

THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY
Ten Values That Build Strong Families - Part 1
Exodus 20:2
Rick Warren

We begin a new series today. This summer, the political process and the presidential campaigns have brought family values to center stage. The first line of the Republican platform says, "As the family goes, so goes the nation." Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats invented family values, but they're playing tug of war with them right now. If you notice this last week in the paper, the phrase is everywhere. Articles this last week such as "Family Values, A Familiar Ring", "Boxer Talks of Real Family Values", "Views Vary on Family Values", "Examining the Meaning of Family Values", "Family Values".

For years we have been in a values vacuum. We've been in a permissive society where basically, out of the 60s, anything goes and now we're reaping the results. Every 30 seconds there is a divorce in America. Every fourth child born in America is born to an unwed mother. AIDS is an epidemic. Everybody says we need to get back to family values but nobody is defining them. William Bennett recently said in a speech, "It's now politically correct to believe in family values, but it's not politically correct to get specific about them." Because then, all of a sudden, you start dividing people up. Newsweek was right on with their cover a couple of weeks ago "Whose Values?" Whose family values? -- because there are a lot of different kinds of families. When you look on television whose family values are you going to follow? the Simpsons? the Cosbys? the Waltons? People say, "We've got to get back to traditional family values. You've got to go back a whole lot further than Ozzie and Harriet to get to that."

Thousands of years ago God gave 10 values for family living, God's Big Ten. They're called The Ten Commandments. These are not values that are fads that are going to last only as long as the presidential campaign. These are values that last for a long, long time. In fact, they are the bedrock of western civilization. They are the foundation on which our entire judicial and law system has been built. The Ten Commandments are about the only thing that Jews, Moslems and Christians will agree on. All three religions accept the Ten Commandments as the commandments from God. So for the next ten weeks we're going to look at them and how they can make a difference in your family and why God gave them.

Deut. 6:6-7 "Never forget these commands that I am giving you. Teach them to your children." He says two things: remember them

and teach them. Do your kids know the Ten Commandments? How many of you would say, I try to live by the Ten Commandments? Most of you, if not all of you, would raise your hand. What if I said, name them. How can you live by them if you can't name them?

Why did God give the Ten Commandments? He gave them not to hurt us but to help us. Not to hamper us but to release us. Not to punish us but to protect us. When I tell a child, "Don't touch the hot stove" am I doing that for their good or for my good? I'm doing it for theirs. Every time God says, "Don't" in the Bible it's always for a positive purpose. Always. The negatives that God gives are always for your own benefit. If you ignore them, they are to your own hurt.

God has lined up the universe by universal laws. There are certain physical laws that the universe operates by like the law of gravity. If you ignore it you only hurt yourself. You have to cooperate with it. If you jump out a ten story window, and you ignore the law of gravity, you don't break God's laws they break you. Likewise there are spiritual laws. God says these are tracks by which to run on.

They are not the ten suggestions; they are the Ten Commandments. They're not optional. God says, you do these things and things will go fine in your life. If you don't do them, you're going to really mess up. Psychiatrists now are saying in the 60s when there were no boundaries and everybody grew up during that time, do whatever you want to, they're saying we need boundaries for emotional and mental health. We need parameters for people and children who grow up without boundaries grow up being extremely insecure. We have an extremely insecure generation in the baby boomers. We need to know what's right and what's wrong -- what are the parameters in life.

I. THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY

Today we're going to look at the foundation for being a strong family, the very first command. The order of the Ten Commandments are not haphazard. They are not by accident. God intentionally put the first one first because it's the most important one.

Exodus 20:2 "You shall have no other gods before Me."

What's the principle? Put God first. In my life and in my family. God says, I demand top priority in your life. I'm not

going to play second fiddle to anything. He deserves to be number one in your life because He made you. If He hadn't made you, you wouldn't even be around. Everything you have in life is from God because He's given it to you. He's allowed you to have it.

What does it mean to "have no other gods before Me"? No other gods? I thought there was only one God. There is. The word "gods" is written with a small "g". He's not talking about "the God"; He's talking about little gods.

What is a god? A god is anything that dominates your life, anything that controls your life. Can a career be a god? You bet it can. Can another person be a god? Yes. Can golf be a god? Even good things that God has created for us to enjoy, become gods when you give them first place in your life. God says, "Wrong. I deserve first place in your life." This is the foundation -- put God first.

Most of you know in the last few vacations, I've been building a log cabin. Three summers ago was the most difficult of all. We went nine weeks without a back hoe. I had to get it started so my dad and I basically dug the foundation of this house by hand. We took out 38 trees that were going to be under the house. I was so tired at the end of that summer, I really didn't feel like I had had a vacation. We finally got the foundation laid. But I looked back and thought "I've taken all that energy and that's all I've got to show for it?" But I later learned that is the most important part of the whole process. If your foundation is wrong, it doesn't matter how pretty the structure is, it's going to fall over. I realized that it was not too glamorous but the foundation was actually the most important part.

Today, in America, families are dropping like flies. They're falling apart faster than we can put them together. Why are so many marriages crumbling? Because they're built on the wrong foundation. It doesn't matter how much money you put into it it's not going to last unless it's built on the right foundation. Today we want to look at the foundation of putting God first in my family, in my life.

Every time God gives a principle, He gives a promise. The promise: In everything you do, put God first and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success."

There's one of the great promises of success. Do you want to be successful? Put God first. Wherever you want God to bless, you put Him first in that area.

I said earlier, the divorce rate in America is now one out of every three marriages. But Harvard University did a study: marriages where the wedding is in a church service, the divorce rate is one out of fifty marriages. In marriages where they're married in a Christian ceremony and they go to church every week, read the Bible and pray together the divorce rate is one out of 1,105 marriages. Would you say that's a little different than one out of three? Put God first.

I'm going to give you a way to divorce-proof your marriage. Put God first in your marriage, in your family, and you'll see tremendous benefits.

II. HOW DO I PUT GOD FIRST?

How do I do it? What does it mean to put God first? I took the acrostic F-I-R-S-T and I'm going to give you five ways to put God first in your life and your family.

F - FINANCES

Put God first in your finances. Let's start with the most difficult one. Proverbs 3:9-10 "Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income, and He will fill your barns to overflow." God says give Me the first part back and I'll bless all the rest. God has said that money is the number one test of your priorities. We spend most of our lives trying to earn it. God says that your checkbook reveals what's really important to you. Not what you say is important, but how you spend your money. If I were to ask all of you to get out your checkbook right now and pass it to the person to the right of you and let them examine it, what would it reveal about the priorities in your life? By simply looking at how you spend your money a person who may or may not even know you could be able to tell a lot about your life. That's why you don't want them to see it. The way you spend your money says what's first in your life.

Deut. 14:23 "The purpose of tithing is to teach you to put God first in your lives." What's tithing? God says that the first 10% of all I make goes back to Him. Why 10%? That's just what He said. The purpose is simply to teach you to put God first.

We're in sluggish economic times right now. We have many people in our own congregation totally out of work. They've been out for a long time. I don't know any clearer, simpler advice to

give you as a pastor that cares about you than to say, if you're in a financial mess right now, step one is put God first in your finances. Whatever you want God to bless, you put Him first in it. It teaches you to put Him first.

Why is tithing so important? God says that if I'm not tithing God is not really first in my life. If He's not first in your finances He's really not first in your life.

When should I do it? "On the first day of every week..." I give Him the first 10% of my money on the first day of the week to show that He's first in my life. "If you put Me first, I'll direct you and crown your efforts with success."

The first day of the week is Sunday. Why does He say tithe on Sunday? Because tithing is an act of worship and that's the day you worship. You ought to give to other charities in generosity and charity, but that's not tithing. Tithing is an act of worship and you do it when you worship.

I - INTEREST

If God's really going to be number one, you put Him first in your interests. That means in my fun times, my play times, my amusements, recreation, hobbies, pass times.

I Corinthians 10:31 "Whatever you do, do it all for God's glory."

Does that include going on vacation? Yes. You can eat to the glory of God, you can play golf to the glory of God, you can go sailing to the glory of God, you can collect stamps to the glory of God. How do you do that? In everything you do, you put God first. Do it with an attitude of gratitude. If you're out playing tennis, say "Lord, thank you that You gave me arms to play tennis with and thank You that you gave me hand/eye coordination that I wouldn't have had if it weren't for You." Everything you do with an attitude of gratitude puts God first in that area. So you like to make crafts or whatever? You enjoy the gifts and abilities He's given you with a grateful heart. Whatever you do.

You can tell what a person's priorities are seeing what they get excited about. What gets you excited? That's what's important to you. I can go to a 49-ers game and get excited and they call me a fan. But if you get excited about the Lord, they call you a fanatic.

What do you talk about the most? I know people who can talk for hours on end about other people's lives. But they couldn't talk three minutes about the Lord. "Talk with each other much about the Lord." If He's first in your life you're going to make God a part of your conversation. You won't be ashamed to talk about Him because He's first.

R - RELATIONSHIPS

If you want God first in your life you're going to have to choose your friends carefully. Prov. 27:19 "What a man is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses." Why is that? What does who my friends are have to do with God being first in my life? Because you become like the people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with people who take God lightly, you will tend to become a casual believer. But if you spend time with people who are committed and take God and His word seriously you will become a stronger, committed Christian. Whoever you spend time with that is what you're going to be like.

Those of you who are parents, let me ask you who or what type of people are you exposing your children to? Who are you inviting into your home? If you're serious about building strong values in your kids then you ought to be inviting people over to your house from this church who model the kind of behavior you want your kids to have. If you don't provide models for them they're going to get it from TV. That's why you ought to be in a small group. You get to know other people so you can invited godly men and women into your home and your kids can see what people are like who love God.

Prov. 12:26 "A righteous man is careful about his friendships." He's cautious. The truth is if you really want God first in your life there are some relationships that are dead wrong for you. I've seen so many times a dynamic Christian get wooed away. They want to get married. They get wooed away by a person who does not share their values. They start sleeping with them, and you see their vitality just sap out of their lives. Choose your friends carefully. It is always easier to pull somebody down than it is to pull somebody up. Put Him first in your relationships.

S - SCHEDULE

Put God first in your schedule, in your time. "Make the most of your time, grasp firmly what you know to be the will of God."

How do I put God first in my schedule. I ask Him to help me use my time wisely. You get up, make a TO DO list of things you have to do and you say, "God, which of these things do You want me to do? I have 17 things to do today and I only have time for 5." You do not have time to do everything. Selection is the name of the game.

How do you select? You ask God to help you. You have just enough time to do God's will. When God made you, He has a plan for your life. If you find yourself having more things to do than you have time to do, it means you're doing some things that aren't God's will. They may be good things. But God never puts more on you than He puts in you to bear it up. He doesn't ask you to do more than you have time to do. When you start feeling frustrated and hassled and frazzled it's because you're trying to do more than God wants you to do.

Make a daily appointment with God. If God is going to be first in your family, in your life, you need a daily appointment with God. It doesn't matter when you do it. You just need to do it. Ten, fifteen minutes. Maybe you get up fifteen minutes early, drive to work and before you go into the office, you set in your car you read your Bible and pray and talk to God about all the things you've got to do and ask, "What do You want me to do?" Have a quiet time. Or at lunch time, take your lunch and apple set under a tree and read your Bible while you eat. You read for 15 minutes and talk to God in prayer about the things that are important to you. Or you come home at night and after the kids are in bed set down on your easy sofa chair, read the Bible a few minutes, pray, talk to God about the things that are on your heart. It doesn't matter when you do it, but you need a daily time that you check in with God and say, "God let's review my life. Let's review my schedule, my goals, my priorities. What is really important because I don't have time for everything and I know You don't expect me to do everything."

Even Jesus felt the need for daily prayer. If He felt the need for it we need it too. "Very early in the morning...Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place where He prayed." You can get so busy that you forget God. A verse in Jeremiah that says, "My people have forgotten me for days on end." Schedule a daily appointment with God.

I would encourage you if you are a family or married, when you set down to eat, hold hands as a family and say a brief prayer of thanks that says, "God we just remind ourselves the food came from You in the first place." Pray aloud together as a family.

It doesn't have to be some long prayer. But it is a visual demonstration to your kids that God is first. The little bit of self control that it takes to pause for 30 seconds or a minute to pray rather than when you're starving hungry, says even when I'm hungry, God, You're first in my life.

T - TROUBLES

When you face unexpected problems and pressures, when you have a crisis, who do you turn to? God says, "Turn to Me first when you've got a problem." Many people, when they're in a tight situation, prayer is the last resort, not the first option. They do everything they can physically to try to correct the problem then they say, "I guess now all we can do is pray." Like it must really be hopeless! Prayer should not be your last resort, it should be your first option. If you just get undercut by a competitor or slammed by your boss, pray "Help". Make God your first resort in a crisis. He says He is an ever present help a refuge in time of need. God is waiting. He commands us to turn to Him first.

Psalm 50:15 "Call upon me in your day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will honor me." God says, Put Me first, even in the tough times. Some people get embarrassed and think, I don't talk to God much when times are good and I don't want to bother him with my problems. God says, "Bother Me. It's no bother. I can handle your and every other person's problems at the same time. Bring it to me. Don't carry it all yourself."

This brings up an interesting point. How do you know when God's first in your life? You stop worrying. Worry is the warning light that God is not first in my life at this particular moment. When I start worrying, it says, I'm playing God, I'm assuming responsibility He didn't intend for me to have. When God is not first in any of these five areas we begin to worry about it. When He's not first in my finances I worry about them. When God is not first in my relationships, I worry about them. When God isn't first in my problems, trials, troubles, I worry about them. When God isn't first place in my schedule, I worry about my schedule. But when I stop and do a priority check. "God, You be number one in this area, You handle it, You're in charge." I take a deep breath and relax.

Matthew 6:33 "Seek first the kingdom of God [put Him first in every area of my life] and all these other things shall be added unto you." Jesus said that right in the middle of a sermon on worry. It's the antidote to worry. Put God first.

In this series we're going to be in the next ten weeks we will have some Saddleback families share with you how they're trying to put God first in their families and how they're trying to build family values. I've asked Mike and Gail Moran to share with you today.

Mike: Let me give you a brief overview of our foundation. My wife Gail and I just celebrated our 17th anniversary and I can proudly say I love her more today than the day I married her. We have two daughters. Shawna is 12 and Natalie is 8. Gail started attending Saddleback church 12 years ago and I followed her by 6 months. I was the one at home on Sunday mornings in my bathrobe, reading the LA Times and hiding. But Gail came back visibly uplifted by these one-liners this young pastor was telling her. With my background, being raised a Catholic and falling away from the church, I would say, "He said that in church?" So after I got over my shock I started using Rick's materials in my sales presentations and getting good responses.

Being the quick learner that I am it took me 7 years of being "spoon fed" a little bit at a time, to go to the first men's retreat. That's when I had the big turning point in my life.

A man named Steve Soden, who was a real driving force in the men's ministry, wouldn't leave me alone. He kept getting me involved in activities at the retreat, kept introducing me to new people in the church that I didn't know and I changed from the person that I was and found out what true fellowship is all about.

As a result of the retreat I became baptized by Rick and I joined a business men's weekly breakfast. We meet on a weekly basis and share personal and business crises that go on. And who doesn't have a crisis at one time or another? We also opened our home up to a small group and said we're going to devote our home to the Lord. It immediately grew to 26 people. This was so foreign to me to have all of a sudden, witnessing and sharing, and real true caring like a real church family is supposed to do. It was happening in our home. We watched God's hands in people's lives, from borderline divorces to financial, you name the situation. Regardless of your age, you're all going to go through some trials. We saw God's hands in each case. The real honor was our daughters got to see these people coming into our home.

After the retreat which was five years ago, I was a principle in a company that had me flying all over North America and the Orient. The price I was paying was my daughters' tears as I

headed towards the front door. They knew daddy's going on another trip and he's gone for a long time. It wasn't worth it. I elected to quit and we went through a financial roller coaster. Today I'm a principal in a company with two other Christian business men and we market products to put on television for sale and we pray regularly together. Another influence to us has been Ernie Casaris, of Cornerstone Bank. He takes Rick's messages and shares them with the staff. Once again we're blessed with great teaching but what is it doing? Is it coming just to you? Are you the stopping point? Or is it flowing through you?

Rick asked us quickly to cover what we figure are our important points of our foundation. A very important point is to have meaningful prayer together. We pray at dinnertime fervently. One daughter is on the quiet side, the other is a prayer warrior, very spiritually mature. At night time we have meaningful prayer with our daughters. The neat thing is they get to hear what is important to us, because you can't expect telepathy to work all the time, you have to voice it, get it out to them. Another point is, get informed. Don't get all your input from one source, be it CNN, Christian television or radio. You've got to weigh up an agenda and hold it up to the light and ask, "What does Jesus say about this? What does the Bible say about this?" Also look at your checkbook and your day timer, you can think what you want but you have visible proof in those two elements. Paul Harvey said, "Why is it that people have to be flat on their back before they learn to look up?" Saddleback is a life-development church. Rather than the ceremony and just coming in and out there are many avenues that can help build a foundation for your family.

If you want to build a successful life and a strong family you've got to have the right foundation. You've got to put God first.

I know it's not Father's day and I don't want to devalue the importance of Mothers and wives, but I want to say to the men, I want to challenge you men to make a public commitment to do the right thing, the right thing for your own life, the right thing for your family, the right thing for our nation and that is to say, "I'm not ashamed to say I want to build my life on God's values, on values that last. I want to build a strong family with the right foundation. I want God to be first in my finances, interests, relationships, schedule, troubles. Believing that if I follow that principle, He'll keep His promise to bless my life in the areas that I put Him first in."

THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY
Ten Values That Build Strong Families - Part 1
Exodus 20:2
Rick Warren

"Never forget these commands that I am giving you. Teach these to your children..." Deut. 6:6-7a (GN)

I. THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONG FAMILY

"You shall have no other gods before me" Ex 20:2

The Principle: _____

The Promise:

"In everything you do, put God first, and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success." Prov. 3:6 (LB)

II. HOW DO I PUT GOD FIRST?

Give God priority in 5 areas

F _____

"Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of all your income, and he will fill your barns... to overflow..." Prov 3:9-10 (LB)

"The purpose of tithing is to teach you to put God first in your lives." Deut. 14:23 (LB)

When?

"On the first day of every week, you should put aside something from what you've earned and use it for the offering."

I Cor. 16:2 NIV/LB

I _____

"Whatever you do, do it all for God's glory."

I Cor. 10:31 (GN)

"Talk with each other much about the Lord."

Eph. 5:19 (LB)

R _____

"...what a man is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses."

Prov. 27:19 (LB)

S _____

"Make the best use of your time ... grasp firmly what you know to be the will of the Lord."

Eph. 5:16-17 (Ph)

"Very early in the morning ... Jesus got up and went off to a solitary place where he prayed."

Mark 1:35

T _____

"Call upon Me in your day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will honor Me."

Ps. 50:15

Joshua's Commitment:

"As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

Jos. 24:15 (LB)