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Series: *Building Up the Family*

Title: *"How to Nurture a Family"*

Text: Genesis 2:7, 15, 18-24; Genesis 1:27-28a

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Genesis 2:7, 15, 18-24

2:7 – “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

2:15 – The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

2:18 – The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’

19 – Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

20 – So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

21 – So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

22 – Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man.

23 – 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.’

24 – For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Genesis 1:27-28a

1:27 – So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

1:28a – God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number.’”

This weekend Andrew and Becca and Luke boarded a plane and flew to Chicago to attend Becca’s 10th Wheaton College reunion. Their trip reminded me of the days all three of our kids were in college---specifically those fall days when we moved them INTO the dorm and those spring days when we moved them OUT. On those moving days, I remember seeing other families like ours working together, laughing together as they carried items in or out of the dormitory. I listened to conversations like this between parents and their kids: *“Hey, let’s all go out to a nice restaurant for lunch!”* Or--- to the college student, *“I’m proud of you daughter---you are doing great!”* Or, as the family leaves the student behind, *“If you need us call! We will miss you!”* The farewells in the fall were full of tears and hugs. The arrivals in the spring were full of smiles and embraces!

Many times, those trips to and from campus included a Sunday and we would see some of those same families in church when we worshiped. I remember thinking, *“Those are great families! The parents and kids obviously love each other--- and the Lord!”*

Well, how do great families like that come to be? I mean, how do you nurture a family unit made up of moms and dads and sisters and brothers who not only think of themselves as a family---but actually enjoy each other and cherish the unique relationship they share?

As we continue our series on BUILDING UP THE FAMILY, I want to suggest three basic principles---think of them as lessons---that moms, dads, and kids must learn in order for their families to function as God intended.

1. First, for the family must be a place of TOGETHERNESS.

Deuteronomy 6:7 reflects this first principle of family health by inferring that parents and children should spend a lot of TIME TOGETHER, *“sitting at home, walking along the road...when you lie down and when you get up.”* Spending time

together is an important part of family health for the simple reason that it takes TIME for a group of people to BECOME a family. It takes more than biology to make a family a FAMILY---it takes shared experiences.

Eons ago in my early in my days as a youth minister I learned the importance of building a youth group---sort of a pod of teens that could grow spiritually and minister together---and the main way we did this was by scheduling lots of events, things we would do together; everything from fifth quarters after high school football games, to lock-ins, to weekly fellowships after our Sunday evening services, to weekend retreats, and ski-trips, to Centrifuge or camping trips at the Lundberg's cabin on Lake Anna.

These events gave teens a chance to build friendships and make memories. All this time spent together literally "built" a group---because through these events, relationships were formed and strengthened. If you've ever glanced at our busy youth ministry calendar here at Redland, you'll see that Kevin adheres to the same group-building principle.

This principle also works when it comes to building a family. Think of it this way. To be a FAMILY we need to be TOGETHER---doing things together---enjoying each other's company---like this family on the title slide is obviously doing at the beach.

During morning devotions with his two young daughters, one father realized he hadn't been spending as much time with his girls as he wanted. After apologizing, he said, *"You know, the QUANTITY of time we spend together is not always as important as the QUALITY of time we spend together."* His daughters Kristen, age 6, and Madison, age 4, didn't quite understand, so the dad explained by saying, *"Quantity means HOW MUCH time and quality means HOW GOOD the time is we spend together. Now, which would you rather have?"* Not missing a beat, Kristen replied, *"Quality time---and lots of it!"*

Kristen was right---to build a family unit---in which brothers and sisters and moms and dads actually think of themselves as a family---and value their relationships---requires QUALITY time and lots of it. Kristen understood---better than her dad that to be a family requires our doing things together regularly---and especially things that are FUN!

Proverbs 5:18 says, ***"ENJOY the wife of your youth."*** and I don't think it's too far of a stretch to say this also means parents are to ENJOY the children of their youth---families are to ENJOY times spent together. I believe this and other texts teach that God intends for families to find ways to build memories they can look back on and laugh about.

I remember a family vacation we took to Gatlinburg Tennessee many years ago---when Sarah was only about 18 months old. She was still in the "high---chair stage" and we were eating at a restaurant, and she got a hold of a lemon slice. I think Daniel gave it to her to see what she would do with it. Well, you know toddlers. They put everything in their mouths and that's what Sarah did. She bit into it and then she grimaced at the sour taste---but then instead of crying, she laughed out loud at the experience. Well, it tickled us so much we kept giving her lemon slices---and she kept on biting into them and grimacing and then giggling---grimacing and giggling. It was a blast! I'll never forget that day.

Even today on our summer week at the beach we always try to find a way to have fun together on vacation. The year of the last Olympics that summer we set up "Olympic Games"---one per day and we even gave out medals. One summer---the latest *"Incredibles"* movie had come out, so we all got *"Incredibles"* t-shirts and black masks. We've been White Water Rafting as a family and gone horse-back riding in the Smokey Mountains. We've played putt-putt golf millions of times. And I know that many of you do the same kinds of things together as families and that's wonderful because time TOGETHER---especially FUN time---builds family. You can't have a family unit without it.

By the way parents, if you don't spend time together having fun with your kids when they are young---if you don't make a point of ENJOYING THE CHILDREN OF YOUR YOUTH---well, don't be surprised if they don't come back to visit when they grow up.

But, let me ask you, when was the last time you did something TOGETHER as a family? When was the last time you LAUGHED---together? You can't nurture a family without sharing experiences---especially FUN ones!

2. And then second, in order for a family to be healthy it must be a place of LOVE.

Now, when I say "LOVE" I'm referring to much more than a feeling. I'm saying that a family is a place where ACTIONS are driven by---or motivated by---love. It's a place where each family member not only KNOWS he or she is loved but SEES they are loved and FEELS they are loved in the way the rest of the family treats them.

Here's some concrete examples of what I'm saying. A healthy family is a place where:

- Parents show their love by providing for their children's material needs---even when they have to sacrifice to do so.
- Children show their love for their parents by honoring and respecting them.
- It's also a place where parents respect their children as the precious gift of God that they are---where, as Ephesians 6:4 says fathers, "**...don't exasperate their children**" but lovingly, fairly discipline them when they need it---and parent them according to their God-given gifts and talents---their unique "bent" as we talked about a couple weeks ago.

In short---a healthy family is a place where people are more than LOVED---they are also LOVING. And one of the clearest manifestations of this principle is this. In a healthy family PROBLEMS are attacked instead of PEOPLE.

This weekend Ann Michael told us that not too long ago their oldest grandson, Carter, had totaled Bob's Lexus. His parents were out of reach at first, so Carter called his Uncle Andrew. Andrew hurried to the accident---made sure Carter was okay physically---and then put his big arms around him and said, "*Carter, welcome to the club of people who have totaled Dad's cars. I've done it. Your Uncle Shawn has done it. Your mom has done it. Your grandmom has done it. Your great-grandmom has done it...*"

Apparently, that's a trend in the Michael family. I'm thinking Bob needs to get more indestructible vehicles like Humvees and tanks. My point is no one attacked Carter for the accident---everyone in the family, including his parents, attacked the problem instead of him. They knew he felt bad for what happened---so he didn't need to be attacked. He needed to be loved. When problems come in any family---and they will---we must follow this principle. We must attack the problem---never the person---because this is the way of love. And, when families practice this principle---when love drives behavior---then the home itself becomes a SAFE place---a place of SECURITY.

It's like "Chinese Checkers" or "Sorry" or other board games where the goal is to get your playing pieces "home" -- because that's where it will be safe from other opponents. The family should be this kind of safe---LOVING place.

When it is, spouses can bring problems to each other and know instead of criticism they'll find a loving team member who will work alongside their helpmate to solve the problem. In a safe, loving family children realize they can bring their troubles---even those that came as a result of their sin---to their parents and find help.

One morning at the beginning of the school day when I was in 6th grade a fellow classmate started hitting me for some reason. I guess he thought I was an easy target or something. I mean, I did nothing to warrant his aggression. We were waiting in the cafeteria for the first bell, and he apparently thought it would be fun to begin his day by picking on me. I ran from him and was getting away but as I rounded the corner, I ran right into a teacher who didn't see my pursuer. When he saw her, he ducked into a doorway or something. Well, this teacher thoroughly chewed me out for running and wouldn't listen to my explanation. When he finished, I decided if teachers were going to treat me this unfairly, I'd just quit.

So, I ran away from school. As soon as the teacher's back was turned, I walked out the door and started walking home. I was pretty quick because I had gotten about 3 miles before the principal came driving up in his car. After explaining to me that this kind of thing would not be tolerated, I still insisted I wanted to go home. So that's where he took me. In my mind---HOME was a safe place---a place of refuge where I would be loved and treated fairly.

Now, don't misunderstand. My parents were upset. Dad had to stop what he was doing and come home from the church to help mom deal with this crisis. And I'm sure the thought that the principal brought their son home was embarrassing for both of them. But, after telling me it was wrong and unsafe for me to run away from school---and also that I would be going back to school for several more years---they listened to my side of the story. Then they went back to school with me and helped me talk to the teacher and principal about what had happened. My attacker was called to his office and disciplined.

The teacher apologized for his haste in rebuking me so sternly. And all this happened because my family was a safe place---a place where our love motivated us to attack problems and not each other.

Well, that's the way it is in a healthy family. It's a team of people that are lovingly "pro-each other." And when we learn and practice this principle, the family unit becomes very precious to each family member---because in this fallen, unfair world of ours we all need a place of love and safety and security.

3. Finally, a healthy family is a place where God is HONORED.

I am so thankful that God enabled us to send each of our kids to Christian---unapologetically evangelical colleges. Daniel went to Grove City---Sarah to Messiah---and Becca to Wheaton. And at each college orientation that first year and four years later, at each graduation---there was a time of worship. In this way, those schools affirmed the importance of families being places where God was honored.

God must be honored in the family because, as I said a couple weeks ago, the primary purpose of bringing children into this world is to raise kids to become image-bearers---people who grow up to reflect the image of God. Parents who understand this---look for ways to tell and show their sons and daughters all about God and His great love. If they do that their children are more likely to respond by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This shared faith gave these family members the POWER to love each other. If you're in a family like that then you know what I'm talking about. Shared faith in Jesus helps make families healthy because that's the way the family was designed to function---it was meant to be a place where God is honored and obeyed.

Over the years I have talked to many parents who unfortunately feel that teaching their children about God is not that important. They've said that they will wait until their children are old enough to make up their own mind about religion---and that is a foolish mistake. Our children must be taught about the love of God when they are young if they are to have the greatest chance of understanding and responding to that love.

A man once told the noted English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge that he didn't believe in giving children any religious instructions. The man said he didn't want to influence his child on this issue in one direction or the other. Coleridge then invited the man to go outside with him and look at his garden which was overgrown with weeds. Surprised at the condition of the garden, the man said to Coleridge: "*Why, this is not a garden! There is nothing growing here but weeds!*" Coleridge responded that this was his intent. He did not want anything to influence his garden in any way. He said, "*I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself and make up its own mind how and what to grow.*" Of course, Coleridge was inferring that we risk raising "weeds" for children when we don't take advantage of the early years in which they are most open to understanding Who God is. Our little ones are born fallen---so if no one teaches them about God---they are most likely to ignore Him.

You have probably heard that shortly after a gosling hatches from his or her shell, he or she will become attached or "imprinted," to the first thing that they see moving near him. From that time forward, he will follow that particular object, adopting it as his "PARENT." Ordinarily he becomes imprinted to the mother goose. But if she is removed, the gosling will settle for any substitute, whether alive or not. A gosling can be imprinted to follow almost anything as his "parent"---a stuffed animal---even a human.

And time is the critical factor in this process. The gosling is vulnerable to imprinting for only a few seconds after he hatches from the shell; if that opportunity is lost, it cannot be regained later. In other words, there is a critical, brief period in the life of a gosling when this instinctual learning is possible.

Well, there is also a critical period during human childhood when kids are open to learning to follow God as their Heavenly Father. Their concept of right and wrong, which Freud called the superego, is formulated during these early years, and their view of God begins to solidify in this time as well. As in the case of the gosling, the opportunity of that period must be seized when it is available.

You know, leaders of the Catholic Church have been widely quoted as saying, *“Give us a child until he is seven-years-old and we’ll have him for life.”* Their affirmation is correct, because permanent attitudes about God, can be instilled during these seven teachable years. Unfortunately, however, the opposite is also true. In this fallen world of ours, the absence of instruction during this prime-time period severely limits the depth of the child’s later devotion to God. So, when parents say they are going to withhold lessons about God from their small child, allowing him to “decide for himself,” they are almost guaranteeing that he will “decide” in the negative.

Hear me on this: In our homes we need to teach our children about God early on---and lovingly discipline them to live in ways that HONOR Him. Remember---four thousand years ago, God said to Moses: ***“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. IMPRESS them or IMPRINT them on your children.”*** (Deut. 6) I want you to be sure to note that this familiar text implies that the church is not to be the only place a child learns about God. I mean, you can’t teach your children about God by just coming to church a couple hours a week. It’s a start, but it’s not enough.

No, this Scripture teaches that it takes a day-in-day-out commitment. We’ve got to talk to our kids about God as we go about our daily lives. If a family is to be healthy, then from the very beginning the family must be a place where Jesus is always acknowledged as Lord---where God is always honored.

And, moms and dads, much of their understanding of WHO God is comes from the IMPRINTING they receive as they watch our example. They need to see from the way we live our lives that Christianity is not just a set of rules and codes and standards. It is a dynamic relationship with a loving God. When we embrace this foundational principle then families are more likely to be healthy---and parents are more likely to produce Godly children who can make it in this fallen world.

This week I came across a story that told about the reputation the Oklahoma Sooner football program had back in the 1980’s. The article said that it was a program out of control. Recruiting rules were disregarded; players were at the same time pampered and exploited. A significant percentage never made it to graduation. More than a few found themselves in serious legal trouble, facing charges of rape, robbery, drug possession, drug dealing, assault with a deadly weapon and on and on. In fact, someone once said that university officials should work out an arrangement with prison officials so that players could wear the same number in prison that they wore on the field. I mean, according to this story, Barry Switzer had not built a program known for academic excellence. In fact, he once said that the reason OU had a recruiting advantage over state rival OSU is because the name of his school was easier to spell.

Well, into this messed-up program came a young man named J. C. Watts. He played quarterback for the Sooners and led them to two consecutive Orange Bowl victories. Watts was exposed to the same lifestyle that ambushed so many other OU college careers but it didn’t faze him. No, he graduated with a degree in journalism, and went on to play in the Canadian Football League. Eventually he went back to Oklahoma and ran for public office---became a member of the U. S. House of Representatives. During his years in public office, he was given several high-profile assignments and was even mentioned as a possible Vice-Presidential candidate in 2000.

Now, what made the difference in this man’s life? It was his family. His father was a pastor---a godly man---and in J. C.’s home, life was more than just religious. It was full of authentic faith---faith that was lived out. So, J.C. grew up knowing that he had a calling on his life to honor God. He knew his athletic and political careers were more than careers. They were places to honor and obey God. This is the way he lived because he grew up in a family where God was honored.

This place---Redland Baptist Church---is MY Church HOME---you are our CHURCH family. You've helped us raise our kids and I am so very thankful-every day---that Redland is a HEALTHY church family. We are because we embrace these same three principles of family health.

First, we do things TOGETHER---if you doubt that then pay better attention when Peggy or Kevin shares the announcements of all the events that are up and coming! I mean Redland is a place of TOGETHERNESS. Our men have breakfast together. We paid off the ROC together. Our youth sing together and ring together. We go to THE COVE together. We watch movies outside together. We give blood together. We pray for a great day at RBC camp together. We enjoy outdoor orchestra concerts together.

I could go on!

But another reason Redland is healthy is because this is a place of love. We're not perfect but for the most part---our actions are driven by love around here. I've felt it. Haven't you? I know I am loved here because of the way you treat me---and I know you love each other because of the way you treat each other. I constantly see Redlanders who practice the teaching of 1st John 3:16 where it says, ***"This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."*** We believe we are called to be a GRACE-DRIVEN bunch of people. This is one reason that, as a church family, we gather around this table several times a year as we do today to HONOR GOD---our Heavenly FATHER---as we remember the sacrifice of His Son.

If you are a Christian---even if you aren't a member of this church, you are our brother or sister in the Lord, So, we invite you to partake with us. After all, if you are HIS, then this is yours.

ORDINANCE OF COMMUNION

If you are here and are not a Christian, then let me remind you that your Heavenly Father loves you---and has made a way for you to have what you long for most---a personal relationship with Him. We've symbolized this in communion---God sent His only Son to die for our sins. And we become His children by professing our faith in Jesus, asking Him to forgive our sins---and to come into our lives as Lord and Savior. If you've never made that decision, then I urge you to do so this morning.

And, if you are looking for a great Church Home, then I know I speak for the rest of my family when I say, Come and join us here at Redland. Become a part of this loving church family. As we stand and sing now, come forward and share with me any decision God has laid on your heart.