Sermon Series: The Christ-Centered Family
Sermon Title: Building a Godly Family

Text: **Ephesians 5:18-21 -- And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

Introduction: **A Gen Z journalist named Rikki Schlott** wrote an essay to explain her generation to parents of Gen Z children (those between 12 and 27 years old today). She called the essay "**her best shot to explain the malaise of my generation**." Here's what she said: Gen Z has inherited a post-hope world, stripped of what matters. Instead, we have been offered a smorgasbord of easy and unsatisfying substitutes. All the things that have traditionally made life worth living — love, community, country, faith, work, and family — have been "debunked." "These are the sentiments I hear often from peers": (**1**) LOVE — "Monogamy is so outdated;" (**2**) COMMUNITY — "I have enough friends online;" (**3**) COUNTRY — "I'm embarrassed to be an American;" (**4**) WORK — "I'm quiet-quitting;" (**5**) FAMILY — "I'm not bringing kids into this melting world;" (**6**) FAITH — "My parents are such naive Bible thumpers. By the way, what's your star sign?" Everything that matters has been devalued for Zoomers, leaving behind a generation with gaping holes where the foundations of a meaningful life should be. ***They're desperately grasping for alternative purpose-making systems, all of which fall short***. I'm not saying all Zoomers should become church-going office drones who churn out babies and never question their country. **But our dismal mental health records and the scars on our wrists seem to indicate that becoming faithless digital vagabonds is just not working out for us**. (*Rikki Schlott, "Do you know where your kids go every day?" After Babel Substack blog -- 11-6-23)*

Like you, I have heard people express concern about the confusion of many of our young people today and their lack of direction in life. ANXIETY seems to be at epidemic proportions and has led more than a few to a sense of stagnation born of a fear of not knowing what to do or, worse, making the wrong choice. This SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS from our young people is a major concern that has led Christians and non-Christians alike to wonder how we got here and what we can do about it.

This morning, I'm launching a new preaching series that can hopefully provide some answers to the dysfunction that seems to be running rampant all across America. Over the next six messages, I intend to paint a picture of what a healthy family looks like and how we can turn the tide of what **Rikki Schlott** describes as "**the malaise of my generation**" having inherited a "**post-hope world, stripped of what matters**." The Bible assures us that it has some satisfying answers not only for her generation but also for those to come. I'd want to start with what a ***healthy family looks like*** according to Scripture.

Healthy families put God first. This may sound a little pessimistic, but the truth is ***… if you're not a Christian, there is no hope whatsoever that you can make your marriage and family everything God intended them to be***. Why? Because God is the One who created humanity, instituted marriage and designed the family. ***Any attempt to make it work apart from Him will lead only to futility***. And the only way to have a relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ. **John 14:6** reminds us that **He alone is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by Him**. Once that matter is settled and a person becomes a Christian, the Bible provides instruction about how Christians are to live. In **Ephesians 5** the Apostle Paul commands us to **WALK IN LOVE** while avoiding its counterfeits – sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness (**Verses 2-3**); **WALK IN LIGHT** by avoiding the unfruitful works of darkness (**Verses 7-12**); **WALK IN WISDOM** by avoiding the evil around us (**Verses 15-16**); and **WALK IN THE SPIRIT** by letting the Holy Spirit control and guide us as we negotiate the difficult times in which we live (**Verse 18**). This is how we're able to walk in love, light and wisdom. ***So, what does it mean to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit***? Paul contrasts it with being drunk with wine (something prohibited in this verse). When a person is under the influence of alcohol, he loses the ability to control himself. This leads to ***outrageous living***! That's what the word DEBAUCHERY means. Here's an example for you. **While preparing for a cookout, a Delaware man decided to use gunpowder rather than charcoal or lighter fluid to get the coals glowing in his grill. The unorthodox fire preparation method literally blew up on him, and he suffered burns on his hands and face. Police said what I'm sure all of us were thinking -- the man had been drinking**. Okay. That's really stupid and we all know that drunk people do stupid things because they're under the control of alcohol.

When Christians are filled with the Spirit, on the other hand, we are controlled by the Spirit so that we produce the fruit of the Spirit (**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – Galatians 5:22-23**). ***This is the recipe for a healthy and holy family! And it's how we put God first in our lives***. We determine not to walk according to the sinful flesh, but to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. The result is healthy relationships between husbands and wives and their children as He changes our wants and desires to conform to His. WITH THIS IN MIND, IT OUGHT TO BE OUR PRACTICE TO BEGIN EVERY DAY BY PRAYING FOR A FRESH FILLING OF GOD'S SPIRIT SO THAT WE CAN RISE ABOVE THE TEMPTATIONS OF THIS WORLD AND BE HOLY IN ALL THINGS. ***That's how we please God and put Him first in our lives. And it's what we must do if we want to have healthy families***. **There is simply no other means for life transformation than the Holy Spirit working in us**. (**Review: Healthy families put God first by being filled with the Spirit**.)

Healthy families put each other second. The command is to be filled with the Spirit in **verse 18**. Paul then describes what that looks like for us. We're told the Spirit creates a heart in us that (**1**) **yearns to worship God** (**singing and making melody in our hearts**), (**2**) **expresses thanksgiving to God** (**giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father**

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ) and (**3**) **results in submission to one another (submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ)**. The word for submission means to "**rank oneself beneath another**." This is the mindset that God wants every believer to have when it comes to our relationships. It's what Paul is referring to in **Philippians 2:3-4** when he says, "**in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others**." Our Lord set the example for us. **Philippians 2:6-8** tells us that … **though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death**. It's this same attitude that we're to demonstrate for those we love. ***We are to rank ourselves under others (especially family members) that we might serve them***.

As an aside and by way of a word of caution, ***Scripture does not teach that submission and authority are incompatible***. ***That is to say … if you are one you cannot be the other***. In the institutions that God has ordained (family, church and government), there is a **necessity** for some to be in authority over others and in each case we're told to submit to them (**Romans 13:1** – (as citizens in a country) **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities**; **Hebrews 13:17** – (in the church) **Obey your leaders and submit to their authority**; **Ephesians 5:22** – (in the home) **Wives submit to your husbands**; **Ephesians 6:1 – Children, obey your parents**). There is clearly a God-ordained chain of command that necessitates certain people exercising authority. But even in these cases, we are still called to be SUBMISSIVE TO ONE ANOTHER WHILE DOING SO and nowhere is that more important than in the family.

Here's what I'm saying: EACH MEMBER OF A FAMILY SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO SERVE AND SACRIFICE HIMSELF FOR THE OTHER MEMBERS. The Bible exempts no one from this kind of submission. **WIVES** are told to honor and serve their husbands in the same way that the church honors and serves Christ (**Ephesians 5:22-24**). **HUSBANDS** are told to love their wives and lay down their lives for them in the same way that Christ laid down His life for the church (**Ephesians 5:25**). **CHILDREN** are told to honor and willingly submit themselves to their parents (**Ephesians 6:1-3**). **PARENTS** are told to serve their children by raising them in the discipline and instruction of Christ which is the best possible life (**Ephesians 6:4**). ***Families go wrong today when they fail to submit themselves to one another***. That's when husbands abuse their wives, wives disrespect their husbands and children rebel. THE WAY TO AVOID ALL THIS MESS IS TO FOLLOW GOD'S PLAN FOR SUBMISSION. ***It may not be the easiest route to follow in life, but it's sure to be the healthiest and the best***.

In the summer of **1846**, a party of **89 emigrants** headed west along the 2**,170-mile-long Oregon Trail**. Tired, hungry, and trailing behind schedule, they decided at **Fort Bridger, Wyoming** to travel to their final destination in California by SHORTCUT. The "**Hastings Cutoff**" they chose to follow was an alternative route that its namesake, **Lansford Hastings,**

claimed would shave at least 300 miles off the journey. The party believed this detour could save more than a month. ***They were wrong***. Hastings Cutoff turned out to be a waterless, wide-open stretch of **the Great Salt Lake Desert**, that Hastings himself had never traveled. He simply looked at a map of the route that **settler John C. Fremont** had taken in **1845** across the Great Salt Lake Desert. Hastings then wrote a guidebook that said it would be quicker and easier than the standard trail. **What Hastings didn't realize was that Fremont almost died doing it**. By the time **the Donner-Reed party** finally reached the Sierra Nevada mountains, the shortcut had cost them weeks. Snow fell, trapping the travelers. **This is when the most infamous (and deadly) part of their tale began**. When members of the party began starving to death, survivors ate their remains to stay alive. Shortcuts, supposedly easier ways of doing something, have often produced disastrous results. **Historian Rob Sweeten** said, "***It's obvious that [the emigrants] were in need of shorter routes to save time and money. Especially when you figure, they were traveling 15 miles a day and facing challenges like changing weather and river conditions, and conflicts with Native Americans. Such difficulties often led to them attempting to find an easier, shorter route. Though, in many cases, the new route turned out to be much harder***."

Many families today look at the "**old-fashioned and seemingly out-of-date**" idea of mutual submission **like the Donner party did the 2,170 mile long Oregon Trail**. They question if it's the best path to follow in our post-modern world. They look for EASIER trails to follow that will still get them where they want to wind up in the end. The predictable result is devastation in the form of divorce, affairs and out-of-control kids. **Listen**: **Putting God first and each other second in the family isn't always easy but it is necessary if you want to have a healthy and holy family. God offers no shortcuts**.

Healthy families put themselves third. This only stands to reason, right? If you put God first and your other family members second, the only place left for you is third. Of course, this is in keeping with what our Lord taught. He told the twelve that any disciple of His would have to **deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Him** (**Matthew 16:24**). At another time, Jesus told them, "… **whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave**". These words were spoken after the mother of James and John asked that her sons would be exalted in His kingdom (**Matthew 20:26-27**). It was Jesus' way of saying that in the kingdom of heaven, THE WAY UP IS DOWN. This is always true in families that are blessed by God. No one seeks to be worshipped or served because that matter has already been decided. In the words of Jesus, we **worship the Lord our God and serve Him only** (**Luke 4:8**).

So, let's review what we've learned: A godly family puts God first, one another second and themselves third. Of course, no family does this perfectly. The reason is because of an ongoing war inside each of us that pits our sinful flesh against the Spirit. Here's how Paul describes it: **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit**

what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want (**Galatians 5:17-18**).

This side of heaven that conflict will never end. The secret to a healthier and holier family is for each of us to learn to put off the flesh and put on the Spirit every day. If this increasingly becomes our mindset, I'm confident our husbands, wives and children will reap the benefits.

Conclusion: **Yes, the secret to a healthy and holy family is that everyone lives by the same standard. In other words, you can't have one member of the family believing that he or she is exempt from submitting to God and one another WHILE demanding that everyone else must. This never works**. Military policeman **Danny Brown** was working at the massive **Fort Jackson Army Base in Columbia, South Carolina** when late one night he saw a truck going 13 miles over the speed limit. He pulled it over and asked the driver, dressed in civilian clothes, for ID. He didn't recognize the driver, who said nothing as he handed over his ID. Brown had already decided to give the driver **a 1408 warning ticket**, which doesn't go on the offender's record but does go right to the company commander. To his surprise, the ID indicated the driver's rank was "**07**"—**a one-star general**. Brown writes: I'm a Pfc - private first class, the third lowest rank in the Army. My primary job is to carry out orders by commanding officers. And here I am writing a ticket to a general. I decided to treat him as I would anyone else and hold him the same set of rules. I walked up to the truck and saluted him. "***I didn't recognize you, sir***," I said. Then I handed him the ticket. "***Sir, that ticket is going back to the highest command in your unit, which is, well, you. So, when you get back tomorrow, you're going to explain to yourself why you were speeding***." The general laughed and thanked him, but early the next morning Brown is suddenly worried and stressed. Two MPs in full uniform entered his room and told him that the colonel, who was the police chief of the base, wanted to see him right away. Brown told them he'd be there in a minute, but the MPs insisted, "***You're coming with us right now***." Brown was certain he would get chewed out for giving a ticket to a general. "***It happens all the time - someone of higher rank trying to intimidate, talk down, or lay into me for doing my job***." At the military police station, in the colonel's office, Brown saluted the colonel and stood at attention. "***The general sent this for you***," the colonel said, and handed him a military coin. It had the general's name and rank. It is a coin of appreciation. THE LESSON FOR US IS SIMPLE. WHEN EVERYONE SUBMITS, EVERYONE ELSE IS BLESSED.