

The Family As Grace Restores It

In the previous chapter we began looking at the **Family As God Intended**. Our initial focus was on **The Family As God Created It**. God's original design for the family involved individuals that were created in the image of God. Thus, they reflected the nature and character of Jesus Christ. The original family experienced God's presence and was filled with His favor and blessing. God gave Adam and Eve a mission to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth.

The Family As God Created It, however, was soon replaced by **The Family As Sin Made It**. Sin entered the world and with its entrance, family life forever changed. Fear came into the family, as did shame, abuse, violence, division, and a host of other destructive practices. Instead of families functioning as loving units filled with God's presence, many became places of heartbreak and pain. Selfishness and sin began to reign instead of God's unconditional love.

Each of our lives has been impacted by the effect of sin in our family. Our view of family life has been distorted. We have a flawed understanding of what it means to be a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a son, or a daughter. We don't have a godly perspective on relationships or intimacy. We carry these misunderstandings into our adult lives and they that affect our ability to form intimate relationships and to build godly families.

God wants to free us from the bondages and heal us from the wounds we experienced as we grew up. He then wants to use us to bring healing to other hurting families in the world. He wants to proclaim a message of freedom and hope through us to those who are bound by their past family sins and experiences.

Jesus declared in John 8:31-32 that, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Knowing the truth about God's plan for the family will set us free from the bondages of our past. God will transform our lives as we hold on to His Word and discover the truth. We need to have our minds "transformed" so that we can discover what God's "good, pleasing, and perfect will" really is regarding godly family living. (Romans 12:2)

God uses four main transforming agents to accomplish this goal of freeing us from error and bringing us into the truth. The first transforming agent is the Word of God. As Jesus said in John chapter eight, the Word of God will lead us into the truth and that truth will set us free. We need to be students of the Word. We need to meditate on the Word and we need to memorize the Word of God. If we do, the Word will correct us, train us and fully equip us build families that glorify Him.

Secondly, the Spirit of God is referred to in Scripture as the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17). The Spirit will take the Word of God and apply it into our lives in specific ways. The Spirit will make the Word of God alive and relevant to our particular situation. The Bible says that when the Spirit comes into our lives he will lead us into all truth. (John 16:13) The Holy Spirit will lead us into the truth about family life as we submit to Him and allow Him to speak to us.

Thirdly, Jesus referred to himself in the Gospel of John as, “The way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) He is not just “a” truth; He is “the” truth. In Christ, we find the truth we need to fulfill our destiny as godly families. Transformation takes place as we enter into a personal and living relationship with Jesus. The more we are conformed to the image of Jesus, the more we are transformed and set free from the bondages of our past.

Finally, God uses the people of God to speak truth into our lives and to help us see some of our family and cultural bondages. People outside our family circle have a more objective view of our family and its impact on our lives than we do. The Scripture tells us that wise people listen to counsel. We will be successful in life when we listen to the input of others. (Proverbs 11:14, Proverbs 19:20) It is hard to see clearly when we are receiving input only from those who have the same perspective as we do. It is helpful to get advice and input from people who have had broader experiences and see things from a different perspective.

Restoration in our families will come as we allow the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Son of God, and the people of God to impact our lives. We will know the truth and the truth will set us free from **The Family As Sin Made It**. Knowing the truth will transfer us into **The Family As Grace Restores It**. Lets turn your hearts to discover what the family looks like as God’s grace restores it.

The Family As Grace Restores It

The good news is that God wants to restore family life! He has not left us hopelessly victims of **The Family As Sin Made It**. He has provided an answer and has given us a remedy for the breakdown of the family. He has poured out His Grace upon us so that our families can be restored. One of the most powerful and encouraging messages in the Bible is that God is a God of restoration. He not only wants to restore individuals to their original design and destiny, He also wants to restore broken families to their destiny. He wants to heal nations by healing the families in those nations. Restoration of nations begins with the restoration of families.

Let’s look at Malachi 4:5-6. These prophetic verses should stir your faith and give you great hope for what God wants to do in the days ahead.

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

This Scripture indicates that in the last days before the “day of the Lord” comes, God is going to release a ministry that will focus on family restoration. Hearts of fathers will turn back to their children and hearts of children will turn back to their father as a result of this emphasis. Restoration of the family is the key for a nation to avoid being struck with a “curse.”

The family is the basic building block of society. If the family is healthy a nation will prosper. However, when the family breaks down, a nation breaks down, as well. The ingredients that hold the family together are the very same ingredients that hold communities and societies together. The family is the socializing agent in a culture and it plays a key role in preparing children to

become functioning members of the larger community. It is in their families that children learn language skills. Children learn proper manners and social customs in their families. Their worldview is formed in the family and many of their basic values are established as they grow up in their families.

The family models what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. The family defines the role of father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, grandparent, aunt, uncle, and cousin. These definitions may be contrary to what God originally designed, but, nevertheless, the family defines these roles for each child as he or she grows up. The family is where relationship skills are developed and where we learn various communicate skills (good and bad). The family is where we learn how to deal with conflict (positively or negatively). If family members disrespected one another and communicated in destructive ways, children carry these patterns with them into the families that they eventually establish.

Many of the social “curses” in a nation can be traced back to the breakdown of the family. Poverty, crime, violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, and sexual immorality often have their roots in the breakdown of the family. If we are going to reach a nation then we must reach the families of that nation. One prominent Christian leader once said, “If we reach the family, we reach the world.” Family restoration is a key to evangelism and to bringing the Gospel to the unreached nations of the world.

Let’s look at a story that illustrates the link between the breakdown of the family and the impact it makes in the life of an individual. This story also demonstrates that, when you “turn your heart back to your father,” healing and restoration takes place.

A young woman, named **Ruth**, turned her heart away from her father during her teen years and become very bitter towards him. He was a very demanding person and was unreasonable in many ways. He lacked good communication skills and was insensitive to **Ruth’s** needs and desires. Increasingly, the relationship between **Ruth** and her father broke down and she eventually rejected him. She turned her heart away from her father and began to live a life of rebellion.

She became sexually involved with men and finally moved in with a young man and they lived together for several years without being married. They were involved in drugs, drinking, immoral activities, rebellion, occult practices and a lifestyle of spiritual darkness. **Ruth’s** life could be characterized by the story of the prodigal in Luke 15. She was lost and living in the pigpen of sin and selfishness.

Ruth and her boyfriend were invited to attend a Christian family camp being held near to where they lived. They agreed to come and while they were there the Holy Spirit began to draw **Ruth** back to her Christian heritage. At the conclusion of one of the evening meetings, she went forward for prayer and personal ministry. As I and some other leaders of this ministry prayed for her, one of the leaders was prompted by the Holy Spirit to ask her the following question, “Are you willing to forgive your father?”

I was a young leader at the time and I thought this question did not address the really “big”

issues in this woman's life. It seemed to me that we needed to focus on the destructive choices she had made. She was living an immoral lifestyle, she was struggling with drugs and alcohol, and she was involved in occult practices. However, as soon as that question was asked, **Ruth** broke down and wept uncontrollably for several minutes. The Holy Spirit had touched the core issue in her heart. The breakdown with her father was the key to her other problems. It had opened the door of her life to the sinful lifestyle she was now living.

Turning her heart back to her father was the key for her personal restoration. It led to deliverance from the bondage of sin in her life. She willingly forgave her father and let go of the bitterness and resentment that had filled her heart for many years. That evening was a powerful time of deliverance and transformation for **Ruth**. It was the beginning of her road to recovery and restoration

She was eventually reconciled to her father and turned away from the lifestyle that had bound her for many years. She and the man she was living with both gave their lives to the Lord and they repented of the way they had been living. After some input and counseling from me and other Christian friends, they married one another and began to live for the Lord. They gave up their drugs, their alcohol, their occult activities and their immoral lifestyle. **Ruth's** story is a powerful illustration of the important link between family restoration and individual restoration.

Romans 5:20 tells us that, "where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Even though sin brings a destructive and devastating impact on individuals and families, God's grace is greater and can overcome the consequences of sin.

Restoring the Image of Christ

The beginning place for family restoration is in the lives of the individual members of the family. Fallen and unregenerate humanity will produce fallen and unregenerate families. God wants to restore the image of Christ in every family member, including, husbands, wives, parents, children, and grandparents. Herein lays the hope for change and transformation. The family, as a whole, will be transformed and restored to God's original intention and purpose as each individual yields his or her life to God.

Guess whom God wants to begin with? YOU! The focus is not on your parents, your husband, your wife or your children. The starting point for family restoration is with you. You don't have to wait for your parents to change before you can change. God is able to restore you, even if no one else in your family responds to God's grace. You will not take the steps you need to take personally as long as your focus is on the other members of your family.

A mother came for counseling for her 16-year old son who had dropped out of school and was living on the streets. She was told to work on changing herself during her counseling sessions. She committed herself to this, repenting before God and her family. She fasted for 40 days, began to study good parenting skills, and changed her way of being a mother and wife. The son came back home and wanted to go to school again. A few months ago he came to the Lord and was baptized and is now behaving as a very responsible young man.

As soon as you begin to embrace your personal responsibility for change, God will begin to

influence and change the other members of your family, as well. Personal transformation in the life of one family member will lead to personal transformation in the lives of other family members. Your transformation will have a positive impact on your marriage and on the rest of your family. It is important to remember is that change is a process, and processes take time. It is important to allow the Holy Spirit time to work His salvation process in the lives of your family and friends.

I grew up in a religious home, but no one in my family had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I was the first-born child in my family and my parents considered me a model son. I lived an outwardly moral life and, from all appearances, I respected and obeyed my parents. I worked for my father, who ran a small business that provided for the needs of the family. My father took pride in his work and had a very high standard for his business and for himself. He wanted things done right and he would not accept anything less than the very best from either himself or me.

He often required me to repeat my work because it did not meet with his approval the first time it was done. My father also kept a very tight control on my personal life and tried to protect me from falling into a life of moral looseness and sin. I began to react to my father's demanding attitude and felt like I could never please him or live up to his expectations.

An attitude of resentment and criticalness toward my father grew inside my heart. Most of the time these attitudes just simmered inside my heart and were not expressed outwardly. However, increasingly, I began to react to my father and say things that were hurtful and disrespectful. Our relationship began to suffer as a result of these outbursts and there was regular tension between us during my teenage years.

When I was 19, a friend of mine introduced me to Jesus Christ and my life began to change. On one occasion after I had become a Christian, my father and I were traveling together and my father made a decision that cost us a lot of time and inconvenience. I tried unsuccessfully to convince my father to change his mind, but he was adamant and unmoved. Finally, I reacted to him with an outburst of anger and expressed my frustration to my father verbally. Following my outburst we continued traveling together in silence for several minutes.

The Holy Spirit, however, was convicting me that this response to my father was wrong and that, as a Christian, it was not right to speak to him in this way. I began quietly to repent before the Lord about my attitudes and my outburst to my father. Finally, after several minutes, I began to reach out to my dad and sought to be reconciled with him. That step was a turning point in our relationship and opened the door for the two of us to communicate in ways we had never done previously. Over time, my father committed his life to Jesus Christ and so did the other members of my family. In fact, my entire family was transformed through my obedience to the Lord and through my prayers.

As I mentioned previously, Colossians 1:15 tells us that, "He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God..." Hebrews 1:3 states that He is "The exact representation of His nature." The nature and character of Jesus Christ is the standard for the Christian husband, wife, son, daughter and every other family member. The Bible tells us that when we accept Christ we become a "new creation" and that old things pass away and new things come into our lives. (II Corinthians

5:17) Destructive communication patterns and controlling family rules are some of the old things that pass away as Jesus Christ changes us and fills us with new ways of relating in our families.

The Bible says that we are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10) God begins to work on individual family members to fashion and form them, so they can walk in the “good works” that He intended for them from the beginning of creation. Paul emphatically states in Romans 8:29 that God’s purpose is that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. God’s purpose in redemption has always been to conform us to the image of His Son.

Restoring God’s Blessing

Jesus said that He came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). God wants us to have abundant and overflowing family life. He doesn’t want us to just exist and barely make it in life; He wants us to experience His favor and blessing in an overflowing way. He delights in showing loving kindness to thousands (Exodus 20:6) and His desire for His people is to make them the “Head and not the tail.” (Deuteronomy 28:13)

Tragically, however, some of us grew up in homes that were not filled with blessing, favor and abundant living. Some of us look back on our childhood and it seems like years of our lives were either lost or ruined. We feel like we are damaged and handicapped in our ability to form intimate relationships with others. We are plagued with painful memories from our past and have developed destructive habits in response to the abuse we experienced at home. It’s easy to become discouraged and hopeless if this has been your experience.

A young woman went through a family ministry training program in her church. There she shared her tragic experience of how she had been raped and violated by her brothers in her family when she was a young girl and teenager. Because she was a girl, she was considered less valuable, and the horrific acts done to her held little consequences. The road back to reality has been difficult for her. However, because of her persistence in discovering how much God loves her, she is now able to look at her family in a different way. Learning that she is not responsible for another person’s behavior, especially in light of what has happened to her has been a great revelation.

She now has the freedom to be who God intended for her to be. It has been a very long process for this young woman. She is an adult and is readjusting her perspective about her past circumstances. This young woman is slowly being restored in her relationship to God and to other relationships in her life.

The road to recovery from lost innocence has been a long one. The pain that was inflicted is deep and does not heal overnight. The process to restoration began by discovering that God is a God of Grace and Truth. (John 1:14) God accepts us no matter who we are or what has happened to us. His love is unconditional.

One of the most encouraging scriptures for those struggling with a tragic childhood is found in the book of Joel in chapter 2 and verse 25. Israel had just gone through a season of destruction and devastation at the hands of enemy armies. The destruction was so complete it was likened to

a swarm of locust coming and eating up everything in its path. After such a shocking season of loss the Lord promised in verse 25 that He would “make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten....” In other words, the Lord is saying that He will give back what was lost and make up for those lost years. God is a God of restoration!

He wants to give you a future and a hope no matter how devastating or destructive your past life has been. You are not damaged beyond repair with no hope for the future. God’s promise to you and to all of us is that we can be restored. Ruined years of our lives can be recovered and healed. Lord promises to even care for children whose parents forsake them.

“Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” (Psalm 27:10)

He promises to pour out His love upon you and be a father to you. He is committed to bless you and to cause His grace to abound in every area of your life where sin manifests itself. (Romans 5:20)

My wife, Violet, grew up in a home where there was a lot of pain and conflict. Her mother suffered from mental illness and was hospitalized for several weeks when Violet was a teenager. As the oldest child, Violet had to step in and care for her younger brothers and sisters when her mother could no longer function in the family. When Violet’s mother returned home from the hospital she was still unable to function normally. A wall of tension and conflict developed between the two of them. The relationship between the two of them broke down and the distance between them deepened.

Violet eventually left home and moved away from the farming community where her family lived and pursued a new life as a nurse in a large city. Violet’s aunt led her to the Lord when she was a small child and she maintained her relationship with the Lord into her adult years. However, during a season of personal spiritual renewal, the Lord started Violet on a new journey of restoration and healing. God began to restore Violet personally and He began to release her from the painful memories of those years when her mother suffered from mental illness.

Violet reached out to her mother again, and the two of them began the process of restoring. At first there was still a lot of tension and conflict in their interactions, but over time the Lord was able to break down the barriers between Violet and her mother. The mother/daughter relationship that had not been there in previous years was healed and restored. They laughed together, cried together and spent many hours sharing and talking on the phone with one another.

Violet was able to pray with her mother and to share God’s love with her in many meaningful ways during the later years of her mother’s life. The Lord gave back what had been lost and He made up for those lost years in Violet’s life. Violet was even able to be at her mother’s bedside when her mother passed away. She was there comforting her, singing hymns to her, and expressing God’s love to mother in her dying moments. God had faithfully heard her prayers and poured out His blessing upon their relationship.

Restoring Family Unity

Many families have developed walls and barriers that separate family members from one

another. There is a history of resentment and bitterness keeping people apart. Such walls destroy unity and rob families of God's blessing and favor. Jesus came to break down such walls of hostility and to reconcile alienated individuals.

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity...” (Ephesians 2:13-18)

These walls of hostility in families can be thick and tall. They are not easily removed and it takes the power of the cross to break them down. Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 5:18-19 that God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation begins with restoration of our relationship with God and then it expands to restoration of our relationships in the family.

John was a very committed and hardened unbeliever. He had no time for God and he had rejected the pleas of his Christian mother to give his life to Jesus. Instead, he turned his heart toward making money and acquiring material possessions for himself. He became quite successful in his business ventures and had no time in his life for God or his family.

His teenage daughter, however, became a believer and began attending Christian meetings that were held in the city where they lived. She started to grow in her relationship with the Lord and began praying for her father and the other members of her family. The church she was attending hosted a special weekend conference that my wife and I spoke at and she invited her whole family to attend these meetings. During the final meeting on the last day of the conference an appeal went out for people to repent and give their lives to Jesus. The Holy Spirit moved on **John's** hardened heart and both he and his wife responded to the invitation by giving their lives to Christ. They made a public confession of their sins and repented of their past way of living.

Within two days of his conversion, the Holy Spirit convicted **John** regarding his relationship with one of his brothers. **John** had not talked with this brother for over two years because of some sharp past disagreements. Now, however, he knew that he needed to be reconciled with his brother, so he contacted him and asked forgiveness for his stubbornness and pride. As he humbled himself, the two of them were restored after two long years of separation and hostility.

Three days after his conversion, **John** sought to restore his relationship with his god-fearing mother. His parents lived in a small farming village in the mountainous region not too far from the city where **John** and his family now lived. The church leaders drove **John**, his wife, and us where his parents lived. We found his mother and father working in their fields just outside their village.

He briefly shared with his mother the good news that her prayers had been answered and that he had repented of his sins and given his life to Jesus Christ. His mother was overwhelmed with joy upon hearing her son's testimony. She kissed him over and over, as she gave thanks to the Lord for this marvelous answer to prayer. She kissed and hugged us, as well, and insisted that we all come to her home in the village for a meal in honor of this joyous event. Her prodigal son had returned home and it was time to celebrate!

Later that night we sat down in the courtyard of their farmhouse with the entire family for a

joyous meal together. We all thanked the Lord for His mercy and grace. God had finally restored this family that had been torn apart by strife and division for many years.

Restoring God's Presence

God's grace restores the family as a place where He is honored and where His presence is revealed. Sin drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden and away from the presence of the Lord. Many of us grew up in homes where God was absent. He was not honored, nor was He given His rightful place. A restored family will be God-centered and there will be a noticeable sense of His presence in every aspect of their life together.

The Bible tells us that God wants to live with us and walk in our midst. He wants us to separate ourselves from every defiling thing so that He can be our God and we can be His people. Our families are to be a dwelling place for the Lord.

“For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord, touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’” (II Corinthians 6:16-18)

Restoring Biblical Husband/Wife Relationships

God wants to restore a biblical understanding of the roles of men and women in the family. Many men have dominated, controlled and abused their wives and children. They have not been models of Christ's love and servant leadership. Rather they have been models of ungodly leadership ruling their families with harshness and force. Many women have embraced the idea that submission means they have to obey their husbands without question, even when to do so would mean violating their conscience and going against the clear teachings of Scripture. Others have rejected the concept of submission altogether and see it as demeaning and destructive.

The apostle Paul presents a picture to us in Ephesians chapter five of the husband/wife relationship being a model of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The husband is to be an example of servant leadership to his wife and she is to be an example of a loving helper to her husband. They are to walk together in a respectful unity with one another as they raise their children and serve the Lord together as a family.

This passage reveals the high calling and esteemed place that God has given marriage. The way a husband treats his wife is to be a demonstration of the way Christ loves the Church. The way a wife responds to her husband is to be a demonstration of how God's people are to relate to the Lord. If husbands abuse their wives and misuse their positions of leadership in the home they present a distorted model of Christ's love and leadership.

Is it any wonder that the devil attacks the marriage relationship and seeks to distort this picture of God's relationship with His people? Marriage has a high and sacred calling. A husband and wife have the awesome privilege of presenting a concrete demonstration of the Kingdom of God through how they relate to one another. This is a mystery, as the apostle Paul states in Ephesians 5:32.

In Matthew chapter twenty, verses twenty to twenty eight, the mother of two of the disciples, James and John, came to Jesus with a request. She wanted her sons to occupy positions of authority in the coming kingdom that Jesus was ushering in. When the ten other disciples heard about this request they were very angry. They all had their eyes on these coveted positions and they looked forward to the power and prestige that would come with them.

Jesus used this occasion to instruct the disciples about a different kind of leadership in his kingdom. This kind of leadership must begin in the home. Husbands and fathers need to embrace a new model of leadership if they are going to demonstrate Christ's love to their wives and children. Non-Christian leaders focus on ruling over people and want others to serve them. They seek positions of authority because it gives them power and privileges.

Jesus, however, did not come to be served by others but rather to serve and to give His life as a ransom. He was service-minded instead of position-minded. This kind of mindset needs to be embraced by husbands if they are to lead their families as Christ leads the Church. Kingdom leadership involves a radically different mindset in regard to how a man is to be the head of his family.

Restoring Our Understanding Of Covenant

The God of the Bible is a covenant-keeping God. Both the Old and New Testament demonstrate over and over again that God keeps his word and that He is faithful to His commitments. Our understanding of covenant is central to our understanding of the Kingdom of God. Marriage in the Bible is built upon this covenant understanding. When a couple exchanges vows they are pledging to be faithful to one another until they are separated by death.

There are three elements to the marriage covenant that need to be restored in our understanding. First of all, marriage is a covenant between the husband and the wife. As we mentioned, they are vowing to one another that they will be faithful all the days of their lives. They pledge to remain committed in good times and bad times, in health and in sickness, in riches and in poverty. They promise to stay together even when things are at their worst. This understanding is central to having a biblical marriage covenant.

Secondly, marriage is a covenant between the couple and the Lord. They are not just pledging their faithfulness to one another, they are pledging their faithfulness before the Lord. They are accountable to Him and are acknowledging that He is the author of the marriage union. They are also acknowledging that they need His grace and blessing in order to live out these vows and to be faithful to one another. He is the third strand of the three-strand cord that Solomon talks about in the book of Ecclesiastics.

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastics 4:12)

Finally, marriage is a covenant between the couple, their family and the supporting community. They pledge to be faithful to one another in the presence of human witnesses, in addition to their pledge to be faithful in the presence of God. Marriage is also a social institution and it is the

building block of the supporting community. The society has a vested interest in the success of each marriage. If a marriage fails, the entire supportive community feels the effects of the failure. As the Bible says, if one suffers we all suffer. The death of a family is the death of a small civilization.

Restoring The Family's Destiny

God designed the family to play a key role in bringing the Gospel to the nations of the world. Restoring families is not just so that people can enjoy happy and peaceful homes. A restored family is to fulfill its God-given purpose and mission. The call to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) applies to families, as well as, to individuals. God calls entire families to serve and obey Him.

When Abraham went out in obedience to the call of God upon his life, his entire household went with him. The great commission in Matthew 24:18-19 should be taken seriously by families, as well as, by individuals. There is a powerful dynamic set in motion when an entire family rises up and responds to the call of God by declaring that they are going to live fully for the Lord

Joshua stood before all Israel and declared, "As for Me and my House, we will serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:15)

He recognized that every family had to make a decision as to whom they would serve. Are you going to serve the gods of your forefathers? Are you going to serve the gods of the land you are living in? Who will you serve? That was Joshua's challenge to the rest of Israel. He had made his decision and thus, he declared boldly that he and his family were going to serve the Lord. Each one of us has to make the same decision today. Joshua recognized his family's destiny to serve the Lord and he called them to embrace that destiny.

Violet and I met each other at a university where I was pursuing a degree in engineering. We were both committed to the Lord and quickly recognized that the Lord was bringing us together for a life-long partnership in marriage. A year and a half after we met each other we were joined together in a Christian marriage ceremony. We knew that God had a destiny for us as a couple, and we wanted to proclaim that destiny to the Lord and to those attending our wedding ceremony. So, this Scripture became the theme of our wedding and then it became the mission statement for our marriage. Within a year of our marriage, we both left our professions and committed ourselves to full time missionary service. We have faithfully served the Lord together for over 45 years.

Fighting For The Family

Finally, I want to leave with you the challenge that Nehemiah gave the Israelites when they were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. They were at a critical moment in their history and they were facing threats from powerful and determined enemies. It appeared that enemy forces would attack them and force them to stop building the wall they had been working on with such diligence. In the midst of this bleak situation Nehemiah stood up and challenged them with these words.

"...Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your

brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” Nehemiah 4:14

Nehemiah recognized that they were in the midst of a significant battle and that the completion of the task was going to require great resolve and perseverance. He encouraged the people to keep their focus in the right place and not to be overwhelmed by what they were facing. His words are applicable to situations we face when we seek to bring restoration to our own families and to the families around us. There are many forces fighting against families and at times it looks like those forces are going to prevail. It is easy to lose our perspective and become focused only on the size of the problem or the strength of those who are attacking us.

David is another example of someone who kept his eyes on the Lord and was not impressed with the size of the giant he was facing. The rest of Israel’s army was paralyzed by the size and strength of Goliath. They could describe in great detail everything about Goliath, including his size, his armor, his weapons, and his experience. David, however, looked beyond Goliath and saw the greatness of the God he loved and trusted. He took courage from knowing God was able to defeat this giant, even as he had defeated the lion and the bear in previous occasions in David’s life.

Nehemiah and David are examples that encourage us to keep our eyes on the Lord. Don’t let the threats and the actions of your enemies distract or discourage you. Don’t look at the size or the power of the enemy. Keep your focus on the Lord and remember who He is. He is GREAT and AWESOME. Let Him inspire you and empower you to fight for your family and for the families of others. It is a fight worth fighting and it is a fight that will surely be won by the grace and power of God.

In these first two chapters we have looked at the biblical model of family from the perspective of what God originally intended. We have viewed this issue from the perspective of The Family As God Created It, The Family As Sin Made It and The Family As Grace Restores It.

In response to what you have read please reflect on what God has been speaking to you. Consider your own family and examine where you have come from. Ask God to heal you and to restore you from the wounds of your childhood. Claim the promise from Joel that God wants to restore the lost years of your life. Ask Him to give you a vision of what He wants to do in your family and trust Him to use you to bring a message of hope and restoration to the hurting families around you.

Application Prayer

Father, I bring to you the wounds of my childhood. Your heart was broken when my heart was broken. You wept when I wept. You saw every painful and abusive event that took place in my childhood. You were with me, even though I didn’t realize it at the time. You love me, in spite of what happened to me as a child.

I bring to you the years of my life that were damaged and ruined. I bring to you every memory I have that is painful and that needs to be healed. I ask you to heal me and to set me free from

those memories. You came to set captives free and to heal the broken-hearted. I trust you to set me free and to heal my broken heart.

I forgive those who hurt me and failed me in the past, especially my mother and my father. Please forgive them, Lord. They did not know how deeply their words and actions hurt me. I let go of all resentment and bitterness I have had in my heart toward them. I forgive them fully and I release them completely.

I receive your healing love and I trust you to restore the years that were lost. Thank you for your promise of restoration. In Jesus Name! Amen