



What About . . .

Christian Families

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian families face enormous pressures in our world today. It is important that they have a good understanding of what God intends for the family and how they best can respond to the many challenges that confront them.

What does God say about families in His Word, the Bible?

In the beginning, God created men and women to live together with one another as husbands and wives, and through their marriages to bring children into the world. We read in Gen. 2:22–24: “The Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed the divine institution of marriage during his earthly ministry (Matt. 19:5).

Through the Apostle Paul, the Lord revealed that Christian husbands and wives are to love and serve one another, modeling before the world the love Christ has for His bride, the church. In Ephesians 5, St. Paul wrote: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior.

“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy. . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of His body.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph. 5:21–33).

In this powerful description of marriage, there is no room for husbands to “lord it over” their wives, nor for wives to disregard their husband’s role of “headship” in the home. The key is mutual submission to and love for one another, modeled after Christ’s love for the church, and the church’s submission to Christ her Lord.

Parents are to provide discipline to their children with love and compassion, doing what is best for their children. We read in Eph. 6:4: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” And children are to honor and obey their parents, as the Lord commands, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’ ‘Honor your father and your mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Eph. 6:1–3).

What are some of the cultural trends impacting families?

As we review what the Bible has to say about families, we quickly realize how far many of our cultural trends are from God’s will for families.

Christian families are bombarded by signals which contradict God’s Word. Popular culture—through movies, music, magazines, books and especially television—inundates us with wrong messages. The signal is sent that a sexual relationship outside of marriage, or before marriage, is perfectly natural, or that even a homosexual lifestyle is merely an alternative to “traditional” marriage. Children are led to believe that being disobedient and disrespectful to parents is normal, even amusing, or that the elderly are to be viewed as a burden, or subjects for humor. So much of popular culture appeals to humanity’s most sinful inclinations, and encourages them in a barrage of images and words.

The pressure on our children—particularly our teenagers—to do whatever is necessary to be “popular” among their friends is sometimes difficult for parents to understand and appreciate. Our young people are often caught up in destructive lifestyles and behaviors, encouraged by popular music, which encourages rebelliousness and disdain for life and the dignity of their fellow human beings. As our teenagers grow older, they are given the impression that “living together” without marriage is perfectly acceptable. How tragic

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it is when their own families do nothing to resist this behavior!

Men in our culture are encouraged to indulge their lusts and selfish desires. So little respect or attention is given to the man who wishes to be a faithful husband or father. How many children today grow up without a loving and responsible father in the home? The horrendous consequences of this trend will only become greater as we move into the future.

Women too are pressured to take a dim view of what God has given them. They are pressured to view childbearing as less than fulfilling, something perhaps only to be tolerated, and not to be enjoyed as a gift from God. They too face temptations to disregard God's expectations for them when they are wives and mothers, or to view marriage as something to be abandoned when it becomes inconvenient for them.

Yes, we surely do recognize that popular cultural trends often convey messages totally contrary to our Lord's Word and His will for Christian families. This needs to be recognized and resisted.

What can a Christian family do to deal with the challenges of our day?

Openly facing the issues is the first step. Pretending that problems do not exist will certainly not help. Nor will it do for a family simply to hope that they will not be faced with problems. Ignoring reality will not make it go away.

It is crucial for Christian parents to spend both quality and quantity time with their children. Reading with their young children, discussing the questions they have and being there to support and encourage them is extremely important.

Husbands and wives need to take time out of busy and hectic schedules to simply talk to one another, discussing the needs they have and the problems they are experiencing, working together to grow in their love for one another, and for their children.

More importantly, Christians need to pray for the Lord's blessing on their marriages and families, asking God to forgive them for their sins and failures as parents and spouses, and then turning to the Lord's mercy through their Savior Jesus Christ.

Christian families need to make every-Sunday worship an absolute priority. As families are gathered by God around His Word and Sacraments, they receive forgiveness, life and salvation—the strength they need to cope with the challenges of daily life.

What role do daily devotions have in the life of the Christian family?

One of the most important things a family can do is spend

time together in the Word of God.

Key ingredients for the family's devotional time are the Scriptures, the hymnal and the Small Catechism. These are excellent resources for meaningful time together in the Word of God.

Parents should begin reading and reciting the chief parts of the Small Catechism with their children when they are very young, helping them learn the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, and then working on the explanations, building as time goes on.

Parents need to discuss their faith with their children, pray with them and encourage their children in love to do what is right, not hesitating to say "no" when necessary. And always, parents will want to be for their children a model of the Heavenly Father's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How can parents help their children resist temptations?

Parents often overlook the very important role they play simply by the way they themselves handle life. A parent can provide an important role model for his or her children.

If a man constantly displays a harsh and fierce temper at home, uses foul language and acts disrespectfully toward his wife, it is little wonder why his son would grow up with similar attitudes and behaviors. If a woman constantly gripes and points out every fault, again, there is little surprise when her children do the same when they grow up.

Christian parents need to model the faith, both to their children and others around them. St. Paul wrote that a Christian marriage is to be an image of Christ's love for the church. This is both an awesome responsibility and a joyous privilege.

May God bless our families richly with His loving mercy, strengthening them as they seek to love one another and serve their Lord and Savior.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
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