

“FAMILY VALUES (#1): SPIRITUAL VALUES”

(Proverbs 3:5-10)

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1. Read Text: Proverbs 3:5-10 Pray.
2. Since the last presidential election, the phrase “Family Values” has become a buzz-word of sorts for people of all political persuasions to talk about their understanding of the American “family.”

A—And while the political and moral debates over the issues that surround this phrase make for stimulating discussion, what I want to talk about today actually has nothing to do either with these issues, or even with the biological “family” at all.

B—Instead, as we prepare for Easter by journeying through the spiritual season known “Lent,” over the next four weeks I want us to explore what it means for us as Christians to be the “*Family of GOD*” (a *spiritual* family) through a series called “Family Values” (a play-on-words with the more common use of that phrase).

C—Specifically, we’ll be using the 12 “Values” that our church adopted at last year’s Church Conference as a LENS through which we can understand and hopefully put into practice what it means to be a Christian as part of the family of God in today’s world.
3. Now before we talk about them, I need to first remind us that “Values” are NOT the same as beliefs, purposes or goals/visions.

A—For example, a “value” is *not* simply me intellectually *believing* that there is a God, that Jesus “died for my sins,” or even that “God is love” – values *presume* that one *has* beliefs, but they’re not the *same*.

B—In like fashion, values *presume* Purpose & Vision: our church’s Mission/Purpose is “*Sharing the Love and Light of Jesus with a Changing World*” ; and our Vision is “*To become more intentional about reaching our local and global community with the gospel of Jesus Christ*” – but neither of these are our values.

C—Instead, values are **moral and behavioral standards which we aspire to live by** [REPEAT]
 - 1—They’re not just philosophies to *think about* (beliefs), not merely a “*reason for being*” (purpose), and not merely a destination towards which to travel (vision).
 - 2—Instead, values are essentially the *principles* which enable us to accomplish our beliefs, purpose, and vision.
4. This is why, if we want to live a true Christian life, that I believe we need to know, understand, and then *put into practice* these 12 Values of the “family” of God we call Christianity.

A—So what are they? Well, for the sake of discussion, I’ve divided these 12 Values into four sets which we’ll discuss three at a time over the next four weeks.

B—We begin today exploring a set which acknowledges of our relationship with the author of all Values.

C—And so, the first three Values that we’ll discuss deal with **how we as God’s people are to relate to GOD Himself** [hence today’s title Spiritual Values, dealing with divine-human (spiritual) things]

–II–

5. The first of these Spiritual Values is what we call **FAITH**, [Add Block #1 of “Let God Rock” & write in bulletin blank] and we find the essence of it described in Verses 5-6 of today’s text from Proverbs 3...

A—*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

1—Now, many of us have grown up with this passage – when I was in High School, I remember many teachers and classmates writing this when they signed yearbooks.

2—And even though the word “Faith” is not found in it, the concept nevertheless IS.

B—According to these verses, biblical faith is NOT what some people think (even in the church): it’s NOT wishful thinking; NOT naive romanticism (pie-in-the-sky); NOR is it irresponsible idealism.

1—No. Biblical faith is a firm and proven confidence and reliance upon the character and nature of God Himself to act to bring about His preferred future for our lives.¹

2—Verse 5 talks about it in terms of *TRUST* – *trusting* in God for our future even when we can’t yet see or have all the answers in black and white.

3—Faith is an attitude/perspective on life that enables us – in the face of obstacles and challenges – to confidently say “*I can/We can*” even when those around us are saying “*You’re crazy! Or at the very least, you’re naive to think you can do that!*”²

C—And yet, history is full of examples of God’s people accomplishing great things because they were willing to exhibit this kind of radical Faith. For instance:...

1—By faith Noah built the Ark, even though there wasn’t a rain cloud in the sky and people thought he was nuts!

2—By faith Abraham left all he had known and started on a journey, not knowing where his ultimate destination would be or even the route he would take to get there, but trusted God to lead him every step of the way.

3–By faith Moses and later Joshua led the people of Israel out of Egypt, through the unknown wilderness, and finally across the Jordan River to the “Promised Land,” even though the people questioned their leadership, and questioned where they were going and how they would get there.

4–In the first century A.D., Peter, Paul and other early church leaders stepped out on faith to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, even though it would have been much easier (and safer) to stay at home in Palestine.

5–By faith, in the 1700s John Wesley, frustrated with the lack of godliness in his own Church of England, and in spite of ridicule and criticism, began a world-wide revival movement that we know today as... Methodism.

6–In 1872, following revival at Marietta Campground (across the street from us), several Cobb County families took a “leap of faith” to form a new church that would eventually be called East Cobb United Methodist Church.

7–By faith just last year, without drawings, blueprints, or even a financial goal, just like Abraham thousands of years before, our church embarked on it’s own “Journey to the Promised Land” – a “land” we’re now exploring as part of our Vision to reach our community for Jesus Christ.

D–So let me ask: What “impossible” thing or situation are you facing today? Whatever it is, are you willing to trust God to help you with it? Are you willing to have FAITH that God will guide you through to the other side?

6. A second Spiritual Value that we as Christians aspire to live by is that of **HUMILITY** [Add Block #2 of LGR & write in bulletin blank] – in which we recognize our own shortcomings, and use this awareness to help us grow our faith in God.

A–In Verses 7-8 of today’s passage, it says, “*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.*”

1–“THE MESSAGE” translation of Verse 7 puts it this way, “*Don’t assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil!*”

2–In other words, don’t be cocky, arrogant, or “stuck in your ways” about what you think you know, or about your experiences, or your current view of life, or level of faith.

B–I don’t care how old any of us is, we don’t need to believe the lie that says “*You can’t teach an old dog new tricks*” – it’s bologna for a Christian!

1–For a Christian, it’s *all* about having what we call a “**teachable spirit**” at *whatever* age!

2–Abraham was 75 years old when he was called to leave his home and start a new nation; Moses was 80 when he led the people out of Egypt; and Paul was in his late 30s when he *began* his second-career ministry as an Apostle.

C–My point is that as we consider this Value of Humility, each of us needs to ask ourselves, “*Do I have a ‘teachable spirit’? One that is willing to grow and learn new things, even if they’re different from what I’ve grown up with? For example... Am I willing to try to understand and appreciate different styles of worship, education, or leadership? ...Different forms of music or preaching? Am I willing to see the face of God in people who’re from a different race or culture than me? OR... am I going to be so arrogant and close-minded that I won’t even open myself to the POSSIBILITY of God doing something new in my life!*”

D–Friends, one of the marks of a mature Christian is the presence of a “teachable spirit” in that person’s life. It’s not easy to be humble and admit that we *can* learn new things; but are we willing at least to *try*? If so, then *that’s* what it means to grow in and practice Humility.

7. The final Spiritual Value that we as Christians are called to live by is that of **GENEROSITY** [Add Block #3 of LGR & write in bulletin blank] – the ability to be generous with our resources of time, talent, and money, and it’s described in Verses 9-10 of today’s scripture:

A–“*Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*” ³

1–Notice here that the prerequisite for material fulfillment is that we *first* honor God with what this passage called the “*first fruits of all [our] produce*” – this means that we are to give God through His church the first and best of what we earn and have.

2–And yet what most of us do? We give God our “left-overs” – ...

- (A) A couple of dollars here when we happen to have it in our wallets or purses;
- (B) An hour in worship there once or twice/month (plus Christmas and Easter);
- (C) Perhaps we even volunteer occasionally in ministry to people just like us.

B–And yet, was God’s gift of Jesus the “left-overs” of His love? Did God allow Jesus to die on a cross because it was *convenient*, or because He didn’t have anything *better* to do?

1–I don’t think so. I think it was because God was *generous* – He was lavish and extravagant and unsparing in His love for us.⁴

2–And I don’t know about you, but even though I know I can never fully repay that love, I want at least to give *something* that is generous and lavish in my love back to God.

C–I remember growing up in my home church in College Park, GA we used to sing an old Camp Meeting hymn whose words went like this:

*“Give of your best to the Master; Give Him first place in your heart.
Give Him first place in your service; Consecrate every part.
Give, and to you will be given; God His beloved Son gave.
Gratefully seeking to serve Him, Give Him the best that you have.*

*Give of your best to the Master; Give of the strength of your youth.
Clad in salvation’s full armor, Join in the battle for truth”* ⁵

D—Friends, the question that each of us needs to ask ourselves today is: “*Am I giving MY best to God through the work of my church? Am I giving Him my first and BEST ‘fruits’ of my time, my talents, and my financial resources? OR... Is He merely getting my ‘left-overs’?*”

E—I think we’ll find that when we learn to be generous towards God with our resources, not only are we doing what God asks of us, but we’ll discover a joy in knowing that we are participating in the work of God Himself here on earth – that through our generosity, the hungry are fed, the poor clothed, lives are touched, and souls are saved for the kingdom.

–III–

8. Now, I hope you’ve figured out that by offering these 12 Values over the next 4 weeks, I’m NOT saying that either our church, or myself, or any one of us here have perfectly *attained* these yet.

A—No. These Values are always things that we as Christians *aspire* to live by.

B—And what’s more is that since we can’t accomplish them in and of our own strength, the **ONLY** way we can successfully live them out is by inviting and relying on God’s Holy Spirit each and every day.

C—So my prayer for each of us today is that by asking the Holy Spirit to help us remember and practice these three Spiritual Values by which we relate to God – **Faith, Humility, and Generosity** – we would be not only inspired, but also equipped to live a more meaningful and committed Christian life.

9. [PRAYER]

10. [HYMN: #452, “My Faith Looks Up to Thee”]

ENDNOTES:

1. A future that by definition will be better than anything WE could think up!
2. Some of you may remember my very first sermon here at East Cobb UMC I preached Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4) who despite the taunts, laughing, and derision of people around him who said he couldn’t and shouldn’t rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, instead did just that by having the attitude “*I can and I will, by the grace of God, in spite of the obstacles!*”
3. Another scripture that says a similar thing is 2 Corinthians 9:11-12, “*You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.*”
4. The fact that God is author of all true generosity is the reason that I categorize “generosity” as a “Spiritual Value” (dealing with our relationship with GOD), rather than as a “Relational Value” (dealing with our relationships with other human beings).
5. Verse 2 and Refrain of Hymn “Give Of Your Best to the Master”, words by Howard B. Grouse, music by Charlotte A. Barnard (Hymn #187 in The Cokesbury Worship Hymnal).