesome, it is really awesome. It used to be awesome always.

The fact that it's still here is something we take for granted. God chose to allow family to continue even after sin. Not everything continued—unending life being one example. Many things were lost, but not family. It is a gracious gift from God and we should be thankful

that we even have a family. No matter how broken your family is, have you given thanks that you have one?

### **The brokenness of family is a stark reminder of the Fall**

But then, family also tells the story of the Fall. Every harsh word. Every dissonance in marriage. Every feuding sibling. Every funeral for a family member reminds us that when mankind fell, the family fell with it.

Every family has this brokenness. Jesus' family was broken and his brothers were offended at him and refused to believe him. Even the selected-by-God-virgin-Mary couldn't mother sinful attitudes out of her kids. Some moms should take comfort in that.

Think of the dynamics there. Growing up, Jesus said something or did something. His brother James said, *Who made you God?* Think of the shadow you grow up in when Jesus is your oldest brother. Jesus' family was very imperfect.

So is yours and so is mine. We imagine other peoples' families more wonderful than they really are no matter what they portray on Facebook.

### **God's plan for restoring the family is future, and NOW**

This isn't a message that says, *hang in there, die, then family's great*. No. Jesus' victory over sin at the cross was the breaking of the future kingdom into the here and now. He is restoring what sin broke. Your family today can experience some of what total family redemption will be like in the New Creation. Never perfect. Often not close. But still supernatural and empowered by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

A Christian family is not defined by going to church on Sunday. A Christian family is one that is faithfully living out the gospel in the day-to-day of life. Romans 1:16 says the gospel is "*the power of God for salvation*." What does that mean? It means something changes in how a Christian family relates to one another. What does that look like?

### **How a Christian Family Relates to One Another**

#### **A unifying vision for your family**

Most families don't know why they exist. This leaves them very self-serving, which only adds to the dysfunction. A Christian family is one that has a shared vision. What? As an example, to quote Joshua, "*as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*." (Joshua 24:15) A home where honoring Jesus and making his name and fame great gives a sense of purpose. The new creation family will be *All About Him*.

Why does your family exist? If I was to ask your family, what would they say? Some families go so far as to paint the vision on a wall of the home or have their family values somehow prominent as a reminder. Good idea!

A Christian family has the vision of their family honoring the Lordship of Jesus Christ as a family. A Christian family takes their cues from the roles in marriage and family as outlined in the Bible. A husband and father loves and leads in the marriage and family. A wife supports and submits to her husband as friend, lover, and companion. Children are called to obey their parents. Who wins the Super Bowl tonight if the players on the field don't know

why they are there? Is your family “winning”? Is everyone committed to God’s blueprint for marriage and family? What a difference a unifying vision can make! Talk about it.

### **Brokenness is redeemed by grace and forgiveness**

God is a God of love, grace, and forgiveness. When we are loving, gracious, and forgiving, we are experiencing the new creation family now.

What do most of our family relationships need more than anything? *Grace*. It’s the mark of a Christian who has experienced the grace of God. Grace most often looks like forgiveness. Even our forgiveness is often broken.

I captured this moment in our home between my two daughters. My youngest Madeline had done something wrong against my oldest Kiralee. Kiralee, as the older and wiser sister, was trying to explain to Madeline how Madeline should ask her, Kiralee, for forgiveness. Madeline was struggling to get this as you will see.

*Kiralee: Forgive me. Can you forgive me because...No, you’re gonna forgive...no you are the one who did naughty, so I will say ‘I will forgive you’ and you say whether you forgive me.*

*Madeline: OK.*

*Kiralee: (quietly prompting Madeline) Will you forgive me?*

*Madeline: Yeah*

*Kiralee: No you’re gonna say, ‘Will you forgive me?’*

*Madeline: I forgive you.*

*Kiralee: No, Madeline!*

*Madeline: No! (folds her arms across her chest and pouts)*

*Kiralee: Daddy, Madeline will not forgive me!*

*Steve: Well, should you forgive her for not forgiving you?*

*Kiralee: (Shakes her head “no.”)*

*Steve: Madeline, can you say, ‘Will you forgive me?’*

*Madeline: I forgive you. (Kiralee starts laughing)*

*Steve: Madeline, can you say, ‘Will you forgive me?’*

*Madeline: I forgive you. (Kiralee laughs harder)*

*Steve: Madeline, can you say, ‘Will you forgive me?’*

*Madeline: I forgive you.*

Steve: *Ohhhkaaay.*

Even our forgiveness is broken, right? Madeline refused to acknowledge that she had done something wrong and needed to be forgiven. Tim Keller writes,

*"One of the most basic skills in marriage is the ability to tell the straight, unvarnished truth about what your spouse has done – and then, completely, unself-righteously, and joyously express forgiveness without a shred of superiority, without making the other person feel small."*<sup>2</sup> (Timothy Keller)

It's not leverage against them anymore. It's not brought up against them anymore. It is forgiven. Is your family living out the Fall instead of the future because you are refusing to do your part and forgive? Who suffers? You do. A lack of forgiveness breeds pride, bitterness, anger, and even hate. Why are you stuck in Genesis 3 instead of Revelation 21? Maybe you are failing to live John 20. Jesus was resurrected. He is Lord and Savior and Forgiver. You can get your family relationship out of Genesis 3 but only through the cross, which humbles us and makes forgiving doable. "Father, forgive my debts as I also forgive those indebted to me." Maybe you are like Madeline and you just can't bring yourself to acknowledge that what you have done was wrong and seek forgiveness.

*"What God desires is happy, secure, and fulfilled families where the needs of the individual family members are met but where this fulfillment is not an end in itself; rather, it becomes a vehicle for ministry to others. In this way God uses families to bring glory to himself and to further his kingdom, showing the world what he is like – by the love and unity expressed in a family and by the husband's respect for his wife, the wife's submission to her husband, and the children's obedience (even if imperfect)."*<sup>3</sup> (Köstenberger)

In this way our families are prophetic. They declare truth about God. When grace is on display they make visible the invisible kingdom of God. In some families, just staying married is a prophetic word to the family. How? Why? What? *Our home is a Christian home. Jesus and the gospel is the only explanation.*

In our world today, a faithful marriage and a loving family marked by grace and forgiveness is powerfully influential, even if it's at best, broken AND blessed.

And that's Family Month at Bethel Church. Not crazy busy or crazy distracted. Able to love the annoying family member and the spouse with his or her imperfections. Living present with each other, not living for a glowing screen and pixels. Broken every day but blessed by God who is making all things new.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger, p. 127.