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Message: Strengthening Families

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If you are visiting with us today, my name is Chad Pace I am the Children's Pastor here at Christ's Church. Today is all about families. Today is all about building strong families. In fact, speaking of a strong family, Pastor Don and his wife Lisa are on vacation this weekend celebrating their 30 year anniversary.

What makes a family strong? Today we are going to uncover some of the characteristics that are found in strong families. Before we do that we need to have an understanding what families are faced with in today's world. To do this, I want to take you back a few years. Well maybe more than a few years how about just over 300 years.

It's the industrial age... its around 1698, America is still over 75 years away from declaring its independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain. During this time the steam engine is introduced for industrial use mainly for mines.

From the time the steam engine is first introduce for industrial use, it takes nearly 75 years, around 1778, before the first "efficient" steam engine is designed by James Watt making it a practical form of power.

It takes almost another 25 years, just after the turn of the century, before steam engines begin to show up in locomotives and a few years later in steamboats.

Let's think about this for a moment. The steam engine shows up for industrial use in 1698 it takes just over 100 years for this technology to be refined and developed so it can be used in more practical ways such as powering locomotives and steamboats.

Now jump forward a couple of centuries to the here and now. Welcome to the information age. Can you imagine a radically new technology being introduced in today's world and it taking over 100 years before it is ready for practical use? I have some items on this cart to really show you how things have changed in last 40-50 years.

1. **Rolodex...** nothing major... but a simple way to keep contacts organized. I'm sure the kids here today are wondering, what's a rolodex. Well you are in luck if you want to see on in action you can come hang out in the church office one day. Yes we still use it. Go figure.
2. **Phones...** Now this is the oldest phone I could find around here... it still has the push buttons... but when I was a kid you had the rotary dial, many of you I'm sure remember the phone where you had to crank the handle. Just the other day a parent was telling

me they had just purchased a home and when they were moving in her daughter was surprised to see a phone mounted on the wall. As if, what is the strange object with wires? Then along came the mobile phone.

3. **Calculators...** boy this was a big invention. To be able to calculate figure quickly and accurately.
4. **TV...** this was a huge invention... I remember my mom telling me that when they got their first TV that all the neighbors came over to see it. When I was a little kid, a lot of the shows were still in black and white, and I remember thinking how weird it must have been living back then when everything was black and white with no color in the world.
5. **Cameras, Video Recorders & VCR...** these were some amazing inventions. Remember the Video recorders that worked with VCR tape. Those big bulky cameras that you had to put on your shoulder to film. Now most of them fit in the palm of your hand and film in HD. That was huge to be able to take the tape out of your camera and immediately watch it on your TV at home.
6. **Video games...** Pong... I remember playing that at my grandmother's house. My brother and I would be captivated for hours playing that game. Then came the Atari that was the prized jewel of every kid in America. Can you imagine a kid today spending more than 10 seconds playing an Atari. Games today are "life like" even using your own body motions to interact with a game.
7. **PC...** Here come personal computers. I remember my dad in the early 90's had a PC called the 80/88. It didn't even have a hard drive. If you wanted to run a program you would have to load it using these floppy disk. Each program had 2-3 disks and you had to load one disk at a time. So just to open a word processing program would take 3 to 4 minutes. Forget trying to run multiple programs at the same time. Now computers are SUPER computers compared to the only just a couple of decades ago.
8. **GPS...** Now you have devices that you can literally guide you anywhere you want to go with pin-point accuracy anywhere around the world.

Here is the amazing part... all of this technology now fits in the palm of your hand. And just about all the information you collect... data, contacts, pictures, videos can be shared to the entire world instantly.

During the industrial age our economy was based primarily on selling products but as we began move into the information age the service industry grew incredibly fast requiring a much larger work force. So the question is did this change in the economy have an effect on families?

Let me share some facts with you. A generation or two ago, a typical household only needed one income typically from the husband to make ends meet. Now more than 70% of households have dual working parents so they can make ends meet. All of this extra time by the parents takes away from the family life. And it shows in the divorce rates today. Over half of all marriages today end in divorce, which is twice as high as it was in 1966 and more than three times the rate in 1950. Families today face more challenges than ever before. The world is changing... no longer does it take a century to develop new inventions. Things happen much faster and we are expected to keep up with this ever changing world around us.

In the midst of all this change is there anything that is consistent and unchanging? Is there anything that can help a family today?

God, is consistent and unchanging...

Malachi 3:6

"For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed..."

In the midst of all of the change in our world there is one constant. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Before you do anything as a family, you must make sure that Jesus Christ is the center of your family.

1. Strong families have Christ at the center.

Pastor Jared touched on this subject last week as he was talking about how Christ must be the center of everything you do. He talked about letter Paul wrote to Timothy.

1 Timothy 4:7

⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Paul is clearly saying don't have anything to do with how the world tells you to live but rather train yourself to be godly. As time goes by you notice the world will try to convince you that certain sins are "justified" or "acceptable". Here is the problem when you try to live your life according to what the world says you should do. The worldview it is always changing and adjusting.

Just to give you an example there is a website that has been in the news lately that provides a dating service for people who are MARRIED! As of just over a year ago they had over 4 million members.

Can you imagine the reaction from the public back in the 50's if a business providing this kind of service opened in any downtown street in America? Who knows the place probably would have been burned down! But not today... To many this sin is considered "acceptable". I know and you know that this is not "acceptable" but there are over 4 million people who think it is.

This just one small example of why it is critical of why you must make Christ the center of your family. Even though the world around you is changing He remains the same.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

If you want stability in your family you must make Christ the center of your family before you do anything else. This is a commitment you must make as a family.

Joshua 24:15

¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

I think Joshua's statement sums the decision that needs to be made by each family.

God blesses those who follow Him.

Deuteronomy 28:2

² All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

A couple who had been married for 55 years was asked "what was the secret of your marriage?" Without hesitation, the husband replied, "Senility. I wake up each morning and I can't remember who this old girl is. So each day is a new adventure." When his wife finally quit pinching him, he got serious.

"In a word?" he said. "Commitment."

2. Strong families are committed to each other.

Before Jamie and I were engaged we talked a lot about the marriage commitment. I always told her “I’m not doing this to see if it works out, I am committed for life”. We went for pre-marriage counseling with the pastor who performed our service. Boy was that an eye opener... they cover all these things you never even thought of... but in the end it made us realize the commitment we make to each other is critical to a successful marriage.

Romans 12:9-10

⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

We must be devoted to one another. Many marriages fail because the relationship lacks the commitment required to make a marriage work. Many people find it just easier to quit than to work through their problems.

This verse says we must “Honor one another above ourselves”. You must put your spouse before yourself.

3. Strong families communicate effectively.

Strong marriages typically exhibit a strong ability to communicate effectively. There are two key forms of communication vital in strong marriage. “Communication with God” and “Communication with each other”.

There are several ways to communicate with God. Through worship, fellowship, reading your bible, just to name a few. But the one that seems to surface over and over again in successful marriages are families that pray together. To gain the wisdom and power to overcome the challenges your marriage will face, it only makes sense to connect to the power source.

Well then if you need more prayer what is an effective way to pray? You only need to look toward Jesus for the answer.

Luke 5:16

¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Mark 1:35

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”

Even the Son of God needed to get to a place where he could focus on God's will. Many times we are so overwhelmed by everything that is going on around us, our prayer become less effective. Not because God is not responding but because we cannot hear Him because of the environment around us. Couples who seem to have a good understanding of God's will for their family typically follow the example of Jesus. They regularly find a "quiet place" for prayer.

The second half of effective communication is "communication with each other". Marriages end in divorce for a number of reasons, money problems, change in priorities, failed expectations, you name it, but one factor that is present in just about every failed marriage is a lack of communication. Many times marriages simply cannot solve their problems because they do not know how to communicate with each other.

I'm going to share with you a communication method that was shared to me by a marriage counselor.

- a. **Find a place and set a time to communicate...** He said the reason most people cannot resolve issues in the marriage is because it only comes up when someone is upset or mad. He said this is the worst time to try to resolve issues. Couples must actively find time to communicate about their issues when they are calm.

Ephesians 4:31

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Find a place where you can communicate without being distracted or interrupted. Kind of sounds like Jesus finding his "solitary place".

- b. **Listen without Interruption...** I believe this is something men struggle with more than women. I know I do... you thinking in your mind as she is laying it all out... (OK Honey... just land the plane already... I just need the facts) and then once you believe you have all the fact you just jump right in and offer the solution. Well let me tell you 99.9% it doesn't matter what your solution is if you didn't the time to listen to your spouse.

James 1:19

¹⁹My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

- c. **Repeat for understanding and seek clarification...** This is the most critical step for effective communication. You must repeat back to the person what they said to make sure you have a clear understanding of the issue. You will find that most of the time you heard it one way but your spouse had a different meaning.

- d. **Respond...** Now the shoe is on the other foot. This is your chance to respond to the correct understanding of issue. It is time for your spouse to listen without interruption and follow the same steps.

Proverbs 15:23

²³ A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—
and how good is a timely word!

Simply follow steps until you resolve the issue. You will find that when you follow these steps, in most cases you will resolve the issue after repeating the process only once or twice.

- e. **Seek Forgiveness...** if needed.

Ephesians 4:32

³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

There are two more pieces of advice based on my experience... If you really struggle with communication in your family and you begin using this method I would highly suggest you start off with the small stuff get used to working through your issues. As you begin to see it working the BIG problems will be much easier to resolve.

The other piece of advice is... understand this is a never ending process. I can't tell you how many times my wife has threatened to nail my clothes to the floor if I don't pick them up.

Strong families...

4. Strong families expect life will be challenging.

1 Corinthians 7:28b

“those who marry will face many troubles in this life.”

I wish it wasn't true but your marriage will always be under attack. Satan loves to destroy marriages.

1 Peter 5: 8

⁸Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

This is where strong families persevere where others fail.

Strong families are constantly aware of the severe consequences of sin how it affects a marriage. Temptation is all around us, more today than ever before. The good part is that God will never allow us to be tempted with more than we can handle.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Rest assured God will always provide a way out. You must choose to turn away from the temptation.

Strong families surround themselves with other strong families.

This is really where fellowship comes in. This is where small groups have literally saved marriages and saved lives. God did not design us to be alone. We were designed to be with others.

Acts 2:42-47

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

When you are with other strong families they can help you through the hard times.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.”

Strong families are thankful and find peace even when times are hard.

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

When times are hard we tend to only think about the negative things in our lives. We find it hard to be thankful for anything even though in most cases we have a lot to be thankful for. This verse also says we must put into practice what we have heard and if we do the peace of God will be with you.

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Does your family need to make a commitment? A commitment to Christ? Or does your family need to make commitment to each other?