

WHY
CHILDREN
MATTER

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PART ONE

WHY
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CHAPTER 1

THE DEFINITION OF FAMILY

The family is a divinely ordained community. The institution of the family—consisting of one man, one woman, and their children—was created by God, not by people. It is not an arbitrary collection of individuals, and it is not something that mere creatures get to define.

Congress can no more vote on what the family is than they can vote on whether gravity exists or not. It is possible Congress could decree that water flow uphill, but no matter how hard

they vote, they cannot change what God has previously done. Similarly, if Congress voted to repeal the law of gravity, and some people decided to jump off a cliff or a skyscraper, the people jumping might have a sensation of liberty for a moment—*we're flying!*—but nothing would change the reality of what gravity is and does. In the same way, even if the Supreme Court outlawed marriage, while it could destroy a lot of people's lives, it would not destroy the reality of marriage itself. Marriage was established by God at the very beginning of the world. It is not going anywhere any time soon.

Since the family was not invented by us in the first place, we do not get to *reinvent* it. For this reason, parents must beware of treating the family as something cobbled together and managed with techniques developed by experts. So you should not begin this small book by thinking that it is a collection of clever techniques for getting the perfect family. Each person in the family is a being made in the image of God, and if we are to manage the family properly, we must heed God's Word as our first and most important guide. That includes treating all the people

in the family as though they were *people*, not place-holding counters.

When someone talks about family or childrearing or other practical matters, it is easy for Americans to start wishing for books with titles like *Three Steps to . . .* or *Twelve Steps to . . .* or *Secrets of . . .* etc. But this book is not an exercise in therapeutic self-help—it is nothing less than a proclamation of the gospel as embodied in family life. If you are looking at your family and you are not seeing gospel principles, then you are looking at your family with your eyes shut.

Young parents in particular should come to the Scriptures with a hunger for instruction on how to perform this task, especially those who did not have a good example from their own parents. Parents can give their children something that their own parents did not give them, because our God breaks cycles of sin. Even if you did not have a great parental model for being a godly father or mother, you are not limited to imitating people who are right there next to you. Learning by imitation is a great blessing and help, but the Bible teaches us that we can imitate others from what has been written down as well, whether from biographies or from

examples in Scripture itself. God is the God of new beginnings, and He blesses to a thousand generations. When God says He visits iniquity to three and four generations, that is not a dire threat, but an act of mercy. This is because God is *limiting* the cascading effects of sin.

The title of this small book is *Why Children Matter*, but I should probably expand it to *Why Children Matter to All of Us*. The gospel principles described here have application everywhere, but particularly in the family when you are bringing up children. Moreover, if you are reading this and think you have nothing to do with children, I would encourage you to pay close attention anyway: when I was single and in the Navy, home ported out of Norfolk, I attended Tabernacle Church. It was a great church, and they had a thriving Christian school associated with it. If I had known that within a few years I would be in the midst of trying to start a Christian school, I would have paid much closer attention to what was going on in that school, because it turned out, there was a lot for me to learn. Even if you are a very young man and still trying to figure out her father's phone number, you should pay attention. As a

matter of fact, if you are trying to get her father's number, you are far down the road we are talking about.

CHAPTER 2

BE MIMICS OF GOD

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

EPHESIANS 5:1 ESV

Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to be imitators of God. I chose the English Standard Version here because the King James Version has “be *followers* of God,” but the Greek word for “followers” is actually where we get the words “mimesis” and “mimetic.” Paul is telling us to mimic, to *copy*, God. We are God’s beloved children, and we are to look to Him as children look to their father.

God has created us to be reflective and imitative creatures. We imitate instinctively and naturally. Not only do we imitate those who are shoulder-to-shoulder with us, such as our friends, colleagues, co-workers, and family members, but we also pick up many things from those above us. We learn how to walk and talk from our parents, but the fundamental imitation the Bible calls us to is imitation of the One we worship.

Idolaters become like what they worship. Psalm 115:4–8 says that the idolaters worship statues that have eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, noses that do not smell, and then caps it all off by saying that “they that make them are like unto them.” If you worship something that is deaf, dumb, and blind, then you are going to become deaf, dumb, and blind yourself. If your god is stone cold, you are going to become stone cold. If your god is ultimately impersonal, this will result in you becoming less and less personlike.

Worshippers of the true God also become like what they worship, as Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are

changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The God we worship is the sun that shines on us; we are the moon and we reflect Him. As we face God in worship, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another, and as we are transformed, we too wish to pass that glory on to our children.

There are few places where the ramifications of this principle of imitation are as important as in childrearing. Imitation is absolutely crucial for childrearing. You do not want your children imitating you unless you are imitating God. If you are not imitating and pursuing God, sincerely and openly beholding His face in worship weekly, being transformed from one degree of glory to another, then the last thing you should want is for your children to imitate you. However, the bad news is that your children will copy you regardless of whether you want them to or not. When your child is born, you might cast around for an instruction manual. You may feel as if you have no idea what you are doing. However, there is a false premise in the worry—you *do* have a Bible. You must worship God, imitate Him, and ask Him to walk with you as you take up the challenge of being a parent.