

A HAPPY FAMILY IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ October 2, 2016



² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³ “What did Moses command you?” he replied. ⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” ⁵ “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ ⁹ So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” ¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” ¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:2-16)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

There's a push being made today in our country to have happy and successful families. Some of it is in response to the traditional family structure disintegrating. Some of it is the new millennial generation embarking on the parenting adventure for the first time. Some of it is in response to the 50% divorce rate in our country. People are trying to find out what works, what makes a couple or a family stay together and be happy.

And so you have groups like the Mormons promoting their religion by saying to have a happy family you need to be Mormon. You have websites like WebMD making top ten (or in this case top 15) secrets to a happy family. Much like everything else in our world, it is easy to become overwhelmed by all the information out there. It sounds good in theory, but then you take a look at your own family, and wonder, could we ever be like that? Could we ever be like those perfect TV families you see?

The truth is “yes.” A HAPPY FAMILY IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK. A happy family doesn't require 15 secrets, but in reality, only three. They are three that Jesus talked about in the gospel for this morning. These three truths to a happy family are good to put into practice if you have a family, or for encouraging those who have families. These three truths are:

1. Love your spouse
2. Love your kids
3. Love your Lord

The gospel writer Mark records for us the events that led Jesus to speak so highly of families. And remember where we've come from. Jesus has been teaching his disciples in the northern part of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee, and now he has begun his long and winding road south to Jerusalem where he would be handed over to his enemies. He had told his disciples on several occasions this was going to happen. But they responded in defiance, in disbelief, and in ignorance. They just didn't want to believe this would happen to Jesus.

As Jesus began to get closer to Jerusalem, some Pharisees, members of one of the religious sects of the Jews, approached him for one very specific reason. They did not come to learn from him, they came to test him. They wanted to discredit him, they wanted to get back at him. It was the last time Jesus was in Judea, he had accused them of having a faulty view of marriage. So they pick it right back up again. **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** Like all of the Pharisees traps, they wanted to catch Jesus in his words. If he said it isn't lawful for a man to divorce his wife, they could've pointed to the law of Moses, if he said it was lawful, they would have accused him of being against marriage.

But instead of just saying, "no it's not lawful for a man to divorce his wife," he took them back to the real issue. Jesus knew as well as the Pharisees, that Moses, the man who led Israel through the wilderness after they had left Egypt, had written a procedure for divorce. But instead of just accepting Moses' words, he said, **"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you that law."** Moses never commanded divorce, or even advocated for it, but rather he tolerated it. It was a toleration that helped control what otherwise would have been a chaotic camp. The Israelites of Moses' time had hard hearts, meaning, they didn't and wouldn't listen to what God said, just like the Pharisees had hardened hearts over the words of Jesus.

But Jesus didn't just leave them with the words of Moses, but rather he took them back to the words of God, which Moses happened to record in the book of Genesis. **"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."** Jesus was of course talking about Adam and Eve, the first two humans created by God, and joined by God in the first marriage. You might say that Adam and Eve had no choice in whom they married, but that doesn't minimize the truth – that God intended marriage to be the life-long partnership between man and woman, and anyone not wanting to hear that is in danger of a hardened heart.

It is this lifelong partnership that is the first building block to having a happy family. Love your spouse. We live in a world where this doesn't always happen. We can see the obvious examples of people remaining together only as long as they both shall love, the 50% divorce rate in our country, the single parents raising children. But then there are also the less spoken about examples. The times when the husband yells at the wife for spending too much, the times when the wife is belittling her husband who's not a good provider, the selfish pettiness that I would imagine can flare up in even the most Christian of marriages. So love your spouse is harder than it sounds. Love your spouse is more than just a feeling you have, love your spouse is an action that takes work. It doesn't take a Christian to realize that the plan God laid out in Genesis is pleasing not only to God, but can make for a happy family.

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So love your spouse is the first building block for a happy family. The second is very similar, love your children. We see an example of this in the latter half of our gospel for this morning as parents were bringing their kids to Jesus to have him bless them. This is one way they were showing that they loved their kids, they were bringing them to Jesus.

Unfortunately, the disciples' weren't as eager to have Jesus waste his time with little children, Jesus was far too busy for that. This is where the disciples hearts were a little hardened, and here's the part in this gospel account where the disciples are rebuked for their behavior. **"When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'"** In this simple example, Jesus shows that he was not above talking with or hanging out with children, but rather just the opposite, he took time for them.

Parents today have a wonderful gift from God in the form of their children, and this second building block to a happy family is to love your kids. To show love not only in bringing them to Jesus – bringing them to church and Sunday School, reading them Bible stories, but loving them also like Jesus loved them – by taking the time for them and loving them. It's so easy in our busy lives for families to spend little to no time together. It's so easy (and I can attest), to get frustrated at your little kids when they ask you for milk right after you've sat down to dinner, to get angry when they just won't listen, or be selfish by spending time away from them. And yet God says this second building block to a happy family is to love your kids.

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Now unfortunately, all too many sermons would end right there. Two building blocks for a happy family is to love your spouse, and to love your kids. But just saying that isn't enough. Because if you're anything like me, I want to do that, but then there's so many times that I fail. Which is why the third building block to a happy family is so important. It's so important because it gives us the fuel with which to love our spouse and love our children. It gives us the charge to get through the day and get through the week. That third building block to a happy family is to love your Lord.

No, this isn't another imperative command like love your spouse or love your kids, it's the reason we have for loving the Lord. Jesus closes our gospel this morning with the words, **"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** In other words, he was speaking against both the Pharisees and his disciples, who had their moments of stubbornness or hard hearts. He is speaking these words to us for those times we have hardened our hearts. Instead of having a hardened heart, have a believing and trusting heart. But believing and trusting in what?

Believing and trusting in what Jesus came to do and did do. You see, I could talk to you all day about your needing to love your spouse and needing to love your kids as the building blocks to a happy family, but that's not all it takes, because there will always be those times when our families are not happy, where are families are a mess, where our families are chaotic, and it can be easy for us to get depressed, it can be easy for us to become overwhelmed. And when that happens where do you turn?

You turn to your Lord. You turn to your heavenly Father, who watches over you and knows everything that goes on in your life, both your struggles and your sins, and despite all of that says "I love you." You turn to your brother, Jesus Christ, who gave everything up for you. Who said the only way we can have a happy family is by me taking away all of that pain, all of that anger, all of that selfishness, and divorcing it from you on the cross. You see, God not only tells you how to have a happy family, he made us part of his happy family. It is a family that we are a part of right here and right now. It's a family that we get to enjoy when we come to worship in God's house as members of his family.

God making us a part of his happy family is the fuel we need to go out and love our spouse. God making us part of his happy family is the charge we need to get through another week loving our kids. God making us part of his happy family, is the way that a single or widowed person can not only feel included, but also is motivated to encourage others in the earthly families God has blessed them with. This is why A HAPPY FAMILY IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

We spend so much time trying to achieve the perfect family, but sometimes we're quick to forget that as believers we are already a part of a perfect family, God's family. It is being part of God's family, with the perfect model he sets that encourages us to share that with our earthly families around us. We do that when we love our spouse, love our children, and love our Lord. Amen.