

Go Light Your World:  
Fanning the Flames of Family  
Ephesians 5:8-10

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*“It only takes a spark to get the fires going and soon all those around can warm up to it glowing.”* Could the lyrics of that old camp song be true for the American family? What happens in your house may be more important than what happens in the White House! The greatest threat to America may not be terrorists abroad, or storms above; our greatest threat may be the disintegration of family to whom we normally turn in times of crisis. So today, let’s think for a few moments about fanning the flames of family life. How can you be a light to your own kinfolk?

**IT’S TIME TO FAN THE FLAMES OF MUTUAL RESPECT.** Paul addresses family concerns a little later in this Ephesians letter by saying, *“Love one another as Christ loves the Church.”* That is a wise instruction for husbands, for wives, for children, for parents, for grandparents, and even aunts and uncles and anyone who claims any kin to one another. Love one another as Christ loves the Church.

Love is more than a second-hand emotion; love is first-hand devotion. Love is more than an act of passion; love is an act of the will that leads to service. Love is grounded in mutual respect.

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield who died last year at the age of 82, made a living joking about disrespect. “I tell ya, I get no respect,” growls Dangerfield. “Last week I told my psychiatrist I was contemplating suicide. He asked me to pay in advance. I get no respect. I could tell my parents hated me; my bath toys were always a toaster and radio. I get no respect. My uncle’s dying wish was to hold me in his lap as he was strapped into the electric chair. I get no respect.” Lack of respect in our relational lives is nothing to laugh about. It would be a happy day in many families if we started treating the people we know as well as the strangers we meet. Love one another. Begin at home.

I just read a book this week entitled Season of Life. It’s the story of Joe Ehrmann who played professional football for the Baltimore Colts from 1973–1980. There he earned a reputation as the “sack pack,” the man who could mow them down on the field. Joe Ehrmann learned a bigger purpose in life than knocking people down. He devoted his life to picking kids up. His Gilman High School football team won many state championships. The motto of that team was, “We are here to love each other and coaches are here to love us, too.” Can you imagine that on a football team? Why are we here? “To love one another.” Why are the coaches here? “To love each of you?” They shouted it to one another before every game and before every practice.

You see, Joe Ehrmann wanted kids to receive what he never received from his own father and failed to achieve as an NFL football star. That is respect that comes from being loved. Fan the flames of mutual respect—start at home.

**IT'S TIME TO FAN THE FLAMES OF HONEST COMMUNICATION.** In Verse 9 we read, *“Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth.”*

In America we are experiencing a massive breakdown in communication. The storm knocked the power out, washed the roads out, and ran the batteries down. Such is the nature of a storm. People let the ball drop, the time pass, the chain of command control the channels of relief leaving people stranded in the flood and volunteers stuck in deployment centers. Such is the nature of chaos.

When communication fails, blame becomes the name of the game. I don't think I have seen it any more intense than I have seen it in the last couple of weeks. It's the president's fault; it's the mayor's fault; it's the governor's responsibility. Why didn't the Red Cross do something and where are churches when you need them? Meanwhile the face of a child is broadcast into living rooms across America pleading, “We need some help down here. Can't you all come and help us?” What a traumatic situation we have experienced. Such is the dilemma of trouble.

When communication fails, people scream at each other. Here in the twenty-first century communication is to get on the television and get at least three or four people screaming at each other at one time and call it news. It seems to me that it's a weird sort of communication. Hardball is the dominant metaphor of American public life making our exchanges confrontational and divisive. Truth is not something to be discovered, but something to be imposed.

In microcosmic ways, the same thing happens in families every day. Will Willimon shares in one of his sermons that his first ministerial job was serving as a summer chaplain at a family campground in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. People were always asking me what I did with my time, says Will. I replied, “Aside from preaching and leading worship on Sundays, I also became involved in innumerable family squabbles. Summer vacations can put a lot of stress on families. In the usual course of things, families have very little contact with each other. Forced together in a tent or mobile home on vacation, they suddenly realize how little they enjoy each other's company. It's a stressful time for many.” I think he's right.

When Sandy was teaching school and our boys were playing football and I was trying to save the world, I remember how stressful the fall of the year always seemed to be. Tempers flared, fights broke out, threats were made, tears were shed, because we all were living in a state of emergency. In moments like that, the pressure is on.

So how can we learn to communicate with one another in the close quarters of

family life with those to whom we are kin? Let me suggest a few ways.

- Lower our voices. Proverbs 15:1 says, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*”
- Stop the blame game. Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, “*Do not judge or you too will be judged.*”
- Speak the truth in love. Michael Card says marriage would be much easier if your spouse was a psychic so you wouldn’t have to work through how you feel about an issue and then present your feelings in a graceful, Christ-like manner.
- Listen carefully. We were made with two ears and one mouth so we would be wise to listen twice as much as we speak. Nobody said communication is easy. We all know it’s necessary. Fan the flames of communication with one another in your family.

### **IT’S TIME TO FAN THE FLAMES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.**

Paul says in Ephesians 4, “*We must no longer be infants blown here and there by every teaching, instead in everything grow up into Christ.*”

Sociologist George Barna regularly studies the religious habits of Americans these days. Some of his findings are revealing. Eighty-five percent of parents of children under thirteen believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. But very few have a plan for the spiritual development for their children, do not consider it a priority, and have little or no training in how to nurture a child’s faith.

Two-thirds of these parents do take their children to religious services at least once a month. Is twelve hours a year enough to communicate the faith? Another study concerning the spiritual maturity of adults in America revealed seventy-eight percent of those who attend mainline churches feel average or below in their knowledge of the Bible, and seventy-six percent feel inadequate about sharing their faith. Very few hold a Biblical world view.

Spiritual transformation is a life-long process. Habits formed when we are young are the behaviors that define us when we are older. How can I say it more importantly? The formation of a young life has eternal dimension, but on the flip side we must understand we never graduate from the school of discipleship. No one graduates from the school of Christian Discipleship. To be formed into the “likeness of Christ” is more than a course of study. It is a life-long adventure. We are forever growing into Christ and we need to be consistent about it at sixty or at six. The church needs to find ways to partner with you to do that. For families in the process of spiritual formation of children, youth and adults, pick up a packet on your way out today. It at least gives you a start to sit down together and do an activity and devotional as a family. It is a way to begin—some place to start in your life. Spiritual formation—it may be the most important thing that we can do.

### **IT’S TIME TO FAN THE FLAMES OF GRACE AND FORGIVENESS.**

Ephesians 4:32 says, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another just as Christ in God has forgiven you.”* Forgiveness fits faulty people.

Families in the Bible were far from perfect.

- Adam and Eve no sooner left the garden than their children got in a fight.
- Noah got off the ark of safety and immediately got drunk to the embarrassment of his children.
- Jacob and Esau were such rivals that the world is still reeling from it.
- Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery.
- King David had an affair and covered it up with a murder.
- Even Jesus realized his mother and brothers could not embrace his mission.

As surely as Noah, Jacob, and David found grace in the eyes of the Lord, so can we. Forgiveness is the oil that lubricates the human machine and without it all the life becomes hot and squeaky. Is forgiveness and grace something that is practiced at your house?

It only takes a spark to get the fire going. And soon all those around can warm up to its glowing. That’s how it is with God’s love. Would you let the Holy Spirit fan the flames of love throughout your family today?

Amen.



