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From Generation to Generation

what:

Family is God's idea.

so what?

Intentionally consider what kind of family you want to build.

WEEK 1

Beginning in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, it's evident that family is God's good plan for the flourishing of mankind. And it doesn't take long for Satan to slither in seeking to destroy it. In this session, you'll lay a foundation by building a biblical definition of family.

It's time for me to say my favorite words . . . **open your Bible** to Genesis 50. As we dig into the story of Joseph, let's start at the end.

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

BEGINNING AT THE END

Big idea: *Building a God-honoring family requires intention.*

READ GENESIS 50:22–26

Start with what you know. When you think of the story of Joseph, what comes to mind? Make a list below.

(If you're new to the Bible or to Joseph's story, hooray! I'm so glad you're here. It's okay to leave this space blank. You're going to have a lot to fill in soon.)

Revisit Genesis 50:22–26. What details of Joseph's life can you add?

Long after the day of Joseph's funeral, another patriarch had something interesting to say about the value of such sad occasions. King Solomon was the wisest man to ever live (1 Kings 3:12). God gifted him with a unique ability to see life and death through a truth-shaped lens. Solomon wrote:

It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.

ECCLESIASTES 7:2

What point do you think Solomon was trying to make?

We can paraphrase that passage with this dichotomy: funerals and festivals. If we have to pick one of the two, wise Solomon says, "Pick the funeral."

That's not exactly a happy thought, but unless the Lord returns first, there will come a day when you and I are the ones in the coffin and the families we are building today will be gathered around *our* bodies.

It's a sobering reality. Here's one equally sobering: When your life is over, what will your family say about you? Were you a source of joy, comfort, and wisdom to them? Or, were you critical, easily angered, and constantly offended? What will they say you built your family life around? Was it love, charity, faith, or fun (one of my favorites!)? Or something else?

Based on the description of Joseph's funeral, what can you discern about his legacy?

We know Joseph lived a long life: one hundred and ten years filled with high highs and low lows, providentially stitched together by the presence and power of God. He died surrounded by his brothers and children. Though there are many things worth saying in such moments, Joseph wanted to talk about his promise-keeping God.

Look at verses 24 and 25 again. What do you think Joseph was trying to express?

Perhaps it seems strange to start a study of Joseph's life with his funeral, but events like this have a way of distilling things down to what is absolutely true. In this snapshot of the end of Joseph's life, we see what lasts: faith and family. We also see that God-honoring families don't just happen. They are built, one decision at a time.

**GOD-HONORING FAMILIES
DON'T JUST HAPPEN.
THEY ARE BUILT,
ONE DECISION AT A TIME.**

Joseph's legacy wasn't buried in Egypt. We're still thinking about it today. And by God's good plan, your story won't end with you. As we will see in the days ahead, part of His vision for our families is that they are a means by which His blessings are passed from generation to generation. We have the privilege of cooperating with Him in what He wants to do through our families.

Think about the end of your life. Who do you hope is gathered around you on that day? I doubt you're picturing the faces of your coworkers or social media followers. More likely it's the man you vowed to love "until death do us part," the children or grandchildren you adore, or the extended family you've spent countless holiday dinners beside. This mental exercise reminds us that family matters. Still, building God-honoring families requires constant Spirit-enabled, flesh-denying, countercultural work.

Write out Psalm 127:1 below.

I'm fond of the New Living Translation version of this verse:

Unless the LORD builds a house,
the work of the builders is wasted.
Unless the LORD protects a city,
guarding it with sentries will do no good. (NLT)

The point of Bible study is never to try harder and do better in our own strength. (I'm sure you've already noticed that no amount of human effort can result in perfect families.) But Joseph's story dramatically illustrates that God can make beauty out of brokenness. He alone can take our families and turn them into something that lasts forever.

As you wrap up today's study, take the time to think carefully and critically about what you want God to do through your family, using the prompts below.

I want God to shape me into the kind of woman that my family would describe as . . .

When others look at my family, I want them to see that God is . . .

The areas of brokenness in my family I most want to see God redeem are . . .

I want our family to be known as a family who . . .

WEEK 1 | DAY 2

A PLAN FOR FLOURISHING

Big Idea: *Family is God's idea*

READ GENESIS 1:26–31, 2:18–25

Some of my earliest and fondest memories involve playing “family” as a little girl. I made a bridal veil out of a white pillowcase, pulled some wildflowers from the front yard for a bouquet, and forced my little brother to pretend to be the groom. Or I’d rock and sing to my baby dolls and tell them, “I’m your mommy.” Unlike the alphabet or counting to a hundred, no one had to teach me the value of family.

Write down some of your earliest family memories.

Consider the grand narrative of Scripture. Family is a prominent theme. Noah escaped the flood of God’s judgment with his family (Gen. 6–7). The Israelites fled

Egypt with their families (Ex. 12:31–38). Jesus Himself was born into a family. *He chose* to experience firsthand the discipline of a parent (Luke 2:41–52), the pestering of a sibling (Mark 3:20–35), and the expectations of aunts, uncles, and cousins (Luke 1:39–45).

When you think about families in the Bible, what other stories come to mind? Make a list.

Review Genesis 1:26–31. What observations can you make about God’s design for the first human family?

Humans aren’t the only ones with families, you know? The Madagascar tenrec deserves a lot of flowers on Mother’s Day. She is the mammal with the largest litters, often birthing 30+ babies at once.¹ Wolves, beavers, and vultures are among the many creatures that mate for life.² **But humans are distinct in that we bear the image of God. This has implications for the way we see the purpose of our families.** When God made the first family, and every family since, He made something special—something *set apart*.

Though the world began with God’s creation of light and dark, land and sea, and creatures of all shapes and sizes, the text reveals that the first human family was not an afterthought, but an essential part of God’s plan for the world He made.

Where Genesis 1 records the creation of the first image bearers of God, Genesis 2 captures the very first wedding.

Write out Genesis 2:24–25 below.

Look at that passage again. Circle any words or phrases that intrigue you.

Did you circle “hold fast,” “one flesh,” or “not ashamed”? Scripture gives us a vision of the perfect shalom God intends for our families. The sinless intimacy enjoyed by the first couple feels like a dream to those of us who have been marred by the fall. But my, how our hearts do long for it.

Connect the dots between Genesis 1 and 2 to see that God’s good design for families goes well beyond giving Adam and Eve a happy home.

Revisit Genesis 1:28.

Write a synonym for each of the words God used in His instructions to the first family.

Fruitful _____ Multiply _____

Fill _____ Subdue _____

Have dominion _____

Write the assignment God gave to Adam and Eve in your own words.

God's intent for the first family was that they would play a vital role in ruling the world He made. **His design hasn't changed.** Families remain a fundamental building block for human flourishing. The reverse is also true: When the family crumbles, the implications for God's world are catastrophic.

God's heart for families is not limited to the first two chapters of the Bible.

Thinking big picture about the Bible, answer the following questions:

How are families addressed in the Ten Commandments? (Check out Exodus 20:12–15).

What role did families play in God's covenants to Abraham, Moses, and David?

Do the Psalms and Proverbs address families?

How does God use family language to express His relationship with His people?

Bottom line: Family is God's idea. Circle back to Genesis 1 one more time.

Review verse 31.

When God observed all of creation, crowned with the first family, how did He describe it?

Based on what you've read in this session, how do you define family? Write your definition below.

Throughout the rest of this study (and beyond), I'd encourage you to define family this way:

Family: an institution designed by God to reveal who He is and to subdue and cultivate the world He has made.

How is this different from the definition of family often offered by the world?

How does a biblically based definition of family change the way you see the purpose of your family?

Though God's design is perfect, none of us have picture-perfect families. In Day 4 of this Week, you'll see that Adam and Eve's family was fractured soon after it began. Throughout this study, you'll find that Joseph's family could have made a heated episode of a popular reality show. But what is true about the first family is true of Joseph's family and is true of yours and mine: **God is working to redeem even the most broken families.** You can participate in His redemptive work by expressing your desire for God to use your family to accomplish His good plan.

Wrap up today's study by writing out a prayer, asking God to fulfill His vision through your family.