

Family Sphere

God's First Sphere of Stewardship

Long before there were nations, governments, businesses, schools, or even the Ecclesia, there was the family. It was within the family that God first entrusted mankind with the responsibility of cultivating life, exercising stewardship, and passing truth from one generation to the next.

The family is far more than a social institution—it is God's first classroom for faith, character, love, responsibility, and discipleship. It is here that children first learn what authority, forgiveness, service, and unconditional love look like. Strong families become the foundation upon which healthy communities and nations are built.

Every believer occupies this sphere in some capacity. Whether you are a husband, wife, parent, grandparent, son, daughter, sibling, widow, or trusted friend, God has placed people in your life to love, serve, encourage, and disciple. Your influence within your family may become one of your greatest Kingdom assignments.

The Family Under Pressure

If the family is God's first sphere of stewardship, we should not be surprised that it is also an area of significant cultural conflict.

The pressures facing families today come from many directions. Some have developed gradually over generations; others have accelerated rapidly. Marriage has weakened as a lifelong covenant. Divorce and fatherlessness have affected generations of children. Pornography has entered homes through devices carried in our pockets. Economic pressures frequently require parents to spend increasing amounts of time away from their children. Technology competes for attention at the dinner table. Government programs can sometimes unintentionally replace responsibilities once carried by families and communities. And increasingly, parents must navigate profound cultural disagreements concerning sexuality, gender, marriage, and the formation of their children.

These are not merely political issues.

They are discipleship issues.

The question for the Ecclesia is not simply, “What is happening to the family?” It is:

How do we strengthen families so they can faithfully follow Christ in the midst of what is happening around them?

Marriage and Sexuality

Historic Christian teaching understands marriage as a covenantal union between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6). Western culture and civil law have increasingly adopted different understandings of marriage, sexuality, and gender.

Christian families therefore face a discipleship challenge: How do we teach what we believe Scripture says while treating people who believe or live differently with dignity and love?

Truth and love cannot become competitors. The Ecclesia should neither abandon biblical conviction to gain cultural acceptance nor use biblical conviction as permission to demean another person.

Is it hateful to disagree with someone concerning sexuality, marriage, or how they choose to live? I believe much of the answer lies in how we approach the person and how we communicate what we believe.

We should begin by remembering something fundamental about the nature of God: God is love.

John writes: **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God... Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”** — 1 John 4:7–8

And this love was demonstrated toward us before we deserved it. Paul reminds us that **“while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son”** (Romans 5:10).

That should profoundly affect the way we approach others. Our first posture should not be condemnation, superiority, ridicule, or hostility. Paul instructs us instead to be **“speaking the truth in love”** (Ephesians 4:15). And when religious leaders wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery, Jesus challenged them: **“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”** — John 8:7

Every person bears the image of God and therefore should be treated with dignity. We are called to walk worthy of our calling and to treat people whose beliefs or conduct differ from what we understand Scripture to teach with genuine love and respect.

Paul asks us another penetrating question: **“Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”** — Romans 2:4

Perhaps therein lies an important part of our response. Jesus Christ lives in us through His Spirit. Let Him teach us how to love people.

But biblical love does not require us to redefine our convictions. Love is not the same as agreement or affirmation. Jesus demonstrated extraordinary compassion toward sinners while continually calling people to repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and new life.

The cross itself holds these truths together. Sin is serious enough that Christ died for it, and God's love is great enough that Christ died for sinners. Therefore, our calling is neither to throw stones nor to abandon truth.

It is to represent Jesus.

Speak truth in love. Treat people with dignity. Listen before condemning. Show kindness. Build relationships. Pray. Refuse hatred and ridicule. And when God gives an opportunity, point people toward the One who reconciled us to Himself when we too needed grace.

We do not have to choose between truth and love. In Christ, we are called to both.

Children, Gender, and Parental Responsibility

Questions surrounding gender identity have become particularly difficult for Christian parents. Schools, medical institutions, entertainment, social media, peers, churches, and families may communicate very different messages to children about identity, sexuality, gender, and the human body.

Whatever cultural debates surround these questions, Christian parents cannot outsource the spiritual formation of their children. If parents do not disciple their children, someone else will.

Our response, therefore, cannot simply be to oppose ideas with which we disagree. We must equip parents to talk with their children, know what they are being taught, listen to their questions, remain involved in their education, teach them a biblical understanding of humanity, and create homes where difficult subjects can be openly discussed.

God's Design Begins with Creation

For the Christian family, our understanding of human identity begins with God's creation:

“Male and female he created them.” — Genesis 1:27

Jesus reaffirmed that creation account: **“He who created them from the beginning made them male and female.”** — Matthew 19:4

Therefore, our understanding of male and female does not begin with politics, government, education, medicine, or changing cultural definitions. It begins with what we understand Scripture to reveal about God's creation and purposes.

Scripture also warns us not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). Jesus said: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”** — John 10:10

Deception has been one of Satan's weapons from the beginning: *“Has God indeed said...?”* (Genesis 3:1).

If deception can cause us to question what God has said and what God has created, then Christian parents must exercise discernment concerning the messages reaching their children. But our response cannot merely be anger toward the culture around us. It must begin by recovering responsibility for the children God has entrusted to us.

Discipleship Was Always the Parents' Responsibility

God's instruction to Israel concerning children was remarkably practical:

“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” — Deuteronomy 6:7

Notice where discipleship occurred.

- At home.
- Along the way.
- At bedtime.
- When they got up in the morning.

In other words, discipleship was woven into everyday family life.

God never designed the spiritual formation of children to be merely a weekly event delegated to a church program. The responsibility belonged first to the family.

Yet over generations, many Christian parents gradually entrusted increasing portions of their children's formation to schools, churches, television, entertainment, peers, and eventually phones, social media, and digital technology.

Not all outside influence is harmful. Teachers, pastors, coaches, relatives, and other trusted adults can make wonderful contributions to a child's life. But there is an important difference between allowing others to assist us in raising our children and allowing others to replace us in forming them.

The responsibility ultimately remains ours.

When Our Family Had to Decide

My wife and I confronted this personally many years ago when our oldest child was in first grade. He began bringing home some thoughts and attitudes that deeply concerned us. God used that situation to cause us to take a serious look at how our children were being educated and, more importantly, who would have the greatest influence in shaping their worldview.

We had three children at the time, and the discussions between my wife and me were intense. At that time in Texas, state education authorities were interpreting compulsory-attendance laws in ways that led to legal action against some homeschooling families. The legal status was not finally settled statewide until the Leeper litigation established that bona fide home schools qualified as private schools under Texas law.

So this wasn't simply a matter of choosing one educational option over another.

We became convinced before the Lord that the responsibility for educating and discipling our children ultimately belonged to us, and we made the difficult decision to homeschool despite the legal uncertainty at the time.

For our family, it became a question of conviction and obedience.

One of the strongest objections we heard—even from friends—was:

“What about socialization? Children need relationships with other children their own age.”

We agreed!

Our response was essentially: “Absolutely. But we will take responsibility for helping determine those relationships and influences rather than simply leaving them to chance.”

Our decision wasn't primarily motivated by fear or condemnation of the public-school system. It came from a conviction concerning our responsibility before God for the children He had entrusted to us.

That distinction remains important today.

The Answer Is Responsibility, Not Simply Homeschooling

I am not suggesting that every Christian family must homeschool.

Families will make different decisions concerning public schools, private schools, Christian schools, homeschooling, and other educational arrangements. The larger issue is not where the child attends school. The issue is who accepts ultimate responsibility for discipling the child.

A Christian parent whose child attends public school does not surrender that responsibility at the schoolhouse door. Neither does enrolling a child in a Christian school guarantee that the child is being disciplined at home. Wherever our children receive their academic education, parents cannot abdicate responsibility for their spiritual formation.

Who Is Discipling Our Children?

Our children are being formed every day. The question isn't whether they are being disciplined.

The question is: By whom—and toward what?

Parents need to know what their children are learning.

- Know what they are watching.
- Know who is influencing them.
- Know what is happening on their phones.
- Listen to their questions.
- Understand the cultural messages they are encountering about sex, gender, relationships, marriage, success, money, faith, and identity.

Most importantly, build relationships with them so that when difficult questions arise, home is the safest place to bring those questions.

When our children bring us difficult questions—or tell us something we were not prepared to hear—our first reaction can determine whether they ever bring that subject to us again. **We need to learn to listen before we react.** One of the ways parents unintentionally push their children away is by reacting to what they say rather than thoughtfully responding to what they are trying to communicate.

Reaction can close the door; a thoughtful response can keep the door open.

Our children need to know that difficult conversations will not cost them our love. We may not agree with everything they believe, say, or do, but we want home to remain a place where truth can be discussed, questions can be asked, wisdom can be sought, and love remains constant.

You cannot disciple a child who has learned that it is unsafe to talk to you.

Our children need more than a list of everything Christians oppose. They need to understand what God created, why He created it, and why His purposes are good.

They need an identity that begins not with cultural categories, popularity, sexuality, achievement, or social acceptance, but with understanding who they are before God.

Recovering What We Surrendered

This brings us back to a recurring theme throughout these spheres:

Abdication creates a vacuum—and vacuums rarely remain empty.

When parents surrender their responsibility to disciple their children, other voices will gladly fill the void.

Our response cannot simply be to blame schools, government, entertainment, social media, or culture for influencing our children. We must first ask whether we have been faithfully exercising the responsibility God gave us.

The Ecclesia must help parents recover that responsibility—not through fear, isolation, or hostility toward the world, but through prayer, wisdom, involvement, relationship, discernment, and intentional discipleship.

And perhaps this leaves us with one of the most important questions in the entire Family Sphere:

How can we expect to disciple nations if we give our own children over to others to disciple them?

Government Dependency and the Family

Government assistance can provide necessary help to people facing genuine hardship. There are circumstances in which such assistance can be a lifeline. But long-term dependency can also produce unintended consequences when government gradually assumes responsibilities historically carried by individuals, families, churches, and communities.

The question, therefore, is not simply whether assistance should exist. The deeper question is: **Are we helping people become stronger—or merely helping them remain dependent?**

The Ecclesia should be asking how we can help families move toward stability, responsibility, meaningful work, healthy relationships, and eventually the ability to help others. The goal should not simply be relief from today's crisis, but whenever possible, restoration toward tomorrow's responsibility.

Fatherlessness and the Breakdown of Marriage

If we are going to discuss same-sex marriage and questions surrounding gender, intellectual consistency requires us also to examine heterosexual failures within the family—adultery, divorce, abandonment, abuse, absent fathers, neglected children, pornography, and adults placing their own desires ahead of their covenant responsibilities.

Otherwise, we can easily leave the impression that the greatest threats to Christian families are always *other people*. They are not. Not every attack upon the family comes from outside the family.

Some wounds are self-inflicted.

The restoration of the family therefore requires more than confronting cultural changes. It requires husbands and wives to recover covenant faithfulness, fathers and mothers to accept responsibility for their children, forgiveness and reconciliation where possible, and the Ecclesia to surround struggling families rather than merely lament their condition.

Have We Outsourced Responsibility?

Once again, we encounter the question of abdication. God's people are instructed to care for the poor, widows, orphans, one another, and those in genuine need. Yet perhaps we have gradually adopted another pattern:

Have we become so occupied with our own lives that we increasingly pay others to carry responsibilities God intended us to participate in personally?

- We pay taxes and expect government to care for the poor.
- We give offerings and expect the church staff to care for hurting people.
- We contribute to organizations and assume someone else will care for widows, orphans, elderly people, single parents, and struggling families.

There is certainly an important place for taxes, charitable organizations, ministries, and financial giving. But writing a check is not always the same thing as accepting responsibility.

- Sometimes people need our money.
- Sometimes they need our expertise.
- Sometimes they need our home.
- Sometimes they need a meal.
- Sometimes they need someone to help them find work.
- Sometimes they need someone to sit beside them.
- Sometimes they simply need us.

Perhaps part of strengthening the family in this Eleventh Hour is recovering the biblical understanding that we belong to one another. Are we faithfully representing Jesus to them?

Preparing and Strengthening the Family

If we don't recognize that a problem exists, we are unlikely to do anything about it. Recognizing the pressures facing families should not produce fear; it should produce prayer, discernment, preparation, and action.

Every family could begin by developing a simple strategy:

PRAY: Make prayer part of ordinary family life, not merely something we turn to during emergencies.

DISCIPLE: Parents and grandparents intentionally teach Scripture, identity in Christ, character, wisdom, and discernment.

COMMUNICATE: Create a home where children can bring difficult questions without fearing that honesty will cost them relationship or love.

PROTECT: Understand what children are encountering through schools, phones, social media, entertainment, pornography, AI, and peers.

PREPARE: Develop practical resilience—finances, food, emergency plans, useful skills, relationships, and trusted community. Preparation is not fear; it enables families to remain faithful and help others when circumstances become difficult.

SERVE: Teach children that the family does not exist merely for itself. Serve neighbors, widows, elderly people, struggling families, and the community together.

BUILD COMMUNITY: Families need other families. Single parents need support. Widows and widowers need family around them. Children need trustworthy adults. Younger parents need the wisdom and experience of those who have traveled the road before them.

No family was designed to do everything alone. And perhaps that brings us full circle:

The family needs the Ecclesia, and the Ecclesia needs strong families.

Before we can strengthen communities, disciple nations, or confront the challenges of the Eleventh Hour, we must strengthen the place where God began—the family.

Questions to Consider

Does the rhythm of our home make room for prayer, Scripture, conversation, and intentional discipleship?

Who or what currently has the greatest influence in shaping our children's identity, values, and understanding of truth?

Have we created a home where difficult questions can be asked without fear of losing relationship or love?

What responsibilities have we gradually transferred to schools, churches, government, technology, or other institutions that God may be calling us to recover?

Are we strengthening faithful marriages, supporting single parents, honoring widows and widowers, and surrounding children who need trustworthy adults?

How is our family preparing spiritually and practically to remain faithful and serve others during difficult circumstances?

Who outside our immediate household may need the hospitality, encouragement, wisdom, or practical help of a family?

Where is God asking our family to represent His Kingdom together?

Biblical Foundation

Genesis 1:27–28 — God created humanity male and female and entrusted them with fruitfulness and stewardship.

Genesis 2:18–24 — God established marriage and the covenantal union of husband and wife.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 — Parents are to teach God's Word diligently through the ordinary rhythms of family life.

Psalms 68:5–6 — God reveals Himself as a Father to the fatherless and One who places the lonely in families.

Ephesians 5:21–33 — Marriage is to reflect sacrificial love, mutual faithfulness, and the relationship between Christ and His Ecclesia.

Ephesians 6:1–4 — Children are called to honor their parents, and fathers are instructed to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

1 Timothy 5:8 — Believers bear responsibility to provide for and care for their households.

Titus 2:1–8 — Older believers are to help form and strengthen the generations that follow.

James 1:27 — Pure religion includes practical care for orphans and widows in their distress.

1 John 4:7–12 — Because God is love and has loved us, His people are called to love one another.

Summary — Strengthening the Family

The family was established by God as the first sphere of human relationship, responsibility, nurture, and discipleship. Before there were governments, schools, businesses, or organized religious institutions, there was the family. It remains the primary place where identity is formed, faith is demonstrated, character is developed, and one generation prepares the next.

Yet families today face enormous pressure—from cultural confusion, economic strain, fractured relationships, absent parents, digital influences, and the gradual transfer of responsibilities God entrusted to the home. Strengthening the family therefore requires more than defending a traditional structure. It requires husbands and wives to recover covenant faithfulness, parents and grandparents to embrace their responsibility to disciple the next generation, and the Ecclesia to surround families that are struggling or alone.

We must also recover the understanding that families do not exist merely for themselves. Strong families become places of hospitality, refuge, service, generosity, and discipleship. They care for neighbors,

welcome the lonely, strengthen single parents, honor the elderly, and demonstrate the love and order of God within their communities.

The challenge before us is therefore to:

PRAY — DISCIPLE — COMMUNICATE — PROTECT — PREPARE — SERVE — BUILD COMMUNITY

We pray together. We teach the next generation. We create homes where truth and honest questions are welcomed. We protect our families from influences that seek to deform their identity. We prepare wisely for difficult circumstances. We serve others. And we build relationships with families and believers who understand that none of us was designed to stand alone.

The family needs the Ecclesia, and the Ecclesia needs strong families.

Before we can strengthen communities, transform culture, or disciple nations, we must strengthen the place where God began—the family.