



**Title: What is the Role of the Family?**

**Text: Various Texts**

**Date: May 21 2023**

**Main Idea:** God has been building his family from the beginning of creation until now. Every person has a role in the family.

## **Personal Study Guide**

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This lesson will be slightly different in that it is going to trace the theme of family throughout scripture. Everyone is in a family, so whether you're married or single, the hope is that this lesson will serve your time together.

## **Highlight – What stands out?**

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**Family in the Old Testament**

1. Look up Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-24. What are the markers of this first family? What command are they given? What defines the family?
  
2. Genealogies play a big part in the Old Testament stories. Look up a few of them (Genesis 5:1-31, Ruth 4:18-21). Now look up Genesis 3:15, Genesis 17:15-21, and 2 Samuel 7. Why do you think genealogies are so important? What is being traced here?

**See this note for context:** Genealogies play a prominent role in the book of Genesis. Aside from the major genealogies in the primeval history (Gen 4:17–18; 5; 10; 11:10–26), the entire book is built around the genealogical structure imposed by the תולדות (*tholedoth*) formula (Gen 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The word תולדות (*tholedoth*) most closely means “descendants” and is related to the word ילד (*yld*), “to give birth to.” The repeated use of this term is widely recognized as a structural feature of Genesis. It serves to introduce narratives that provide literary expansion on the specific generation introduced in the תולדות (*tholedoth*) formula, thus giving the entire book the form of a literary genealogy.

There may be a connection to the serpent’s curse in Gen 3:15 underlying this genealogical structure to the entire book, and in particular the primeval history. The anticipated enmity between the serpent’s descendants and the woman’s offspring appears to be played out in Gen 4:7, which probably refers to a crouching demon waiting to ambush the woman’s seed, Cain, while clearly referring back to Gen 3 through lexical and syntactical parallelism with Gen 3:16. The genealogical focus draws attention to the arrival of each successive generation of the woman’s seed and reminds the reader of the

ongoing conflict with the seed of the serpent as well as the anticipation of the arrival of one who might crush his head.<sup>1</sup>

3. In Genesis 3, we see sin enter the world and have an impact on the family. What are the implications on marriage and family that come after sin enters the world? (Use Genesis 3:9-13, 16-20, Genesis 4:1-16, Genesis 11:30).
4. There are also examples of unfaithful families. Read Genesis 16, 2 Samuel 13 and 15, 1 Kings 11:1-8. How does this miss the mark of what God intended family to be like?

### **Family in the New Testament**

1. Let's look at some genealogies in the New Testament. Look up Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. What did you notice? Try to research if genealogies are mentioned in scripture again after this one. What did you find?

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<sup>1</sup> Martin A. Shields, "[Genealogy](#)," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).



that tells us what a family looks like in that time period. It's important with narrative to understand if it's telling us to do something, or if it's telling us how things are (but not necessarily how to act). For example: polygamy is all over the Old Testament, but what does God say about marriage? How do we know that?

In these instances, we can look at the stories of men having multiple wives (like Abraham, David, and Solomon) and go back to what the Bible says is true from the beginning (before sin entered the world) to find a lens to see what is happening in the text.

God allows natural consequences to happen from people's choices, like in the case of these men (from the **Highlight** section). But that does not mean he condones it or sees it as normative. This might seem like a detour from what we're looking at regarding the family, but often people ask us how we know it is wrong to practice polygamy. We can point to these examples of how it played out, along with God's original design in Genesis 1 pointing towards his ultimate design that we'll see when we get to the New Testament.

### **The Purpose of the Family in the Old Testament**

1. In Exodus 1-2 there is a crisis. What is it? What happens if evil wins in this story? Look back at Genesis 3:15 to help you answer.
2. As the nation of Israel prepares to enter the promised land, God gives them the Law and expectations for living in his land. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. What does he expect of Christian parents?
3. Summarize based on your answers from the **Highlight and Explain** sections, what is the purpose of the family in the Old Testament?

## The Purpose of the Family in the New Testament

1. In the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, something seems to shift regarding families. Look back at your answers in the **Highlight** section. What is that shift?
  
2. But it doesn't mean that families don't matter, right? The New Testament writers still speak of the priority of Christian marriage and family. Look up the following verses and explain what each are saying about marriage and family:
  - Ephesians 6:1-4
  
  - Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7
  
  - 2 Corinthians 6:14-16
  
3. The role of singleness in the family. Look up the following passages. How do these passages show the value that single people bring to God's family? (Look back at the passages you studied in the **Highlight** section too)
  - Matthew 28:19-20

- 1 Corinthians 7:6-9, 25-40

Going back to some cultural aspects of marriage, how does the New Testament purpose of the family explain why marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life? (Think back to what it represents.)

Look back at Mark 3:31-34. Who is Christ's family here? Why is that offensive to this audience or any audience? Look up Hebrews 2:11. What does this mean for all of us who trust in Christ?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

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1. Family is important, but according to Jesus, being united to his family is greater. How have you seen the church be a family for you or others?
  
2. If the church is a family, then how are kids born into this family? In what ways can you participate in being "fruitful and multiplying?"
  
3. Both in the Old and New Testaments we are told to honor our father and mother. What does this look like? What does it look like when it's hard?

4. Do you see the people you go to church with on Sunday morning as valuable to you as your blood family? What keeps you from seeing them this way?

## **Respond – What’s my next step?**

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1. Who are the spiritual parents in your life? Who do you need to be a spiritual parent to?
  
2. Who do you know who needs to be “reborn”? What plan do you need to make this week to speak to them, pray for them, or discuss Christ with them? Ask your class to pray, or even report back on this conversation.
  
3. In what ways have you seen the brokenness of family in your life or the lives of others? How can you be part of restoration?



## Supplemental Reading

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Instead of a commentary, below are two articles to read related to the family. One is written by our guest preacher, and Family Conference speaker, Dr. Al Mohler. The other is on the role of men and women in the family of God by Jen Wilkin. For additional reading and listening on the family, see the “Additional Resources” section.

### FAMILY

## [A Christian Vision of Marriage and Family](#)<sup>2</sup>

"For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to *define* the meaning of the terms 'marriage' and 'family.'" So states author Andreas J. Kostenberger who, with the assistance of David W. Jones has written *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*.

This sense of crisis and the need for definition sets the stage for this book and its central thesis--that the only way out of our present cultural confusion is a return to a biblical vision of marriage and family.

As Kostenberger observes, "What until now has been considered a 'normal' family, made up of a father, a mother, and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only or even superior form of ordering human relationships. The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures has to a certain extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual and societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under seige in our world today, and that with marriage and the family, our very civilization is in crisis."

In one sense, the statistics tell the story. The great social transformation of the last two hundred years has led to an erosion of the family and the franchising of its responsibilities. The authority of the family, especially that of the parents, has been compromised through the intrusion of state authorities, cultural

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<sup>2</sup> <https://albertmohler.com/2009/07/06/a-christian-vision-of-marriage-and-family>

influences, and social pressure. Furthermore, the loss of a biblical understanding of marriage and family has led to a general weakening of the institution, even among those who would identify themselves as believing Christians.

At the cultural level, Kostenberger suggests that the rise of a libertarian ideology explains the elevation of human freedom and a right to self-determination above all other principles and values. The quest for autonomy becomes the central purpose of human life, and any imposition of structure, accountability, boundaries, or restriction is dismissed as repressive and backward.

Within the Christian church, Kostenberger discerns what he identifies as a "lack of commitment to seriously engage the Bible as a whole." As he correctly observes, evangelical Christianity has no shortage of Bible studies, media production, parachurch ministries, and the like. Yet, most Christians are woefully unaware of the deep biblical, theological, and spiritual foundations for marriage and the family that are central to the Christian tradition.

"Anyone stepping into a Christian or general bookstore will soon discover that while there is a plethora of books available on individual topics, such as marriage, singleness, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality, there is *very little material* that explores on a deeper, more thoroughgoing level the entire fabric of God's purposes for human relationships," he observes. To fill this void, Kostenberger and Jones, along with Mark Liederbach, who contributed sections on contraception and reproductive technologies, attempt to offer an integrative approach that would establish a biblical theology of marriage and family. The primary focus of Scripture, they assert, is "the provision of salvation by God in and through Jesus Christ." Nevertheless, the Bible also addresses an entire spectrum of issues related to marriage and the family--extended to issues such as human sexuality, gender, reproduction, parenthood, and more.

Kostenberger and his co-authors begin their consideration of marriage and family in the book of Genesis, establishing the starting point for these considerations in the doctrine of creation. Throughout the volume, a complementarian understanding of the relationship between men and women is affirmed, and the man and the woman, both created in the image of God, are assigned different responsibilities and roles.

Early in the book, Kostenberger makes an audacious claim: "Our sex does not merely determine the form of our sex organs but is an integral part of our entire being." This flies in the face of the postmodern claim that gender--indeed the very notions of male and female--are nothing more than the product of social construction and ideology. This complementarian arrangement is correctly grounded before the Fall and its consequences.

Yet, Kostenberger gives careful attention to the effect of the Fall and the consequences that follow. Thus, sin and its effects becomes the explanatory principle for all confusion over gender, sexuality, marriage, and the integrity of the family.

In successive chapters, the book moves through a series of special topics, surveying the biblical material and presenting a systematic exposition of the Bible's teachings. The authors balance considerations from both testaments and deal honestly with the biblical narratives concerning biblical characters. Thus, the Patriarchs become examples of faithfulness, even as their own sin and misadventures in marriage and parenting are candidly observed. The authors use a very helpful outline format in setting out the various scriptural passages and their importance to each question. In this sense, they succeed in presenting an integrative model, pulling from a comprehensive reading of the biblical text.

For example, marriage and the roles of both husbands and wives is grounded in Genesis and then traced through the entire Old Testament. Husbands are to love and cherish their wives, to bear primary responsibility for the marriage union and to exercise authority over the family, and to provide the family with necessities for life. The wife, on the other hand, is to present her husband with children, manage her household with integrity, and provide her husband with companionship. Contemporary readers may be shocked by the candor of Kostenberger's presentation, but he grounds his arguments directly in the biblical text. Thus, readers are offered the opportunity to read the critical passages for themselves, and then to understand how Kostenberger framed his argument.

In an interesting section, Kostenberger acknowledges that, within six generations of Adam, the biblical vision of monogamy was at least occasionally compromised by the practice of polygamy. As Kostenberger observes, "While it is evident, then, that some very important individuals (both reportedly godly and ungodly) in the history of Israel engaged in polygamy, the Old Testament

clearly communicates that the practice of having multiple wives was a departure from God's plan for marriage." Further, the Bible is clear that individuals in the history of Israel who abandoned God's design of monogamy and participated in polygamy did so contrary to the Creator's plan and ultimately to their own detriment. The sin and disorder produced by polygamy, then, is further testimony to the goodness of God's monogamous design of marriage as first revealed in the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden."

In light of contemporary confusions, this is a most helpful and accurate clarification. Similarly, Kostenberger deals honestly with the Bible's teachings concerning deviant sexual practices, ranging from homosexuality and adultery to incest.

In another helpful section, Kostenberger differentiates between "traditional" and "biblical" visions of marriage. The traditional vision is deeply rooted in middle-class experience in America. The biblical vision is not dependent upon this traditional model.

Considering the nature of marriage, Kostenberger dismisses the notion of marriage as a sacrament or as a mere contract. Instead, he argues that marriage is rightly understood as a covenant, defined as "a sacred bond between a man and a woman instituted by and publicly entered into before God (whether or not this is acknowledged by the married couple), normally consummated by sexual intercourse." Thus, marriage is not merely a bilateral contract, but is a sacred bond. Moving from marriage to the larger family context, Kostenberger suggests that a biblical definition of family points to the structure constituted by "primarily, one man and one woman united in matrimony (barring death of a spouse) plus (normally) natural or adopted children and, secondarily, any other persons related by blood." Citing Old Testament scholar Daniel Block, Kostenberger identifies the family in ancient Israel as patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal. As Block helpfully suggests, the Old Testament family might best be described as "patricentric." In other words, the family is centered around the father.

In the New Testament, the structures of marriage and family are explicitly affirmed, even as the church is identified as the new family of faith. Nevertheless, the emergence of the church does not eliminate marriage, family, or the bonds and responsibilities established in Creation.

In a helpful section originally contributed by Mark Liederbach, the authors survey questions related to procreation, contraception, and the use of advanced reproductive technologies. The authors write with sensitivity, but also warn against a superficial embrace of contemporary technologies as without moral and theological complication. Readers are advised to look carefully at the nature of reproductive technologies, as well as contraceptive choices, in order to evaluate such options in light of biblical principles and mandates.

Kostenberger also presents a wealth of material related to the structure of the family, parenthood, and the care and discipline of children. He deals honestly with the need for parental correction and discipline, and affirms the role of corporal punishment in the raising of the young. "*Of course* children will disobey--they are sinners!," Kostenberger observes. "Parents rather should be expecting their children to sin, even after they have come to faith in Christ. Such an expectation is realistic and enables the parent to deal with each infraction calmly and deliberately, administering discipline with fairness, justice, and consistency."

The authors also provide a very helpful consideration of the biblical material concerning homosexuality. "The biblical verdict on homosexuality is consistent," Kostenberger argues. "From the Pentateuch to the book of Revelation, from Jesus to Paul, from Romans to the Pastorals, Scripture with one voice affirms that homosexuality is sin and a moral offense to God. The contemporary church corporately, and biblical Christians individually, must bear witness to the unanimous testimony of Scripture unequivocally and fearlessly." In later chapters, Kostenberger deals with questions related to divorce and remarriage and to the roles and responsibilities of men and women within the church. Even those who disagree with this understanding of divorce and remarriage will appreciate his careful consideration.

Against the backdrop of civilizational crisis, Kostenberger concludes by arguing that this crisis is "symptomatic of an underlying spiritual crisis that gnaws at the foundations of our once-shared societal values." Further, "In this spiritual cosmic conflict, Satan and his minions actively opposed the Creator's design for marriage and the family and seek to distort God's image as it is reflected in God-honoring Christian marriages and families."

Thus, recovery of a biblical understanding of marriage and family is itself a witness to the gospel and to the grace and mercy of God in giving humanity

these good gifts for His good pleasure. Kostenberger and his coauthors are to be congratulated on a volume that takes the biblical text seriously and seeks to apply Scripture to contemporary questions in a way that is neither arbitrary nor piecemeal. Their integrative approach will assist Christians to think through the most important issues of our day and, more importantly, lead their families to show the glory of God in the midst of a fallen world. This book should be welcomed and widely read.

## **Mothers in the Church by Jen Wilkin<sup>3</sup>**

One of my favorite books as a child was the classic by P.D. Eastman, *Are You My Mother?* It's the story of a baby bird who falls from his nest and goes in search of his mama. I would anxiously turn the pages as he asked a hound dog, an old car, and a host of other creatures and objects his soulful question: "Are you my mother?" As the little bird goes along searching, he passes right near his mother without being aware. The text reads: "He did not know what his mother looked like. He went right by her. He did not see her." Having met with disappointment and even danger again and again, at last he would find her on the very last page, just as my four-year-old heart was about to break from the suspense. Eastman wrote a book that appealed to an obvious truth: babies need mothers.

I'm now in my forties and a mother to four children who are almost grown. As I'm writing, they are all "out of the nest" for the week, and the unusual quiet orderliness of our house has felt like a foretaste of the next stage of life that is rushing toward me. To be honest, I'm not sure how I feel about it. Being the mama bird of this nest has consumed me for twenty years, and I have loved it. The term "empty nester" feels like an odd fit.

But I know better than to think that my mothering days are drawing to a close. I know this because God calls every believing woman to be a mother. Think about the command given to Adam and Eve in [Genesis 1](#): Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth with more image bearers. The command to the first man and woman meant that they were to become parents in the literal sense. But in the New Testament, we find this command expressed also in spiritual terms in the Great Commission: Go to all nations and make disciples. Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth with more image

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/mothers-church>

bearers. But this time, the call is also to be spiritual parents, raising newborn believers to maturity, helping them conform to the image of Christ.

I know my mothering days are not over because, as long as I draw breath, the call to fill the earth with image bearers will be incumbent on me. Just as my biological children needed me to train them in self-control, industriousness, and obedience, so also do young believers in the church need those who are more mature to train them in godliness. Every believing woman who grows to maturity becomes, in her time, a spiritual mother to those following behind, whether she ever becomes a mom in physical terms. She fulfills that most basic calling of motherhood: nurturing the helpless and weak to maturity and strength. She helps the young believer to nurse on the pure milk of the Word, faithfully teaching basic doctrine and modeling the fruit of the Spirit. She sacrificially makes herself available, like the mother of a newborn infant, allowing her schedule and personal needs to be inconvenienced for the sake of caring for the spiritually young and vulnerable. And she understands the work to be not a trial but a sacred duty, finding deep delight in wobbly first steps of faithfulness and stuttered first words of truth.

But connecting spiritual infants to spiritual mamas is not always a smooth process. Like the baby bird in Eastman's book, fledgling Christians may not recognize a mama bird even when one is standing right in front of them. They may go right past her. They may ask, "Are you my mother?" of the wrong person and receive the answer, "Yes." Plenty of false teachers are eager to prey on young Christians not yet established in their faith. Younger men and women in the faith, do you recognize your need for the wisdom of a spiritual mother? Whom could you approach to help you grow to maturity in your relationship with God and others?

Not only may spiritual infants fail to recognize spiritual mamas, but spiritual mamas may fail to recognize themselves as such. We may underestimate the need or question our ability to meet it. Or we may hesitate to extend ourselves out of a fear of commitment. But a motherless church is as tragic as a motherless home. Guiding the spiritually young to maturity is not solely the job of the vocational pastor, the elder, or the Sunday school teacher. The church needs mothers to care for the family of God. We must rise to our responsibility, eagerly searching for whom the Lord would have us nurture. There is no barrenness among believing women. Through the gospel, all become mothers in their maturity. And unlike biological motherhood, spiritual motherhood holds the potential for hundreds, even thousands of descendants. Older women in the faith, do you recognize the vital importance of your influence and example? Whom could you make room for in your life to guide toward maturity? Who needs the hard-earned wisdom you hold? Spiritual babies

need help to open God's Word, to live at peace with God and others, to be lights in dark places. Babies need mothers.

It is the calling of every believing woman to submit to the command to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth with image bearers. This means that for us, the term empty nester can never truly be applied. There is comfort for me in knowing this truth as I watch my biological children grow up and leave home. I suspect and hope there is comfort in this truth for any believing woman, biological mother or not. None of us needs ever to question our usefulness in the household of God. We have only to draw the next searching fledgling under our wing.

## **Additional Resources:**

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**Sermon:** [It Takes a Church: Focused on the Family of God by Al Mohler](https://albertmohler.com/2019/04/01/it-takes-a-church-focused-on-the-family-of-god)

<https://albertmohler.com/2019/04/01/it-takes-a-church-focused-on-the-family-of-god>

**Podcast Interview:** [Sit With Your Family at Church – But Maybe Not Your Spouse with Rebecca McLaughlin](https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/church-seating-family-introvert-extrovert.html)

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