

## Storm Strong Family Strategies

June 9, 2019

### 1 Thessalonians 5:6-22

Ah, family life! I remember as a young dad being caught up in the momentary crises – coming home to the kids yelling at each other over something the other child did. OR...I found myself running from the soccer field to a quick meal to music lessons and then tutoring in homework and trying to get the dishes put away until I drop into bed and set the alarm to get up early enough to get another child to play practice or a club before school and then back home again to get everyone going for school.

- I distinctly remember one day I was busy at the office and I got a call from Northwood Elementary school. My daughter's teacher said that she had a little girl there waiting for her dad to pick her up for a dad date. Ugh! When I arrived this cute, knobby-kneed girl was standing alone on the small hill and fought back the tears when I drove up.
- And Sue and the kids got consumed by the daily grind too. At the same time, Sue and I were trying to be alert for what our kids were listening to and watching and we were in the trenches observing their friends and grades and their integrity. We were battling for their minds and hearts and spirits.
- Somehow, in the middle of the parenting battle I learned it was important to focus on the war's objectives, not just the individual battles...I needed to step back from the fray, to ponder my parenting STRATEGY for winning the war, not just the daily battle.

So this morning, whatever role you now play in your family, parent or child, grandparent, aunt, uncle, pause from the daily drama and duties for a moment and in the next few minutes let's look at four Simple Family Strategies you can remember...

FOUR simple strategies for families:

Look AHEAD

Look UP

Look AROUND

Look IN

I'm so grateful that Sue likes to read her Bible. In part because I didn't know what we should talk about this morning and she ran across a great Bible passage. Grab a bible under the chair in front of you and turn to page \_\_\_\_\_

I was on a trip recently and had the luxury of getting away for an extended quiet time and, somehow, I landed in the book of 1 Thessalonians. By the time I got to chapter 5 I was so intrigued by Paul's heart for these believers and his deep love for them. He viewed them as family. In chapter 2 verses 6-8 Paul says,

*"Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children."*

And then in verses 11-12 he says, *"For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God..."*

These people were his family, and Paul wanted to close out his letter with practical advice they could hang on to in the midst of persecution.

Some think that there is very little parenting advice in the Bible. We glean instructions about family life from a few verses like 'fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath', 'children obey your parents', and in Proverbs, 'stay out of red-light districts', etc. But in 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul takes off his authoritative religious leader hat, and his Bible scholar hat, and his 'I'm an Important Apostle Guy' hat and chooses another approach

entirely for his church family. He decides to give practical strategies for operating as a family and “walking in a manner worthy of God”.

As I mentioned earlier, the church in Thessalonica had been experiencing some persecution and it had gone on longer than they expected. They were tired and discouraged. The storms had come. Some of their members had died and they were confused about Christ’s return. In every single chapter of this book Paul assures them that Christ is coming again and they will be with Him. Paul’s heart for them was that they not live in fear but, instead, live life intentionally in hope, knowing that Christ indeed *would* come again and He *could* come for them at any time.

Chapter 5, Vs. 6 says, “So then, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.” Vs. 8 says, “...let us be sober...”. The New Living Translation puts it like this, “So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded.” The Sue Thomas paraphrase says “Wake up, be intentional”. Paul is urging them to look ahead. He implores them not to fall asleep and be morally or spiritually disengaged but to be active. He urges them to get in the game and live life intentionally in light of Christ’s return.

## 1. Look AHEAD

If we truly desire to see our kids, our family members, our friends become strong, become more and more like Jesus, and live an abundant life in intimate relationship with Him then we need to be intentional in our parenting and relational interactions.

You’ve all heard quotes regarding planning: Benjamin Franklin said – ““If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” And the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry - “A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

Believe me, as a basically unstructured personality, I hated those quotes. But they *are* true. I was never personally one for writing things down and checking them off, or organizing things to a T. But I WAS intentional in my own way.

Together we wanted to teach our kids to love God, love others, and to **think**. We wanted them to process what they were seeing, hearing and feeling, to feel comfortable with God’s Word as a source of wisdom and guidance, to think for themselves in the face of other’s opinions and urgings. So, you would often hear us saying things like, “what did you think about what she said?”, or “what are they trying to sell you?”, or “is it true that a Cabbage Patch doll will make your life completely happy?”. Nothing really escaped my questions, including Sesame Street. We also wanted them to *think* about God, question, challenge, doubt, and explore Him and, eventually, make their faith their own as God’s love drew them in.

Even if you have an unstructured personality you can still have clear goals for your kids. What character traits do you want to instill that are based on inner values rather than outer performances? Are soccer skills or academic success really the primary things or do we move winning with humility and failing with grace to center stage? Will they have an understanding of God and His love for them and develop a desire to please Him? Will they engage in their responsibility toward loving others well? Will they be hard-workers, resourceful, kind, respectful, humble, content, confident, honest, compassionate, loving, curious, and the list goes on and on? These traits are learned, they are not inborn. And children do not acquire them in a vacuum. They are learned from the modeling and instruction of those closest to them: parents, grandparents, family members, Sunday School teachers, small group leaders, and others God has placed in their lives in positions of influence.

And beyond kids, these are traits we all should be developing as children of God. And He’s given us each other in *this* family to sharpen one another if we are intentional in our relationships. That’s the beauty of mentoring. That’s why it’s become so appealing, because we intentionally work together toward the goal of being all-in Christ followers.

I found myself this week simply googling “intentional parenting” and found a whole host of resources available at my fingertips. Amazingly, many of the first pop-ups were from Christian organizations. But secular resources were also abundant and, usually, very sound.

As David mentioned last week there’s no guarantee that our kids will turn out loving God and loving others like we hope. They still have their own wills and can choose for themselves. It can be heartbreaking at times to watch people we love make poor choices, turn their backs on God, or simply self-destruct.

We live in a quick-fix society, but there simply is no shortcut to intentional living with our children and those closest to us. We’re in it for the long haul and we need to be looking ahead. We’re in a battle. Paul uses the armor metaphor in verse 8. “...let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” It was a good metaphor because 10-12 years later Paul used it again when he wrote to the Ephesians and mapped out the armor of God. It is a battle but we can trust God to help us persevere in our responsibility. And we can trust Him to draw our kids to Himself in His irresistible grace and love. Every one of us is flawed and so broken but He still longs to use us. It’s not easy but it’s worth the effort to look ahead and live intentionally in our families.

I felt like I had to keep it simple in my Strategic goals as a Dad. There’s a reason there is only one soccer goal or one end zone to aim at...it’s for guys like me. My two simple Parenting mantras that kept me looking AHEAD were:

- a. I want my kids to love Jesus above all else, and if possible,
- b. I want my kids to be productive members of society...to leave places better than they found them

So, we need to keep our kids’ future in mind. One day they will face Jesus, and we will be held accountable too. Our job is to prepare them by Looking AHEAD to the near and distant future.

Then our next strategic move as family members is to **Look UP**.

## 2. **Look UP**

By Looking UP we mean that we should pay attention to how we respond to those above us, our authorities.

*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*

*BLT (Brent’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Version) - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*

*Brother! Don’t disrespect people. Show some respect...especially to your kids’ refs, and umpires, and your own spiritual leaders, and even elected officials, and teachers. In fact, don’t just show them respect, go overboard in demonstrating respect. At the very least, stop complaining about authority and stop adding friction; rather, be a peace-maker.*

Our kids know us, our kids know our friends and they know what excites us. They’re watching. Our behaviors truly reflect our core values and priorities. One of the harshest lessons I’ve had to learn is this...it’s not what I say, it’s what I DO that matters. I can tell my kids to submit to authorities and to obey my authority as their parent, but, if I lie to the IRS or call in sick to spend the day at the zoo with my kids, I shouldn’t be surprised when they lie to me about where they were last night or if they cheat on a test. There’s an old phrase: Monkey see, monkey do. And some mostly true advice from Zig Ziglar, “if you set the example, you don’t have to set the rules.”

But obedience to authority takes Submission. And Submission is hard. It goes against our very nature, especially if we haven’t been properly disciplined ourselves, or if we have only had abusive authorities.

You can't read the gospels without coming away with one idea: Jesus is the new king, He's the authority. Will he find resistance or compliance? It's really as simple as that. Where it gets complicated are the many areas of our lives where we try to negotiate if Jesus is indeed Lord.

Once we start to resolve our Authority issues...we Look AROUND closely at our family members.

### 3. **Look AROUND**

*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. – 1 Thessalonians 5:14*

Look at your family members closely.

Is someone **Idle**? "out of order" "unruly"

Patiently instruct them, point out their behavior. Hold up a mirror. Explain how their conduct makes others feel, explain how their unruliness effects not only others but themselves. Explain to them why it is in their best interests to follow your instruction.

Danny was one of those unruly students in our youth ministry. Whatever the group would do, or game they would play, he would subvert it and ruin it for everyone. I showed up at Danny's home and pointed out to him how his behavior was affecting me and others and what they were thinking of him. He thought he was being funny, but in reality, they were frustrated with him. He was a natural, smart leader, but he was just wanting to control in a way that no one wanted. I gave him the option, to be a contributor and a leader with his youth group. I held up a mirror, I had to patiently and privately admonish a future leader that had gotten lazy and unruly. He was a different kid from then on. And, he became a successful business leader.

Look around for a family member who is **fainthearted**. Weak in their psyche?

Where is that person lacking in inner strength and fortitude? What...

Phases other family members are in.

Stressors and challenges

Key relationships

Changes in patterns

Their unique temperament and personalities and physical and mental and emotional limitations

**Encourage** them..."God Around" - be like the loving strength of God around them

Affirm their uniqueness, and strength

Look around at your family members' environment, what they're facing. Maybe they need direct help.

Two Parents emailed me about their 14-year-old daughter Julie who found herself in a relationship doing things she didn't want. Her parents noticed that she seemed depressed but when they probed Julie shut them out. She was afraid of what they would say or do. Yet she knew she was stuck in this toxic relationship with no place to turn. Julie had been weakened by this unhealthy relationship. Yet she was afraid of losing it.

This passage says "**help the weak**". "Hold firmly to the weak. The picture here is of a long distance runner helping, almost carrying, another across the finish line.

Eventually Julie's parents strengthened their insistence that Julie must tell them what was going on in her relationships and in her environment. Their persistence that Julie tell them or a counselor paid off. It was painful for her. It was painful for her parents but her depression eventually lifted as her parents covered her with an umbrella of protection from the person that Julie couldn't break free from. They helped her with boundaries and reinforced them when she couldn't yet do that.

And when you're looking around to help at home, Sea gull parenting isn't helpful. Sea gulls hover around, squawk a lot, and always deliver an unpleasant payload. Don't be a sea gull parent or brother or sister.

Unfortunately, I know **I** was a sea gull parent at times. The kids probably just heard "WA WA WAWAWA". During those times especially I remember being SO grateful for the eyes, the ears, and the influence of other godly adults in the lives of our kids. Many of you at this church invested heavily in them.

I recall one youth leader verbalizing a sadness she truly felt. She said "I rarely see parents who simply enjoy their kids." It DID make her sad and she has spent a lifetime enjoying other peoples' kids. It was a lesson to me that I never forgot and she spent many hours enjoying my own kids even when I couldn't.

But I remember well getting ready to send our oldest daughter off to high school. As the firstborn I really wasn't sure she was ready for it. And I definitely was NOT ready for her to go into the wild unknown. But this same youth leader saw her potential. She knew Megan might flounder a bit at first but she believed in her enough to ask her to be the manager of the cheerleading squad and work alongside her. Not only did Megan do a great job, but she gained confidence and began to thrive as her own person. All because this leader cared enough to give her a chance.

Paul ends his book by giving the Thessalonians a laundry list of things we ought to keep in the forefront of our minds if we really desire to live and love as intentional Christ followers. He's encouraging these dear brothers and sisters, people he considered family, to look IN, and deal with their own stuff.

#### **4. Look IN**

*Verses 15-22 say "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."  
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15-22*

One of the most difficult things about parenting and even close friendship is the level at which you see yourself, in all your ugliness, more clearly. Family ought to be a safe place for us to grow and mature, even as adults. But it requires a posture of the heart that is humble and open to the hard work of growth. If we're coming into our roles lazy, naïve, or worse, hard-hearted we have work to do. We have to ask ourselves, "Do I really always seek to do good to others? Am I truly joyful, prayerful, and thankful in all circumstances? Am I listening for the voice of God's Spirit and responding? Am I open to God's Word and the words of trusted family and friends in my life? Am I honestly holding on tenaciously to what is good and not dancing with evil?"

These are hard questions. They require courage, honesty and humility to engage. But the reflection of Christ in our lives to our kids, our families, our friends, and the world will have a payoff for eternity.

I remember going through a particularly difficult time with one of our daughters in upper elementary school. She and I were sometimes like oil and water. I could only see what needed to be changed in her and I was having a hard time enjoying her.

It was conference time at school and I walked in armed and ready to talk with her teacher. I was convinced she was probably bossing others around in class or, in general, making the lives of her classmates and teacher miserable. Of course, I didn't verbalize all that to the teacher but I did ask about her attitude in general.

The reply I got set me back on my heels. "Oh," her teacher said, "she is an absolute delight. She has a real heart for helping others. She often helps her classmates that are struggling on her own and gets them to understand things in a new way. I wish I had more students like her."

Well, I don't remember for sure but I think my mouth must have gaped open for a very long time before I could even speak. But I respected that teacher and I took her words to heart. I decided to ask God to help me see her through His eyes. And He did! I had a lot of confessing to do and repenting before the Lord. But, in His grace, he changed my heart AND my eyes. She WAS helpful to others and she had a deep compassion for the underdog. She worked hard to include them and make them feel special and appreciated. And those qualities define her even today as an adult.

Each of our kids have been my teacher in some form over the years. Our oldest daughter has been a model of kindness for me. She listens intently to anyone and everyone she has the pleasure of spending time with. Our son has shown me how deep convictions and steadiness in the face of chaos can be an anchor for people.

Thankfully, my family is a safe place for me to look IN. It hasn't always felt like that but working hard at open communication and building and rebuilding trust has made it safe today. They make it easier for me to put aside my pride and look IN.

You may not have a safe family in which to do this kind of hard work but I'll bet you have a good friend or two who would tell you the truth if you're willing to hear it. That's what the family of God is all about and it's worth the effort to take a hard look IN.

**What Sue said is really true.** It gives hope to Sue and our kids when they see a husband and dad learning lessons and humbling myself and struggle to change my attitudes and behaviors. It's not pretty to see Dad wrestle with stuff, but it's real. By genuinely Looking IN, we show our family members how to grow and thrive and change.

When we got our **first dog**, a Cairn Terrier we named Haddy, we enrolled the family in what I called People Obedience School. The instructors called it Dog Obedience School. But it didn't take us long to realize that they were training us, not Haddy.

### **What about YOU**

That's what the New Testament is about. Jesus and Paul and others are taking us to People Obedience School for anyone who is in a family. If you're a kid, look at any Bible passage and it teaches you how to be an outstanding kid. If you're unmarried, you probably still have a family to contend with. Go to People Obedience School in the Bible. Grown adults, Parents, the same thing is true.

In reality there is very little special instruction in the Bible about how to be a better parent. There are precious few commands targeted just to parents or kids. If you're a properly trained Person in God's Obedience School, you'll certainly be a better mom, dad, sister, brother. You can't lose with this Strategy!

What's the Storm Strong Strategy again?

Look AHEAD. Look Up. Look AROUND. Look IN

What if it was more than just the parent's job to invest in our families with this strategy? What if Brothers and sisters would care for each other this way? What if kids treated their parents this way? Can you imagine how healthy and helpful our Connect Groups would be if we applied this simple strategy in our church family? Or in our youth groups?