

Lesson 8 | January 22, 2023

Protecting the Christian Family

Study Text: Proverbs 23:31–35; Matthew 10:37–39; Mark 3:31–35; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Ephesians 5:1–5, 15–18

Central Truth: The Bible provides guidance to instruct and protect the family.

Key Verse: Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee (KJV).

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will identify challenges facing Christian families.
- Students will desire biblical guidance for growing Christian families.
- Students will incorporate biblical guidance in overcoming challenges facing Christian families.

Introducing the Study

Say: Most Christian parents would say their greatest desire for their children is that they grow up to love and serve the Lord. This outcome will not come about by accident. Christian parents need to recognize challenges facing their families and find biblical guidance to overcome them.

Opening Activity—Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

Ask. What advice (good or bad) did your parents, grandparents, or other adults share with you when you were younger? Ask three or four volunteers to share advice they received. After each person shares, have the class vote “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” on whether they consider this good advice.

Say: Human wisdom can be helpful in raising a family, but Christians recognize that godly wisdom for life is found in God’s Word. Today we are going to examine guidance from the Bible for raising godly children and protecting them from ungodly influences. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The most important task of parents is to protect their children from harm. Unfortunately, too many parents in our culture limit that job to physical protection. Although they provide food, clothing, shelter, and safety from predators, they do not understand the importance of protecting their children from the spiritual predators who want to steal their very souls. Even Christian parents who do their very best may struggle with this task. God’s Word gives us direction on the things we can do. Then we need to trust God and pray that our children make the right choice regarding their relationship with God.

Part 1—Seek Wholesome Relationships

Avoid Unwholesome Influences

2 Corinthians 6:14–16

[2Co 6:14-16 KJV] 14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Say: Imagine trying to carry a sofa. Whom do you want on the other end, a **five-year-old or an adult?** This is the idea behind Paul’s admonition for Christians not to “team up” (2 Corinthians 6:14, NLT) or be “unequally yoked” (KJV) with unbelievers. As teaming up with a child to carry a sofa would likely result in injury to you, the child, and/or the sofa, so would teaming up with unbelievers most likely harm the relationships believers have with the Lord and one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While this passage is often tied to marriages and business partnerships, its broader application is to any close relationship between a believer and an unbeliever. Paul’s five questions in 2 Corinthians 6:15–16 contrast the distinction between believers and unbelievers: righteousness versus wickedness; light versus darkness; Christ versus the devil; worship of God versus worship of idols. Believers must focus on relationships and activities that draw them closer to the Lord.

The apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel in Corinth, and those who believed became part of the church in that city. In his second letter to these believers, Paul dealt with the problem of false teachers who had wormed their way into the church. These false teachers were unbelievers who were trying to turn the believers away from their loyalty to Paul and the true gospel. The goal of these false teachers was to fleece the flock, not shepherd it.

In these five questions, Paul challenged the believers in Corinth to see the necessity of avoiding the influences of these false teachers. If believers failed to avoid these influencers, they would “team up” (verse 14, NLT) or be “unequally yoked” (KJV) with unbelievers, and bring harm to their relationship with Christ.

Instead, believers, both adults and children, should avoid close relationships with unbelievers and activities that promote wickedness. Such things will draw them away from the Lord and righteous living. Christians must learn to live in the world while not being of the world.

Discuss

? How can Christians have relationships with unbelievers without being “unequally yoked” (2 Corinthians 6:14, KJV) with them?

? What might be considered modern-day idols that Christians should avoid?

Understanding Whose You Are

2 Corinthians 6:16–18

[2Co 6:16-18 KJV] 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Say: If you think back to your childhood, you may remember being told you should or should not do something because of the family you were part of. **Paul called on believers to understand they are part of God’s family.** Further, God dwells in them, making them the temple of God. Because of that, certain things are expected of them, including holiness and purity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Believers must never forget that Christianity is about having a right relationship with God, not about keeping certain rules or following a tradition. However, believers are to cling to wholesome relationships and activities that promote what is holy and right in God’s sight. Love for God and obedience to His commands are intertwined.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation and transformation. By faith in Jesus Christ, people are saved, that is, they are forgiven of their sins and made alive as God’s Spirit dwells in them. The Spirit then works through the Word to transform believers so they learn to live as sons and daughters of their Heavenly Father.

In 2 Corinthians 6:17–18, Paul quoted portions of Isaiah 52:11; 2 Samuel 7:14; and Ezekiel 20:34 to remind the believers in Corinth of these truths. If they focused on whose they are, they would avoid unwholesome influences so nothing would hinder their relationship with God.

[Isa 52:11 KJV] 11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean [thing]; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.

[2Sa 7:14 KJV] 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

[Eze 20:34 KJV] 34 And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.

Parents can best teach children to seek wholesome relationships by modeling attitudes and actions that help them do this very thing. Explain to children why they should have godly attitudes and choose their friends and activities wisely. Make sure they understand it is more than following a prescribed list of dos and don'ts, but about building a stronger relationship with God. Children are best protected from unwholesome influences when they understand the reasons why things are right and wrong, and how their choices affect their relationships with God and other people.

Discuss

? What does being separate from unbelievers and unwholesome activities look like in everyday living?

? How can parents help children see how their choices affect their relationships with God and other people?

Resource Packet Item 1: Living with the Tension

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups, assigning one Scripture passage to each group. Give them a few minutes to respond to the questions, then ask the groups to share their answers.

Part 2—Abstain from Destructive Habits

The Deceitfulness of Sin

Proverbs 23:31–35

[Pro 23:31-35 KJV] 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, [when] it moveth itself aright. 32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 35 They have stricken me, [shalt thou say, and] I was not sick; they have beaten me, [and] I felt [it] not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Say: People often downplay destructive habits. They choose to ignore or reject what the Bible says about the deceitfulness of sin and its consequences. Sin hardens the heart, making it harder and harder for people to respond to the Spirit's work in their lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.) *v (Play the video available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)*

Parents need to teach their children what God says in His Word about destructive

habits. Christian parenting organizations usually have materials that can help parents do this in a way that emphasizes the positives about living according to God's Word while pointing out the negatives of living according to worldly values. Instruction should be presented so children understand that their parents want what is best for them. And, of course, modeling a godly lifestyle is powerful. It matters that parents and other adults in your children's lives practice what they preach.

Christian parents do well to heed the biblical warnings about the harmful effects of alcohol and other life-controlling habits, and by teaching children about their dangers. Set a godly example for your family by avoiding destructive habits. Trust God's Word and the leading of the Spirit to help both you and your children in making wise, life-affirming choices.

Proverbs 23:31–35 shows the harmful effects of alcohol. Like most addictive substances, it can bring short periods of pleasure and escape from reality. Eventually it takes more than it gives. Even when people realize that destructive habits are hurting them and those around them, they find they have become enslaved by the alcohol or other substances. Without help, they continue to spiral downward.

Don't be afraid to ask for help and prayer in dealing with addictions to alcohol, drugs (both legal and illegal), gambling, and sex. Many groups are available to support the adult children and teens (or their parents) who are fighting addictions.

Someone has said that you never have to stop what you don't start. So be careful not to start something that in the end "bites like a poisonous snake" (Proverbs 23:32, NLT).

Discuss

? How practical is this advice: You never have to stop what you don't start? Explain.

? What can parents do to help children learn how destructive harmful habits are?

Live Wisely

Ephesians 5:1–5, 15–18

[Eph 5:1-5, 15-18 KJV] 1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ... 15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but

understanding what the will of the Lord [is]. 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Say: Life is all about choices. What tools can people use to determine whether choices are good or bad? God's Word supplies clear commands and principles to guide people, some of which are found in the apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ephesians 5 includes three principles for living wisely. **The first principle is to consider if the choice you are making reflects God's character. "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do" (verse 1, NLT).** Christ lived this way as He reflected His Father's loving nature, being willing to sacrifice His life for the sake of others.

The second principle is to avoid choices that lead to sexual immorality, impurity, or greed (verses 3–4). At their core, these choices show a disregard for God and His advice on the best way to live.

The third principle is to use godly wisdom. This comes from the work of the Holy Spirit, and from learning and practicing biblical truth.

These three principles are a good start to living wisely (verses 15–18), which will help us avoid destructive habits. As Proverbs 27:12 (NLT) states, "A prudent [wise] person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton [fool] goes blindly on and suffers the consequences."

God's Word provides divine insight into the dangers of destructive habits. Immorality, impurity, and greed do not reflect God's holy and loving nature (Ephesians 5:2). Those who live by worldly standards rather than the example of Christ will not inherit God's kingdom (verse 5).

Note that the specific sins Paul points to in these passages relate to pleasures of the flesh. What begins as pleasure usually turns into the avoidance of pain, then into addiction. For example, social drinking often drifts into drinking to deal with stress. Finally, drinking can become habitual, leading to severe consequences including lost work and struggling, broken relationships.

Christians need to take seriously their calling to Spirit-led living. Forsaking the pleasures of the flesh will help Christians experience the joy that comes with living to please the Lord.

Resource Packet Item 2: The Bible Says

Distribute the work sheet for students to complete. Ask for a volunteer to read each passage aloud. Then discuss the accompanying questions.

Discuss

? What role does gratefulness have in avoiding destructive habits?

? Why is the work of the Spirit necessary for living an overcoming life?

Part 3—Love Christ above All Others

First Commitment Is to God

Mark 3:31–35

[Mar 3:31-35 KJV] 31 There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. 32 And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. 33 And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? 34 And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! 35 For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Say: Jesus used a situation involving His family to teach that one's first commitment is to God. People become part of God's family through faith in Jesus. As children of God, they learn to live according to their Heavenly Father's will. Those who follow Jesus must be fully committed to God (see Luke 14:25–27). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While Jesus' declaration in Mark 3:34–35 may seem controversial, it really is a reflection of the most basic precept of the Bible: love God wholeheartedly (Deuteronomy 6:5). When believers love the Lord above all others, they will find it easier to put other relationships in their proper priority.

While some may misconstrue Mark 3:31–35 to mean following Jesus means forsaking one's family ties, we need to remember Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the whole Bible. While Jesus did make His highest priority the pursuit of His Father's business, He did not forsake His family. Even on the cross, He made sure His mother, Mary, would be cared for (John 19:26–27). After His resurrection, Mary and Jesus' brothers were among those gathered together to pray and wait for the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). Also, the apostle Paul taught that providing for one's family is an expression of one's faith in Christ (1 Timothy 5:8).

A family committed to loving and serving Christ above all will find divine strength to face the trials and challenges of life. Serving the Lord often requires sacrifice. Family members can make these sacrifices with gratitude and fortitude rather than resentment when their commitment to the Lord is their highest priority.

Discuss

? How can our commitment to Christ above all other commitments help us persevere through trials or persecution?

? How would you answer someone who argues that a person's first commitment should be to family or a job?

Your Life Is Not Your Own

Matthew 10:37–39

[Mat 10:37-39 KJV] 37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. 39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Say: Living for Jesus is not always easy. It calls for sacrifice. It means a believer's love and devotion to Jesus might be seen by others as hatred for family or recklessness. Believers understand that their lives are not their own. Times and circumstances may require them to choose serving the Lord above family obligations or even their own welfare. Christian history is replete with examples of believers who have been rejected by their families or who have suffered pain or death because of their commitment to serve the Lord Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

How can Christians live sacrificially? They understand they must love Christ above all others because their lives belong to Him. They believe Christ's claims that dying to self brings them true life in the world and eternal life in His presence in the world to come (Matthew 10:39).

Is it possible to be a casual Christian? Jesus' instructions to His followers in verses 37–38 seem to indicate that choice is unlikely. Jesus taught that His followers were to serve Him without fear of human opposition and acknowledge Him publicly. They needed to understand that their commitment to Him could bring opposition from one's own family. Their willingness to place their commitment to Him above their closest earthly relationships and even the preservation of their own lives would result in rich blessings.

For a Christian family to be able to stand strong for the Lord, each person must be convinced of whose they are and why they are committed to Him. They will find the strength to do what it takes to be worthy of being Christ's.

Resource Packet Item 3: First Priority

Distribute the work sheet for students to complete. Ask volunteers to share their responses to the questions.

Discuss

? What are you willing to sacrifice to be worthy of being Christ's?

? How would you answer someone who used Matthew 10:37–39 to say Christians are to abandon all family ties and responsibilities?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Bible provides guidance to instruct and protect the family. God helps families overcome challenges they face as they live for Him. Their closest relationships should be with

people who encourage them in their walk with God. This does not mean they avoid interacting with unbelievers, but that they use caution so these relationships do not become unwholesome. Believers must live wisely, recognizing that they are not to allow destructive habits or anything else into their lives that might deter them from being able to fully serve the Lord. Finally, believers must choose to love Christ above all others.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your relationships. Take steps to strengthen wholesome relationships and move away from unwholesome ones.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any destructive habits you have and to aid you in overcoming them.
- Examine if the way you are living demonstrates that you love Christ above all others.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Pattern for Marriage.
Genesis 2:20–24

[Gen 2:20-24 KJV] 20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This [is] now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Tuesday:

Commitment of Love.
Genesis 29:15–20

[Gen 29:15-20 KJV] 15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou [art] my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what [shall] thy wages [be]? 16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder [was] Leah, and the name of the younger [was] Rachel. 17 Leah [was] tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19 And Laban said, [It is] better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him [but] a few days, for the love he had to her.

Wednesday:

Boaz Redeems Ruth.
Ruth 4:1–12

[Rth 4:1-12 KJV] 1 Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. 3 And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which [was] our brother Elimelech's: 4 And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy [it] before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem [it], redeem [it]: but if thou wilt not redeem [it, then] tell me, that I may know: for [there is] none to redeem [it] beside thee; and I [am] after thee. And he said, I will redeem [it]. 5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy [it] also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. 6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem [it] for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem [it]. 7 Now this [was the manner] in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave [it] to his neighbour: and this [was] a testimony in Israel. 8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy [it] for thee. So he drew off his shoe. 9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and [unto] all the people, Ye [are] witnesses this day, that I have bought all that [was] Elimelech's, and all that [was] Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. 10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye [are] witnesses this day. 11 And all the people that [were] in the gate, and the elders, said, [We are] witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: 12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

Thursday:

Joseph's Example of Love.

Matthew 1:18–25

[Mat 1:18-25 KJV] 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just [man], and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. 20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. 22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. 24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Friday:

The Marriage of the Lamb.
Revelation 19:1–9

[Rev 19:1-9 KJV] 1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: 2 For true and righteous [are] his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. 3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. 4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. 5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. 6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. 7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. 9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed [are] they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Saturday:

The Spirit and the Bride.
Revelation 22:12–17

[Rev 22:12-17 KJV] 12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward [is] with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. 13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 14 Blessed [are] they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without [are] dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. 16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, [and] the bright and morning star. 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.