

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. Our Topic today is Ignite your Family. This is part three of a special series called Ignite... where the goal is to get in your face with grace.
 1. *"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15, NKJV)*
- B. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
- C. Ignite your family. All of us have lived through some major changes in what comes to mind when we hear the word family. Just look at the evolution of family on TV shows.
 1. 1950s - Father Knows Best and I Love Lucy
 2. 1960s - Dick Van Dyke Show
 3. 1970s - All in the Family and Brady Bunch
 4. 1980s - Growing Pains
 5. 1990s - Full House and Fresh Prince
 6. 2000s - Seventh Heaven
 7. 2010s - Modern Family
- D. I know, I skipped a lot, don't email me. Some might see that trajectory as a downhill slide. I do know that ideas of family have changed radically since I was a kid. When I was a kid in school, every single kid in my Chicago Public School came from a home with a married father and mother. No divorces or single parents. I'm not criticizing, I'm just pointing out the the radical change.
- E. Yesterday's normal is today's unusual.
- F. Every one came from a family. It might have been healthy. It might have been dysfunctional. It might have been intact, or traditional. It might be new, or non-traditional.
- G. I want to talk about family. And I want to give you some real-world guidance to IGNITE your family in new ways with the grace of God.
- H. But first, I feel a more basic need as a pastor.
- I. And that is to explain why God created family in the first place, and what a family is designed to be. And then some real-world applications.

II. Family

- A. The Setting:
 1. *The setting for the family is life in a fallen world.*
 2. This is something most of us at Neighborhood know a little about. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.
 - a) It's broken by the Fall.
 - b) It's broken by evil and sin.
 - c) It's broken by a spiritual warfare that never goes away.
 - (1) *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. (1 John 5:19, NKJV)*
 - (a) And yes, there are good things that happen, it's not Mad Max all the time, and there's beauty and goodness all around... even so, this order of creation is cursed.
 3. That is why bad things happen and that is why people suffer, and bad people have done bad things to you, and you've done bad things to people. All day long, and all night long, the giant pain machine hates you and has a horrible plan for your life. It wants to chew you up and spit you out.
 4. So it's like there's this big bully on the playground, and you're stuck in the same playground all the time. That's the setting for this thing called family.
 5. God knew this. He saw it coming. So he has set up some protection for you. And not just for you, but for the whole world — believers and unbelievers in Jesus alike.
 6. So, picture four expanding circles of protection for the human race, stuck with the giant bully of the pain machine. Like four perimeter fences to protect the real you. We'll just lightly touch on three of them, because our focus is family.
- B. *The Four Circles of Protection*
 1. *The Individual*
 - a) At the center of the storm, is the eye. A place of calmness and poise and peace. This is the citadel of your heart. The inner world. The deepest you.
 - b) The rains and storms can howl around you, but a house built on the rock, Jesus said, stands firm.
 - c) That house is you. It is you being whatever you want to be. Nobody can get inside your brain, your heart, your mind, your will. They may compel your outsides, but inside is a citadel that nobody can storm unless you let them. This is your dominion. Your free will is your first line of defense and the first circle of protection. (Genesis 1:26-28)
 2. *Marriage*
 - a) Your marriage is your second line of defense. You have an ally against the bully. You have a helper, an encourager, a friend. You have someone to stand shoulder to shoulder with you against the bullies of the world. That is what

marriage is for, and that is what it is supposed to be. It doesn't always happen that way, but that's the plan. (Genesis 2:18) Marriage is the second circle of protection.

3. *Family*
 - a) Your family is your third line of defense. That's our focus, so I'll come back to it.
 - b) Family is the basic building block of the fourth circle of protection:
4. *Nation*
 - a) The nation-state is your fourth line of defense in a fallen world. You know how ships and submarines have airtight doors? That way if one compartment gets flooded the whole ship doesn't go down. That's the idea with nations. Nations are a kind of barrier so that if one nation gets flooded the whole world doesn't go down. It's why God has thwarted every one-world government since the Tower of Babel.
 - (1) Maybe one day I'll do a series on that. (Genesis 11:1-9, Romans 13:1-6)
 - b) The devil hates nations, and he hates families, and he hates marriages, and he hates individuals. Never forget there's a war going on, and you can run, but you can't hide... and all these things, by the way, are for the world. Not just for believers, but for everybody. There are special blessings that God puts into the lives of any person, in any religion, who honors individual freedom, honors marriage, honors family, and honors the honorable nation.
 - (1) So let's go back to family.
5. So, what I'm saying is simple.
 - a) *God designed the family to safeguard you as you become the individual you were meant to be.*
 - (1) Your family *shields* you, when you are vulnerable and weak, from the dangers of living in a fallen world. It doesn't always work that way, but that's the plan.
 - (2) Your family *loves* you. It is the first place where you learn what it means to create bonds. It flips on all the switches to enable you to form lasting relationships. To care about others and to care about yourself.
 - (3) Your family also *encourages* you. It helps you believe in yourself, but not in a secular, shallow, humanistic way. It helps you believe in yourself rising up to your high calling in Christ Jesus.
 - (4) Your family also *equips* you. It give you language skills, social skills, homemaking skills, logical and informational skills. It shows you how men relate to women and how to love and parent and share and serve one another. It shows you how to yield your preferences to another in the name of love.
 - (5) Your family *teaches you about God*. This happens through both teaching and example. Your family instills faith in you as a child. It lives out that faith in every day life. It talks about God and Scripture and truth, and reflects on the nature of life as a child of God in a fallen world.
 - (6) Your family *corrects* you. It delivers consequences for foolish behavior, designed to motivate healthy behavior.
 - (7) Your family *releases* you. It lets you go, and cheers you on. Because a man and a woman leave their father and mother, says Genesis. You move on.
 - b) You are a work in progress. Evil will interrupt the progress. Your family is there to shield you from the evil, so you can become who you were meant to become. So you can be what you dreamed you could be.
 - c) You're thinking, out of the seven, I got maybe 2.5. Or zero. Or even worse, you might say you got negative 7, because your family not only failed to protect you, they actually did harm.
 - d) That's painful to even think about, and our hearts ache every time we hear of this, even a little bit.
 - e) It can be devastating. Family of origin wounds can worm deep inside your heart, and mess with you in ways you hardly even see. So you feel damaged.
 - f) On the flip-side of this, you might be thinking—I'm a horrible parent and I've really messed up my family. So you feel guilty.
 - (1) The power of the gospel says that if you feel damaged, you are never damaged beyond repair,
 - (2) and if you feel guilty, you are never guilty beyond forgiveness.
 - g) That is the power of the grace we proclaim.

III. Scripture

- A. The Bible says:
 1. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (Ephesians 6:1, NKJV).*
 2. *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV).*
 3. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (Ephesians 5:25, NKJV).*
 4. *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22, NKJV).*
 5. *submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21, NKJV).*
 6. *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 6:5-7, NKJV).*
- B. God entrusted your spouse to you, and your children to you. And the best you can do, over and over again, is to point them to God and his Word... by your teaching and your example.
- C. So I want to give you nine suggestions on how to do that better.

IV. Here are my *Top Nine Guidelines for a Healthy Family*:

- A. 1. *Put God First (and keep him there).*
 1. First in your affection, first in your time. Love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
 2. If we can do this, we've won the battle.
 3. Somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of Americans go to church. Half of those go more than twice a month, so a quarter.
 - a) Soccer is not your God. The trails are not your God. The lakes and rivers are not your God. Football is not your God.
 4. Every weekend, you have a choice to make. And if you really want to see God's hand of blessing on your family then you will LEAD THEM SPIRITUALLY TO KEEP GOD FIRST.
- B. 2. *Grow Along the Grace Pathway.*
 1. God saves you, God blesses you, God grows you, God uses you. This is your life. This is your sanctification. This is your holiness. This your walk with the Lord.
 2. This is your every day with Jesus, walking on the King's highway.
 3. As a pastor, the big problem I've seen over and over again is God's own people switching on and off and on and off with God.
 4. Mom and dad, keep growing in grace, keep growing along the Grace Pathway.
- C. 3. *Honor God's Word, the Bible.*
 1. God has promised a special blessing to any person, any single, any couple, and any family that makes God's Word important.
 - a) *He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalms 1:3, NKJV).*
 2. If you want your family to prosper emotionally, spiritually, and financially make the Bible a central part of your life.
 3. And we have a brand new, special tool to help you with this: I am very proud of it. I am proud to introduce for the first time ever our very own: *Ignite Devotional Book*.
 4. This book was written by the staff of Neighborhood Church. Pastors. Youth and Children's ministries. Admin. Care ministries. Small groups. All our departments participated. Over 20 authors.
 5. There are 144 short devotionals in here. That's enough for 4 per week. Each one has a Bible verse, a short meditation, and a suggestion for prayer.
 6. Here's my encouragement to you: single, married, empty nest, grandparents, everybody.
 7. Use this to do at least one, but hopefully two devotionals each week as a family.
 8. Make dinner together, sit together, and have one person read a devotional. When we have dinner together, Margi sets a really nice table. We have candles, and we light them and eat by candlelight. Simple, but it makes it special.
 9. The devotionals are organized by month, and the book starts with October. Pick one from that month, and just go through it.
 10. A couple of families have already been using this, and here's what they say.
 - a) "My family has enjoyed the simplicity and brevity of the IGNITE devotionals. We take a few minutes at the dinner table to read one of the entries... My family has enjoyed the stories shared by the Neighborhood staff which beautifully pave the way for further conversation on the topic presented."
 - b) "We just did some of the devotionals last night. We had some friends over for dinner and we all took turns reading one of the devotionals as we enjoyed our meal outside. The first thing everyone wanted to do was go to the end to see who wrote it and then proceeded to read the devotional. The kids really liked hearing the personal stories..."Mr. DeWitt really ran 100 yards in 10.64 seconds?" We had to limit each person to read just one. I think we could have sat outside and read the whole book!"
 11. Each devotional has a really brief suggestion for prayer, and there you go. It's written with family in mind, and you can pick one up today in the lobby for \$6, while supplies last. (It is also available on Amazon.com for \$9.99)
- D. 4. *Fix What's Broken.*
 1. There are some parents who bring needless drama into the family. They create chaos. They cause pain to their children, and don't even notice. Or if they notice they don't care.
 2. If your family is walking on eggshells, if they never know when you're going to explode, if they have to gauge your mood... then that's a huge problem and you're hurting your family.
 - a) Your addictions and dysfunction are hurting your family.
 - b) Your Inner Brat is hurting your family.
 - c) Your Inner Victim is hurting your family.
 - d) Your Inner Thug is hurting your family.
 - e) Your Inner Pervert is hurting your family.
 - f) Your Inner Gollum is hurting your family.
 3. You have to work on unresolved issues, or a root of bitterness with spoil the love in your family.
 4. And you can. You can rise above these things. You have the power of Jesus Christ. You have the fellowship of God's people. We are with you in this. Rise above.

E. 5. Mom and Dad, Love Each Other.

1. The best thing a Dad can give his kids, is that he loves their mother. The best thing a mom can give her kids is that she loves their Father.
2. Now, I know, it's not a perfect world, and that's already not going to happen in a lot of families.
3. But if it can happen in your family, then let's do it.
 - a) Love. Kind words. Affection. Touching. Hugging. I love you's. Kisses.
4. And let me add that even if your children are grown, or your family is broken, it's never too late to bring healing to your diseased branch of the family tree.
5. This may require counseling, or Stephen ministry.
6. If you're divorced and your partner has been remarried... if you can make it peaceful do it, for your children's sake.
7. When my mom and dad got divorced, it was horribly painful. But one thing I can say is that my parents never said anything bad about each other.
8. If you're still married, then love each other.
9. If you're living together and not married, then love each other enough, and love your kids enough, to make it permanent. I lovingly say to get married.

F. 6. Serve God Together.

1. God saves you, blesses you, grows you, and then God uses you. You can let him use your whole family together!
2. God Uses You (yellow icon) is part of that lifestyle. One of the coolest things that happens at Neighborhood is when whole families come and serve God together. You can do that...
 - a) There's a table in the lobby with a Family Serve sign... go find out the many ways you can come here once a month, as a family, and serve God together.

G. 7. Kindness Rules: Make Your Family a Refuge from Life's Cruelty.

1. You send your kids to school every day, or you go to work, or you work in the home, or you go to school... whatever you do, it's a giant pain machine.
2. Mom and Dad, your language matters. If you're a constant critic, sniping at everybody, your kids will pick that up. They'll not only be critical, but they'll learn to keep their shields up. They'll be emotionally closed.
3. Watch your mouth. Discourage criticism in the family.
4. Use your words to build up, not to tear down.
5. Remember, *God designed the family to safeguard you as you become the individual you were meant to be and for your kids to become that too.*
6. Make your home a refuge from the cruelty, a refuge from the insanity, a refuge from name calling, teasing, arguments, shouting, sarcasm, and selfishness.
7. The world is hard. Don't talk down your husband, your wife, or your kids in public (Facebook is public, in case you didn't know).
8. Make your home a refuge.

H. 8. Blunder Forward.

1. I'm saying this because it means that we're not perfect. I'm a husband and dad, and I'm not perfect. My wife and kids aren't perfect.
2. We have to make room for this in our lives as a family. Do you know why?
3. Because kids can spot spiritual hypocrisy a from hundred miles away.
4. Do not put on the spiritual Christian fake happy face, and expect that your kids will be unaffected.
5. Kids are turning away from the church in large numbers. I don't think it's the church's fault mainly. Sometimes, but not mainly.
6. My suspicion, and this is the Ignite series where I get a little tough with you... my suspicion is that the kids' reality detectors told them that Christianity wasn't all that real in mom and dad's life.
7. There I said it.
8. God help us.
9. Be real. Be honest that you have struggles, but don't reveal those struggles to your kids because they can't cope with them. Be as real as you can, without going into details, and without creating uncertainty in your kid's lives.

I. 9. Let Them Go.

1. Not when they're 18, I mean now. Let them go. Let your kids go, your husband go, your wife go... They are not extensions of you. They are their own people. They belong to God. Hand them into his care. Trust him to be a father to the fatherless.
2. And have your own life. Be the individual God designed you to be, and let your kids and spouse see you do that, with their help and blessing.

V. Ignite Wake Up Call

1. *"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15, NKJV)*