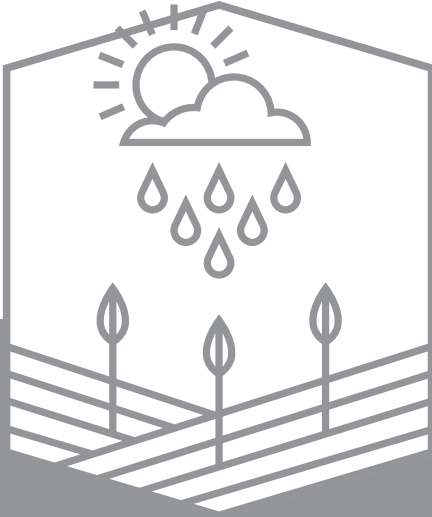


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A 6-SESSION STUDY
FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND
THE SCRIPTURES



PASSING ON YOUR BELIEFS

First Principles of Family Life

BY JEFF REED

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These materials are designed to integrate with BILD-International resources, which are designed to help churches train leaders.

All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is from the New American Standard Bible.

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CULTURAL BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY LIFE ①

We live in a culture in which there is almost a complete breakdown of family life. The statistics are staggering. The divorce rate has more than tripled over the last few decades. The USA currently has the highest divorce rate in the world. Around 50% of today's teenagers are not living with both parents. One of the most startling books, as mentioned in a previous booklet, is David Blankenhorn's *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*. These truly are the first stages of a post-Christian culture. We are producing a generation of children, even in our churches, of children who know little of the lifelong security and stability that comes from a mature, two-parent family, founded on the concept of lifelong commitment and stable faith. A significant majority of our children are not continuing in the faith. Our churches are not that far behind culture. What can we do? How do we keep from experiencing the same breakdown as the families around us? We will begin by examining a passage in 2 Timothy that describes what we should expect in the culture around us and lays a foundation for how to build solid families.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-17

Think Through the Questions:

1. What traits will characterize culture in “the last days”?
2. Which of those traits directly relate to the breakdown of the family? Indirectly?
3. What was key in Timothy's life that kept him strong?
4. What does the passage teach us about stopping the breakdown of our own families?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage:

Write a paragraph, outline, annotate, or chart your conclusions— whatever best communicates for you. Be sure to comment on the cultural traits that are related to the breakdown of the family and your initial insights on how to protect our children in such a culture.

Core teaching of 2 Timothy 3:1-17



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1-17:

Remember that this passage is in the context of the Pastoral Epistles. Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus to give them instructions on how to fully establish the churches and how to keep them on course over the long haul. The specific context of 2 Timothy is a challenge to Timothy to keep the faith and to find other faithful men to whom he could entrust the sound doctrine for the next generation.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes the culture during the last days. In this session, we are particularly interested in what he says about the breakdown of the family. One characteristic is a generation marked by disobedience to parents. Also noted are households where men entered and led weak wives astray. Added to this are a whole set of individual characteristics that mark a culture driven by rampant individualism—a culture that is selfish, driven by money, lacking personal disciplines and controls, destroying lives of others, always seeking personal pleasure, etc. This has become a mirror of our culture—the breakdown of the family in the wake of unbridled pursuit of individual interests and pleasures.

This whole section is followed by a prediction, in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, that many will fall into the ways of the culture and not listen to sound doctrine (teaching based on the first principles). Instead, they will find teachers who will adapt the message to the culture, who will twist the principles into what they want to hear. The most “successful” teachers, those who gain the largest response of the culture, will have to tell people what they want to hear. They will have to water down the message or change the principles. That is why Paul warned Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6:6, to “preach and teach these principles.” In 2 Timothy 4:2, he was to preach the word “in season and out.”

Now let’s turn our attention to the faith of our children. What does this section teach us about the fate of our children in this type of culture? First, they are part of a generation that is much like the one in this passage. Most individuals in this kind of generation will not respond to sound doctrine. They will not accept the teaching and build their lives around the first principles. So our children are going to be in the minority; it will take exceptional strength to build their lives upon the teaching. Second, they need to be taught the first principles of the faith from childhood, as was Timothy (3:15). Timothy’s tradition ran deep. He learned his faith from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). Then Paul came along, evidently when Timothy was in his teens, and took him under his wing. Third, our children need to be challenged to continue in the faith (3:14). Even though Timothy was a young leader, he needed to be challenged to continue in the teaching. The temptation was there, even with Timothy, to be affected by the culture and fail to continue in the faith. You can see how difficult it is to keep the faith alive and developing from generation to generation.

We can see three generations here: Timothy’s grandmother Lois, his mother Eunice, and Timothy. Paul reached back into Timothy’s spiritual roots, his childhood, and set the learning of the Scriptures at the core of his ability to continue with the faith. He learned the Scriptures within the context of his family. As a spiritual mentor to Timothy, Paul simply built upon the foundation that was laid by his family. If we expect to reverse the exodus of children from our churches and eventually build strong, multiplying churches, we have to build the Scriptures into the lives of our children from childhood.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote is from *Generation at Risk: What Legacy Are the Baby-Boomers Leaving Their Kids?* by Fran Sciacca. Fran has devoted his life to teaching high school in Christian schools and has seen the current generation drift from the faith. He is one of the sharpest teachers I have ever met, and his book, though out of print, is an accurate penetrating analysis of both the times and the urgent need to take more seriously the passing on of the faith to our children.

“We may doubt that we can reclaim an entire generation; however, we certainly can reclaim our own children and their friends. The home is the reasonable starting place for healing in the church. And the most effective and lasting instrument for accomplishing this healing is parental example. We as evangelical parents need to take a serious inventory of our own spiritual lives. Do we have a distinctly biblical worldview? Do we measure our behavior by the standards of Scripture or by the guy next door? Do our children hear us talk about God in a real and personal way, or do they perceive from our conversations that our faith is an impersonal subject to be studied? Are we living out our faith before them as authentic aliens or simply as tourists?

“We must ask ourselves other questions. Do our children see us spending time with God in prayer and Bible study or do they merely see us rushing from one religious activity to another? Have our children ever felt the liberty to ask us the tough questions about God’s existence, the truth of Christianity, and the future of man? Do our children see us laboring to enlarge the kingdom of God, or seeking to enhance our own kingdoms? Do our children see us collecting “things,” or investing in people? Do they believe they have an option?

“These are not merely provocative questions. They are penetrating queries into our own spiritual lives, asked of the ones who know us best. I encourage every parent of junior- or senior-high children to spend a half day with your kids privately; ask them these questions about yourself. Assure them that you will not hold them “hostage” to their answers; give them liberty to be honest. They’ll tell you what they “see,” which incidentally is also what they are going to become someday. (For those who are not parents or are unmarried, this suggestion fits just as well. Simply ask your questions of those who know you best.)

“The personal investment and sacrifice required to cultivate a biblical worldview and lifestyle are enormous, but the stakes are high. An entire generation is at risk! Our lives are on the line, and so is the future of the church.”¹

Record any insights from the brief commentary and quotes:



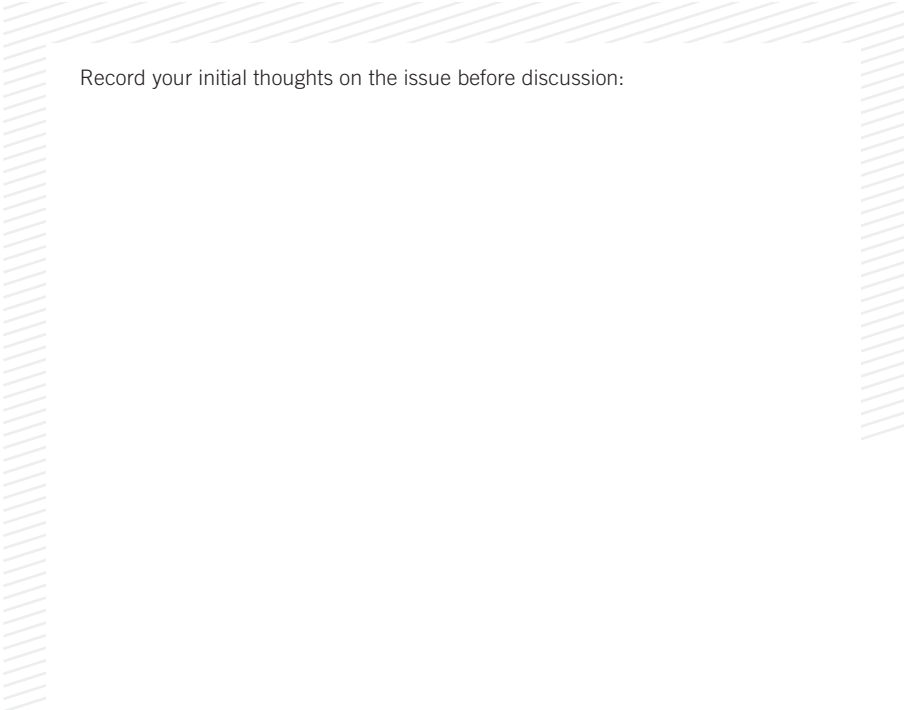
Think Through the Issues

The children of believing families are leaving the faith in significant numbers—commonly quoted figures hover between 60-70%. One of the main problems is the cultural breakdown of the family in the West. This breakdown has infiltrated our local churches. Careerism dominates family life. Divorce is becoming common amongst Christians. Biblical roles of fathers and mothers are being radically altered. There is little biblical authority and order in Christian homes. As a result, churches no longer function as a family of families. The following issue is designed to help us explore the reasons that children leave the faith and to begin the evaluation process of reclaiming this exiting generation.

ISSUE: Children leaving the faith

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. How would you assess the state of the families in your church? Are they strong and vibrant in their faith?
2. How about the faith of teenagers in your church? Is their faith genuine? Or, can you see a trend toward sterile faith? Or of rejecting the faith?
3. Of the children in your church who became young adults in the last decade, what percentage now possess a strong, active faith?
4. What are some of the reasons that so many fail to continue in the faith?
5. What philosophies has your church, or the believers within it, adopted that directly or indirectly contribute to the breakdown of the Christian family?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.



Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion:



Apply the Principles

It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

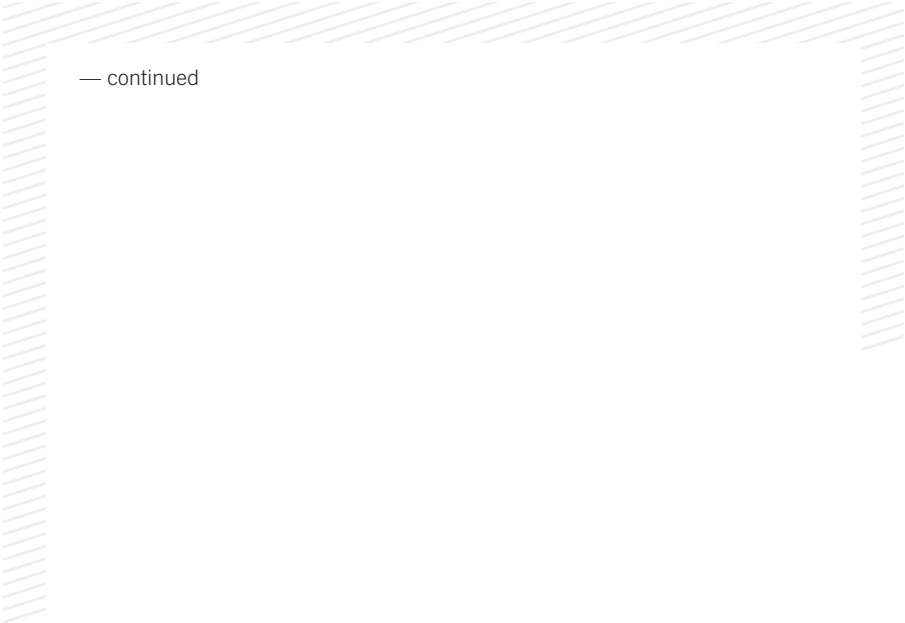
Design an Application for Your Life.

In light of the direction culture is moving, think through your family to gain a sense of the degree that contemporary culture is defining your family life. Purpose to examine your family—especially the faith of your children—in light of Christ’s design for His households (churches) and the families and marriages that make up His churches. Reaffirm your commitment as a disciple to building every phase of your life around the first principles of Christ.

Design Intergenerational Applications.

How can you encourage your children and grandchildren to fully embrace the faith? If you don’t have children, how can you encourage young adults in your church to fully embrace the faith? If you are a young adult yourself, evaluate the likelihood that you will fully embrace the faith when you are completely on your own.

First, evaluate the spiritual state of the children in your home or directly under your influence. Second, reaffirm your commitment to building your family, or to helping others build their families, on the first principles of Christ. Record your evaluation and reaffirmation:



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