

Whose Family Values?

by John Vissers

Christian families should prioritize prayer, faith, and commitment to God's plan, and be willing to serve the cause of Christ and bring others into His family.

Duration: 32:42

Scripture: Joshua 24:15, Psalm 127:3-5, Matthew 6:33, Luke 14:26

Topics: "Family"

Description

The sermon transcript discusses the story of Hannah, a tormented and misunderstood woman who turned to God in prayer. Despite her personal pain and family problems, Hannah believed that God had a purpose for her family. The sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing the values of the Lord in our own lives and families. It also highlights the need for repentance, grace, healing, forgiveness, and cleansing in our families. The transcript concludes by stating that God wants to use our families to accomplish his purposes in the world and calls Christian families to witness to his love, power, salvation, and glory.

Transcript

Hear the word of God this morning from the Old Testament, from the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 1, and reading there verses 1 to 28. 1 Samuel, chapter 1. There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zulfite, from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah, son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zulf, an Ephraimite. He had two wives.

One was called Hannah, and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year, this man went up from his town of worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord.

Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. And because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Elkanah, her husband, would say to her, Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Once, when

they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up.

Now Eli, the priest, was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. In bitterness of soul, Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, how long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.

Not so, my Lord, Hannah replied. I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer.

I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman. I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.

Eli answered, go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him. She said, may your servant find favor in your eyes. Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah, his wife, and the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son.

She named him Samuel, saying, because I asked the Lord for him. When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, after the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always.

Do what seems best to you, Elkanah, her husband told her. Stay here until you have weaned him. Only may the Lord make good his word.

So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. And after he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli.

And she said to him, as surely as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord.

For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading from his word.

Let us pray. Prepare our hearts and our minds, O Lord, to receive your word this morning. Silence within us any voice but your own voice, that hearing your word we may also obey your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. It was a confrontation that probably affected the outcome of the 1992 presidential election in the United States.

A confrontation between a real-life politician, a real-life political leader, and a fictional television character. The confrontation between Dan Quayle and Murphy Brown. Dan Quayle, as you may recall, had criticized the television show for promoting values which were contrary to family life by encouraging single women to have children.

Murphy Brown shot back that the Vice President was a narrow-minded bigot whose vision of family life was limited. The public debate which emerged forced people to choose between the family values of a Dan Quayle or the family values of a Murphy Brown. And even here in Canada the debate raged.

Whose family values? Whose family values were to prevail? Whose family values were you to choose? In North America today we are witnessing what one writer has called the battle for the family. James Dobson of Focus on the Family writes that our children are at risk. There is a battle for the hearts and the minds of our kids.

And what many see as the traditional family is under attack. What many regard as biblical family values are being assaulted. In Canada there is increasing pressure to redefine the meaning of family.

Just this past week, as we read in the papers, four lesbian couples won a court case here in Ontario to legally get the right to legally adopt. They were fighting for the right to adopt children. They want to redefine the family to include same-sex couples.

Out of concern for the family, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has formed and established a national task force on the family. Whose family values will prevail? Whose family values are we to choose? There is no question but that we are living at a time when family values are changing in Canada. Family life is in turmoil.

There is a good deal of uncertainty. Marriages frequently end in divorce. Single parent families abound.

Family life seems to be in chaos. At the same time, however, family life is still important to people. Most people still long for stable and positive marriage and family life experiences.

Roy Bell, who teaches at Cary Hall in Vancouver, says this. He says, What every survey indicates is that almost without exception, what people want out of marriage and family life is exactly what the Bible teaches marriage and family were designed to produce. So on the one hand, we have all of this chaos and turmoil and redefinition going on.

At the same time, there is this tremendous yearning for positive family life and marriage experiences. In Sweden, where there is a very high rate of divorce and family breakup, studies show that still 90 percent of men and women plan on forming a monogamous marriage and family relationship again in the future. And most want children.

In the United States, five out of six divorced women indicate that they wish to remarry. And in Canada in 1991, still 73.4 percent of all families consisted of married parents with children. And so today on Christian Family Sunday, on Mother's Day, we want to think for a few minutes about the meaning of Christian family life.

What are Christian family values today? What does it mean to hold these values in a changing world, in a changing culture, in a non-Christian culture? What does God's word teach us about family life? How can the Christian family be strengthened to face the changes which are inevitably emerging all about us? And how can the Church of Jesus Christ both encourage a biblical model for family life and yet at the same time embrace those who do not fit in to the traditional patterns of family life? How can we embrace them with the gospel? Single people and divorced people and broken families and single parent families. What does it mean in our culture, in our world, in our city? What does it mean for us in Knox Church to choose family values today? Whose family values? In the book of Samuel, there is this intriguing story about an Old Testament family. It's the family of a woman named Hannah, her husband, whose name is Elkanah, and their young son Samuel, who grew up to be the great prophet of Israel.

This was not your typical or traditional family. It was, in fact, by today's standards, a rather dysfunctional family. Although Elkanah was married to Hannah, we also read that he had a second wife whose name was Peninnah.

Now, at this point in Israel's history, polygamy, that is, the practice of having more than one wife, was not all that unusual. It was practiced, even though it was clearly contrary to God's original intention at creation in Genesis 1 and 2, as well as contrary to God's law in Exodus 20. Nevertheless, it was practiced in the life of Israel.

Now, the story tells us that Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not have any children. And this created a great deal of tension and conflict and jealousy in this rather unusual family. Hannah was distraught because she had no children.

And as you know, a married woman in Israel at this time who had no children, and especially who had no son, was considered somehow as unfulfilled and cursed by God. The text indicates that Elkanah loved his wife Hannah dearly, but that because she did not have children, the other wife, Peninnah, tormented her and teased her mercilessly, and that her life was something of a misery. So each year, when they went up to the temple, Hannah pled with God.

And on one occasion, Hannah prayed so fervently in her anguish and grief that Eli, the priest, thought that she was drunk. She was persistent in praying for a son. She would not give up.

And God, it says, heard her prayer and answered her prayer. And Samuel was born and dedicated to the Lord. And in verse 20, we read that the name Samuel literally means, I asked the Lord for him.

I asked the Lord, and he answered me. I asked the Lord. Hannah prayed for Samuel and then gave him to the Lord.

And he became the prophet that God used at a critical point in Israel's history. Now, one of the reasons I think this story appears in the Old Testament in Scripture is to tell us about the birth of Samuel, this great prophet of Israel, this great man of God who was used by God at a critical time in the life of Israel, how he was set apart by his mother for the work of God even before his birth. But it is also an account of a real mother and a real family in the history of Israel.

You see, God used a very difficult and dysfunctional family situation to accomplish his divine purpose. It is an account of a woman who had no children and who pled with God for a child. It is a carefully drawn vignette of a tormented and misunderstood woman who took her pain and her secret desires and her

hopes to God in prayer.

And what we learn and what we discover in this story is that Hannah believed that God had a purpose for her family no matter what the circumstances seemed to indicate. In the midst of her personal pain and the problems of her family, she chose the values of her Lord for herself, for her son Samuel, and for her family. And in the midst of the frailty, and in the midst of the brokenness, and in the midst of the dysfunction, and in the midst of all of the problems of her family, Hannah was a woman who believed God.

And that, my friend, is a family value worth choosing. These are family values worth choosing in a real world. Values which focus on faith that God has a divine purpose not only for your life individually, but for your family, as husbands and wives, as children and as parents.

Values which include the practice of prayer for children, praying for them and with them. Values that shape family life even in the midst of the frailty and the brokenness and the dysfunction of our daily experience of living together as husbands and wives and parents and children. Values which shape our lives as sinners saved by grace, as those who seek to live daily before God.

Dedicating yourself as a father or mother or grandparent or aunt or uncle or child, son or daughter to life in the kingdom of God. Committing your family to the glory of God. Discerning the ways of God in the midst of the daily struggles of life.

Being able to say with Hannah, I asked of the Lord and he answered me. You see, Christian family values only make sense when we set them clearly in the context of God's purpose and God's will and God's plan for our lives. We are living at a time when many traditional, so-called traditional family values are being set aside in our country, in our culture, in our world.

And in this context, it is indeed right that we should raise high the banner of the family. For in scripture, marriage between one man and one woman was instituted by God at creation. Two of the ten commandments are devoted to the sanctity of marriage and to the parent-child relationship.

And throughout the Old Testament, we discover that the family was the focal point of religious instruction for those within the covenant community of faith. And when you come to the New Testament, you see Jesus with outstretched arms for mothers and for fathers and most of all for children. And he taught that God designed marriage to be the union of one man and one woman in lifelong monogamous commitment.

And the Apostle Paul appealed to the marital bond as a picture of Christ's relationship to the church. And he left clear instructions on how husbands and wives and parents and children were to relate. But let us be clear.

We need to do more than defend these so-called traditional family values as important and as non-negotiable as they are. We need to do more than simply maintain what has been as absolutely essential as this is. You see, it's possible to believe all of this without living out the purposes of God for our families.

In our zeal to defend the biblical model of Christian family, we can lose sight of the biblical mandate of the Christian family. In our enthusiasm for the family, we can actually forget about the God-ordained values of daily family life which ought to shape the practice of our life together. Unless we are prepared to ask, how is it that God wants to work within my family, that God wants to use me as a parent, as a father, as a mother, as a child, we're missing one aspect of what scripture teaches.

In our reaction sometimes against the denial of the biblical family, we can actually turn the Christian family into an idol. Let us be clear, we need to maintain essentially what scripture teaches, but we also need to move beyond that in our practice as Christians to live out those values in our lives. Our Lord Jesus taught the importance of God-ordained family life as fundamental to human existence.

But he also saw the family within the larger purposes of God. You'll remember Jesus also said some very strange and startling and difficult things, some hard sayings. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14, 26. When his mother and his brothers came to speak to Jesus, our Lord responded by asking, in what seems almost a cruel response, who is my mother? Who are my brothers? And what does he say? Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother, Matthew 12. Or in Mark 10, in another place, Jesus says, no one who has left home or father or mother or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in the present age.

You see, family life was fundamental to our Lord. Family life was vital to our Lord. Our Lord upheld the biblical model of the family, but he called us to something more.

He calls us to use our families within the larger purposes of God. The redemptive purposes of God in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are to understand our families within the divine purposes of God.

Our families are to be set within the family of God. God wants to use our families to bring others into his family. And God calls us as families to serve the cause of Christ.

And as families within the family of God, God calls us to embrace those who are without family, the single. Those who have been disowned by their families for the sake of the gospel. You see, the Christian family is the family committed to the pathway of discipleship within the world today, and that's not easy.

The Christian family is not intended to be a haven from a heartless world. It's not intended to be a cocoon from a constantly changing culture. It's not intended to be a retreat from the insanity of our world.

But God wants to use our families to accomplish his purposes in our world for his glory. Just as God wanted to use Hannah's family. Christian families are called to witness to the love and the power and the salvation and the glory of God.

Shaped by a determination to see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven. Values which are shaped by the kingdom of God. Families who know God and who believe God and who trust God no matter what the problems.

No matter what the pressures. No matter what the dysfunctions. You see, this is what makes Christian families real families.

It is easy, too easy to idolize and idealize family life. And the story of Hannah's family is an eternal reminder that God's purposes for our families are worked out in the nitty gritty of everyday life. Like Hannah, most of us come from and most of us live in families that are dysfunctional.

None of us lives today in the perfect family. None of us has come from the perfect family. Family life isn't easy.

Most of us have skeletons in our family closets. We have deep scars from the past. We live with guilt about our failures as husbands and as wives, as parents and as children, as grandparents and as grandchildren, as aunts and uncles and cousins.

We carry burdens because of broken relationships between those that we love. Some of us, quite frankly, need to repent for what we've done to our families and in our families. And others of us need to experience something of God's grace and power and healing and forgiveness and cleansing in our own lives and in our families this morning.

You see, those are the values which the Gospel brings to family life in our world today. Healing and hope for the family in Jesus Christ. Like the great prophet Samuel, the great church father, Augustine, came from what could be described as a dysfunctional family which was used by God.

Augustine's mother, Monica, was a woman of deep, deep faith. And she had a powerful certainty about the dreams that she had concerning her son, Augustine. Augustine's father was a pagan, a non-Christian, a non-believer.

And young Augustine was sent to the very best schools, and Monica had ambitions for him that he should become an intellectual, a distinguished academic, so that he would find a place of honor in Roman society. But it was also, while it was a human ambition, it was also an ambition dedicated to the service of God. But Augustine, as you may know, drifted.

He became interested in cultic religions. He drifted from his Christian faith. He rejected the faith of his mother, the faith in which he'd been raised.

And he led what we would consider, even by the late 20th century standards, a pretty wild life. He fathered a child out of marriage. But Monica prayed ceaselessly for his return to the true faith.

At one point, she became so discouraged that she went to her local bishop, her pastor, and pled with him to go and speak to Augustine. But instead, his advice was, go your way and God bless you, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish. And Augustine didn't.

In the summer of 386 A.D., he sat in the garden of a friend, weeping his life in ruin, weeping for the brokenness of his life and his experience, almost persuaded to begin a new life, but somehow lacking resolve to break with his old life and his old patterns. And then he picked up a scroll and he began to read from the Book of Romans. And Christ came to him and healed him, and he found salvation in Christ.

And he came to Jesus Christ as his Savior and as his Lord. And Monica's son, the child of this broken, fragmented, dysfunctional family, came to Christ. And God used Augustine mightily as one of the greatest theologians and leaders in the history of the Church.

Let us pray for our families and children that God's purposes will be fulfilled. Let us encourage one another to good works in our families. Let us embrace God's model of family life wholeheartedly.

Let us embrace and uphold God's purposes for our own families. Let us remember that God's purpose for some includes being single, that God's purpose for some includes being married without children. God embraces and loves all forms of family life today.

But let us, above all, put our families and place our families in the service of our Lord and King, our Savior, Jesus Christ. And let us do so honestly, without pretense, in our brokenness and in our frailty. When we need healing and when we need strength, let us go to Jesus, the one who wants to come by his grace and heal our families.

And like Hannah, let us believe God. Let us ask of the Lord and believe that the Lord will answer. Whose family values will you choose? I encourage you this morning to choose those biblical values, the values of the kingdom of God, the values of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Whose family values? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Let us pray. We give thanks, O Lord, this morning for family life.

We give thanks for our own families, for our loved ones. We thank you that you call us to embrace the biblical model and ideal of marriage which you have set out and family life which you have given in scripture. But that also in your grace and in your mercy, you take our weakness and our brokenness and even there your divine purposes are accomplished.

So use our families this day. We pray for your greater glory through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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