

# going deeper study guide

## what happens when I put my family first?



*"Family is the most important thing in the world."*

Princess Diana

*"The only rock I know that stays steady, the only institution I know that works is the family."*

Lee Iacocca

*In Life Groups, kids, youth and adults study God's Word together and discuss the issues and challenges of life.*

### Family (glaring lack of) Values

"I put my family first." "I'm a family-first kinda guy." We hear phrases like this, and in a culture where commitment to family is often thrown under the bus in the name of ambition, we want to stand up and applaud. It sounds laudable to elevate our commitment to our family above everything else. To be honest, When I first read the title of this week's sermon (What Happens When I Put My Family First?), that's exactly where I went. I thought we were in for a lesson on sidestepping the corporate ladder, workaholicism, materialism – and any other number of "isms" that all good Christians should shun – and really, truly prioritize our family. Then I read the Scripture associated with the sermon, and I had to double-check to make sure I hadn't (as I did in writing last week's lesson) got the Scripture references wrong. You want a picture postcard of a family that is jacked-up 8 ways from Sunday? Read Genesis 29:31 - 35 and all of chapter 30. If this mess doesn't sound like a Jerry Springer two-hour special, I don't know what does! How is anyone in this family putting the good of their family first? And that's the point - they're not.

As you read through this story it's very clear to see that what motivated these people was not a passion for God - or really even a passion for what's best for their family, but instead, their actions are driven by very selfish motives. Thankfully, I'm sure we can all agree, we are so very blessed to have moved past that in our day and time, right?

Q :: We know from Scripture that God takes the motives with which we do anything very seriously. Look at the behavior of the key players in this story, what are some of the motives you see at work behind the curtain?

Q :: I think there is a difference in what our family REALLY needs and what we may mistakenly believe they need. List out things our family REALLY needs from us. Follow that with a list of what things we may mistakenly BELIEVE they need.

Q :: Read chapter 30:3-6. Here we see Rachel ascribing to God not only approval of her actions (I think we can agree that giving her maidservant to her husband to impregnate was likely not God's will), but that the results were God's vindication of her. Can we make the same kinds of "spiritual" justifications with our own families? How?

Q :: What have learned about Jacob throughout this part of his story?  
Can any of these things – or the underlying root causes for them – be a stumbling block in our families today?

### God is a Given (or is He?)

I'm going to go out on a limb here, and perhaps ruffle a few feathers. My goal is not a judgmental spirit or any sort of holier-than-thou finger-wagging – but I think sometimes we all make assumptions that aren't really true. We may have the ability to talk a good game, but do we back it up, where God is concerned? Look again at Jacob's actions throughout the latter verses of Genesis 29 and the first half of Genesis 30. He makes one proclamation about God in verse 2 when he tells Rachel that it is God's call who has or does not have children – not his. Now Jacob, in this same span of verses, has (count 'em) 11 children by four different mothers.

If you're keeping score at home, that's talk: 1 – actions: 11

While it's no a sin to have a large family, it can certainly be argued that Jacob's seeming passivity over all these many years, his willingness to play favorites at the expense of someone else's feelings (here with his wives, and, failing to learn his lesson, repeated with Joseph and his other 11 sons later) and his overall failure to step up and lead his family cannot be undone with a single proclamation about God.

The reason I misinterpreted the intent of the sermon's title this week is because I was operating under the assumption that God is a given. But is he? It's the same conditioned response when one of my children will tell me they love me (or my wife, or something else) more than anything in the world – and then they throw in "...except for God." There's a part of me that wants to tell them (and I don't know, but I actually may have at some point) that they don't need that extra qualifier. I completely know that whatever it is they love is not loved more than God. But y'know, If I've ever said that before, I don't think I'll ever say it again. I don't want them to take their relationship with the creator of the universe for so much for granted that conversations about what they love don't even have God invited to the party. Studies show that we believe more of what we tell ourselves than what others tell us – so I'll cherish these little proclamations about where God stands in their priorities, knowing that they are building blocks for a foundation of faith that they can stand firm on as they grow up.

I am most certainly not saying that we need to just be about words; about clarifications and proclamations. For me, the priority of my love for God is a given. But do my actions bear that out?

If God is SO MUCH the number one thing in my world that it just "goes without saying", then why is time set apart and spent with Him so easily kicked onto the back burner of my life? Why is it that it can sometimes be so much easier to read the comics or sports section in the newspaper – every day – than it is to crack my Bible open before next Sunday?

Honestly – sadly – I don't know.

I just know that I fail sometimes. I said that my love for God is a given, but I invest time in so many things other than building that relationship. Not necessarily bad things, but things I allow to take God's place of most importance. I am reminded of one of my favorite quotes; it's from Erwin Lutzer: "Many of us are not thirsty for God because we have quenched our thirsts at other fountains."

Q :: I think it's easier to identify the other fountains we have drank from than it is to grasp an idea of how we can renew our thirst for God. How, if our thirst is quenched, can we become thirsty again?

Q :: Can "good things" squeeze out God in our life? Explain...

Q :: How can we – as families – marry our proclamations about God's importance to actions that back them up?

Os Hillman has said "Can we set proper boundaries in our lives that don't allow our time with Him to be continually stolen away? It is a challenge in a world that screams "activity, activity!" I've heard former Kingsway member Clem Ojeh put it this way: "You must jealously guard your quiet time with God."

Q :: In a culture where more and more activity is "required" of us, how hard is it to ratchet activity DOWN instead of continually up – even in things that we think are for the good of our family?

Q :: A last thought, albeit a bit unrelated to the other questions: Isn't it interesting that God opened the womb of Leah (a specific interaction on His part - with the exception of Rachel conceiving Joseph in 30:22, Scripture does not say that God specifically opened the womb of one of these women - just that they bore children), in response to her being unloved.

Q :: Do you think it is significant that Jesus Himself would come through the line of a middle child (Judah) born from a woman who was unloved and rejected by her husband? Can we take anything from that for our own lives?

## Conclusion

I believe the key to having families that follow, reflect and please God is a refusal to elevate anything – including your family – over your relationship to God. For your relationship to God is the very things that will build into you the capacity for the blessing we're all desiring. Pastor Tony Evans has a great analogy that really hammers this idea of capacity for blessing home:

If you take a thimble to the Pacific Ocean and dip it in, there is more than enough ocean to handle your thimble, but only your thimble, because your thimble only has a thimble's worth of capacity.

If you bring a glass to the Pacific Ocean, you can get more than a person with a thimble but you will never get more than a glass. Because while the Pacific Ocean can give you more than a glass, all you brought was a glass.

If you bring a bucket to the Pacific Ocean, it'll give you more than a person with the thimble, more than a person with a glass, but it will not give you more than a bucket because all you brought to that big ocean was your limited capacity.

If you bring a barrel, then it will give you more than the bucket, more than the glass, and more than the thimble, but not more than the barrel because all you get is what your capacity can handle.

If you bring a tanker, it'll give you more than the barrel, it'll give you more than the bucket, it'll give you more than the glass, and more than the thimble, but it won't give you more than the tanker because that's all you have to work with.

Why are we not experiencing God's power? We want to see God do exceeding abundantly more in our lives, in our families. We want to get on our knees and we want to make heaven quake. Thimbles don't do that.

Your relationship with God is your container – your capacity for blessing.  
The problem is that we want a tanker full of blessing with a thimble full of relationship.