



Our Legacy of Hope Begins at Home

Introduction: Recognize the longest married couple in the service and possibly the newest married couple. (Perhaps distribute a special gift of some kind)

FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- Psalm 127:1-3
- Proverbs 22:6
- Proverbs 18:22
- James 1:17
- Philippians 2:5-8

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
- II. The Lord is Our Hope For a Blessed Marriage and Family (Psalm 127:1)
- III. Relationships Are Your Hope of Life Abundance (Psalm 127:2)
- IV. Children Are Our Hope-Filled Heritage (Psalm 127:3)

KEY TRUTH:

Life fulfillment and abundance is NEVER found in what we acquire, accomplish or achieve. It's only found in the loving intimacy with God and others.

KEY WORDS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- House
- Gift
- Vain or vanity



A question for married couples

For those of us who are married, what hope do we have that our marriage will last? What hope do we have that we will “finish strong”? What should we count on—or hope in, so that our marriage is full of passion and intimacy?

The headlines are filled with stories of unfaithfulness and marital discord. So what lessons can we learn from legendary sports heroes, political figures and movie stars that seem to have it all, but can't seem to make their marriage last?

What do the stars of Hollywood or the politicians of Washington hope in? What are they counting on? I wonder if their hope of marital success was misplaced? How about yours and mine?

A question for parents

For those of us who are parents or grand-parents: What hope do we have that our children will stand by their faith? Live by their values? What are you counting on? What are you hoping in—that will produce relationally healthy, followers of Jesus? (Proverbs 22:6)

We certainly can't hope for perfect children, because our children are just like us: imperfect people. They make their own decisions and just like us, some of those choices are good ones and some of them are not!

Could you join with me in this hope?

- Our children are more influenced and shaped by their parents and by their faith—than by the world.
- Our teens, remain open to our input and continue to be open about the details of their physical, emotional and spiritual life.
- Our adult children want to be around us and we regularly enjoy being around them!

Some of us may also champion the simple, but profound hope that our current family could be a little healthier, or a little more functional than our childhood.

When we consider the worldwide tragedies of family violence and neglect, abuse and fragmentation – We've got to ask the question: **Is the hope for our families in the right place?**

A question for teens and single adults

If we were to ask, the vast majority of you would say that you hope for a life-long soul mate and committed marriage relationship, but many of you would settle for much less. The rise of co-habitation, frequency of divorce, having children outside of marriage and “hooking up” are all signs that the hope for life-long commitment often gets terribly lost.



Is your hope for an abundantly satisfying, life-long marriage just a fantasy or could it be, God's hope for you?

Again, lessons from the Psalmist give us wisdom to ground our hopes in confidence for the future.

Let's read what many refer to as, “The Homebuilding” Psalm – Psalms 127:1-3.



The Lord is Our Hope For a Blessed Marriage and Family

“Unless the Lord builds the house they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

NOTES:

The Lord is in the homebuilding business. He builds heavenly homes (John 14:1-3), church homes (Matthew 16:16-18) and earthly homes!

Married couples: Consider God’s wisdom—“Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church...” (Ephesians 5:25). And “let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

Parents: Consider God’s wisdom—“Do not provoke or exasperate your children ...” (Ephesians 6:4).

Teenagers and singles: Consider the encouragement of II Timothy 2:22—“Run away from youthful indulgence. Run after mature righteousness—faith, love, peace—joining those who are in honest and serious prayer before God.”



Our homebuilding Psalm reminds us that there are only two kinds of homes being built: Those the Lord builds and those being built in vain—the homes and families built with emptiness.

Consider how life events have recently exposed the vanity – or the emptiness of celebrity marriages. They looked good on the outside, but painful emptiness and betrayal was just below the surface.

Colossians 3:16 Preparation:

“Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you.”

Pastor, take time now to allow the Lord to remind you of a “wake-up” call you received from the Lord—a time when you realized your home priorities were out of balance. Recall a

time when emptiness or vanity was creeping into your home. Consider sharing this with your congregation as a testimony of humility and dependence upon the Lord as our hope.

“I remember the time that the Lord got my attention about our family ...”

It is the Lord who both builds and guards our homes. Countless enemies are trying to destroy God-honoring relationships. The Lord is our only true hope for faithfulness.

You see, it’s not just today’s celebrities who have failed to “hope in the Lord” for their marriages and families, this problem has been around a long time:

Remember King David? He was named, “a man after God’s own heart” yet we can read of his marriage betrayal with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-2).

Remember Abraham, the Old Testament Patriarch? Abraham, was named the “friend of God”. He failed to protect his wife, Sarah when life’s pressures came closing in. He chose instead to lie and take the easy way out (Genesis 12:10-20).

Allowing the Lord to build and guard your home, means more than just a token acknowledgement of Him or His principles. It requires a commitment to live out His blueprints for your family.

The Bible is the Lord’s blueprint for your family. God lets us know how to have a blessed marriage and family. Part of His plans are about:

Communicating in Families:
Proverbs 15:1 and Ephesians 4:15

When Someone Messes Up in a Family:
I John 1:9 and James 5:16

When Someone is Hurting in a Family:
II Corinthians 1:2-4 and Matthew 5:4



Relationships are Our Hope of Life Abundance

“It is vain to rise up early and retire late” (Psalm 127:2).

NOTES:

The barrenness and emptiness of a busy life has stolen much of the closeness from relationships and families today. Recent talk show hosts have seen the need to invite experts to help families slow down, unplug and communicate with one another. Even secular experts have seen the need for relationships to take priority.

Marriages, families, and friendships are our hope for a meaningful life.

Life fulfillment and abundance is NEVER ultimately found in what we acquire, accomplish or achieve.

It's only found in the loving intimacy with God and others.

The home the Lord builds is a home where people are the priority!

- Could you take initiative this week to make a quick phone call or short text, just to communicate with your spouse, family member or friend: “I was thinking about you; I miss seeing you; I look forward to seeing you soon”? You might be amazed at how a few minutes of thoughtful initiative can deepen a relationship.
- Could you develop a habit of giving first? This week, why don't you look for ways to share words of encouragement and appreciation, offering comfort and support? Start each day with an attitude of “Who will I give to today?”

- **For married couples:** Set up a weekly time to talk. Some call it a Marriage Staff Meeting (See Additional Notes) This is the time where you can plan your next date night, discuss marriage & family goals, or communicate about parenting challenges.
- **For parents:** Try designating a family night this week. This is a time where fun, games and laughter deepen the connections between family members. (See Additional Notes)



Insert video segment

There is a special film coming to theaters across the country on April 9th. *Letters to God* shows a boy named, Tyler and his battle with cancer. While Tyler's family struggles to accept his diagnosis, hope is inspired through his letters to God! Let's watch some clips from *Letters to God* that show how God and the priority of relationships can bring hope to the most difficult circumstance.

KEY TRUTH

Life fulfillment and abundance is NEVER found in what we acquire, accomplish or achieve. It's only found in the loving intimacy with God and others.



Children are Our Hope-Filled Heritage

“Behold children are gifts from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3).

NOTES:

Each year, for almost a decade, national marriage and family leaders from across the U.S. have gathered at the Chick—Fil—A Winshape retreat center outside of Rome, Georgia for a Marriage CoMission Summit (www.marriagecommission.com). The goal for these gatherings and subsequent actions is to:

Inspire the created desire of men and women for life-long healthy marriages, equipping them to lead strong families and lead hope-filled children.

Could this be the vision of the parents in this room? Could this be the vision of anyone who interacts with the children of this church? Could this be the vision of anyone who ministers to a child? Could we be equipped to inspire hope-filled children?

Let’s examine this vision for hope-filled children. What would it look like to see children who are filled with hope? It would mean that our children wouldn’t be filled with self-centeredness, arrogant pride or self-condemnation, but instead with a hope-filled faith in the Lord. Our children’s faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

As parents, we can not make our children receive our faith. Each child must live out his or her own faith journey ... **but we can instill in our children the hope that we have in our Lord.** It is this hope that can blossom into a child’s personal faith. This is the incredible opportunity we have as parents, building our homes as the Lord leads.

Look around the room, (and without scaring any of the children) imagine each child as an extravagant gift. Imagine that God has given us individually wrapped presents. He’s laid before us, packages that have brightly colored paper, uniquely tied ribbons and beautiful bows. Parents, if you have more than one child in your family, imagine each gift and how it is uniquely packaged & carefully displayed.

Here’s an important challenge and valuable opportunity to instill hope in our precious wrapped gifts:

- Have you slowed down long enough, to turn aside, enter each child’s world and “unwrap” each gift?
- Have you stopped, noticed and admired the special way in which each child is wired? Have you stopped, noticed and admired each of their personalities, giftedness and character?

Encountering Christ

I’d like for everyone to take a moment and pray. Pause to imagine yourself standing before a child, your children—your gifts from the Lord. Each gift is uniquely packaged, precious wrapped and carefully presented.

Now as you admire your gifts from the Lord, you look over your shoulder, to see Jesus standing next to you.

Jesus leans in to look at the children and seems to gaze in awe of His creation. Speaking with the admiration of the Master Creator, Jesus reminds you of how He knows these children intimately; He formed them in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5). Jesus reminds you that He notices each part of their day—when they rise up and when they lay down (Psalm 139:1-3). Christ lovingly recalls how He knows and admires each child’s gifts and talents (Psalm 139:14, 16). Jesus offers reassurance that He hears each child’s thoughts and intentions and knows the intricacies of each person’s character (Psalm 139:23). Jesus leaves your side, but before He does, He whispers an invitation: Will you join me in unwrapping these gifts?





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NOTES:

Consider how deeply Jesus knows your children.

Reflect on His intimate knowledge of each one of them. Now pause to meditate on how He has asked you to join Him in loving the children well.

How could we know and love our children the way Jesus does? How could we inspire hope in the children we touch?

- **Verbalize Appreciation:** Do you really know that each one of your children flourishes on appreciation? They blossom inside when they hear your acknowledgement of their behavior and gratitude for their efforts.
- **Convey Respect:** Did you know that some children are starving for respect? They crave the moments when you ask their opinion and include them in decisions. They deeply want to know that you value and honor them as individuals.
- **Know Their Fears:** Are you aware of your children’s insecurities and fears? Do you know about the things that make them nervous and the situations that cause them anxiety?
- **Discover Dreams:** Do you know your children’s dreams and aspirations? Have you discovered the paths where their imaginations take them?
- **Celebrate Strengths:** Are you close enough to your children to see each child’s character strengths? And are you attentive enough to verbalize those strengths, both in one-on-one conversations and in front of other people?
- **Prioritize Confessions:** Apologies instill hope! It’s ironic, but a parent’s apology sows some of the best “seeds of hope” into a young life: “I’m sorry to be impatient” “I was wrong not to keep my promise.” These humble admissions of wrong give a child hope that they, too can admit and make amends for their own imperfections.

Colossians 3:16 Preparation:

“Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you.”

Pastor: Think about a recent time of apology to one of your children. You may even want to pause quietly before the Lord and see if a fresh apology might be needed.

Make time to apologize to your child (if needed) and then reflect on how that apology could have instilled hope within your child.

With your child’s permission, share your own testimony of confession and the hope that was conveyed. Consider making this testimony a part of your sermon.



Chick—Fil—A’s Winshape Retreat Center (www.winshaperetreat.org)



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NOTES:

One final way to inspire hope within a child:

- **Set Aside Time:** Individual, quality time with a child instills hope. When a child senses that mom or dad sets aside special time just for them, a child’s worth is affirmed and a sense of hope increased. When was the last time you enjoyed fun time alone with your son/daughter, doing something they wanted to do? If it’s been too long, you might reignite their hope with words like:

“Eric, it’s been too long since just you and I had some fun time together. Let’s make plans for Saturday afternoon. You get to choose what we do!”

Why is this simple action such a good idea?

Jesus is a powerful example of leaving His world (of Heaven), to enter into ours. He took initiative to set aside time for us! He didn’t just look out for His own interests, Jesus looked to the interests of others (See Philippians 2:4-8). As parents and those who care about children, we have a similar opportunity to “think more highly” of our children as we leave the busyness of our adult world and enter the world of our children: So kick a ball, play with Playdoh, let them beat you at a video game, have a tea party, listen to a drum solo, draw together, read together, get a cup of coffee together. Enter your child’s world, enjoy your gifts from the Lord and pass on a little hope.

Closing story: An elderly gentleman took the stage to talk about some of his business successes. He told about starting his own business and becoming a millionaire at age 21. He told about the ten’s of millions he made and the many businesses he purchased by the age of 30. This successful business man described his private airplanes and extravagant yachts.

But he also described the broken relationships, multiple divorces, lawsuits between family members, a teenage daughter’s attempted suicide, and his son’s incarceration. In his closing encouragement, the elderly gentleman said this:

“As a young man, I set out to climb the ladder of success and in the world’s eyes, I climbed it. But when I got to the top of the ladder, I discovered that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall!”

Only loving relationships provide lasting fulfillment and hope.





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NOTES:

Experience the Word:

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

In closing, let’s pray a prayer that we can be certain is according to God’s will:

God does not want us to take the gifts that He has given for granted.

“Receive not the gifts of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1).

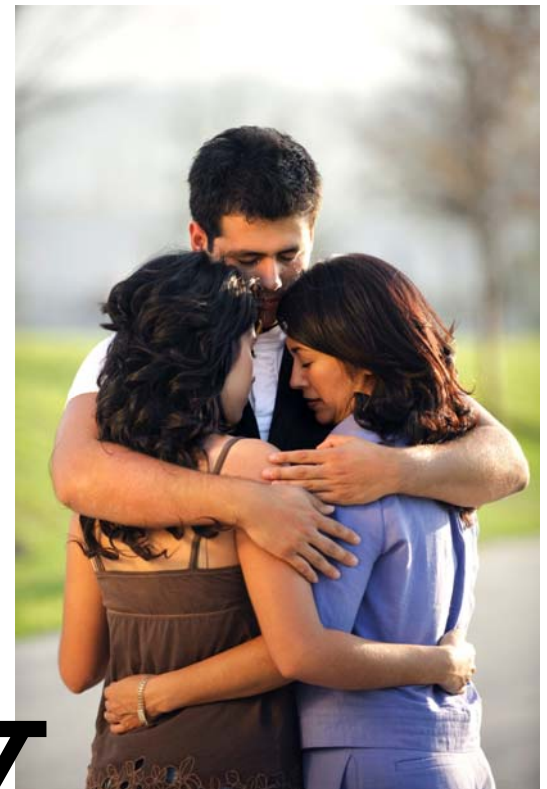
- Husbands have been gifted with a wife (Proverbs 18:22).
- Wives can receive their husbands as gifts from above (James 1:17).
- Parents can pause to unwrap their children as gifts from the Lord (Psalm 127:3).

Would you pray this prayer with sincerity?

Pray individually, before the Lord or pray as couples and families.

Hold hands with a friend, family member or loved one at the altar and pray:

“Lord, I receive my wife/my husband/my children as gifts from You. I recommit myself to joining You in knowing them deeply and loving them well. Give us a hope-filled home as we deepen our faith in You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. May You continue to build our home.”



Pray...



Marriage Staff Meetings

Developing and maintaining closeness in a marriage and family requires that husband and wife spend quality time together. The external stresses of work, carpool, homework and checkbooks don't have to take their toll on marital oneness, if couples will prioritize time together!

It's inconceivable that a successful business could operate without regular staff meetings. Then why do most families try to operate without a regular time of planned communication?

Characteristics of a successful marriage staff-meeting:

Schedule a Time: Preferably, the staff meeting will be a standing appointment, occurring the same time and the same place each week. If that's not possible, set your staff meeting on the calendar before each week begins.

Prioritize the Time: Once the time is scheduled – protect it! Treat the appointment like it's the most important item on your schedule – because it is. Prioritizing your marriage staff-meeting will produce a renewed sense of closeness.

Protect the Time: Find a quiet place at home, or if necessary, meet away from your home and office. Avoid phone-calls and interruptions, if at all possible.

Home is where people are the priority.

A productive marriage staff meeting might have this agenda:

Calendar Coordination: Discuss the family's plans for the coming week. What are the children's schedules? Who's working late? Plan your next Date Night and your next Family Night. You'll even find that there's often great value in calendaring some of your lovemaking times!

Listen to One Other: One or both of you may just need to talk. Establish eye contact and give undivided attention. Be quick to offer comfort, encouragement, and support. Avoid advice-giving, arguing, teaching, or lecturing.

Discuss Family Goals: Discuss and monitor the progress toward your goals. Goals and plans could be developed in these areas: marriage, social, financial, personal, family, educational, spiritual, and professional.

Discuss Parenting Plans: Discuss significant character development or discipline issues; what seems to be working and what doesn't. Plan family times together plus individual times with each child. Discuss and agree upon parenting responsibilities and schedules for the next week. Who's needing help? Who's needing a break without the kids?

Share Truth in Love: Lovingly share areas of irritation, hurt, and disappointment. A marriage staff meeting provides a neutral setting in which difficult issues can be honestly shared in an atmosphere of acceptance and openness. For instance, you might need to share: "I miss being alone with you, could we plan a date together?" or "It would mean a lot to me if we could remain in agreement in front of the kids...and discuss any differences privately."



Forty (40) Family Night Ideas

Review your family's time commitments and schedule a dedicated Family Night

**Home is where
people are the priority!**

Remember:

- Clear the calendar of all conflicts.
 - Take turns choosing a fun, family activity.
 - Complete homework before dinner.
 - Commit to be on time.
 - No phone calls and no interruptions.
 - HAVE FUN!
1. Visit a park.
 2. Have a card, checker, or chess tournament.
 3. Play charades (kids love to see parents act silly).
 4. Play a board game.
 5. Color, draw, or paint.
 6. Play with blocks, cars or army men.
 7. Have a tea party.
 8. Try cooking a new recipe together.
 9. Build or repair something together.
 10. Play hide-and-seek.
 11. Go for a family walk or bike ride.
 12. Make a playhouse, tent, or tree house.
 13. Visit an airport and watch the planes take off and land, or go to a lake and watch the boats.
 14. Go on a picnic. How about a picnic breakfast?
 15. Make popcorn, maybe even caramel corn!
 16. Build a snowman, make a snow fort, or throw snowballs. How about some snow ice cream?
 17. Go swimming or water-skiing.
 18. Plan a scavenger hunt. Try to find something in the house for every letter of the alphabet.
 19. Read a good book aloud.
 20. Look through photo albums or view family movies.

21. Play miniature golf or croquet.
22. Make a recording of the most recent family "news," and send it to a close friend or relative.
23. Go fishing.
24. Sing favorite songs, nursery rhymes, or hymns around the piano.
25. String popcorn and place on a tree for the birds.
26. Make puppets and put on a puppet show.
27. Have a bonfire and roast hot dogs and marshmallows.
28. Visit an elderly friend or relative.
29. Pick wildflowers. (You might want to press them.)
30. Read a psalm together. Then write a psalm of praise for your own family.
31. Put together a scrapbook, describing a favorite vacation or any special event.
32. Play "I think you're nice because ..." Think of a quality you like in each person in the family.
33. Encourage everyone to write an actual letter or color a picture to send to grandparents.
34. Play badminton, volleyball, tennis, or darts.
35. Take the kids on a tour of where Dad or Mom works.
36. Draw a family tree on paper and complete it as a family. Add old photographs if available.
37. Go to the library or bookstore. Check out the latest books and magazines.
38. Write a letter to a missionary family.
39. Write and act out a pantomime or play centered on a specific holiday, a Bible story, or an important cause.
40. Go to a ball game, or play one – football, kickball, softball, baseball, basketball, soccer.

**Laugh, have fun,
enjoy being together !**