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Presentation Transcript
Loving Your Family
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This is *The Important Stuff* series. We're talking about loving neighbor. And the aspect of that is *Loving Your Family*.

Hello everyone. Good to see all of you today. We're happy to have all of our folks online with us. It's been awhile since we've worked on *The Important Stuff* series, so let's review a little bit.

Jesus said that the most important thing of all is to *love God* with your whole being. We covered four main aspects of that, as explained in the Bible – loving God with your whole heart, trusting God, seeking God and following God.

Today we're moving on to the second most important commandment – according to Jesus – to *love your neighbor* as yourself. So we're going to cover five elements of this second most important commandment. And the first one that we're going to be talking about is *loving our family*.

Some people don't seem to understand that the Bible would consider a member of your family your neighbor, because your neighbor is everyone that is not you. Right? So it's just talking about loving *others*. "Love your neighbor *as yourself*," right? So everyone else would be your neighbor.

So what does the Bible tell us? Well, let's look at Matthew 22:37 and review just a little bit.

Mt. 22:37 – *And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*

So that's what they're really all about. See, it's not just *me*. I'm part of a family. I'm part of a group – a group greater than just my nuclear family – the family of humanity – the family of God. In God's eyes, each of us is connected to everyone else. We have certain

responsibilities to all other people. So that's what we're going to talk about. But, specifically, we're going to talk about our responsibilities to our family.

Let's go to Ephesians 5:21. I used to be part of a church that focused very heavily on how the man was the head of the family. And it does say that. But it also says this:

Eph. 5:21 - ...*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ* – in Ephesians 5:21.

The head also submits to the other members. How does that work? Well, I think about our little group here. We have a board because we're incorporated, because we have assets. And to have assets, you have to have a Board of Directors and a corporation. So, in our little group, we all hate to be the President of the Board. After years of careful manipulation and avoidance, I couldn't put it off any longer. It was my turn. In fact, there was nobody else that could be elected, right? Pretty much. So I'm the man right now. Right? I'm the head of the board. But our documents say that not only does the group submit to the President of the Board in some ways, but it also says.... How would they submit? Well, they have to come to the board meetings – the board members, when they're scheduled. And I'm responsible to run them in an orderly fashion – that's debatable in the eyes of some here – and they have to follow the lead there. But how do I submit to the group then? Well, my job is to make sure that everyone that wants to is heard and all their suggestions are considered fairly by the group. *My* ideas, *my* opinions are no more important than anyone else's. And, if I get outvoted by the board, then I go along with it. I have to submit to the will of the group. That's the way it's supposed to be in a family, in a way. And I'll explain more about how, specifically, that is.

Let's look in Ephesians 5:22.

Eph. 5:22 – *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. How do you submit to God? Well, completely, right? For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church – His body – and is Himself its Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* Well, that sounds pretty dogmatic – pretty autocratic – doesn't it? But let's keep reading.

V-25 – *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her – oh, he's supposed to sacrifice himself for his wife – that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the Word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.* You know, husbands can make it easy for a wife to be submissive, or he can make it hard. He can make her look good, or he can make her look bad.

V-28 – *In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.* Now, I love my body. But if I put my thumb up here and hit it with a hammer, would that be loving my body? Some guys like to hammer their wives pretty hard though. It's not how it works! Not in God's plan. "Love your wife as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself." It's the same thing, isn't it?

While the husband has the lead responsibility – if anything goes wrong, it’s his fault – why is that? Because he is the one who is responsible. His decisions are based on what others want, need, etc. So he’s supposed to make his decisions based on what the others want and what’s good for them and what they need. True of mothers, as well, toward children. So, when a man is the head of a family, it’s not what *I* want. It’s what is good for *us*. What do *we* want? And what is good for all of *us*? That’s how his decisions are to be made.

Sometimes, there might be some things that he would want more than would be good for the family, and sometimes his wife may have a better read on it, and he jolly-well better go with her decision then. And sometimes the kids are right and he better hear what they have to say, too.

I would say that most of the children that come into my office are brought there because their parents want them fixed. And, actually, the parents are the problem. Kids only respond to what is going on in the family. They don’t set the tone. That’s the situation in our society today, but that’s, unfortunately, the way it is.

Ephesians 6:1 through 3. This is for children.

Eph. 6:1-3 – *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise – and he quotes that – that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.*

So it’s pretty obvious how children are supposed to submit to parents. But, if people in the family are supposed to submit to each other, how do parents submit to kids? Well, in the next verse, it says:

V-4 – *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

What do parents do to provoke kids to anger? How is it that they are not submitting to their children properly in that? Let me ask you this question. Is it easier for kids to obey their parents when they’re angry, or when they’re not? The parents have a lot to do with how successful a kid is at obeying parents. So it’s the parents who are responsible, to a large degree, as to whether their kids are obedient to them. Some parents make it really easy for their children to obey them and some make it really hard.

I was listening to a YouTube thing by a guy named Jim Burns. I think he lives in Santa Fe. I know I’ve met him at a trail head when I was out hiking one day – recognized his picture. But he was talking about how he was one of these parents that always has an agenda. He said, “I’m always wanting to talk to my daughter about her homework and her chores.” He said, “But I found out that, if I took her out for lunch and asked her to talk to me about what she likes, eventually, *she’d* bring it around to homework and chores. And she was much more receptive to listening to me talk about that stuff *then*.”

See, he was submitting himself to her. Of course, I know that some of us will disregard that, because Jim Burns isn't a member of the Church of God.

The question was, how do parents make it difficult for children to obey them? Well, there are two things – just two. Neglect and over-control – the two extremes.

I had a boy come to my office – a teenager. And this boy did not look like the other boys that I see in my office. He was completely preppy. He had Dockers and a button-down collar shirt and a knit sweater. His mother told me, before he came in, that the reason she was bringing him was that he was not performing up to his ability in school. He was only getting As and Bs, instead of all As. He was gifted, so they expected him to get all As. And he was playing too rough with his younger siblings. He wouldn't help around the house. He was argumentative. He played computer games too much. He told me that his church was very important to him and his family. He told me his father worked from 6 am to 10 pm every night, but they were in the Boy Scouts together on the weekends. He wondered, out loud, why he was such a procrastinator, why he had trouble getting excited about anything, except computer games, why he didn't care about school, why he had trouble going to bed at night and then getting up and going to school in the morning. A few other factors to consider were, that his mother had been ill with a mentally debilitating disease as long as he could remember. So all the subtle hints of over-control and, also, neglect are present there in the family. And he doesn't want to think of himself as angry with his father, who takes him scouting, but isn't around all during the week, or his mother, who can't, because of an illness, attune herself to him – and may never have been able to. So he stuffs it. And so he has this mild, ever-present lack of motivation – numbness. What do you call that? It's depression. Right? It's anger turned in on the self. So he doesn't know it, and neither do his parents, but he has been provoked to wrath. And he shows it in subtle ways.

Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The word there – that is translated *discipline* in the ESV – is translated *nurture* in the King James Bible. *Paideia* is the Greek word. That word is opposed to neglect or over-control. That's kind of the opposite of both those things. And it means in the Greek...it can mean different things in different contexts, but, I think, in this context, it could mean all three of the things it means. It can mean *instruction*. It can mean *discipline*. And it can mean *punishment*. So, instruction on how to live and then consequences, either positive or negative, depending on what he or she does. Summed up: “Do what I tell you to do” – kind of a summary for what that means. The second one – the nurture and admonition – *nouthesia* is the word – can mean *a teaching or warning*. It's translated both of those ways. And that could be: “Listen to what I say.” So there are boundaries in the home – where there are consequences – and there is also instruction – formal instruction – about how to live life. When kids get these things, then they're not angry. One of the best ways, I think, to do this is to explain to our kids why following God is a good thing. “If you do X, here's what is going to happen.”

Now both of these things take time with children. So, if you're doing these things, you're not neglecting them. And since punishment and discipline are included there, we're also

taking care of the part of that that is fully involved with them. We're taking care of our children like they're a part of our body. We have to correct our bodies sometimes, don't we? If you get a hang nail, you've got to clip it off. Right? We have to take care of things. Are children a part of our body? Well, if they're our bio-kids, yeah! They absolutely are – not just a metaphor, right?

So those are some things that the Bible says about how we should take care of our family. There are lots, lots more, but this is only a thirty-minute talk, not a three-hour talk. So we move along.

Let's also think about what we know from observation about people. All people come, when their born, with innate wiring to connect to their parents – or whoever is taking care of them. We're self-protective. We're self-oriented. We don't know anything else. We come that way for our own good – to keep us alive. We come knowing how to be cute, so that people like us. And we know how to cry, so we can tell people when we're hungry, or wet, or cold, or uncomfortable in some way, or we need attention. That isn't bad. That's all good, especially for parents, who need to know what is needed. We come innately wired to connect to parents, but everything else we have to learn. We have to learn how to love other people, how not to be selfish, how to empathize with other people, how to be fair, how to read people's body and facial expressions. That all starts with connection to parents. And, if a child experiences love, and empathy, and nurturing from parents, then they learn to trust that they can be loved, so there is no doubt about that the rest of their lives, and that things are generally – even though there are rough spots – going to be okay. And, of course, this is all a matter of degree. Right? Some learn that very much so, and some only a little. It's impossible to meet every need of a baby when a baby wants it to be met, because the baby only knows right now. And sometimes, there's a load of laundry to do. So nobody's ever been perfectly taken care of as a baby. But we can be good enough. So, if a child's needs for that early attachment and attuning that has to go on are not met – if they can't find a way to trust their parents – then the child languishes and grieves.

Years ago, when I lived in Arkansas – when I was in my first pastorate – I volunteered for a local community service organization. And they used volunteer workers to support people who had been abusive or neglectful of their children and had been turned in to Child Protective Services. One of my clients was a lady who was pregnant. She had her baby and not long after she had the baby, the baby was back in the hospital – court ordered by the case worker – because the baby was a case of what they call *failure to thrive*. It wasn't gaining any weight – even though it wasn't sick. They know that that happens when there is a disconnect between the mother and the baby. The baby feels like it is not wanted, so it shuts down its system. Neglect is worse than abuse in every case. Kids will do stuff to get abused rather than be neglected or ignored, because neglect is an invitation to no longer exist. That's what her baby was doing. That is an extreme case. And, you know, this mother wasn't a mean person. She just didn't know what to do. She'd never had anybody connect to her. This is a great insight for me to see that there is a whole different side to society – than the one I know – where there are generations of

people, by the millions, living in our country today, who don't understand what it takes to bring up a child, because they were not brought up that way.

So, the pain of grief that is caused when a baby doesn't get care causes them to become angry. *Provoke not your children to wrath.* Right? Well, this is one way that this happens. It's not just because we won't let our teenage child go to the movies with their friends. It goes way back to the very beginning when we didn't meet the needs of our children. So they become angry. Then they have this deep pool of rage that leaks out into all their other relationships and they wind up in prison, or married four times, because they can't find a way to get along with anybody. They always wind up angry at everyone. They don't have any friends, because they're always going off on people.

So, what does the mind do to deal with this kind of rage and this kind of pain? Well, children – when they are in these kinds of situations – develop emotional defenses against what they have no control over – against the pain – sometimes physical pain, but more often I'm talking about emotional pain or the rage, which nobody likes to feel angry. These defenses take two forms. There are **relational disconnects**, sometimes, where we can't connect to other people in a healthy way.

I have a little girl, who comes to see me, who can't make eye contact and deflects all of my efforts to pull her in and draw close to her. Her mother is an alcoholic and her father is like her. He never got enough of what he needed, so he's defending himself from relationships, including his daughter. So he's unavailable to her, even though he's standing right there in front of her. She's been hurt so much, she has a hard time letting people into her life.

2 Timothy 3:1. Paul said to Timothy:

2 Tim. 3:1 – *Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self.* If you have to look out for yourself, from the time you're six months old, or less, you become self-centered. ...*lovers of self, lovers of money* – because there was never enough care given, where we feel like we have enough - *proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

Well, Paul is giving us a picture of what happens to a society when the children are provoked to wrath by not being taken care of early. And once you get that snowball rolling, it gets big quickly, because the next generation doesn't know what to do.

So relational disconnect – people who are brutal and abusive, proud and arrogant – nobody wants to be around them – those are defenses against relationship. And the second one is **self-deception**.

This boy I mentioned...he's relational, but he covers his anger that he has for himself and his parents, with diversions and excuses. He's self-deceiving and he's trying to deceive me, without even knowing it.

Jeremiah 17:9 says:

Jer. 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick* – that's the correct translation – not wicked – sick. *Who can understand it?*

So there are several ways that we can defend ourselves and this one is a big one for a lot of people. That's what this boy is doing. He is the least sick between the two. The one who has a wall up against relationships is going to be a lot harder to help than he is, because he connects with me. So I can build a relationship with him. And when he trusts me enough, I can point out his defenses and we can work together on those.

This girl, who can't make eye contact or trust me because of how her parents treated her, do you think she'll have an easy time trusting God? No. Harder. God tells us to love our children so they will learn how to love God, which is the first great commandment. And the part about us loving our kids is included in the second one.

So those are some observations that I have about how what I see every day is also in the Bible. That's what I observe.

Let's talk about some how to's. How do you love your family? Well, I think, maybe, the most important thing for us, in our society today – and this might not have been true in Paul's day, but I think it is in ours – is the principle of first things first.

I had a young couple come to my counseling office, some time ago, for marital counseling – very unhappy. And I started quizzing them a bit about what life was like for them every day. They said that their work schedules prevented them from seeing much of each other. I found out that she went to work at 10 o'clock at night and came home in the morning at 6 or so. That was about the time he was getting up and leaving for work and he would get home at 4 in the afternoon. I said, "Well, you've got from 4 to 10. That's six hours. That's as much as most people have, so what's the problem?" Well, she liked kickball and soccer and he like computer games. And one day they found out they felt like strangers living in the same house, because he was spending all of those six hours playing games and she was gone – out doing what she like to do. They both said that they'd lost the love that they once had for each other. So, I explained to them that we are all, in our culture, so busy and there is so much to think about and there are so many things to do, so many distractions, so many recreational choices that we have to *intentionally* plan to be together or it's not going to happen. So, if they wanted to get back what they once had, they were going to have to make a plan and then follow it. They needed to cut back on the things that they like to do on their own so that they would have time to do some things together. And that would require giving up some of what they each liked. I suggested that they think about their own stuff as less important than their relationship. And she questioned that. The young lady questioned it. I asked her if she

was happy doing the things she *thought* would make her happy. She said, “I hadn’t thought about it that way.” So she’s going to have to decide whether she wants to be connected to her man or play volleyball or whatever. The question is, “Is her independence more important than her relationship with him?”

Those kinds of things happen in the family all the time with our children. If we want to do what God tells us to do with them – to show love and bring them up healthy and faithful – we have to *intentionally* prioritize it, instead of just thinking, “It’s going to happen naturally without any effort.” You have to plan it.

In a 4-mile-an-hour world, when you are riding from Haran to the Promised Land, like Abraham did with his whole family, you could sit beside somebody on a camel all day long and talk to them. But that’s not how it is now. It’s different.

So, point 1: ***First things first.*** The only way I know to do that is to put it on a calendar and then not let other things crowd it out.

Steven Covey has the jar with the big rocks in it. The big rocks are things that you put first and that are going to take up time. Then you put more rocks that are smaller in it and that fills in around them. Those are other things you have to do that aren’t as important – might not take up as much time. Then he pours the sand in and it fills it up even more with even tiny little things – phone calls and reading the mail. And then he pours a gallon of water in there on top of all of that – and shows that there was still a lot of space left in there, even after it looked full. So it’s not that we don’t have enough time. I think it’s that we don’t plan. We don’t put the most important things first.

The second thing I want to focus on is: ***Relationship.*** If we go back to that idea that we come wired with the need to connect to parents, and that everything else, including our relationship to God, grows out of that, then we can see that our relationship with our children is very, very important.

The way I talk about this to parents is I call it the *bank account model*. A relationship is like a bank account. You have to make deposits so that, when you need to make a withdrawal, you can. The deposits are fun time, and talk time, and together time. And the withdrawals are correction. If you want to correct your kid, then you have to put something in first. Rules without relationship equals resistance. Rules with relationship equals respect. So we have to spend time with our kids relating to them, doing fun things with them, talking about the things they’re interested in.

You know that boy that’s angry and doesn’t know it? Do you know what we’re doing? We’re talking about hiking and computer games right now. Why are we doing that? What a waste of time! His parents are paying a co-pay for me to talk to their kid about computer games and hiking? We’re building a *connection* so that I can pressure him about his deceitfulness at some point and I can throw him a lifeline so he can get at all of the anger he has. I’m going to be able to point out later that he makes excuses and changes the subject when he gets too close to being angry with Dad. But that won’t work

unless he knows I'm there to help *him*, and I'm interested in him, and care about him. So that has to come first. He has to know that I'm going to be non-judgmental and that I'm on his side.

There was a young woman, awhile back, who came to my office – very young and has two kids already – grew up *way* too fast. She came in one day, looking very sheepish. She got angry with her husband and smacked him on the face. When she came in and told me that, after she told me, she just looked so downcast, and she said, “Are you angry with me?” That was good, in a way, because it means that we *do* have a therapeutic alliance and what I think about her is important. So I have leverage to help her. So I just said, “You think you're terrible for what you did and you feel ashamed of yourself. You want to know if I think you're terrible and if I'm going to give up on you.” You know, she sat there and nodded. And as she did, she teared up. I said, “You know, if you'll remember, I told you the first time you came here that I would *never* give up on you. And you know that outside of this room, we're considered weak for expressing our feelings, but in here we know it takes strength. So I can see that you're feeling something and that's good. So let's look at what happened.” Well, it turned out that her husband read her therapy journal and it outraged her. And then she smacked him. And then she felt terrible, and ashamed, and weak, and foolish, and out-of-control and all of that. We started, from that point, doing some EMDR and it went right back to when she was a little girl and her father read her journal. So she was being triggered by that past thing. And all the rage she felt, when her father violated her privacy, triggered when her husband did the same thing. Now she's feeling much better about her father and knowing that she needs to apologize to her husband and lay down some boundaries with him at the same time. That all happened in thirty minutes. Before she walked out the door that day, she looked at me and said, “Thank you for helping me.” That's what the relationship does.

The third thing I want to talk about today is: **Example**. It's interesting. The same young woman has seen her mother smack her father in the face several times while she was growing up – and go off on emotional tirades. She said, “I always hated it when my mother went off on my dad, and I vowed I would never do that, but I guess I'm my mother all over again.” Well, our kids *are* us all over again, aren't they?

When we get all upset about church politics, when we rant about the bad behaviors of other people in the congregation, when we gossip about people, when we lose control of our anger, our kids learn at a very deep level how to behave, and what to think, and to look at other people, and all that. They learn by our example. When they ask us why the deacon won't speak to our mother, but speaks to John's mom, and we point out that nobody's perfect, and that we all set bad examples sometimes, when we extend grace instead of angry outbursts or icy stares, our kids also learn at a deep level. They learn that it's not the people, it's God. And they learn that we can forgive and let go of stuff like that, and that nobody's perfect.

So what kind of example do we set? The Bible talks about telling our kids to listen to our training – both formally and informally – but mostly they absorb our values and beliefs by watching.

2 Timothy 1:5 – let’s look at that. Paul said to Timothy, who was a church kid – he grew up in the church:

2 Tim. 1:5 – *I am reminded of your sincere faith – a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.* That’s how it works.

The fourth thing to think about is **training** – not by example, but formal training. I was at Lexington a few years ago for the Winter Family Weekend and Keri Seelig was doing an activity for young teens while the older teens were having an activity in another room. She called it *Hollywood Squares*, because it was a takeoff on that game show, *Hollywood Squares*. She had teens 12 and 13 years old in two groups and there was a panel of adults who were in the squares (they didn’t really have that kind of setup, but you get the picture). We would ask them questions and the groups worked together to come up with the answers. The questions were concrete things, like “Here’s a quote from the Bible. Who said it?” or “What was the name of David’s mother?” – the kinds of things that were appropriate for them – memory stuff. It was really interesting to see how much they knew. I don’t think we stumped them all night long. Parents are doing a really good job there of teaching their kids about the Bible. Not every kid knew every answer, but I can guarantee you that, after one kid knew it, they all did. And so it was also a tremendous learning experience for all of them. So we can see that their formal training was working there.

But there’s also an informal kind of training. In Deuteronomy 6:20-21, it says:

Dt. 6:20-21 – *When your son asks you, in times to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you, then you shall say to your son – you now, on the fly – take time out to answer the question – and answer it at the level he is asking it – “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”* That’s what it means.

So there’s that “as you go” thing. Kids have questions and they ask them. And we need to have good answers for them – not above their level of understanding and not below, because then they feel condescended to, but at where they are.

One way we know our children are ready to learn something is, they ask about it. So that’s a really good clue for us.

I’m going to conclude this section, on what we can do, by reading to you about a couple of studies. It was conducted back in the 50s, I believe, but it was quoted in the 80s by some sociologists at Harvard University, who were trying to identify crucial factors in delinquency. They developed a test by which they could predict the future delinquency of children five or six years old. And their followup tests proved to be 90 percent accurate. Pretty good, isn’t it? They determined there were four necessary factors to prevent delinquency: 1) a father’s discipline – it has to be firm and consistent; 2) mother’s supervision – mother must know where her children are, and what they are doing at all

times, and be with them as much as possible; 3) the father's and mother's affection – children need to see love demonstrated between father and mother, and have it physically demonstrated to them; and then 4) family cohesiveness – families must spend time together. How can they absorb stuff from us if we're not around.

And the second one is *The Key to Right Parent-Child Relations*, by Dr. Paul Meyer, from Christian Child Rearing and Personality Development. 1) Love – parents should have a genuine love for each other and for their children (he kind of combined it). 2) Discipline. 3) Consistency – both parents should stick together, using the same rules and consistently enforcing those rules so, when a child gets away with something on some occasions, it's not the cause for which he is capriciously punished at another time. It's always the same response, the same reaction. 3) Example – in healthy families, parents don't expect children to live up to standards they themselves don't keep. Parents should expect their children to live up to the standard they themselves observe. And the fifth one he has is the man is the head of the home. The vast majority of neurotics – both children and adults – grow up in homes where there was no father or the father was absent or weak and the mother was domineering. That last one has a very high correlation with homosexuality. I know that's not politically correct to say, but that's still the truth.

So science, with its structured power of observation, has identified and expands on all the things that the Bible tells us to do to express love to our kids. They do it in a specific way that leads us to see what the Bible means by the compressed statements it makes, I think.

Okay, that's a smattering of information about loving neighbors who are members of our family. Important stuff. And we'll continue with other factors in the near future.