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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Families are certainly different today than they were 25 years ago. I heard the funny story about a man who rushed into a toy store late one evening to buy a Barbie doll for his daughter who had a birthday the next morning. The saleslady said, "Well, you have several to choose from. This is the Tennis Barbie; it's \$20. The Ballet Barbie and the Beach Barbie are \$20 each. We have a new item called the Divorced Barbie, and she sells for \$265." The man said, "Why is the Divorced Barbie so much more expensive?" The saleslady said, "Oh, because she comes with Ken's house, Ken's car, and all of Ken's furniture!"

This is the third of four messages in the series, "Family: An Endangered Species?" I want to talk about ten habits of highly successful families. Let's look at a great passage of scripture on what's most important for a family. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, the children of Israel moved into the Promised Land. They were getting ready to set up their homes as permanent places rather than tents that would be taken down and moved every few days. The leader, Joshua, issued a strong challenge to the families. He said in Joshua 24:15, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." If you come to my house, you'll find a plaque affixed to the wall just above the doorbell. It says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." For us it's more than just a sign, it's the basis of our entire lives. Have you made that priority in your home?

In preparing for this message, I surveyed about 20 families in our church. These are people I consider to have healthy, positive families. Some were retired couples, with grown children, others were blended families, and others were parents with young children. I asked them to share with me the habits they think make their families strong. From their responses I have prepared a top ten list. I don't usually share messages that have ten points; I like to shoot from the three-point line! I'll spend more time on some of the ten than others, but I mainly want to introduce them to you. As you learn them, you should be asking yourself if your family has these habits. If these are not things you are doing habitually, you should consider making them habits for your family.

Some of you remember the old TV game show "Family Feud." I could subtitle this message "Family Fuel," because these ten habits will give fire and energy to your family. The top ten habits of successful families—answer number ten, survey says:

10. Children are disciplined with love and consistency

This theme appeared in most of the responses I got. One of our members wrote: "Firm but loving discipline keeps order in the home. There is much chaos when the kids rule the house!" Another one wrote: "Boundaries are established and consequences are explained. Then choice making is taught as a skill. Children are allowed to suffer the consequences of bad choices. Mother and Father do not disagree concerning discipline in front of the children.

Discipline is necessary in any area of life, but especially in the home. Children are born with a stubborn, rebellious nature, and they are by nature sinful. Okay, I know your children and grandchildren are perfect, but wouldn't you agree that everyone else's children are rebellious?

I actually remember my first and *last* temper tantrum as a kid. My mother was in our front yard raking up the leaves from the three huge oak trees that shaded our house in South Alabama. I wanted to go over and see my buddy Jimmy Dean. That was his real name, but I called him Jimbo-Simbo-Limbo. My mother told me I couldn't go because it was too late. I got so angry I just laid down in the front yard and started screaming, and kicking my feet and pounding my little fists into the ground. In my rage, I forgot my mother had a rake in her hands—and they didn't have plastic tines back then! I hardly started my temper tantrum when suddenly, I felt my mother forcefully apply that rake to the seat of the problem. It didn't take me long to decide it was too late to go see Jimmy. I never had another temper tantrum after that!

You don't have to teach your kids how to disobey and say, “NO!” You have to teach them *not* to be disobedient. The Bible says in Proverbs 22:15 says “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction drives it far from him.”

In these strong families, limits are clearly explained to the children. Then, they are told the consequences if they violate those limits. And if the child trespasses beyond the limits, discipline is applied. One family wrote me that the worst thing a parent can do is to promise punishment, and then *not* deliver it because it teaches a child the terrible lesson that they can get away with breaking the rules.

Several of the parents wrote me that they never use their hands to spank or punish a child, they only use their hands to express love. Instead they use some kind of “rod” of correction and the punishment is never applied with anger. If a child has violated the rules, it's a good idea to send them to their room for a few minutes before punishment is applied. It does two things. It allows the child to think about what they've done wrong and anticipate the punishment, and it allows the parent to cool down so the punishment can be applied with love and with a calm explanation.

Let's go to habit number 9. Survey says:

9. Money is managed wisely and discussed openly

Almost every response I got mentioned something about family finances. Money problems can tear a marriage or a family apart. Several respondents reported all financial decisions should be discussed as a family. One family wrote, “There is no ‘his money’ or ‘her money.’ It's ‘our money.’” Actually we realize that it's all ‘God's money.’”

Another family wrote, “We follow the 10/10/80 financial plan. We give God the first ten percent, we save the next ten percent, and we discipline ourselves to live on 80% of our income.” These families teach their children about the importance of giving their money to God. They *want* their kids to know they tithe, and that one reason they may not have as many “toys” as some of their friends is because they are giving to God.

Several wrote that it is so important to get to the point that the only debt you have is for your principle residence. It's important to avoid buying things on credit. If you use credit cards, you should always try to pay the full balance to avoid paying the interest. If you find you cannot pay the full bill on your credit card for two months, the card needs to be put in the draw, or cut up. The debt trap has snared many families. These strong families work hard to keep a handle on their family finances.

Let's look at the number eight habit. Survey says:

8. Everyone shares household tasks

These families tell me the family shares household chores. One family wrote me, "As a two parent working family, we all have jobs around the house. We all have equal responsibility when it comes to running this household." Another wrote: "We share the responsibilities of life as a family and learn life skills in the process. (Mom is not the maid) The kids do the lawn, help with laundry, learn to cook etc." Another wrote: Each member has some responsibility at home. The father sets the primary example for this by helping out in all areas and not just the 'male' tasks."

Sometimes we think of the "traditional family" as a working dad and a stay-at-home mom. And if moms can stay at home when their children are small, it is a great blessing to everyone. But actually, the stay-at-home mom is a rather late invention. If you read the Bible, you'll discover the woman in Proverbs 31 was a woman who worked *outside* the home. She was in real estate because she bought and sold property. She planted a vineyard with her earnings. Yet she also maintained a great home. I'm certain she had help from her family, or else she couldn't have done it. Throughout most of history, women have worked outside the home, the main difference today is that they either kept their little children with them as they worked, or extended family members kept their young children.

Even stay-at-home moms work hard, and need lots of help to keep the house running. I once had a marriage counseling appointment in another state. A man and wife were arguing because he thought the wife should do all the household tasks. It was beneath him to do the dishes or clean up the house—"that's the woman's job." After listening to him, I asked him. "If I could show you in the Bible, in black and white, that it says a man cleans the dishes, would you do it?" He believed the Bible, but he said, "Sure preacher, but I don't think it's in the Bible." I turned to 2 Kings 21:13 in my King James Version and I read where God said, "I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down." He didn't like it, but the next time I saw his wife she smiled and said, "He's helping me with the dishes now!" In strong families, *everyone* shares the household tasks.

Here's healthy habit number seven; survey says:

7. The family has learned to cope with adversity

Lest you think all the families in the survey are living lives free of trouble, think again. These families in our church have experienced everything from the death of child, brain tumor in a child, physical handicaps, infertility, degenerative disease, and a variety of assorted and sundry

disasters. Every family has do face and deal with adversity, tribulation, and problems. It's *how* a family deals with these problems that makes them stronger. One family wrote: “(Wife’s name)’s (disease) has taught us not to take time or anything for granted. Consequently, we try to have fun as we go and realize that each stage of our life is special and cannot be regained. The adversity of her illness has made all of us more sensitive to others and strengthened our relationship with God and each other.”

Do you see the word “cope?” It doesn't mean the family members ignore the problem, or they flippantly say, “Praise the Lord” and act as if it's not there. They *face* their problems and then depend on God's grace and power to help them live with it every day. They consider themselves Survivors in the midst of their pain and problems.

Habit number six—survey says:

6. Family members laugh together

Everybody mentioned the importance of laughing as a family. One family wrote: “We laugh a lot!! A sense of humor helps you overlook each other's faults and lightens up tense situations!” Another wrote: “Our theme is: Today is as good as it gets, so laugh!” Another writes: “We make a point of laughing out loud and we try to always keep our sense of humor—that's not hard living with (names her husband)!”

The Bible says in Proverbs 17:22, “A cheerful heart is good medicine.” In other words, laughter makes you feel better. Some health clubs now have a “laugh room” where people go and laugh as part of their health program. They have found even forced laughter is therapeutic. So, they don't tell jokes or anything, they just start laughing together.

Commenting on laughter, Dr. Alex Kataria writes: “Laughter exercises your entire body causing you to feel relaxed and pain free. When you laugh, it is like taking a drug, yet there is no such thing as an overdose or, ‘laughter toxicity,’ It should be evident from studies that ‘A laugh a day keeps the doctor away.’”

Studies have shown children laugh an average of 400 times a day, yet adults laugh an average of 15 times a day. Your home will be a better place if there is more laughter there.

Let's go to habit number five: survey says:

5. Each person is treated with respect and kindness

One of the strong families I surveyed wrote: “We try to treat each other, not as good as, but better than we treat other people. Some people are more polite to strangers than to their own family, and we really try to avoid that.” Another family wrote: “Kindness permeates the atmosphere. Sarcasm and ‘put-downs’ are not allowed and this starts with the parents attitude toward each other.” Another wrote: “We don't speak disrespectfully to each other as husband and wife and don't allow our kids to be disrespectful to us or to other adults.”

One of my all-time favorite verses is Ephesians 4:32. Many years ago, I was led a youth camp and that verse was the theme for the week. I made up a song to help them memorize the verse, and to this day, I can remember the song. “Come on and be ye kind, one to another, tenderhearted forgiving one another; even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you...” It’s more than just a verse or a song, it’s a guide for your family. If you want a healthy family, you must treat each family member with kindness. Kindness is love with its work clothes on. Kindness is treating the other person the way you’d like to be treated. There are millions of people who need a little kindness, and you can start looking within your own family.

Our word “courtesy” comes from the behavior of people who used to live in the king’s “court.” There was a code of conduct for the courtesans that included kindness and helpfulness. Men stopped and took off their hats and bowed when approached by a lady. They never let a lady open a door for herself. Their protocol of kindness gave birth to our word “courtesy.”

Have you ever heard the phrase “common courtesy?” Maybe at one time in America, it was common, but today, courtesy is uncommon. Cindy traveled alone to Nashville a few days ago and was riding a parking shuttle bus at the DFW airport to get her car. On one stop at the terminal, a lady was struggling to get two large suitcases up the steps into the shuttle bus. There were plenty of big, strong guys on the bus, but no one made a move to help her. So my wife gets up to help, and turns to the bus and says, “Guys!” (I know that voice well) That’s all it took for a couple of them to hop up and help—whatever happened to just being kind without having to be made to feel guilty? We need to practice uncommon courtesy at home and everywhere else.

Strong families show kindness, respect, and practice courtesy with each other. Here’s habit number four:

4. Time for family activities is a priority

Every respondent to the survey mentioned the importance of spending both quality time together and a large quantity of time doing things with their family. Next week, I’ll bring an entire message on family time, so I’ll just touch on this habit. Here are some of the comments from my survey:

“Time, time, time with our children.”

“We place a high priority on making memories more important than material things. Through the years, if given a choice of a family vacation or a new piece of furniture—we bought a slipcover and were gone! Our grown up kids never reminisce about a single thing we purchased. But, boy do we love the stories of getting lost, or being stranded on an icy interstate needing to powder our noses. Our memories are priceless and timeless!”

Another wrote: “Taking trips together is important—we enjoy going with other friends, but at least once a year, we go by ourselves on a fun trip that is not to another relative’s home.”

Remember, a trip to see the in-laws or your uncle in Shreveport does not really constitute a family vacation. Parents, let me remind you you’ll only have your kids at home for a few years, so you’d better invest time—and lots of it—in your family while your kids are at home.

You can get the full meal deal next week, but let me say that you'll never *find* family time, you have to *make* family time. Unless you make it an absolute priority, other people and other activities will rob you of your family time.

Let's look at habit number three. The survey says:

3. The family eats and talks together regularly

Everyone who responded to the survey talked about the importance of family meals. In a time when fast-food joints abound, I was surprised at how often these strong families sat down together to eat and talk. One person wrote: "We eat dinner together almost every night. No TVs, no radios, no noise, just us. We really listen and ask each other how the days events made us *feel*." Another mother said, "I'm a great cook, so that keeps them coming to the table." I was surprised by how many people mentioned the idea that most of the family communication takes place during meal times. Another person wrote: "We make a point to have dinner together each night and we talk about what has happened in our lives that day. We listen to each other. There is NO television or telephone allowed during dinner." Another very busy family wrote: "We spend a great deal of time communicating with each other. We eat a sit-down dinner at least three days a week, even if it means being late to baseball practice."

If you want to strengthen your family life you may need to make some changes. If your family eats in shifts, or if the television is blaring during mealtime, you may want to work on getting everyone together and making sure that conversation is on the dinner menu. Here's habit number two. Survey says:

2. Love is expressed every day

I was impressed by how many of the families stressed the importance of sharing love with each family member every day. Here are some of their comments: "We show affection to each other. There is an abundance of hugging, kissing, and snuggling at our house and we SAY "I love you" every day." Another wrote: "We say I love you to each other every day, and we mean it. (We say it even if we are mad at each other)." I laughed at one comment: "We all say "I love you" every time we part or hang up the phone—sometimes that's dozens of times a day. Warning: It becomes habit and one has to be careful not to accidentally say it on the phone when you're talking to the landscaper of the same gender!!"

It all begins with a husband and wife who love each other and aren't ashamed to show their kids they are in love. One man wrote: "The greatest thing a dad can do for his kids is to love their mother—this instills a security in kids like nothing else." Another couple wrote: "The marriage relationship has top priority over the demands of children. We take yearly trip as a couple and have "couch " time each day as a couple."

Everyone spoke about the abundance of hugs and kisses family members give each other. Some families are more demonstrative than others. As I look back on my teenage years, it saddens me to think that I don't every recall my dad hugging me and telling me he loved me when I became a teenager. I'm certain he loved me, and was proud of me, but he just never showed it. Dads and

moms, youy kids need to see you showing affection to each other, but they also need to feel your arms around them.

An old man got on a bus one February 14th, carrying a dozen roses. He sat beside a young man. The young man looked at the roses and said, "Somebody's going to get a beautiful Valentine's Day gift." "Yes," said the old man. A few minutes went by and the old man noticed his young companion was staring at the roses. "Do you have a girlfriend?" the old man asked. "I do," said the young man. "I'm going to see her right now, and I'm going to give her this Valentine's Day card." They rode in silence for another 10 minutes, and then the old man got up to get off the bus. As he stepped out into the aisle, he suddenly placed the roses on the young man's lap and said, "I think my wife would want you to have these. I'll tell her that I gave them to you." He left the bus quickly. As the bus pulled away, the young man watched as the old man walked into a cemetery.

It's true that "dead noses smell no roses." Be sure to tell your family members "I love you" every single day. Are you ready for habit number one? Survey says:

1. Jesus Christ is the glue of the family

Every response I got mentioned several things relating to this key habit. Families worship together, they pray together, they have family devotions together. Jesus is not just a welcome guest in the home; He is the Lord of the home. I could have used a word other than "glue." I could have said Jesus is the center of the family, or the heart of the home, or the foundation of the family, but I like the word glue. In fact, that's exactly what one mother wrote: "The bottom line is that Christ is the glue that holds us together." Another person wrote: Christ is the center (our family doesn't revolve around any individual, but Jesus. The wheel is a good diagram. Christ is the hub; each member is one of the spokes.) Here are a few more of their comments: "We pray together. Before anyone leaves for work/school each morning, we hold hands and pray and we pray together each night." "Our Christianity is not tucked into Sunday but lived every day." "Church attendance on Sunday morning is NOT an option. We had our babies in Sunday School from the time the pediatrician gave the okay. We only miss if out of town or too sick to get out of bed."

Take a moment and look at these ten habits again. You can have all of the first nine, but if Jesus is not Lord of your life and Lord of your home, then the few years you enjoy as a family on earth will be the extent of your family time together. On the other hand, you may be lacking in a few of the other nine, but if Jesus is the Lord of your home, then your family can thrive and be effective.

CONCLUSION

I got the idea for the title of this message from the book Stephen Covey wrote twelve years ago entitled *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In the book he tells the story of the golden goose. There was once a farmer who bought a golden goose. A week later the golden goose laid a golden egg, and the farmer was ecstatic! He cashed the golden egg in and had a wild time. The

following week he found the golden goose laid another golden egg! Again he cashed it in and spent the money. This happened week after week until one week the farmer just couldn't wait till the end of the week to get the golden egg so he killed his golden goose and took the golden egg out of it. He had another wild time with the money. But the next week he realized there was no golden egg, for he killed his golden goose. The moral of the story is to never kill your golden goose. Your family is like your golden goose: it is the most valuable earthly treasure you'll ever have. The only thing that can add more value to your family is when Jesus is the Lord of your home. I challenge moms and dads today to make a fresh commitment to Christ. I challenge families to follow the example of Joshua and say, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”

OUTLINE

10. Children are disciplined with love and consistency
9. Money is managed wisely and discussed openly
8. Everyone shares household tasks
7. The family has learned to cope with adversity
6. Family members laugh together
5. Each person is treated with respect and kindness
4. Time for family activities is a priority
3. The family eats and talks together regularly
2. Love is expressed every day
1. Jesus Christ is the glue of the family