God’s Good Design for Life: God’s Good Design for Family

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0:00] Beginning at verse 25, and that's on page 1176 of the Red Church Bibles. Ephesians chapter 4, beginning at verse 25.

Okay, Ephesians chapter 4, beginning at verse 25, page 1176.
Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin, do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.
He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.
[1:33] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

And carrying on to chapter 6, beginning at verse 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment, with a promise, that it may go well with you, and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.
Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And it's really in response to and to help us think through some of the issues that will be facing us this coming year.
The government have already outlined that they would like to hold a referendum early next year to redefine marriage, which will have an impact on family.
And to help us think through that, not only what we do this morning, but on the news sheet at the very top of the page, there's a link there just reminding you that if you go to the church website, on the recent church blog, there is a list of talks, sermons, and websites that will be helpful to you, generally around this whole theme.
[2:59] So I encourage you to check that out for yourselves. God's good design for marriage. This morning we are looking at God's design for family.

So let's ask him for his help. Read to us. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Father, as we listen to your word, so your spirit is active and at work. And we do not want to grieve your spirit's work in our own lives.
But we humbly ask that the power of the Spirit would be at work within us individually, as a mother, or as a father, or as a child, or whatever circumstance we may find ourselves in, that you would speak into our hearts, changing us and transforming us to be more like Christ, and renewing us and enabling us to see your design for our lives and especially for family.
We ask for your help in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when we were kids, or when our kids were younger, rather, we used to play a card game.
[4:46] Some of you may know it. It was called Happy Families. The basic aim was for us to try and collect sets of families by name, and the cards included a Mr. and a Mrs., a Miss and a Master.

And although it was called Happy Families, it very rarely produced a happy family. It usually turned into accusations of cheating, and the other one hitting another, just because they lost, and that was only the parents, while the kids got kicked off to their room.

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But there was something else about that game. There was a general acceptance, or understanding, of what family was. Family was, well, it was a mum and a dad, who were the parents of, well, at least, a boy or a girl.
But experience tells us that family is not always like that. It's not unusual for a child to grow up with just one parent, or perhaps to not even know who their biological parents are.
It may soon be possible and legal for a child to grow up with two dads and two mums as the parents.
[6:03] This was recently made clear by Glenn, which is the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, responding to the government's proposal to redefine marriage, this is what they say.

The government's historic decision in November to hold a referendum on equal access to marriage in 2015 was a landmark moment in the evolution of equality for lesbian and gay people.
We look forward to 2014 being the year that equality of rights and responsibilities is introduced for lesbian and gay families and their children.
Implied in this is the right for same-sex couples to adopt. So a same-sex couple who obviously can't produce their own children, but want a family, will be able to apply for adoption.
And according to Glenn, this is a rights issue, and every loving couple who wants a family should not be denied one. But not everybody agrees.
[7:15] Paddy Manning, who you may have seen on Primetime recently, represents an organisation called Preserve Marriage, which opposes adoption by same-sex couples and equal marriage rights.

Now here's what he says, and bear in mind, he speaks as a gay man. He says, I am a gay man. I'm not a victim, and I reject this notion that traditional marriage should be drastically altered for some fantasy.
Claiming that equality demands that men and women be as interchangeable as Lego blocks shows you don't understand men and women, marriage, or much else.
We can ignore reality all we want, but the outcomes for children are not the same across all family models. Marriage of a man and a woman gives children the best chance.
You see, by changing the definition of marriage, our government are creating or making way for legislation that will deny children the right to a father and a mother by design.
[8:31] Now that's important, we've got to understand that. It will mean that they will deny children the right to a father and a mother by design.

In fact, when we look at God's design for family, we see that every child has the right to a loving mother and a loving father. So we're going to be looking at family under two headings.
First of all, family as God designed it to be, and then family as God ordered it to be. So first, family as God designed it to be.
Let's look at our text in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 1 to 4. Let's read those verses again. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment, with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Fathers, do not exasperate your children.
[9:35] Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. So here, within these couple of verses, we've got a picture of family.

It includes, look at verse 1, children and parents. And the parents are, verse 2, a father and a mother.
This is the design, this is the structure in which children are to be raised. Now, just because you've got heterosexual parents, a mother and a father, doesn't mean to say that the family will flourish.
Parents must also live according to God's good design. So in verse 4, fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
It's implying there that the parents, the father and the mother, that they themselves must provide a loving and caring environment. Just because you're a man and a woman in marriage doesn't mean to say that it's all going to go well.
[10:40] It must be a loving and caring environment. They've got to be gentle, not angry. And above all, to be those who are teaching their children in the way of the Lord.

And if all this design is followed, it leads to healthy family life. So look at verse 3. That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

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We'll come back to that a little later on. But we shouldn't be surprised then that when this design of God is followed, it actually proves to be true.
UNICEF, the organisation that works for children's rights, now accepts that children tend to do best when they are raised by their biological parents, both a mother and a father.
So this is what they say. Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children. And the family structure that helps the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.
[11:52] There is value in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents. In fact, this is not just good for children, it's actually good for all of society.

Further research has also shown that when mothers and fathers are encouraged together to stay together and raise their children together, it reduces poverty.
In other words, it's found that where there are communities where there is high marriage breakdown, there is greater poverty. And in communities where there are strong and healthy marriages, there is less poverty.
So God knew what he was about when he was designing family. But what about single-parent families?
What if a child only has a mother or a father? Does that mean they're not going to flourish? Well, there are all kinds of reasons a child may only have one parent.
[13:02] Sadly, a parent may pass away. We live in a broken world where there are accidents and there is sickness. Things happen.

Other reasons may be that a child only has one parent is because, well, there may have been adultery or some form of abuse within the home which may lead to divorce or separation.
But whatever the actual reason is, it doesn't always mean that the child is now somehow at a disadvantage. For example, my wife, Kirsty, who most of you know, she grew up in a home with just a mum.
Her father left when she was very young. Yes, it was difficult for her. Yes, it was tough for all of the children in that family. It was hard for her mum. Yes, it did affect and it continues to impact on Kirsty's life.
But whatever the reason may be for a single parent family, let's remember this. God, in his goodness and grace, provides all that we need for every parent and for every child.
[14:17] Healing, forgiving, restoring. God isn't bound by the actions or behaviours of others. God is never derailed by the circumstances of our lives.

Remember the psalms that we read earlier just before we sang those songs. Let me remind you of them. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.
God is a father to the fatherless and the defender of widows. let's never forget he is a God who has intervened into our broken and disordered world.
He's come into the mess of our lives and into the mess of families. He is a God who redeems and who renews. This is the kind of God that we deal with.
In fact, one of the ways God provides is actually through the wider church family. That's why we're gathered here this morning. The wider church family is part of God's plan to help and encourage all families.
[15:34] So in a sense, all fathers should be fathers to all children and all mothers should be mothers to all children and all siblings should be siblings to all children.

children. The church plays a huge role, a massive role in providing the practical, emotional and spiritual support to all families.
That's why we make such a big point of us coming together like this. We're not just coming as individuals, me and my family and just our little core group. We're coming together to support and encourage each other and to help each other along.
But having said all of those things, we mustn't lose sight of what God's best design for family is. That is a loving marriage between one man and one woman that is in an exclusive lifelong commitment.
So that is family as God designed it to be. But second, family as God ordered it to be. Because within this design, this beautiful design that God has, we find an order.
[16:57] And that order starts back in chapter 5 verse 21. Chapter 5 verse 21 says, Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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So this is the beginning of the, verse 21 is really the beginning of the whole section through the rest of chapter 5 and into chapter 6. It's telling us that we are all to submit to God's ordering, to submit to God's design, his structure for family life.
So in verse 22 following, there is an order for the husbands and wives. They have distinct and different roles to play within marriage, one to another.
There's an order and God's designed it in that way. And in our text, in chapter 6, 1 to 4, there is an order, there's a particular structure for parents and for children.
So in these verses, parents are placed in authority over their children and children are placed under the care of their parents.
[18:10] So we're going to look at them in two ways. First, we're going to look at the role of parents. So listen up, parents. Look at verse 1.

Or I could even say potential parents. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
So parenting is to be the responsible of the parents, mother and father. You don't just leave it to one or the other. They both have their distinctive roles.
A mother is gifted and a father is gifted differently, but yet they complement each other. They work together to provide the best environment and care for their children.
So parenting is a dual task, something they're in it together. However, and I think this is right, you might want to come back to me on it later. However, I think within God's order, the father is given a particular responsibility.
[19:21] So he jumps from verse 1 talking about parents generally, now to verse 4, fathers. Fathers have a particular responsibility that the mothers don't.

Yes, they all play their role in it, but fathers listen up, myself included. Fathers, do not exasperate your children.
Instead, fathers, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. One commentator has pointed out the common abuse of a father at that time in a typical Roman family.
Let me read it to you what it was like or what it could have been like. A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves.
He could make them work in his fields, even in chains. He could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and he could punish as he liked.
[20:32] He could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Now, that might seem a bit extreme for us in our context and in our environment, but I don't think it's too uncommon for children in Ireland to experience the abuse or the absence of a father.

It's all too common. The number of fatherless children or children being raised not knowing who their father is, or perhaps who their mother is, is increasing all the time.
So there is a specific and an important correction here for how a father should parent. And there are two primary concerns.
The first concern, if you split the verse, verse four, in two parts. The first concern is the first part. Fathers do not exasperate your children or as some translations have it, fathers don't provoke your children to anger.
Don't provoke your children to anger. Don't get them angry and annoyed. Let's think about that for a minute. Because anger, and I guess this is the experience of all parents, it's a common response, isn't it, of a child to a parent.
[21:59] If you had children, do they ever get angry with you? It's alright, they do. It's alright, children will get their own backs in a minute, so don't worry.

So when a parent says no to their child, or no, not there, or don't touch this, what's the reaction? Sometimes they get angry and they throw a tantrum and they start shouting and doing all kinds of things.
Why? Because the child is simply doing what we all do. They're fighting against authority. They're resisting God's good design for life.
They don't like it. They don't want to submit to their parents' authority. They want to live life their way and do things the way they want to, like us.
They have a sinful nature that reacts against authority, doesn't want to submit to it, and responds in anger.
[23:03] So does that mean then parents must avoid saying or doing anything that will ever cause a response of anger? Well, I possibly couldn't tell them never say no or don't do that because, well,

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if they get angry.

Well, I don't think that's what it's saying. What does it mean then? Well, parents and in particular fathers, we must exercise our authority.
we must be firm with our yes and with our no, but in a way that is Christ-like, in a way that doesn't cause a wrong response.
So, have a look at the verses that we read earlier in chapter 4, verse 26. All of us, whether we're a father or not, this applies to us all. These are searching and challenging words.
verse 26 of chapter 4, in your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.
[24:07] In other words, don't go to bed without having sorted out what you need to sort out with your wife or your husband or with your children. Go to bed at peace, having forgiven each other.

Verse 27, and do not give the devil a foothold. If we don't sort it out, he gets in. And he makes things difficult. Verse 29, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.
So if you haven't got something good to say that is going to be helpful or building up to your children or to your husband and wife, don't say it. verse 31, get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander along with every form of malice.
You see, this is what it is to parent. This is what it is to be a father who uses authority but in a Christ-like way.
Well, how are we going to do that? Because I know myself having read through all of this, I know I failed in all of these areas as a father.
[25:33] How are we going to get it right? Well, look at verse 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Do you see that beautiful picture? We have a father in heaven who has fathered us in the most ultimate and best way in that he has forgiven us.
God was the only one who was just and right to be angry with our sin, but yet he didn't pour out his anger on us, but he removed his anger from us so that we didn't have to face it.
And he cared for us as his children so that we in turn would be able to care for our children. Chapter 5 verse 1.
Be imitators of God therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us.
[26:41] love. You see, fathers, parents, if you want a model for how to parent well, yeah, the books are great, talking to others will be great, but look at the model that we see on the cross of what the Father has done for you.

That is the example that we should follow. the loving, forgiving Father. So that's the first concern. Fathers, take your role responsibly. Do not exasperate your children. The second concern is the second part of the verse. Instead, in place of this, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
The greatest desire parents can have for their children is that they love the Lord Jesus. It's not that your children are good at sport.
It's not that they are good educationally. It's not that they have a stable career. It's not even their health. All of those things are good.
[28:00] But to paraphrase the words of Jesus, what good is it for your son or daughter to gain the whole world but lose their own soul?

What good is it if your son becomes the greatest sports person on the field? What good is it if your daughter is the best educationally if they do not know the Lord Jesus?
Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord, fathers. Make sure they are learning Christ from you.
Make every effort to teach them about their true heavenly father. I dream that my son will score goals and tries.
I have to dream because it doesn't happen at the minute. I long that my daughter makes it at school. I want the best for my children in every area of life.
[29:10] But let's make every effort to make sure that none of these passing things, these are empty things, they're unfulfilling things.

Make sure that none of them interfere or take the place of the desire within your parents' heart for your child to know Christ. Fathers, make it your priority to read the Bible and to pray with them.

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Forget about the little job that needs to be fixed. Forget about having to spend extra time at the office. Forget about the stuff that you need to do outside or going to the gym or playing that game. You'll have all the time in the world when your children are gone and left home. Make it your priority. Change your habits.
Do things now to get in place so that we have time to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Use the website, go therefore.
[30:20] It'll help you. help you to help you to help you with your children. Let me encourage all the parents and potential parents because we all know that we live and parent very often out of guilt.

So let me encourage us all, whatever age your children may be, whether they're at home with you now or whether they've left home, and this is the encouragement, salvation is a gift from God.
God is never forced by your success as a parent, and God is not bound by your failure as a parent. He is so good, he is so kind, he is so gracious, and so as parents we pray our children into his care. every day. Parents and fathers bring up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord.
[31:34] The role of children. Verses one and two, children, all of us, we're all children, and those who are younger here, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.

Honor your father and mother, obeying. It's always hard for children, no matter what age we are. It's always difficult to obey your parents.
And it's only when we look at the obedience of Jesus to his father that we can learn what it is to obey. When the father asked his son to go to the cross, Jesus obeyed his father.
He submitted to the will of his father. He did what he asked him to do, and here's the reason why he went to the cross to take the blame for all of our disobedience.
He came to forgive us of all the times that we get angry and annoyed and cross and frustrated at our parents. Jesus obeyed in our place.
[32:42] forgiveness. And the way to show our thanks for all that Jesus has done for us is to obey. We obey our mum and dad not to earn God's love or to earn their favour, but because we have received God's love and forgiveness.

We honour our parents in response to say thank you to our father in heaven for what he has done for us. So children, if we want a model for how to obey and honour your parents, look to the cross and see how Jesus obeyed his father for you.
This is all God's good design for his family. It's something beautiful. It's something wonderful. He designed it from the beginning of time.
And God's order for family brings life and blessing. Look at verse 3. That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.
So as parents and children, as together we live under God's design and order for family, so our lives begin to flourish as God intended.
[33:59] It's not saying that it's going to be a perfect life or that it's going to be without frustration or things won't happen. Yes, they will, but this is saying generally, under God's good order and God's good design until the day we reach heaven where it will be perfect.

He's saying this is the best life for you as parents and this is the best life for you as children.
Don't interfere with God's design. He knows what he is doing. Let's play. Let's pray. Father, we are taken aback again at the amazing, beautiful, and wonderful design of family and the way you have created life to be under your good order.
And we confess, we repent that we have so often made a mess of your good design. We have so often not been the father or mother or child that we should be, and life hasn't gone the way it should go.
And so we look to you, our ultimate father, asking for forgiveness afresh on our lives, asking again that you would mould us and shape us, that we would live a Christ-like life, obeying our father in heaven and fulfilling the role that he has called us to do in the power of your Holy Spirit.
[35:59] Father, would you please give to every parent here this morning your grace. Fill them with your Spirit.

Enable them to care for their children well, to provide for their every need physically, emotionally.
And for every father who is represented here, may you fill them with that wonderful role and responsibility to teach and instruct.
And may they live such an example that their child grows to be like them. And we pray for every child represented here, that you would care for them and that you would help them to see through

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the mistakes the parents make and look to the Lord Jesus.
We pray that they will grow to be obedient and that they in turn will become parents themselves and raise their children well.
father, protect every marriage, protect every home and use it for your glory to be a witness and an example of your amazing gospel.
[37:25] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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