

Family life really puts covenant living to the test. It is easy to mistakenly believe that we are good at being in a covenant with God because He is not in front of us to protest. With family, however, the rubber meets the road and our ability to live joyfully in covenant is given reality on a daily basis. It is stretched, tested, and revealed as we live together, love each other, sin against one-another, and forgive each other. Let's spend some time this week focusing on some skills that can help us live more joyfully in covenant with our families.

## Day 1

Value what is to be gained more than what will be lost

All covenants require sacrifice. When making two things into one, there are only a couple of choices. One thing can completely lose its identity and cease to exist, in which case the two have not really become one, or each thing can sacrifice some of itself and the new creation can be formed. Only one of these options is a covenant, and because of this sacrifice is always required, which creates for us several problems. The most pressing problem is the fear we experience in believing that whatever we are losing is of such value that we cannot hope to thrive considering its loss. When faced with this, we usually resort to the pretense of covenant rather than the reality of covenant, as we pursue the "covenant light" of partnership over true covenantal unity. Partnership offers the hope of getting what we want while keeping everything of ourselves. We just need that little bit of help, so God can be our co-pilot for those moments when the plane is inverted and on fire because of our bad choices. The way to avoid this fakery that earns Christians the charge of hypocrite, is to see the benefit of what we are gaining. When we sacrifice ourselves on the altar of a relationship with God, what we leave behind is sin and the flesh that is headed for corruption, and what we gain is eternal glory. We want to focus on the loss of being in control, instead of focusing on how our control has been disastrous and God offers complete transformation through sanctification. We are told to consider what is true, honorable, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8) and these are the things that we gain in the exchange of covenant. Make a habit of dwelling on the pleasant reality of what is to be gained, and sacrifice becomes much easier.

Verses: Romans 12:1-2, Luke 9:24, 1 John 1:7

Prayer Topics: Agreement, Offering, Gaining

## Day 2

Turn the other cheek

One thing that makes uniting in covenant very difficult is pride. Pride makes us think that we know best, that we offer most, that others are lucky to have us. Pride sets us apart from others, destroying the unity of covenant, often before it can even take root. Pride makes it hard for us to seek help, and makes us unable to respond joyfully to the roles that family life imposes on us. Pride makes us magnify the faults of those who may have roles in the family that we would like for ourselves, and glosses over our own contributions to the difficulties of the family. One way to begin to address pride in our lives is to stop being so worried about being misunderstood and undervalued. In any cooperative endeavor, especially in family life, there are bound to be misunderstandings which result in a loss of value to you. This loss of value might be love, esteem, respect, credit, or some other currency of familial value. Rather than feeling the need to constantly respond to these, to defend our view of the interaction and make sure our voice is heard, maybe being pleasantly silent will do more to move the unity and glory of the family forward. Maybe when we are slighted, we can turn the other cheek, see it as no big deal and move on happily to wherever the family is headed. Perhaps, since the family is a unit that involves all of us, getting the family to the place it needs to be is far better and even more rewarding to us personally

than making sure everyone knows that we weren't the one who left the gate open, or that we were the one who was right about the car window being open when it rained. Maybe if we could be the example of turning the other cheek in the family, the whole culture of the family would change. It's worth a try, especially when the worst that could happen is that we would build a virtue that would serve us well in many aspects of our lives.

Verses: 1 John 2:16, Proverbs 29:23, James 4:6

Prayer Topics: Ego, Humility, Grace

Day 3

Be grateful in obedience

Being rebellious is easy. Being obedient is hard. Being gratefully obedient is almost impossible for most of us. Because we were born as fallen people, our natural inclination toward sin does not set us up for joyful, grateful, unifying obedience to those in the family or anywhere else. No matter what your position in the family, obedience is required. Whether you are father, mother, child, or pet, you must obey someone at some time. In fact, as a member of a family, you live in obedience almost always. Most of us, given the right situation and the proper motivation, can get past our most outward signs of rebellion and embrace some kind of obedience, even if it is mostly performative and not heartfelt. But give something a try this week. Whenever you are called to any kind of obedience in any realm, try to be grateful for the authority that is calling you into that obedience. Do your best to not only obey, but to do your best to make that obedience fruitful, even if that means going above and beyond what you were called to do to make sure the intent of the command you were given is fulfilled and blessed. While you are doing that, do your best to be as joyful as possible, thanking God that He has given you your nation, city, job, or whatever other covenantal relationship has called you into obedience. Practice this wherever it occurs so that when it occurs in your family, you can be skillful at a gratitude that celebrates the covenantal unity found there. And if you don't have a family, you will be further ahead in being grateful for the groups you are part of in your life.

Verses: John 14:15, 1 Peter 1:14, Isaiah 1:19, Colossians 3:15-20

Prayer Topics: Submission, Joy, Eagerness

Day 4

Think more highly of others

In my little drama I call my life, I am the main character. As the main character, I have a certain level of importance, and am mostly the hero in the situations I encounter. My ideas are good ideas, and if someone thinks otherwise, they are obviously the antagonist of this episode. History will show, undoubtedly, that I was right about the situation, and was wrongly victimized and vilified. That's one way of looking at it, anyway. The other way to go through life is to be grateful that so many smart and gifted people are part of your family and community, and that they have contributed greatly to your blessing through the providence of God placing them near you. We could be constantly grateful and amazed that we are blessed enough to stand on the shoulders of giants who not only came before us, but also that live alongside us now, putting intelligence, talent, and resources toward problems we could never solve so that we get the benefit of their work. If we develop the habit of thinking highly of others, not only does our attitude go from being irritated that we are saddled with such buffoons, to being grateful we are living way above our means, but we will find this gratitude and joy bleeding into every aspect of our family life. How grateful we could be to be blessed by such a glorious family, one that is so

much more than we have any right to deserve? Our attitude plays a huge part in the formation of a healthy family and the way we think about the sacrifices necessary to cultivate that family. It will change the level of joy you have in being a part of a family, and will make the family more glorious as well.

Verses: Psalm 100:1-5, Psalm 50:23, Hebrews 12:28

Prayer Topics: Gratefulness, Blessing, Abundance

Day 5

Question yourself

As I recall, I was in the right. In my estimation, this will work. When I look at the problem, the solution is obvious. When it comes to politics, the other side is completely wrong. Our culture teaches us to believe in ourselves, pointing to all those in history who went forward when everyone said they were wrong, only to be vindicated by success. That is true, and inspiring. But what is also true is that history is full of fools who were warned and wrecked themselves anyway, because they believed in themselves. It is strange that this idea of the virtue of believing in ourselves could exist in our minds right next to the certainty that most people, including ourselves, are prone to a surprising amount of stupidity. Maybe instead of believing in ourselves, we should develop the ability to question ourselves. Maybe some humility is in order. Maybe God has given us His word, our superiors (in position as well as in wisdom, intelligence, foresight, and discernment) and even sometimes complete strangers, to help us to question ourselves. Among those God has given us, no one has more access to our best ideas and our worst ideas than our family, and maybe our families can be a great instrument to keep us off the turbulent shores of disaster, where many lives have been shipwrecked. Humility might just make family a great tool for a blessed life. It's worth a try.

Verses: 1 Peter 5:5, Romans 12:3, Proverbs 3:34

Prayer Topics: Inquisitiveness, Curiosity, Humility