

## **SERIES: MAKING SOUND INVESTMENTS FOR THE NEW YEAR**

“Your Family—Investing In Growth” Ephesians 5:21-6:4

**INTRODUCTION** - Some of the most important investments we make are in our families and other relationships. The potential of the effects of the investments we make in our families truly make them investments for growth.

The text we're using today to highlight the family is a controversial one. For centuries Ephesians 5, verses 21 and following, have wrongly been used to subjugate women and children and propagate a male dominated society at the expense of strong family life and relationships.

Though the hierarchy advanced by Paul no longer fits today's family, in its many forms, Paul's words do contain several characteristics that are important for both family life and our lives as Christians.

**SERVICE** - Paul's words for women to submit and serve their husbands and families, remind us that service is a key characteristic of our lives as God's people and members of the body of Christ.

Jesus, of course, is our model when we talk about submission and service. He submitted to the will of God the Father and endured the cross (Luke 22:39-46). During his ministry, Jesus stated that he had come to serve and not to be served (Matthew 20:28). Jesus also called his followers to follow his example of service. He challenged his followers to serve the people around them, their neighbors, and elevated that service to serving God (Matthew 25:40).

Many times it is difficult to see dinner preparation, chauffeur service for our kids, bedtime stories, and homework help as God pleasing service, but it is. These actions and others like them are investments in our families that bear rich returns.

Nurturing our relationships with friends, neighbors and co-workers also involves service. Cheerful smiles, listening ears, helping hands, and feet that go the extra mile reflect the love and presence of a caring God and the good news of Jesus Christ. Service as unglamorous, unappreciated and at times unnoticed it may be, well, it is vital to families and friendships.

In a supermarket, Kurtis the stock boy was busily working when a voice came over the intercom asking for a carry out at checkout register 4. Kurtis was almost finished, and wanted to get some fresh air, and decided to answer the call. As he approached the check-out stand a distant smile caught his eye, the new check out girl was beautiful. She was an older woman (maybe 26, and he was only 22) and he fell in love.

Later that day, after his shift was over, he waited by the punch clock to find out her name. She came into the break room, smiled softly at him, took her card and punched out, then left. He looked at her card. BRENDA.

Next day, he waited outside as she left the supermarket, and offered her a ride home. He looked harmless enough, and she accepted. When he dropped her off, he asked if maybe he could see her again, outside of work. She simply said it wasn't possible. He pressed and she explained she had two children and she couldn't afford a baby-sitter, so he offered to pay for the baby-sitter. Reluctantly she accepted his offer for a date for the following Saturday.

That Saturday night he arrived at her door only to have her tell him that she was unable to go with him. The baby-sitter had called and canceled. To which Kurtis simply said, "Well, let's take the kids with us." She tried to explain that taking the children was not an option, but again not taking no for an answer, he pressed.

Finally Brenda, brought him inside to meet her children. She had an older daughter who was just as cute as a bug, Kurtis thought. Then Brenda brought out her son, in a wheelchair. He was born a paraplegic with Down syndrome. Kurtis asked Brenda, "I still don't understand why the kids can't come with us?" Brenda was amazed. Most men would run away from a woman with two kids, especially if one had disabilities. Just like her first husband and father of her children did. That evening Kurtis and Brenda loaded up the kids, went to dinner and the movies. When her son needed anything Kurtis would take care of him. When he needed to use the rest room, he picked him up out of his chair, took him, brought him back. The kids loved Kurtis. At the end of the evening, Brenda knew this was the man she was going to marry and spend the rest of her life with. A year later, they were married and Kurtis adopted both of her children. Since then they have added two more kids.

So what happened to the stock boy and check out girl? Well, Mr. & Mrs. Kurt Warner have had quite a career in the National Football League, winning awards and the Super Bowl.

**LOVE** - Love is a second piece of investment capital that Paul encourages us to put into our families and friendships. He instructs the men to love their wives as Christ has loved the church.

Certainly love is connected with our service. Grudging service does not have the life transforming power that loving service does. Love is a dynamic motivator for service.

Love causes us to be a part of the lives of other people for their benefit; so that they can and will be all that God wants them to be, and equips them to be.

Love, if it is to reflect God's love for us, needs to be steadfast, unconditional love. There is nothing that can change God's decision to love us, and that should be the bottom line in all families and relationships.

A missionary tells of his encounter with a mother in a poor African village. She was lying on the ground. In her arms she held a tiny baby girl. As I put a cooked sweet potato into her outstretched hand, I wondered if she would live until morning. Her strength was almost gone, but her tired eyes acknowledged my gift. The sweet potato could help so little but it was all I had

Taking a bite she chewed it carefully. Then, placing her mouth over her baby's mouth, she forced the soft warm food into the tiny throat. Although the mother was starving, she used the entire potato to keep her baby alive. Exhausted from her effort, she dropped her head on the ground and closed her eyes. In a few minutes the baby was asleep. I later learned that during the night the mother's heart stopped, but her little girl lived.

Love is a costly thing. God in His love for us (and for a lost world) "spared not His own Son" to tell the world of His love. Love is costly, but we must tell the world at any cost. Such love is costly. It costs parents and sons and daughters. The missionary concluded, "If you will let your love for Christ, cost you something, the great advance will be made together."

## **OBEDIENCE**

Paul tells the children to whom he is writing to obey their parents. Obedience is a necessary part of any family and of any friendship. Obedience is necessary not only for children, but in these days of shared leadership, it is necessary for wives, husbands and sometimes parents.

Obedience addresses our relationships with authorities. Parents need to reflect on how they model obedience for their children. Are they always bucking the system? Do they see how much they can get away with? Obedience involves willingly submitting to authorities and the laws they set, even if we don't fully agree with them.

Obedience also works with ethics and conducting ourselves within the confines of the law. In a society where the end often justifies the means, ethical people are in short supply. Still ethical behavior is needed. It is at the core of our families, and it is foundational to our friendships.

## **POWER**

Paul's final exhortation deals with power. He advises fathers not to provoke their children to anger—wise advice.

Power is an addictive substance. The saying is true that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We like power—in our lives and over the lives of others. It is very tempting to use our power in a controlling manner with other people. When we do this, we do not reflect God in our lives.

We know what buttons we can push to set off our children, our spouse and our friends. Sometimes we use this power in a playful manner to “get their goats.” Most of the time, however, it is a misuse of power. We do it to provoke anger.

Power is a precious gift that Paul encourages his reads to use for the benefit of others and not for their own benefit. Using power wisely is a strong investment in families and friendships.

## **CONCLUSION**

Families and friendships can easily be taken for granted in our hectic lives. Paul reminds us of the essential elements that make strong families and friendships and encourages us to intentionally invest these elements in the lives of the people with whom we are blessed and look for ways to continually strengthen those relationships.