

MATTERS

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Dedication

To Randy and Shirley Culver, whose sixty year marriage has encouraged us as an example of God's model.

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Introduction

What is a family? A group of people living in the same house? A person and his or her pet? Is marriage essential to being a family? Can you be a family with only one parent? If two people just live together, is that a family? Are adults needed to be a family, or could it be just children or teens living on their own? What about grandparents raising their grandchildren? Is that a family?

What represents a family today seems to be up for grabs. The traditional, or nuclear, family consisting of a father and a mother and at least two children (preferably) is regarded by many to be a thing of the past, as old as the Cleavers of *Leave It to Beaver* days long ago, replaced by *The Simpsons* and *Two and a Half Men*. Is there a norm for what family life looks like?

Whose idea was the family? Is it relevant for today? Do we need families? Is there a standard for what constitutes a family? Some kind of criteria that identifies roles, relationships, and responsibilities? Was anything ever put in print that defines and describes a family? Is there any objective truth about the family? To turn a quote borrowed from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, “Can anyone tell us what a family is?”

Actually someone has—God. The family is God’s idea, which makes it the best idea for how people are to relate and grow physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. God invented the family. His Word, the Bible, is where we discover what a

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family is meant to be. The family matters to God; therefore, it ought to matter to us. Furthermore, many family situations are typical and constant from one generation to the next. But others that were once exceptional are now normal. Although family life has changed—a lot—since the first family, what God has revealed as basic to a family has not.

In this first of the three-book Family Matters series, we will learn about when the family began and will discover the primary roles, relationships, and responsibilities within a Biblical family. God has the first and last word on the family, and He has spoken about it throughout the Bible. If we want to experience meaningful, enjoyable, fulfilling, and lasting family life, we need to read and follow the instructions. The Bible is where we find God's instructions on the family—and it is where we learn how much the family matters. So let's get down to the basics of Family Life.



The First Family

KEY VERSES

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground” (Genesis 4:1, 2).

Adam and Eve: familiar names of the first man and woman, husband and wife, father and mother—the first family. Who taught them how to be a family? Who were their role models? Who provided them a good example? Who were their friends, their counselors, their helpers, their mentors? Imagine being the first to experience life, to establish a home and a marriage, to have children, to bear the unprecedented pain of sin and death. Imagine the experiences of failure, shame, guilt, jealousy, rivalry, isolation, loneliness, grief, and hardship without the help of a book, a video series, a class, a support group, or a friend. The family is God’s idea and the foundation for all other divinely ordained human institutions. Before

government or even the church, God ordained the family. It was not His will for individuals to be isolated from others. Instead, He assigned essential, specific roles and responsibilities to the individuals within a family structure to meet each other's numerous needs. The needs of today's families are many—and can seem overwhelming.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What do you consider to be some of the most significant needs of today's families?
2. Which of these needs do you see becoming an increasing challenge among your own peer group?
3. What are some resources available that teach, train, encourage, advise, equip, and counsel families?
4. Which of the resources listed is your first choice, the one you believe to be most important?

USE YOUR BIBLE

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, records many “firsts” related to the family. Consider these “firsts” found in Genesis 1–4.

The first two people were Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:7, 18–23).

Adam was formed from the dust of the ground by God, Who breathed into him the breath of life (2:7). Eve was made by God from one of Adam’s ribs. The woman literally was part of the man when God formed him (1:27). All subsequent people, beginning with Cain, have been conceived (4:1), but still bear the image of their Creator.

The first home was Paradise (Genesis 2:8–17).

Paradise was a perfect environment without sin. God put mankind there “to dress [tend] it and keep it” (2:15). Thus, man was made to work and to have dominion, or authority, over God’s creation (1:28). Work is not a consequence of sin; it is a matter of God-given stewardship. Whatever we call “home” is a gift entrusted to us by God to manage wisely and faithfully for His glory and our good.

The first marriage was performed by God (Genesis 2:18–25).

Marriage is God’s idea and thus the only legitimate option for a man and a woman who desire to share a home. Adam and Eve are the prototypical husband and wife, picturing oneness just as the Godhead itself is the perfect example of oneness. An individual cannot experience unity alone; unity requires plurality. God’s purpose in marriage is that the two, husband and wife, become one (2:24) in reputation, testimony, and pursuits.

The first sin was disobedience (Genesis 3).

Sin is an intrusion into God’s creation. The fall of man was

due to Adam's disobedience and resulted in condemnation (Romans 5:12). Furthermore, through one person (Adam) sin and death entered the world and spread to all people. Thus all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:23). The first sin alienated mankind from God. But as by the disobedience of one man (Adam) many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one Man (Christ) many are made righteous (5:19). Sin can fracture marriages and families, but it need not be fatal. Faith in Christ as Savior and Lord is the only remedy for sin and its deadly effects (6:23).

The first parents were Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1).

Adam and Eve were the first father and mother. They recognized that God had purposefully given them their children as gifts (Genesis 4:1, 25). Apparently they made knowing and worshiping God a priority in their home (vv. 3, 4). God has always expected parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Unless we build our homes God's way, our labor is futile (Psalm 127:1).

The first two children were Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1, 2).

Procreation is the God-ordained means whereby the human race reproduces and populates the earth. Like Cain and Abel, the first two children, each human is the handiwork of God. Human life begins at the moment of conception, and every human bears the image of God (compare Genesis 1:26 with James 3:9). Though Cain and Abel were brothers, they had different abilities, interests, skills, and bents. Abel was a shepherd, and Cain a farmer. Wise are the parents who listen to and observe their children, rearing them according to the way God made them, rather than forcing them to be who they are not (Proverbs 20:11, 12; 22:6).

The first sibling rivalry was between brothers (Genesis 4:3–7).

Like most brothers, Cain and Abel were very different. Their differences were complicated by sin and resulted in the first sibling rivalry. Cain's jealousy of Abel, prompted by God's respect for Abel's worship over Cain's, provoked Cain to anger. A competitive and jealous spirit—like a coiled snake ready to strike—can be lethal (Genesis 4:8). It weakens a person morally and spiritually, resulting in greater vulnerability to sin (Proverbs 25:28). Unchecked sibling rivalry can produce estrangement, with lingering harmful effects that last from one generation to the next. Discerning parents lovingly confront such tensions, mediating reconciliation between siblings to avert further conflict and to produce peace.

The first death was an act of murder (Genesis 4:8).

Because of Cain's own wickedness and unrighteous life, he murdered his brother Abel (1 John 3:12). Imagine their parents' agony, far worse than if Abel had died by natural causes, accident, or illness. Adam and Eve's heartache over losing two sons—one murdered by the other, who then lived as a fugitive—must have been devastating. This was unprecedented pain, grief, regret, and blame, accompanied by subsequent judgment within the family. Though this fulfilled God's prophetic warning in Genesis 2:17, its consequences were unbearable (4:13). Sin of any sort is never inconsequential. Though its wages are death, it is forgivable when confessed, due to the gift of God (Romans 6:23).

The first family was a man and a woman joined by God as husband and wife, and it grew to include one child, then another, and then others (Genesis 5).

Since the fall of mankind when Adam and Eve sinned, there never has been a perfect family. It is unrealistic to expect a problem-free marriage or family, since we all are sinners. But it is

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realistic to expect marriages and families where problems are acknowledged, confronted, and resolved Biblically to produce and grow better and stronger relationships.

1. According to Genesis 3 and 4, what were some of the problems that the first family faced?

Sin is an inherited problem. Cain and Abel inherited their parents' looks, temperaments, allergies, abilities, and sin nature. This sin nature has been passed to every human since then.

2. Contrast Adam and Eve's position and relationship with God before and after the Fall.

Before the Fall	After the Fall

Even though mankind's position and relationship with God changed dramatically after the Fall, God still blessed people according to His mandate. They were fruitful and multiplied (compare Genesis 1:28 with 4:1, 2; 5:1–4). The family, the first institution established by God, matters.

3. What do the following verses teach about the priority of the family and its basic relationships, responsibilities, and roles?

a. Proverbs 24:3, 4

b. Hebrews 3:3, 4

c. Psalm 127

d. Ephesians 5:22—6:4

APPLY THE TRUTH

1. Discuss with members of your family the significance of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge mentioned in Proverbs 24:3 and 4 and how they are evidenced in your home.
2. Identify with your spouse and/or children one strength and one weakness in your family. (For example, one family might practice praying together—a strength, while another family might have a parent who doesn't attend church—a weakness.) What steps can you take within the next week to strengthen the weakness in your family?
3. Though sin has marred the image of God in mankind, that image is still present. How does realizing that people are made in God's image affect the way you treat your spouse and other members of your family?