

## **Under God?: The Family**

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Hello Everyone and welcome to Celebration. We're in the middle of a sermon series entitled Under God. We started a few weeks ago by looking at the relationship between God and government. We said that God established government to do good, restrain evil and encourage its citizens to join in in doing good. Then we looked at the church and politics to see what that relationship should be like. We said that the first step for the church in regard to politics was to BE THE CHURCH. Be a healthy, vibrant community that displays a level of unity, compassion and caring for one another that the state would look at and want to see increase. With that kind of credibility, the church can then use its voice to call for good and call for change.

Then last week, we started a look a 3 things I believe every Christ Follower should consider before heading to the polls. We looked at Religious Liberty, because it's a foundational freedom that gives us the right to disagree, to be in the minority even when our views are not popular or in the mainstream. We said that when religious liberty is healthy, everyone benefits. it doesn't matter if you're a bunch of Baptists, like us, or if your Jewish or Muslim or an atheist. Religious liberty lets each of us pursue God as our conscience dictates. For this reason, it's absolutely vital that we consider keeping religious liberty alive and well when we head to the polls.

Today we're going to take up the second issue that I believe every Christian should consider as they prepare to vote. We're going to look at the family. Now we could do an entire sermon series on family, Right! We have done entire sermon series on family! So today we're not going to look at every possible issue regarding the state and family. Our conversation is going to be a lot more focused. Today we're going to get a good picture of what God has in mind when it comes to family and then we're going to look at a couple of issues that are facing the family in this election year.

Let's pray and we'll get started.

Few things have shaped me more than my family. I draw my name from them. I'm an Emmert. It's kind of an odd ball last name! It gets mispronounced all the time and few people ever spell it correctly, but I wouldn't change it for anything.

My mom and dad were both people worthy of respect. My dad grew up as the son of a shoe salesman. He went on to become a doctor, build a hospital for a small town in rural Tennessee and leave a lasting mark on the community. He carried himself with dignity and everyone respected my dad.

My mom was a woman of character. She had a large group of friends from every imaginable demographic. I've never seen anyone any more comfortable around a wider variety of people than she was. It didn't matter how much money you had or what color your skin, my mom was glad to see you. She liked everybody and everybody seemed to like her.

Both my parents were people worth of imitating.

I went on to marry young. Both of my parents had died by the end of my freshman year of high school, so when I met my wife, I'd been on my own for a number of years. I was living proof that it's not good for man to be alone!

Here again, being married has greatly shaped who I am. I'm a husband and as such, much of my identity is taken from my wife. I can't tell you the source of pride my wife is for me. She's going to be unhappy with me because of this, but by god's grace, I have married someone who models Christ for me daily. I've watched her mature in Christ over the years and along the way, I've benefited in countless ways from that maturity. She treats me with such courtesy and respect and she inspires me to be a better Christ Follower every single day.

Not only am I a son and a husband, I'm also a father. Let me tell you, being a parent shapes you! Nothing has taught me to love more deeply than having kids. Nothing has exposed more of my own shortcomings more than being a dad. Once I became a father, things were never the same!

Being a son, a husband and a father are just the beginning when it comes to being in a family. I've got a brother and a sister. I've got in-laws, nieces, nephews, step sisters and step brothers. It's a wonderful, oddball collection of people and I've had to learn what it means to show Christ to all of them. It's hard, but this is really good for me.

All in all, God has used my family to bring a lot of good things to me and I can't imagine life without them.

I'm confident that if you were standing here with me today, I could ask you about your family and here some pretty similar comments. You'd tell me how, for better or for worse, your mom, dad, husband, wife, son, daughter, brother or sister has made a real impact on you.

Maybe you're the person whose life is now consumed with taking care of your family. I've got a good friend that is in that situation. They invest countless hours caring for a family member who isn't able to care for themselves any more. With a great willingness to sacrifice, they're doing everything they can to be there.

Whenever I see people showing this kind of love for their family, I'm humbled. I'm reminded that nothing moves us like family. Nothing brings us more joy, more angst, more laughter or more tears. And for most of us, our family is absolutely indispensable. They're the people that we're counting on to be there for us when things really go south.

So when we encounter someone who doesn't have a strong, healthy family, it stands out and it breaks our heart. As a culture, we've worked hard to build a safety net for the most vulnerable around us so that there's a place for them to land if something goes wrong and their family is taken away. We may disagree about how that safety net should be provided, but I think most of us would agree that families need a safety net from time to time. When both my parents died, my safety net was my church. I had several families line up and open their homes to me. For them it was unbearable that I would be alone. Everyone seemed to know that I needed a family.

Regardless of how your family story has played out, most of us are aware that if our family is strong and healthy, the odds that we'll also be strong and healthy go way up. So it should come as no surprise that when God established family, he was doing something mission critical for humanity.

Look at the Bible and you'll encounter one family concept after another about family. In we learn how family gets its start: **GN 1:27–28 27 So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it . . . GN 2:24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.**

God brings together a man and woman into a covenant relationship with one another. Notice they're commanded to be fruitful and to multiply.

Now, these two commands are not identical. Multiplying is about quantity. It's healthy for a mom and dad to have kids! Children are a blessing from God. It's a good thing when a husband and wife start a family.

But multiplying isn't the same thing as fruitful. Fruitful is about quality. We're not to just have kids, we're to have great kids. To pull this off a mom and dad come together and bring their own unique spin to the task of parenting.

I mean, look at your own life, did your mom and dad discipline you the same way? Not likely! One of them was probably tougher than the other. One of them focused on the rules, one probably focused on the relationship. When you were out of line, you probably ran to one of them and from the other! That's OK! By God's design you were learning from both approaches because we need both.

What about communication? Any differences growing up? Mothers and fathers communicate differently. Fathers tend to be more brief, directive, and to the point. Mothers tend to be more descriptive, personal, and encouraging. By God's design, we need both. We learn more when we're receiving the same information in different ways.

Mothers and fathers even play differently with their kids. In their play, fathers tend to encourage competition. Dads will often say, *I'm not going to let him win, he's gotta earn it!* as they demolish their 7 year old son in basketball. Moms don't do that!

Research and experience tell us that children need those differences to become healthy adults. Just ask anyone who is involved in the incredibly difficult task of parenting alone. Some of the strongest people I know are single moms. They're taking on a brutal job and all of the ones that I know are doing this job exceedingly well. I'm blown away by what they're accomplishing. But as I've spoken to these single moms, they will tell you it would be easier if they had a committed dad in the picture. It's just not a job that's easy for one person. It needs a mom and a dad.

A strong family was so important the Bible that when Jesus taught about family, he's adamant about seeing it last.

In Jesus' day, divorce was pretty easy to come by, especially if you were the husband. Once Jesus was asked about this practice: **Matthew 19:3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"**

So a group of people who favored the idea of an easy divorce approach Jesus to see what he has to say about it. The question was intended to trap Jesus. The idea of an easy divorce was popular, so if Jesus came out against it, he'd alienate himself from a lot of followers. If Jesus came out as being pro divorce, he'd lose some of his credibility as a teacher.

**MT 19:4-6 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."**

Jesus elevates the conversation. Instead of thinking about ways to end a marriage, Jesus goes all the way back to the original ideal that God has for marriage.

Divorce isn't the best idea. Making a marriage work, building a lasting covenant with your spouse that is rich, satisfying and indestructible, that's what God wants for you. In effect Jesus is saying, *let's not tear that down, let's build that up.*

The people questioning Jesus didn't like what they heard, so: **MT 19:7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"** They're asking, Hey, are you disagreeing with Moses? He's the one who said we could get a divorce!

**MT 19:8-9 8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."**

*So Jesus says, the law is there because your heart isn't in the right place. You shouldn't be looking to end your marriage, you should be looking to make it last. The only way a marriage should end, Jesus says, is when either the husband or wife takes the extreme step of engaging in adultery and thereby explodes the covenant.*

I know that this is such a personal topic for a lot of people. I know what it's like to hurt so bad in a marriage that you just want relief. Pam and I were at that low point for a few years in our own marriage. But let me just encourage you, God wants your marriage to last. He wants it to be a blessing and a privilege. It's why Jesus affirms it and it's why here at Celebration we invest so heavily in helping couples that are struggling. If that's you, let me encourage you - let us know, because we'd love to offer you support and encouragement.

Instead of divorce, Jesus encourages parents to care for their kids and bring their kids to Him. Right after he teaches on the topic of divorce, Jesus has an encounter with some parents who were bringing their kids to see him so that he could bless him. For some reason, the disciples tried to stop them. But Jesus would have none of it. **Mark 10:14-16 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.**

The idea that moms and dads should want their kids to be around Jesus echoes the same sentiment that we see in the OT. Joshua was the key leader of the nation of Israel after Moses died. After he brought the Israelites into the promised land, he challenged them to build their home into a place where God was honored and served. Once when Joshua was addressing the Israelites, he gave them a challenge to build their homes around the things of God: **Joshua 24:15 . . . choose this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."**

This was a pivotal moment in the history of the nation of Israel. Joshua invites the nation to reaffirm their commitment to follow God and be His people. He does so by challenging them to do take on the same commitment to following God that he had made in his own home. Joshua had purposed to lead his family to serve God as their top priority.

Now it's important that we understand that all of us have a unique responsibility to accept Christ for ourselves. But our family is intended by God to be a critical starting point in our faith. I recently talked with a mom who was curious about how much or how little she should encourage her kids in their faith. She knew that she couldn't make a faith decision for her kid and she was really concerned about that risk.

So I asked her, *How much longer do you have with your oldest child in the home?* She answered that she just had a few years left before they went off to college. I told her, *think about it, that's how much time you have left to be a primary influence in the spiritual direction of your kid's life.*

*You can't waste that opportunity. You've got a responsibility to build a home where your kids embrace the truth of the gospel. It's something for your entire household. It's bigger than just you and your personal faith journey.*

Now with all that in mind, we're well on our way to having a biblical picture of what God intends family to look like, but that picture isn't complete when the kids are grown and out of the house.

A healthy family also takes care of its own. Our family becomes a safety net that's there when we need it. The Bible commands us to honor our father and mothers. This verse isn't just for children, it's probably more for adults.

You'd think that it would be obvious to people that you take care of the people who raised you, but that's not always the case.

Once Jesus is having a conversation with Jewish leaders about their responsibility to their moms and dads. He takes the opportunity to call them out for not helping their parents when they needed them most. **Mark 7:10–13** <sup>10</sup> For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.' <sup>11</sup> But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.' <sup>12</sup> In this way, you let them disregard their needy parents. <sup>13</sup> And so you cancel the word of God . . .

The Jewish leaders knew that they were commanded to honor their parents, but they didn't want to spend the money to make it happen. So they found a work around to get out of these family obligations. They would go to the temple and dedicate all of their possessions to God. The way the law worked, they could then continue to live their lives as they would like, but at their death, all of their assets would go to the temple. This way, they could look at their mom or dad who may really be struggling and say, *Sorry, I'd love to help you, but I've already given all I have to God. I've got nothing left.*

They were using religion as a way to short change their responsibilities to honor their mom and dad!

*Jesus says you can't do that! You've got a family! You've got a responsibility. You have to be up to it!*

Paul picks up this same theme from Jesus and says **1 Timothy 5:8** **But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

Ouch! The Bible makes it clear that taking care of our family is a part of what it means to follow God and honor him.

I'm so blessed when I see people here at Celebration living this out. I know of one family that's in the middle of this right now. The husband's parents are elderly and live in another city. He and his wife travel there all the time. They recently made the decision to move from Tallahassee to be near his dad. This couple has built a lifetime here in our city, but they're willing to uproot themselves, move out of a home where they've lived for a couple of decades and relocate because his dad needs his family. That's what honoring your mother and father are all about.

So the Bible paints the picture of a mom and dad in a lasting covenant relationship with one another. They're each bringing their distinctiveness to bear on raising the kids. They're focused on bringing them to Jesus and establishing a home that will covenant together to serve the lord. But it's not just about them. They don't forget their obligations to their larger family. They honor their mother and father even as they head in to old age. They invest time, energy and resources into their welfare. And they look at each step along the way as a sacred commitment: a commitment to one another, to their kids, to their parents and most importantly to God.

Now, what does all of this have to do with government!!!

You may be thinking, David, this is the *Under God* series! You're supposed to be helping me prepare to vote! This is all great stuff, but how does this help me on November 3rd? Great question!

Not only is the family really important to most of us during our day to day lives, the family matters a great deal to the state, because the family is the most foundational unit that we have in society.

Just think of how much of our domestic agenda as a country is shaped by the national health of the family. The higher the rates of marriage, the lower the crime rate, substance abuse rate, and social welfare spending. Married people are more likely to be employed and have greater earning power, live longer, live safer and their kids are safer too. That safety begins even before a child is born. Children conceived by married couples are far less likely to be aborted. Once born, they're less likely to be abused or neglected. They're less likely to be involved in high risk behaviors and are more likely to be in successful marriages themselves.

In short, God's design for marriage is good for our society. If you care about the poor, the homeless and those who are suffering economic injustice you should care about marriage. Because these problems typically find their start in a family gone wrong.

So how is family doing in America today?

Well, we said earlier that a strong family starts with a commitment to covenantal marriage. But today, fewer people are actually getting married. Today about 59% of millennials are unmarried. That's down sharply compared to Gen Xers and traditionalists who were marrying at a much faster clip. A lot of people are choosing to live together instead of getting married. But

living together just isn't as beneficial as a committed marriage. Couples who cohabitate tend to see their relationships be less long lasting than couples who marry. By the time a child in America turns nine, 20% of all children born to a married couple will experience the break up of their parents, while 50% of those who live with a cohabitating couple will have experienced a breakup of their parents.

Cohabiting interferes with education. Only 15% of all cohabitating parents have a college degree compared to 43% of married parents. The instability and lack of advanced degrees does a number on household income. About 16% of families with cohabitating parents live below the poverty line. That's double the number of families with married parents.

What about single parent households? Most commonly, these homes are headed by single moms. Single moms are often the hardest working, most diligent people you'll meet. But these homes face a tremendous, up hill climb. The task of running a family is really hard to do by yourself.

Children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, and engage in high risk behaviors like drug and alcohol abuse. They're four times more likely to live in poverty. Most tragically, they're more than twice as likely to commit suicide.

So when you think about all these challenges, think of what they means to educators, social workers and law enforcement and health care workers. Then consider the cost to our society is in terms of dollars for social services to come alongside these families and try to provide some measure of support, you begin to see what a great challenge it is for government. When our culture gets family wrong, it creates a never-ending string of challenges that are difficult and expensive to remedy.

It should come to us as no surprise that God's vision for marriage: a lifetime covenant where a mom and a dad work to raise a family in the presence of Christ all the while remaining deeply devoted to their extended family, is the best plan for families in our country.

Now, because stakes for our country are sky high, We should be thinking about the family whenever we go to vote. We should ask ourselves, *How will my vote be used to strengthen the family — to bring it more closely into alignment with the kind of long lasting covenant God desires for us that we learned about earlier?*

There are a lot of issues that will have an impact on your family in every election cycle. We can't get to them all, so I've chosen to focus on three that will have a massive impact on the lifestyles of families over the next few years. So let's talk about these 3 issues that are hot topics for families during this election cycle.

The first is the cost of health care. Last year the average American spent over \$11,000 on healthcare. If you're thinking of a family of four, that is a staggering amount. Last year a family member of mine spent a single night in the hospital. The out of pocket costs after insurance



were over \$6,000.00! Thankfully, we had enough in savings to cover the bill. But that's not everyone's story. Half of all the private bankruptcies in the United States are related to medical expenses and of those who filed for bankruptcy, two thirds had health insurance.

Biblically, I believe there are certain things we should encourage as public policy. As a country, we need to find a way to help even the poorest among us have access to care. Read both the Old and the New Testaments and you'll see God commanding his people to have a heart for the least of these. We want to live in a country that protects the most vulnerable among us.

The government has long offered programs to ensure health care coverage for those of us who are in great need, but red tape associated with helping the poorest of the poor enrolled in government funded healthcare options is daunting and many who need the services, lack the skills to get signed up. Often people are uninsured simply because they don't know how to penetrate the system to find coverage. Much can be done to make sure that the programs that are in place are achieving their stated goals.

Not only should care be available for those who are most vulnerable, it should also be fair for those who can afford insurance. Families or companies that are able to buy coverage should be encouraged to do so. And the government can provide industry regulation to make sure that health coverage products are adequate to cover most costs so that families can more accurately budget.

Additionally, government regulation is needed to protect families from insurance companies who deny doctors the authority to order common tests and procedures as a means of controlling costs. The doctor responsible for the patient should be permitted to determine what care is needed.

One more thing here: We also should demand that the consciences of both citizens and those in the health care community be protected. No health care worker should be forced to perform a procedure they find morally objectionable and tax payers shouldn't be forced to violate their conscience by being forced to pay for care they believe is against their religious beliefs.

This year both major parties are addressing health care, but they're doing so in very different ways. Take the time to look at the party platforms and understand the different approaches.

There's another family issue that's pressing in this year: Child Care. Before the COVID pandemic struck, child care was a major expense for most young families and since the advent of COVID, child care has become an even more critical need because many child care providers have shut their doors. In most states, infant care costs exceed the average price of in-state college tuition! This is huge for families. In 1970, 37% of all children were in some form of preschool program. In 2017 that number was 64%.

As you look at the platforms for both Democrats and Republicans, you'll find that both parties address child care costs. Both are willing to invest substantial dollars in to the problem, but their approaches are very different.

As you look at the party platforms, ask yourself, *which will be most helpful in maximizing parent choice? How can tax credits and incentives be better utilized to allow parents who choose to stay home to care for children to do so? Which programs allow parents to send children to churches or other religious institutions for care?*

That last one is important because we should always call on our government to recognize the values and distinctives of its citizens.

Let's talk about one last important issue facing the family this year: Comprehensive sex education. There is a progressive effort to teach sex education in such a way that LGBTQ+ lifestyle choices are mainstreamed and the traditional view of marriage is further marginalized. We learned last week that the church has the right and responsibility to use its voice to call for good and to call for change. This seems to be one of those opportunities that Christians should seek to be heard.

Now, as we work to influence this policy we need to do so in winsome ways. Christians are called to seek justice and love their neighbors. We should not discriminate against other people.

But we should also work to ensure that pursuing a biblical marriage and family remains possible. We should work to ensure that our voice isn't lost as we seek to point our culture toward a more excellent way. We want our country to recognize just how good healthy families can be for all of us and how God himself has given us the best possible blueprint for seeing those kinds of families emerge. As we continue to speak to our culture about this, Christ Followers should continue to working to ensure parents retain the right to raise their children with a biblical worldview is retained.

Imagine where families could be if our elected government addressed issues like health care, child care and sex education in such a way that families were served in such a way that their conscience was not assaulted. We should strive for a place where families can afford the health care they need. We should live in a country where families retain the right to influence how their children should be educated so that important biblical principles are not marginalized.

Because as Christ Followers we know that our nation is in desperate need of families that are built on the biblical principles we looked at a moment ago.

What about you and your family? If you were to take an assessment of the health of your family what would you see? Is it healthy and dynamic, or is it just hanging on by a thread? You have a church that is here for you. I've seen so many families be turned completely around by the power of the gospel. I'm convinced that could be your story too. Reach out to us at

celebrationbaptist.church. Connect with us through the fresh start link and let's have a conversation about what the gospel means for your family. Let's PRAY.