

“GETTING UNSTUCK IN MY FAMILY”
by Rom A. Pegram (9/22/19)

Since we’re talking about ‘Getting Unstuck in Our Families’ today, I thought it’d be fun to reminisce a little about the families we watch (or have watched) every week over the years. On television screens and tablets, we invite TV families of all shapes and sizes into our homes to laugh and cry with every day. And you can’t tell me, culturally speaking, that these TV families haven’t affected the way we operate in our homes at times. According to Southern Living Magazine, they’ve compiled some of the top TV families we continue to love. These are some of the ones that’ve stood the test of time:

- FAMILY TIES – one of the first TV families to seriously deal with political, cultural, and family issues like no one before (or maybe ever again). The Keaton family has endeared themselves to us...
- THE BRADY BUNCH – few shows (and their theme songs) have burrowed themselves into our social consciousness like the Bradys. The story of a lovely lady and a man named Brady has touched our hearts for generations and seems like it’ll continue to...
- THE WALTONS – any family that wishes one another goodnight as they drift off to sleep is a family we can get behind, can’t we? One of the endearing qualities about this family is ... even though they had very little materially, they never shied away from helping others who were in need. We love ‘em...
- LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE – when it comes to American families, the Ingalls are about as iconic as you can get! Based on Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House books, this show told the story of a salt-of-the-earth family of seven who live and work on the frontier of Minnesota during the 1870s and 80s. When many of us think of family, this is what we remember...

And, there’re many more... We love to remember these idyllic families of our lives, don’t we? But, were they so perfect? Though they portrayed many good times, the one thing all families have in common is this. *We all get stuck*, regarding our family, from time to time—both on TV and in real life! Even though we’d like to think so for an hour at a time, there’s no such thing as a perfect family; *every family gets stuck from time to time...*

And when we get stuck as families, it feels bad, doesn’t it? I mean, when you’re stuck as a family, you can feel a lot of anger, frustration, or disappointment. And maybe even there’re grudges being held; *that’s what we’ll call ‘stuck’...*

But listen, God doesn’t want you to live that way—you or your family. God says your family doesn’t have to be stuck! God never promises your family will be perfect; but God does promise your family can get UNSTUCK if you do *one very important thing*. Do you want to know what it is? THE KEY TO GETTING UNSTUCK IN MY FAMILY: GIVE GOD FIRST PLACE IN MY FAMILY! The Bible, over and over again, says that if we give God first place, we’ll get UNSTUCK. It’s true with our families too...

A friend of mine taught me a principle to live by that has really made a difference in my life; I want to share that principle with you. It’s this: **FIRST = BLESSING**. *Whatever area of your life you want God to bless, put him first in that area*. If you want

to God to bless your finances (like we talked about last week), put God first. It's the same with your family. If you want God to bless your family, you've got to do the same.

Let's look at our definition of UNSTUCK one more time (based on Romans 12:1-2): **Moving forward in my life because I'm willing to give God complete control.** And this applies to any area of our life we get stuck in—including our families...

So, putting God first in your family means giving God complete control of your family. I think, intellectually, we're probably all on board with that; of course, God's ways are better than my ways. But, regarding our will to actually do that, we might need some help. So, folks, here are 5 ways you can give God first place in your family: Are you ready?

FOCUS MY FAMILY DAILY WITH PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY. Building a family's like building a house. So, when you're building a family (like a house), you're going to want *a solid foundation*. And the most solid foundation you can build any family on is ... prayer and study of God's word. This would be the obvious answer to how to put God first in your family...

Now, here's an observation/warning for you. Even though we can state this—that prayer & Bible study are the foundation for a solid family environment, it doesn't always mean this will happen. *You have to take the initiative to make it happen.* And, if your experience with the family has been like mine, you'll agree this can be tough...

Look at 1 Chronicles 16:22 (NLT) with me, would you? Let's read it together: "Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him." Here's the truth. *Families get stuck because they don't live according to God's word.* Every issue that happens in our family, that causes us to be stuck, can most times be traced to not living according to some part of God's word. So, we have to ask ourselves: Are we living our lives according to God's word? Are we bringing God's word into our family setting?

Folks, do you set time aside every day, as a family, to pray and get into God's word together? Jane and I have always struggled with this. And, many times, I think even if we shoot for 7, we'd be happy with 5! Do you know what I mean? You shoot for spending time, as a family, with God daily, but if you only accomplished this 5 times a week, or even 3, you'd probably consider that a victory!

So, how do we do it? Building a family foundation is such an important key to getting UNSTUCK in this area. Listen, *you can't control the future of your children, but you can control the foundation.* This is why Jesus taught that the wise build their houses on bedrock, not sand that will be washed away during the next flash flood! Your house won't collapse if it has a firm foundation. 'Same with your family. Learn to build your family on the solid rock of prayer and study of God's word! Next...

INVOLVE MY FAMILY IN MY CHURCH (Two Elements). *The element of WORSHIP is a part of involvement in your church...* Just like when you commit to times of prayer and Bible study together, it's also a part of building the family foundation to *worship together...*

I had a boss, years ago, who always told me ... DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO! And I never forgot him saying that; I thought it was kind of funny. And the only reason it was

kind of funny was ... he meant it! He was dead serious! In other words, he'd never be a good example for me, but he saw potential in me to do things differently, so he encouraged me to do as he instructed...

Now, even though that was *kind of funny*, it was basically a hypocritical way of leading, wasn't it? 'Do as I say, but not as I do!' And yet, that's the way too many people parent. 'I'll drop you off, but you won't see me in church. Do as I say, not as I do...' (Everyone's thinking it, so we may as well talk about it; it's an epidemic today!) But, I'm here to tell you, *this is why going to church together is such an important principle* of getting UNSTUCK as families! And don't kid yourself; your kids are smart enough to figure this out. *If you want your children to value church (the eternal life it stands for), if you want your family to love the Church when they get older, you've got to model that NOW!*

Proverbs 22:6 (KJV) talks about this. Maybe you've heard this before: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I love the way Eugene Peterson translated this (MSG): "Point your kids in the right direction—when they're old they won't be lost." Eternally speaking... Again, *you can't control their future, but you can control their foundation*. This is your part. Involve your family in your church by *worshipping together*. That's what Christians do. Then there's...

The element of SERVICE is a part of involvement in your church... This is another crucial element of involving your family in your church! When you're children see you serving, that can be very powerful!

Here at Trinity, we do our best to model a serving culture. You see people serving here, don't you? Worship is not just one voice. There's musical voices. There're spoken voices. There's those who serve by ushering. There's those who serve by offering you coffee or a plate of good food. And, of course, there's mission work done through Trinity—most recently the Operation Christmas Child (OCC) efforts. There're plenty of ways to serve around here—no excuse for not being involved (sign-ups in Connections Room). Families serving together are very powerful, indeed...

Psalm 127:1a tells us: "Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted." And, for today's purposes, we could also translate this "Unless the LORD builds a family, the work of the parents is wasted." So, building a family together means going to church together—both worship and service. Now, let me continue with other ways we can put God first in our family—quickly...

READILY FORGIVE MY FAMILY WHEN NECESSARY. If you want to get UNSTUCK in your family, you've got to learn to forgive. I realize there are exceptions, but as a general rule that holds true...

My younger brother, Stan, was a psychology major at Asbury College when we were there. I used to talk to him about family dynamics, especially due to the amount of pastoral counseling I've done over the years. And his conclusion, as a psychology major was this: ALL FAMILIES ARE DYSFUNCTIONAL—at least at some level. Would you agree with that? Yes. And some of your families put the 'fun' in *dysfunctional*! ('Just

kidding!) Let me say it again: *All families are dysfunctional* and here's what that means. Because all families are dysfunctional, you're never going to sail through life without getting hurt. 'Agree?

So, *forgiveness has to be a part of any family!* And one of the best ways you can put God first in your family is to quickly forgive each other. Lack of forgiveness divides a family; the presence of forgiveness unites a family! But ... it's one of the most difficult things to do, yet so vitally important if you're going to move forward in life with your family. Maybe in these next few moments ... you need to forgive. Maybe you need to forgive someone in your family that has wronged you ... or just irritated you to death...

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:32, NLT), he tells them this: "...be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." You might say, 'how do I get the power to forgive someone in my family—someone who's done me wrong over and over and over again? It comes from the power God gave you when he forgave you—the Power of Love (not Huey Lewis either!). *When we give our lives to him, God's Spirit of Love comes to live in us ... and empower us, to love like never before.* That's where the power to forgive comes from—not via your own power, but the power of God that lives in you!

Proverbs 17:9a says, "Love prospers...." And the Hebrew word for 'prospers' means 'to move forward.' Love moves forward. Love grows. Love prospers. Love gets UNSTUCK when an offense is forgiven. But dwelling on it separates those involved...

And Romans 12:18 says, "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." The key, here, of course is ... 'do your part.' When you forgive, you release the one who's done you wrong. It's the only way. Are you ready to forgive today? Finally, and I'll just list these last couple *ways to give God first place in your families...*

SCHEDULE FAMILY CELEBRATIONS TOGETHER. I call this the 'party point' in today's message... You've heard it said that a family that prays together stay together, but how 'bout this? *A family that parties together ... stays together!* Learn to celebrate the big important days together (like Jacob did in Genesis 35:3—I'll let you look that one up)... 'Easter, Mother's/Father's Day, Christmas, baptisms, and birthdays ... you'd better be gathering the brood! Finally:

TRUST GOD WITH MY FAMILY. Have you given God complete control of this area of your life ... so that you can get UNSTUCK and move forward with your family? If you're worried about your children or grandchildren today, trust God with your family... If you're praying for a future spouse, and whether you'll even have a family, trust God with your family... If you feel you've messed up in the past and it's too late and you can't go back, trust God with your family... Take everything to God and say, "God, I'm trusting you!" Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us of this: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Listen, *it's frustrating to feel stuck!* It's unsettling to realize that we are ultimately NOT in control of the other people we call family—including *this* family. We can guide our families, but we can't make decisions for them. We can build the foundations, but we

can't control their future. That's a tough realization. So, what do we do? We make a commitment to PUT GOD FIRST IN OUR FAMILIES, then trust God with the rest. And it's decision time, folks... Please read Joshua 24:15 with me—where Joshua and other followers of God had to make a decision. Are you ready? *I'll read the first part; you read the second part—like you mean it...*

“...choose today whom you will serve. ... as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”