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Integrating Faith in Family

Think of the most beautiful garden you've ever seen. There once was a garden that was much, much better. It was the garden where God established the institution of family before mankind's sin and fall. In establishing family, God granted authority and responsibility to Adam and Eve (along with an opportunity to partner with Him in His post-creation work). His pre-fall plan was for man and woman to unite as one, have dominion over His created beings, and be nourished by His creation—and to be fruitful in doing so (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:24). Yes, as incredible as it may sound, God's call for families—even today—is to partner with Him in His continuing work.

Then came the fall of mankind; Adam and Eve sinned and corrupted God's perfect creation. The family that was once without flaw, now experienced strife, sin, shame, and death. For the thousands of years leading up to today, all families felt the same challenges and more, and you and I face those challenges today.

All families are touched in some way by the fall of mankind. Some with members estranged from one another, some led by a single parent, some bearing deep loss, some with profound emotional or physical struggles. We want healthy families and marriages; we want to be fruitful for Christ, but life keeps getting in the way.

In spite of all of this, God has always used wounded families for His kingdom purposes—and He has refined those families in the process. He used Abraham and Sarah's flawed family to establish a people, Jacob's fractured family to establish a nation, and the broken descendants of Judah to usher in the birth of our Savior. Therefore, we can see hope for ourselves as we engage family life through faith in Jesus Christ and partner in His work.

If you ask military Christians today what they want out of life, it would not be uncommon to hear this response, "I want to grow a fruitful family—healthy and Christ-honoring." However, many are frustrated in meeting that goal because of the challenges families face in the military and the culture. Can we navigate the obstacles of deployments, long and erratic work hours, frequent moves, and a culture that seems at war with Biblical values?

The simple answer is yes. Here's how...



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FAITH & FAMILY

Build your family to be a missional family

OCF describes its members as “leaders called to be on mission in representing Christ through our life, leadership, and service.” So then, we are on mission with family as well! What is that mission? A family growing and living through faith in Christ bears fruit for Christ. We partner with Him in His Gospel mission. And as we partner with Christ in faith, missional fruit is found within the family and within each of the family members as they are brought to faith and grow in that faith. We also see families making a Gospel impact among those outside the nuclear family’s boundaries. Let’s discuss how in family life we partner with Christ on His mission and bear fruit in doing so.

First: Make discipleship a core family value.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave us a mission to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20). The first place of discipleship is the home. For our children, we are to “... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). That certainly includes raising obedient, trained, and churching children; but it also includes nourishing the heart aimed at fostering the child’s growth in Christ-likeness beyond the eighteen years in the home, well into adult life. Dave Simmons, founder of Dad the Family Shepherd ministry, taught fathers, “You’re not simply raising children; you’re raising them to be adult parents, grandparents and citizens. Keep the long view in mind.” Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, focused on adulthood as a target outcome when he told us, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

In prioritizing discipleship in the family, we have many aids and resources. Scripture provides the framework, and wise teachers, authors, mentors, and ministries help interpret and enable parents to do so. Online or in stores, you can find discipleship resources for the Christian family. There are many excellent resources that also can be found on the OCF website for family nurture and growth. And beyond the website, you can find OCF’s Conference Center programs for families, teens, and children, OCF’s “Spiritually Smart Families” seminars, and Cru Military’s “The Art of Marriage” seminars all to be excellent aids. And there is probably a chapel, church, or para-church youth program right near your home.

Yes, those aids and resources are helpful. Yet God gave parents the ultimate human responsibility for discipling children. We cannot surrender that responsibility to the church, community, or school. We may and should use the resources available, but only within the higher authority granted to the parents by God.

Not only are children to be discipled but spouses and parents also grow within the family. Gary Thomas, the author of *Sacred Marriage*, asked this incisive question. “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” God uses the marriage relationship in refining us to become more Christ-like, learn selflessness, learn to love when it’s difficult, and learn to serve



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FAITH & FAMILY

another sacrificially as Christ served. As partners grow in their Christ-likeness through marriage, then the fruit of increased love and intimacy, harmony, and joy in service are experienced more fully. Through seeking and trusting in God's wisdom, we learn how to allocate time and energy between the seemingly warring factions of profession, personal needs, and family. And virtually every Christian parent has learned deep truths about the heavenly and eternal Father's heart through experiences only found in family life.

Secondly: Let your family's faith shine.

Writing about the union in marriage, the apostle Paul says, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Marriage is designed to follow—and reflect the pattern—of Christ's relationship with His church. Honor, respect, mutual submission, care, unconditional love, order, and joy in service are just a few of the hallmarks of a faith-filled and Christ-honoring family.

How many have been drawn to faith through the witness of a Christ-following family? Or how many have been drawn to faith through a problem they were facing within their family? Those people may be looking to you as a guide. Whether you know it or not, your family's faith is on vibrant display before others. They see the fruit of the Spirit increasingly on display and it often draws others to emulate the pattern set by the Christ-filled family. By extension, they are drawn to Jesus Christ, the substance of their faith.

The first-century Roman Centurion, Cornelius, had such a witness. Luke described him as "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God." Cornelius' witness was instrumental in the Apostle Peter's life-changing experience (Acts 10:1-48).

It is our example that speaks the loudest. If we show respect for our spouse; speak of each other with words of affection, affirmation and appreciation; talk about how important our family is; and establish relationships of trust and transparency, we have put the Gospel into action and on display. Former OCF President, LTG, Retired, Bob Van Antwerp wrote in *COMMAND* magazine, "Our marriage is a prism through which the world sees the Gospel and the example of how Christ loved the Church. It has to be our best act." Not a perfect family, but rather a family that is engaging faith openly in their commitment to love, serve, and grow well.

So do you see? Family is a critical equipping unit in advancing His Kingdom. God positioned military families in a highly integrated and special culture. He positioned us among others with a common calling and sense of sacrifice. Military leaders have special opportunities to impact their culture by living openly and by serving as a family within the community. Inviting others to family events, assisting in community projects, serving as a family in ministry and service projects, enabling and encouraging others in their family lives all put the power of Christ into family outreach.



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FAITH & FAMILY

All of those are also wonderful tools God uses for growth within the family members. Many OCF leaders, both staff and lay leaders, regard young family members as “force multipliers” in their outreach and ministry to others. They also find that serving others as a family results in growth within their own family members’ lives.

When our Lord established marriage and family in the garden, He gave Adam and Eve a huge mission and He gave them the power to accomplish it. We know from the New Testament words of Jesus and Paul, that the mission remains a wonderfully high calling. We also know that the Spirit will lead and enable us as we engage Him in faith.

Consider and discuss the discussion topics in the participant’s guide and recommit to the journey we are called to in family.