

The Female difference

Creating a wholesome environment for your family development

Introduction

There are numerous books of Parenting, and motherhood which offer a number of resources about how to raise children and fashion family life, but not a lot that focus on the internal world of family life. By internal I mean things like the soul, the health of relationships with God, the growing of character. This study is all about looking and seeing how the female of the family can help shape the issues of self-worth, identity, unfulfilled hopes or expectations, deal with unrealistic dreams look at control and how to relate to other family members. It is about recognising the value and importance of the mother within a family.

A word to Dad's: this study will help you also. This is not about downplaying your role in family development. You will be working with your spouse to help raise a well adjusted family. This is not about leaving the bulk of the challenge of family development to one parent but about sharing the load. This is about you gaining an insight into the feminine side of family development. It is through the crucible of parenting that we learn to be the kind of people God created us to be

Study 1

A joyful female

Introduction

It is not always easy sometimes to be grateful or to focus on the lovely, noble, creative aspects of our children, ourselves or the circumstances of our life. However being thankful works wonders in fighting off the destructive nature of complaint and grumbling

The big picture

1. Think of some in your life who seems to be a joyful person. How does their attitude affect you?

The biblical picture

Read Philippians Ch 4 v.4-9

2. what makes these verses so powerful for you?
3. How do these verses paint a picture of a truly correct and healthy way of life?
4. What does it mean to 'rejoice in the Lord always'?
5. According v.4-6, how should we approach prayer?
6. In the middle of vs. 4-7 Paul writes that the Lord is near. How does this truth affect our ability to pray and rejoice with thanksgiving?
7. Think about your family, what can you rejoice in about it today?
8. Reflect on the content of what you talk to God about concerning your family. How might these concerns change if you presented your thoughts with a joyful heart, and with thanksgiving?
9. Describe what happens in our own lives when we do the opposite of what Paul encourages and we focus on ugly, broken and negative aspects?
10. How does our focus on the negative affect our family development, whether we are being negative about our family, ourselves or life itself?
11. Build a family is a very challenging undertaking. What is one thing you've learned about yourself in the process and you're thankful to have learned?

Being in the picture ourselves

12. Describe the last time that you truly rejoiced about something

Study 2

the secure female

Introduction

The identity we seek can be misplaced. We can centre our life and identity in our spouse, or family, our work or career, in money possessions, in pleasure gratification, or relationships, or a noble cause we give ourselves to, even seek our identity in religion. We can take good things and make them ultimate things, and when this happens we need to be rescued.

The big picture

1. In what ways do you feel insecure as an adult female in your family? What makes you anxious or worried?

The biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 1v. 3-14.

2. When you hear the phrase 'spiritual blessings', what are some of the thoughts which come into your mind?

3. List the blessings in the passage that God has given to his people?

4. What do vs.3-10 reveal about God's heart and emotions towards his people?

5. How does the image of adoption help us understand our relationship with God?

6. In what ways do you as an adult female try to earn God's love and impress others in order to feel secure?

7. How do vs.3-10 help you set aside your insecurity and self doubt?

8. Identify some regrets you have from this past week in terms of working in the development of your family. How does the truth that we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins v.7 affect your memories?

9. How is God's activity in the world described in vs.9-14?

10. How can this eternal and all-encompassing view of God's purpose in the world transform your daily life as an adult female?

11. How do you see the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life as an adult female within a family?

Being in the picture yourself

12. Try to be as honest as you can with yourself, how do you think God sees you or feels about you?

13. Thinking about question 12 what aspects of this passage in Ephesians speak most powerfully to the area in your life you identified in question 12.

14. This passage is filled with the lavishness of God to us. Can you think of a specific way you need to experience God's lavishness, or a way your family needs to experience it this week?

Study 3

The Influencing female

Introduction

If we are not sure how you want to influence the development of our family you will always be responding reactively, with less thought about how your reactions and decisions in the present will affect the future. It was the 19th century French politician Charles Talleyard who said, ' I am more afraid of a army of one hundred sheep led by a lion, than I am by an army of one hundred lions led by a lamb.' we need to be intentional in the influence we offer to our family development.

The big picture

1. Describe someone in your life who has impacted you spiritually? What was it about that person that affected you so meaningfully?

The biblical picture

Read 1 Thessalonians Ch. 2:1-12

2. How would you describe the spiritual lives and ministries of the Thessalonians?

[see 1 Thess. 1:3 & 7-8]

3. What do you think it means in Ch 2 :3 where it says that Silas and Timothy dared to tell the gospel to the Thessalonians?

4. In what ways do you struggle to dare to tell the gospel?

5. What do vs.3-6 tell us about the motives of those who invested in the Thessalonians?

6. Describe some of the impure/unhealthy motivations that tend to find their way into our relationships, ministries, family life building?

7. What familial image is used in vs. 7-12 to describe a method of disciplining or investing in others?

8. Which familial image fits your personality best?

9. Which image do you struggle with?

10. Where do you see the idea of modelling in this passage?
11. What does this passage teach us about the idea of legacy?
12. What would it intentionally look like to invest in the spiritual life of your family?
13. What one thing can you focus on this week towards this goal?

Being in the picture

14. Reflect on the impact of your mother or father upon your life. Where has there been positive impact? How have they invested in you? If your relationship with your mother/ father was a painful one, reflect on how this has affected your desire to influence your family.

Study 4

The healing female

Introduction

Everyone experiences emotional, physical, or spiritual pain throughout their life. The wound can come in many ways, bullying, abandonment racist, jokes, physical limitations. Whatever the wound the effects stay with us, and can affect the way we build our relationships. As a female [or male] one of the things we can do is to be honest and open about the places of hurt in our lives and open ourselves to the healing power of the Holy Spirit

The big picture

1. What is the one thing you would like to change about the way that you build your family relationships?

The biblical picture

Read Mark Ch 5 :21-34.

2. Picture yourself in this scene, what do you see, hear and experience as a person in this story?

3. What do we know about Jairus and the bleeding woman from this passage?

4. In what ways are Jairus and the woman similar and yet different?

5. What risks did Jairus and the woman take in their desperation?

6. Jairus and the woman came to Jesus for healing from their respective wounds. What wounds do you feel are still raw and open in your life?
7. Who do these areas of pain affect you as a family life builder?
8. What would it look like for you to come to Jesus with these wounds?
9. Read vs.35-43. How are Jesus' interactions with Jairus and the woman similar, and how are they different?
10. How does Jesus heal the physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds in this story?
11. Looking inside our emotional and spiritual wounds is challenging and unsettling [vs.33, 36]. What fears do you have in exposing your pain and wounds in asking for healing?
12. What steps might you need to take this week to identify your wounds and bring them to Jesus?

Being in the picture

13. If you could change something about your childhood, what would it be? How has that experience affected the way you build your family life?

Study 5

The Connected Female

Introduction

The truth is that if we ignore our own emotional and spiritual health, we will not be able to help our family if we do this. A crucial aspect of caring for ourselves is realising that we desperately need deep, trust filling relationships. We need to be in a community, where we can celebrate, be loved and known, and where we can love know, and celebrate others as well. Community can be the oxygen we need to help in the building of our family life.

The big picture

1. Think about the friendships in your life right now. How would you rate them on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all life giving, and 5 being very life giving. What makes you choose this number?

The biblical picture

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

2. Identify all the cause and effect relationships in this passage, keywords to look for include ' because, therefore, since.'
3. What were the Colossians like in their past before Christ?
4. How would you describe the description of how the present reality of the Colossian believers is different from their past?
5. Three key verbs are used ' set, put, let'. How do these words emphasise different aspects of living as a believer in a community?
6. Which of the three verbs [set, put, let] do you struggle with the most in your life, and your role as a family builder?
7. Why do you think v.11 is so important in the argument of this passage?
8. How does understanding that we're chosen and dearly loved help us as God's people to live according to verses 12-14?
9. Which of the character traits mentioned in vs. 12-14 would you like to see increased in your life?
10. Why did you choose that particular trait?
11. This section ends with words about thankfulness. Why are gratitude and expressions of thanksgiving crucial to our life, especially as females?

Being in the picture

12. What is one characteristic of yourself that is an asset to relationships with friends? What is one characteristic of yourself that needs the Lord's redemption with regard to the relationships in your life?

Study 6

The Trusting Female

Introduction

A few years back there was a craze for 3D geometric pictures which if you looked at them long enough a picture would appear. In the act of focusing through and beyond

the pattern the brain was enabled to see the picture within. The truth is that this happens in our spiritual life. It is who we see what lies behind the present anxieties and worries . We just need be reminded what it is we need to focus on, so that we don't lose sight of the wondrous gifts lying just beyond.

The big picture

1. If you can describe the cycle of worry in your life, what triggers worry and anxiety and how are you affected by it, and how is the worry resolved?

The biblical picture

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

2. What are all the areas and details that Jesus challenges his audience not to worry about in this passage?

3. How are birds and flowers similar to and different from people?

4. Jesus specifically mentions in vs.25 the daily worries most relevant to his audience. What life details do you worry about most in your present circumstances?

5. How does Jesus show the futility of worrying about our lives in vs. 27?

6. Jesus specifically mentions what a person wears. How do you experience anxiety related to your body?

7. Read Matthew 6:24. In what ways is this verse and verses 25-34 connected?

8. How does Jesus contrast pagans with the people of God vs.32-34?

9. What character traits come to mind when you think of someone who is seeking the kingdom of God? What lifestyle do you envisage them having? How do you think they would make decisions?

10 .How does seeking the kingdom and the righteousness of God help us avoid worrying about tomorrow?

Being in the picture

11. Think back over this last week. What were the things that caused you stress and worry?

12.Think back to question 12. What would it mean to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the specific areas of anxiety you identified?

Study 7 The Humble Female

Introduction

It is very easy to feel guilty or judged when we make comparisons with other who are seeking to make a female difference with a home. Especially if we are approaching the task in a different way. We can all meet people who are claiming to have found the right way who seem to send out the message that their way is the only way. What is often missing in such discussions and debates is a sense of grace and humility.

The big picture

1. Describe the last time you 'bragged' about your family, and the members in it. Who were you talking with, what did they say, and how were you feeling?

The biblical picture

Read Luke 18:9-14

2. What two characteristics of Jesus' audience does Luke highlight[v.1]?
3. How are these two characteristics connected?
4. How does the Pharisee in the parable view himself?
5. Name all the contrasts you can find between the tax collector and the Pharisee?
6. As an adult female in your family, which character in the story do you identify with the most? Why?
7. We all have a tendency at some point to have confidence in our own righteousness and to judge others because of it. Rewrite the words of the Pharisee in v.11 from your own perspective.
8. Why would the end of the parable have a surprise to Jesus audience?
9. What does it mean to exalt yourself? To humble yourself?
10. How have exalting yourself and humbling yourself affected relationships with other women in your life?

Being in the picture

11. What about your family feels you with pride?
12. How is this parable a story of freedom for you as an adult female in your family?

Study 8

The Wonder-filled Female

Introduction

Whether you are a mother of a father, or an aunt or uncle there is a moment of wonder when you hold a baby in your arms. Watch any mother or father especially with their first child and you can see how they are focused on the wonder of birth. The baby has done nothing, and will do nothing for months, it is just the child's simple presence which is the cause of wonder and amazement. Other emotions will kick in later but at first it is wonder. Later comes frustration, worry, and concern over behaviour patterns, personalities, interests. The wonder seems to have gone.

The big picture

1. Think of someone who knows you extremely well. Describe this relationship.

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 139:1-18.

2. What are the topics which the psalmist moves in and out of in this passage?

3. v6 is the psalmist's response to the truth about God's knowledge described in vs. 1-

5. What words or phrases would you use to respond to vs.1-5?

3. What do v7-12 reveal about God's character?

4. How are you affected by the psalmist's statement about God's presence in vs. 7-12?

5. What do these verses about God's knowledge and constant presence mean to you as an adult female/ wife/ mother/ sister?

6. If you were to insert the names of your family members into the personal pronouns in the passage. How would this change your perspective on your family, or even yourself?

7. What do v13-18 teach about God's creation?

8. Describe one aspect of how God created you that is a strength in your womanhood?

9. What does v16 say about the present and the future?

10. Choose one verse for this psalm which stands out for you. What might God be saying to you through this verse?

Being in the picture

11. Reflect on the characteristics of yourself that you enjoy. With what people or in what circumstances do these characteristics shine the most?

Study 9

The Growing Female

Introduction

It is often very challenging to sort out God's leading in our life. The facing of new challenges is something that we need to grow towards, not away from. We need to allow God to lead us into new passions which can stir in or life as we grow in years.

The big picture

1. How has your relationship with God changed over the years, both for the positive and the negative?

The biblical picture

Read Romans 12:1-8

2. Identify the words, phrases that are repeated. What contrasts are being made?

3. What is the meaning behind the urge to present your body as a living sacrifice?

4. Since becoming a home builder, what in your life may have held you back from the Lord?

5. How do we renew our minds?

6. What are some of the consequences of neglecting the things that help us renew our minds and being transformed?

7. What is one specific step you can take to facilitate the renewing of your mind?

8. The phrase 'do not' is repeated twice. How are the two connected?

9. In what ways are you unrealistic about yourself. What could it look like for you to see yourself with sober judgement?

10. What do you think it mean when it says that 'each member belongs to one another'?

11. How has the use of your spiritual gifts changed since becoming a home builder?

Being in the picture

Reflect on the current condition of your relationship with the Lord. How would you describe it?

Study10

The Free Female

Introduction

Watching our children or nephews and nieces progress through the education system can be challenging, especially when they reach the point where they are considering University places, or thinking about training, and career development. This can be a demanding, the time for researching, strategising, planning is long since past. It can be a challenging moment when this point is reached, we need to be filled with peace and not stressed with worry.

The big picture

1 How would you define ambition? Is this something that you would seek to cultivate or not?

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 131

1. It has been said that this is the shortest Psalm to read, but the longest to learn'. What contrasts do you find in the Psalm?
2. What images come to mind when you read v1?
3. Describe the difference between the ambition that the Psalmist suggests is negative and aspiration, which might be positive. How are you tempted by ambition?
4. Describe the characteristics of a weaned child?
5. The psalmist seems to be distinguishing an unhealthy demanding from childlike trust. What does this posture look like?
6. How do you approach God as a child who has not been weaned?
7. How contented do you feel towards God just now?

Being in the picture

8. In what areas of your life are you tempted to 'rule the roost' meddle or control things?

9. In what areas of your life do you feel stilled and quieted?

10. Identify one expectation or desire that you have been holding for a family member. What would it mean for you to let go and trust in the Lord.