

STORM STRONG FAMILIES are JESUS-GOSPEL CENTERED
Why the Gospel is so central to a strong family

Making fun of his age, Bil Keane described his roots like this.

I was born in Philadelphia. Well, I wasn't exactly born...I was discovered there by Benjamin Franklin on October 5, 1922. And I grew up in that city with a penn at my side. William Penn. Taught myself to draw, so I can't blame anyone but me. Started cartooning when in High School. Spent 3 years in the U.S. Army during World War II, but we won anyway.

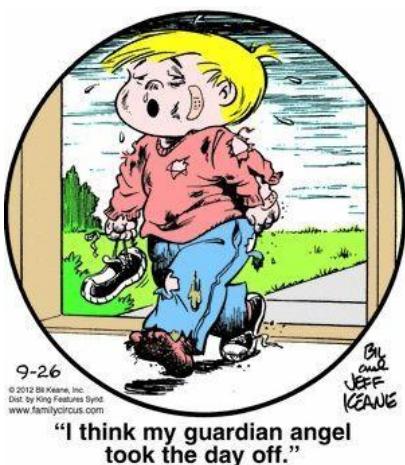
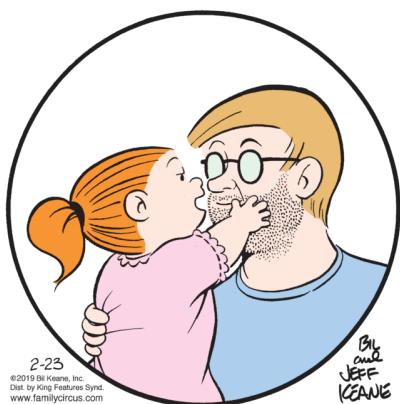
While stationed in Australia, I met a cute koala bear named Thel Carne, who was trying to futilely to throw a boomerang. I too returned. Five years later, we were married in Brisbane. In Roslyn PA, we started our real-life family circus. They provided the inspiration for my cartoons; I provided the perspiration.

From 1960 through 2011, Bil Keane provided a delightful depiction of the American family, or at least "his" American family. The *Family Circus* featured Bil and Thelma, and their 4 children: Billy (7), Dolly (5), Jeffy (3) and 1 year old P.J., living in Scottsdale, Arizona. Over the 51 years of the cartoon, all the characters stayed the same, and day after day, month-by-month, year by year, this fun, precocious, sometimes-surprising, and rather idealistic family found its way on the comic pages of countless thousands of newspapers around the world.ⁱ

Keane's objective was modest. He said,

*"I don't have to come up with a ha-ha belly laugh every day," Keane said, "but drawings with warmth and love or ones that put a lump in the throat or tug at the heart. That's more important to me than a laugh. I would rather have the readers react with a warm smile as they recall doing the same things in their own family."*ⁱⁱ

Which is what he did! Here are just a few *Circus* circles:



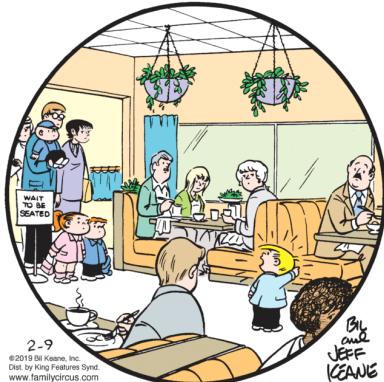
THE FAMILY CIRCUS®

By Bil Keane

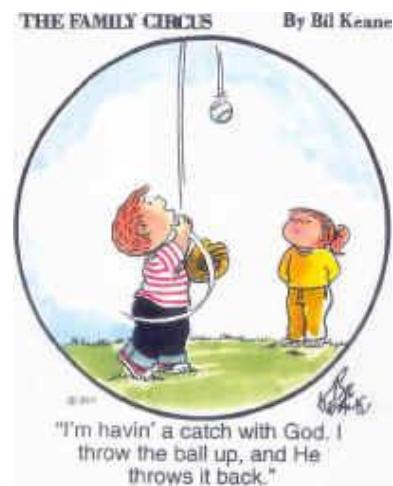


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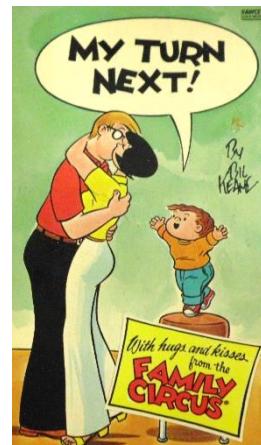
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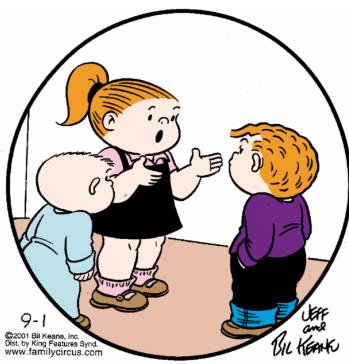
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"I'm havin' a catch with God. I throw the ball up, and He throws it back."



Bil (and now Jeff) Keane's *Family Circus* cartoons consistently portrayed the very best of family life...which sometimes drew criticism, even harsh satire. But he stuck to his guns. Here was a young couple that loved each other like nobody else, who loved and disciplined and provided for and shepherded their children with honesty, morals, God, patience, and good 'ole common sense...and with loving grandparents nearby. Here were kids – boys and girls -- who sometimes scrapped with each other **but more than anything** loved each other, and took great security in their Dad and Mom's sacrificial love and hard work. Kids who had no doubt that God's hand was always in the picture.



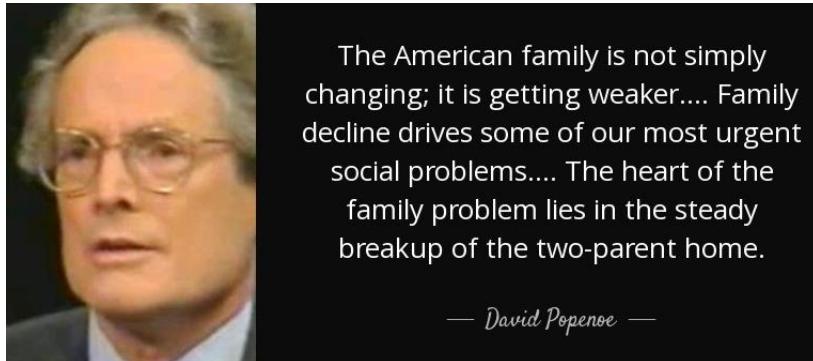
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"God never takes a vacation 'cause He can't find anybody good enough to fill in."

Since the days 60 years ago that Bil Keane began cartooning the best of family life, the landscape of family life has drastically changed. Russell Moore,ⁱⁱⁱ author of the *Christianity Today's* 2019 Book of the Year, contends that if you are a family, you are likely being tossed about by a violent storm.

David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology Emeritus and Co-Director of the *National Marriage Project* at Rutgers University, offered a brutally honest report on "The American Family 1988-2028: Looking Back and Forward."^{iv}

1. In 1988, the American family appeared **to be in serious trouble**. Divorce rates, unwed births, broken homes were skyrocketing, marriage rates were plummeting.
2. In 1995, the empirical data demonstrated that the so-called "**divorce revolution**" (with its promise of greater freedom and happiness) **had failed** miserably.
3. Just after the turn into the 21st century, **public conversation about the decline of the family** (for all practical purposes) **ceased**. We've simply accepted (as routine, nothing wrong with) the experimentation of cohabitation, easier divorce, more and more unwed births and children without their biological parents in the home.
4. We are **preoccupied with "personal autonomy" and "self-fulfillment"** even though the data continues to demonstrate the weakening of the family. ("The greater the dominance of secular individualism, the more fragmented the families.)
5. Fact remains: **Two-parent families held-together by life-long marriage** are irreplaceable for successful child-rearing and for satisfying the deeper-emotional needs of both adults and children.



BACK TO GOD THE TRUE BUILDER – So...what is a STORM-STRONG FAMILY?

Psalm 127:1 (p.485 ESV)
Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.

Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

**A storm-strong family has the humility and courage
to listen to God, believe His revelation,
and use His wisdom.**

**In so doing, the Lord will build their house
to their joy and to His glory.**

Why do we NEED the Lord to build the house? Why MUST we choose to build using the foundation of Jesus' words? When I asked you this past week for your input, here is what you saw the storm bringing to our doorstep:

- SOCIAL MEDIA: we are rising floodwaters; much of it addictive, distressing, and silently damaging
- URGENCY EXHAUSTION: the enslavement to never-ending activities
- ANXIOUSNESS: just about everything
- UPENDED PRIORITIES: H>W relationship sacrificed for everything (anything) else. "Why are children at the center of everything?"
- A SPIRITUAL ENEMY: eager to devour our lives
- SEXUAL/GENDER confusion and disorientation
- BROKEN, then BLENDED "families"
- STRAINED IN-LAW RELATIONSHIPS
- SPIRITUAL "in-the-home" INCAPABILITY:
- NAVIGATING SOLO: unique challenges of single-parenting
- ADDICTIONS: porn, substances, gambling
- UNSEEN ABUSE: psychological/emotional, physical, spiritual)
- MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES: depression spiking in virtually every age
- INTOLERANCE: love, mutual respect, listening declining

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LET'S BEGIN WITH JESUS/the GOSPEL

So...where do we begin? What is at the heart, at the core, of a storm-strong family? This morning, the Spirit of God offers foundation stone #1

FOUNDATION STONE #1
A storm-strong family must have
Jesus Christ unmistakably at the center:

The good news (Gospel) of how His life-saving
Lordship can transform any family

What does that mean? What does it look like when a family (father, mother, each child) has Jesus Christ (and the good news about Him) unmistakably at the center?

It means that the family together understands and agrees with God's blueprint for family building. At the center of a storm-strong family is Jesus. Jesus Himself, and a complete allegiance to only what He can do in each and every family member. Apart from Him, our families will buckle and blow away in the storm. Here's why --

- i. **We live in a universe where something very basically, and very terribly, has gone wrong.**

Not everything is wrong, but the frustration of sin's curse impacts everything. Paul put it simply. As a result of man's moral choices to disregard God's word and disobey God's ways, "the creation was subjected to frustration." Simply put, sin and its consequences is behind the list we reviewed just a few minutes ago. Sin, every day and in every way, kills and destroys and diminishes the life God has for us, and substitutes it with stuff that is so much less.

- ii. Because this is true, **we attempt to do “family” in this “frustrated” setting.** And when we try to "do it on our own", in our own pride and simply with our own resources, much more often than not we lose. We fall short.

Comedian and Christian Jeff Foxworthy wrote the introduction to *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*.^v

I read an article the other day about a wildly successful college football coach, and in the article, he was talking about the cost of success. At one point he conceded, "I don't really know my children." After I read this, I stopped and thought, "How sad." The world had this guy on a pedestal, yet he had failed miserably at the most important assignment he was given during his time on earth. More importantly, the ramifications of his failure will probably felt for decades to come.

One hundred years from now, your great grandchildren probably won't know your name. No one will care about what awards you won or how much money you made. The only thing that will matter is what kind of children you left behind and their influence on subsequent generations.

I can promise that even for the most intentional parents, there will be nights when all you can do is fold your hands and cry, "God, help me!" I imagine God hears that and thinks, "I thought you'd never ask!"

We live in a frustrated universe. We are called to do "family" in that setting...which means we must

iii. Unashamedly & eagerly tap into **God's greatest family resource – the Lord Jesus Christ.**

- He is the seed of the woman who crushes the Serpent's head (Genesis 3:15)
- He is the seed of Abraham who can bless all the families of the world (Genesis 12:1-3)
- He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)
- He is the Good Shepherd who gives His sheep abundant life (John 10:10)
- He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
- He is the Resurrected Lord who conquers sin and death (Romans 6:5-11)
- He is the One who came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8)^{vi}
- He is, bottom line, the Person who is the key to you...and everyone in your family

A storm-strong family every day says this honestly and humbly to the Lord:

"Jesus, you are my Savior and my Lord. You live in me through Your Spirit, powerfully in me. What kind of person do you want to make me to be? What kind of changes do you want to bring about in my thinking, in my choosing, in my relationships? How do you want to make my family 'storm-strong' through me?"

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A WORD ABOUT WHAT'S AHEAD

Our investment in the coming weeks will be truly transforming IF you will do the following

#1 **MAKE SURE TODAY** that JESUS CHRIST IS YOUR SAVIOR and LORD.

#2 **COME EACH WEEK** with a **HUMBLE and HUNGRY HEART.**

#3 **DO MORE** than just come Sunday morning:

- Pray about this. Talk with the Lord about what He wants to do in your life
- Listen again to his message during the week
- Meet with others and do the Connect Group Study
- Talk about this at home with your spouse, your kids. Discuss – Is Jesus at the center of our home?

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ⁱ 1,500 USA newspapers when Keane passed away. His son continues his father's work.

ⁱⁱ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/543723/facts-about-the-family-circus-comic-strip> Interestingly, "Keane's approach wasn't always so family-friendly. In the early days of the strip and while searching for the proper tone, Keane took a more cynical view of parenting, depicting the father drinking and having a wandering eye for passing women. Keane changed the direction after one mid-1960s strip—Billy wandering into a room asking for a hug—resulted in several reader letters saying the sentiment had struck a chord."

ⁱⁱⁱ As a husband and father of five boys, Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, is a bona fide family man. His latest book, *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*, offers a biblical vision for family that bears Christian witness in the world. Writer Jen Pollock Michel spoke with Moore about the promise and peril of family life. **INTERVIEW BY JEN POLLOCK MICHEL | AUGUST 20, 2018**

^{iv} <https://www.scribd.com/document/18004940/The-American-Family-1988-2028-Looking-Back-and-Looking-Forward>

^v Reggie Joiner, Carey Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community* (David C. Cook, 2010), 13-14.

^{vi} Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to **destroy** the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8 ESV