

The Insanity of Obedience – Family

Good morning! I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving!

Today, we're finishing up our series called, The "Insanity of Obedience"! Together, we've been studying what it looks like to faithfully follow Christ no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

And what an appropriate subject that is for us to wrestle with on this last Sunday on the Christian calendar before Advent starts next week...a day known as Christ the King Sunday in the life of the church. Christ the King Sunday is a day when Christians acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the King of all creation. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords! And when we make Jesus the king of our hearts, and the Lord of our lives it will affect how we live in every area of our life. It will cause us to live in some ways that are out of step with the world around us, and with our culture. To other people, we may even begin to live in some ways that appear to be insane.

Today, we're exploring what it looks like to faithfully follow Jesus in the context of our families. Now, families come in all different varieties...some of the moments we share with our families are absolutely wonderful...yet other times our families can be stressful. I get that!

And sometimes, when members of our family are all at different places in their faith journey, even our faith in Jesus can be a stressful subject.

Some of you may know a little bit about my family, but some not, so let me share just a little bit with you.

I was born to parents who were both Christians. Every Sunday of my life that I can remember we were in church for two hours...first we all went to Sunday school, and then we all went to worship. My folks were active in our church, and set the example for me.

My wife Marge did not come from a family who practiced their faith. Her parents had been active in a church earlier in their lives, but something seemed to change for them early in their marriage in terms of following Christ. Something they never talked about. So Marge didn't grow up knowing much about the Christian faith other than what she learned from a wonderfully devout Christian neighbor who taught the children in the neighborhood bible lessons in her home.

When Marge and I got married we went to church sporadically. Then when our second daughter Allie came along, and experienced some pretty severe medical problems at one month of age, Marge decided we were going to start going to church. She wanted to discover what kind of God would allow something to happen to a baby!

Eventually, she discovered that even when Allie was so sick, that God was with her, and us! And Marge's faith began to grow and grow. Marge became a follower of Jesus, and we became really active in the life of our church.

This created division within our family between her parents and us. They could not understand why we would want to spend so much time at church, or give so much of our money to our church. Marge's mom was pretty vocal about it; at times she would even call us names saying we were "Jesus freaks!"

I share this with you today just to level the playing field. All of your pastors here at Anderson Hills strive to be authentic with you. We come from a variety of families just like you do.

We all face relationships within our families that vary because of our faith in Christ. Like we had in our family, most of you have family members who haven't exactly embraced a life of faith in Christ. Some of you may even be dealing with this in your own immediate family.

You're the only one who comes to church.

You come without your spouse, or without your kids.

Or maybe you're a young person who comes without your parents.

Maybe you're discouraged because as your children grew up and left your home, they seemed to leave behind the faith you tried to plant in them and help them cultivate...

Listen to what Jesus says about this...

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn

*"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'*

³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross

and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ *Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

These are some very strong words that Jesus speaks here! It doesn't sound like he's playing around at all! In fact, Jesus quotes a passage of scripture from Micah 7:6, in which Micah was speaking of the coming Messianic age when there would be difficulties, even among family members. For you see, when we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our life, it begins to affect everything else about our life, even our relationships.

So is Jesus really saying that he wants us to turn against our family members? No, of course he isn't. What he is saying is that we had better be prepared for his Lordship to bring division in families...sometimes, that's just what it does.

There are still parts of the world where proclaiming your faith in Christ can be a death sentence. Sometimes it's the members of your own family who turn you in to the authorities, and sometimes they even kill you themselves rather than have a follower of Jesus in the family.

Jesus is warning us that his followers must be prepared for this. We have to be prepared to put him first in our life, above everything, and anyone else. Jesus is saying that everything must pale in comparison to our relationship with him! He must be first in our life, not somewhere down a list of important things.

Where is Jesus in your life? Is he first? Does he matter more to you than anything or anyone else in your life?

If Jesus is first, it will affect all of your relationships. Your commitment to Christ may separate friends and family members, because some will follow Christ with you, and some won't. That may cause conflict to arise. Your relationships may suffer

anywhere from just a little strain, to a whole lot of strain...even division.

When we “take up our cross” and follow Jesus, our different values, morals, and goals will set us apart from the world, from our culture, and even from others in our own circle of friends and family.

Jesus is saying that our first commitment must be to God. God has to be our first priority. Above our spouse, above our kids, above anyone! But God calls us to love our families too! That is also a law of God. We must realize that standing up and stepping out for God puts us in a vulnerable and sometimes even a volatile situation in our home.

Yet we are called to pick up our cross, and stake our claim with Christ. Even when we face opposition, persecution, suffering, even if we face death, we must not waiver...sounds insane, right?

I want to show you a couple of movie clips this morning. Many of you have heard of the book, *The Case for Christ*. It was a bestseller. Well, the story behind the book was made into a movie of the same name. Unlike the book, though, the movie tells the personal story of author Lee Stroble and his wife, Leslie, as they journey toward faith in Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of the movie, neither Lee nor Leslie are believers in Christ. Then one night, while eating dinner at a restaurant their daughter begins choking, and she is rescued by a total stranger named Alfie. According to Strobel, what happened in real life was similar to what happened in the movie.

In the movie it's a choking incident at a restaurant. In real life their daughter became lost at an amusement park. They were terrified and fearful for their daughter's life. In the movie, the

heroine's name is Alfie. In real life it was a woman named Linda who saved their daughter.

Leslie ends up becoming friends with this woman. This woman is a committed Christian and invites Leslie to go to church with her. Leslie ends up learning about Jesus from her, and she surrenders her life to Christ. Lee, however, was not thrilled at his wife's new found faith. Take a look at this clip...

VIDEO CLIP #1

"I have not come to bring peace to the world, but a sword."
And swords can divide...

Sharing the gospel starts with those who are closest to us; with our family members. Jesus warns us, though, that it may not be easy. When Jesus sent his disciples out to do ministry in his name, he said it would be as sheep among wolves, and some of the wolves might even be close family members. Jesus reminded them that following him was to be their priority, and that they were to acknowledge him before others no matter the cost. He also told them that their understanding of family would expand; that while they may lose connection with their biological family, they would gain a much larger spiritual family.

For us today, our mission is the same: to share and model a life in Christ with everyone, starting with our family. Even though at times family is an insanely hard audience, we have to persevere in prayer and in action. We have to do all we can to remove any hindrances that keep faith from moving from one generation to another.

You may have been praying for and ministering to loved ones in your family for years, but have yet to see any fruit born from your efforts. I want you to know that there is still hope! We must

never lose hope for bringing people into the kingdom. Our job is to love others, and to scatter as many seeds of faith as we can. It is God who does the rest. And we serve a living God who is active in the world. He is still on the throne! He still moves mountains, and parts the waters! God changes hearts!

So what can you do? I want to share some practical tips for sharing Jesus with your friends and family. These tips may help you get through the stressful times in your family when faith becomes a sticking point, or a point of contention...

Tips for Sharing – Prayer

And the first tip is...

Never underestimate the power of prayer, because we believe that prayer is powerful! Prayer changes things!

God loves to hear from his children, so talk to God about the people who are important to you. Tell him all about the people who are on your heart. Pray for you husband or wife. Pray for your children by name, and for whatever situation they face. Pray for your grandchildren, your parents, your sisters and brothers.

Pray that God would open their ears to listen, and soften their hearts to receive. Pray for God's prevenient grace...the grace that goes before us before we may even be aware of it. Pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work through prevenient grace in the lives of your loved ones.

Look for Chances to Share

The second thing we can do is look for chances to share. This should be natural; embedded into conversations as they arise. Don't treat it like you would an intervention. Really, when Jesus is

the most important person in your life, you should naturally weave him in to your conversations.

Scripture instructs us how to do this, especially with our families and with our children. Deuteronomy says this...

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

In the morning, in the evening, at all times you can share about what has God been doing in your life recently? How is God changing you? Why is God important to you?

Live as an example

Sometimes we share our faith in words, and sometimes we share our faith through our actions.

If you're having trouble getting a stubborn family member to open up and have a conversation about faith, then just quietly go about your daily life living as Christ calls you to live. Love them well. Offer them grace. Forgive them when they hurt you. Encourage them in every situation. Show them kindness. Care for them, and about them. Remember, people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Be there when tragedy strikes

Next, you can be there when tragedy strikes.

None, of us are immune to tragedy in life. And it is often when we are faced with tragedy and difficulties that we become more open to God and to seeking answers to life's hardest questions. This is what moved my wife Marge to faith as I shared in my story earlier.

Romans 12:15 instructs us to *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn.”*

Be there for the people you love when they need you the most.

Listen well

Finally, you should learn to listen well. We're often so quick to want to speak that we fail to really listen. But listening is how we get to know someone else. Through listening you may learn the key to sharing more effectively when it is time to do so.

God intended for faith in him to be passed down from one generation to the next within the context of the family, from parent to child.

Some of you may be frustrated by the path your children chose. They may be adults now with children of their own and for whatever reason their faith in Christ is no longer first in their life. And what about your grandchildren?

Perhaps you weren't the parent you wish you had been. Maybe you wish you'd done a better job sharing Christ with your kids. Maybe you yourself became a believer after your children were grown.

It's never too late to share our faith with those we love. You have the opportunity to influence a whole new generation with your new found faith. I've seen this happen in the life of my

family, as Marge shared her faith with her parents late in life, and they came to faith.

In 1980, atheist and award-winning investigative journalist Lee Strobel put his journalistic and legal skills to work in an attempt to disprove his wife Leslie's new found faith in Christ. Her faith was causing problems within his marriage, or so he thought, and he believed that the only way to win his wife back was to offer factual evidence that God DID NOT exist.

Leslie meanwhile, had continued to grow in her faith, and to pray for her husband. And in the end, the tables are turned on Strobel. After completing a thorough investigation for almost two years, he finds, not the evidence to disprove the existence of God, but rather the historical evidence for Jesus, and he himself found a new faith in Christ...

Take a look...

VIDEO CLIP #2

Will you pray with me?

Oh God, thank you that you never give up on us. Thank you that you never stop loving us.

Help us to never give up on, or stop loving those you have placed closest to us in our lives.

Help us pray for, live as an example to, be there for, listen to, and look for chances to share our faith with our family.

Lord, we make you first in our life, King of kings and Lord of lords.

We want more of you. We want what's next from you.

Do what only you can do...in our own lives, and in the lives of the people we love.

In Jesus' name...Amen.