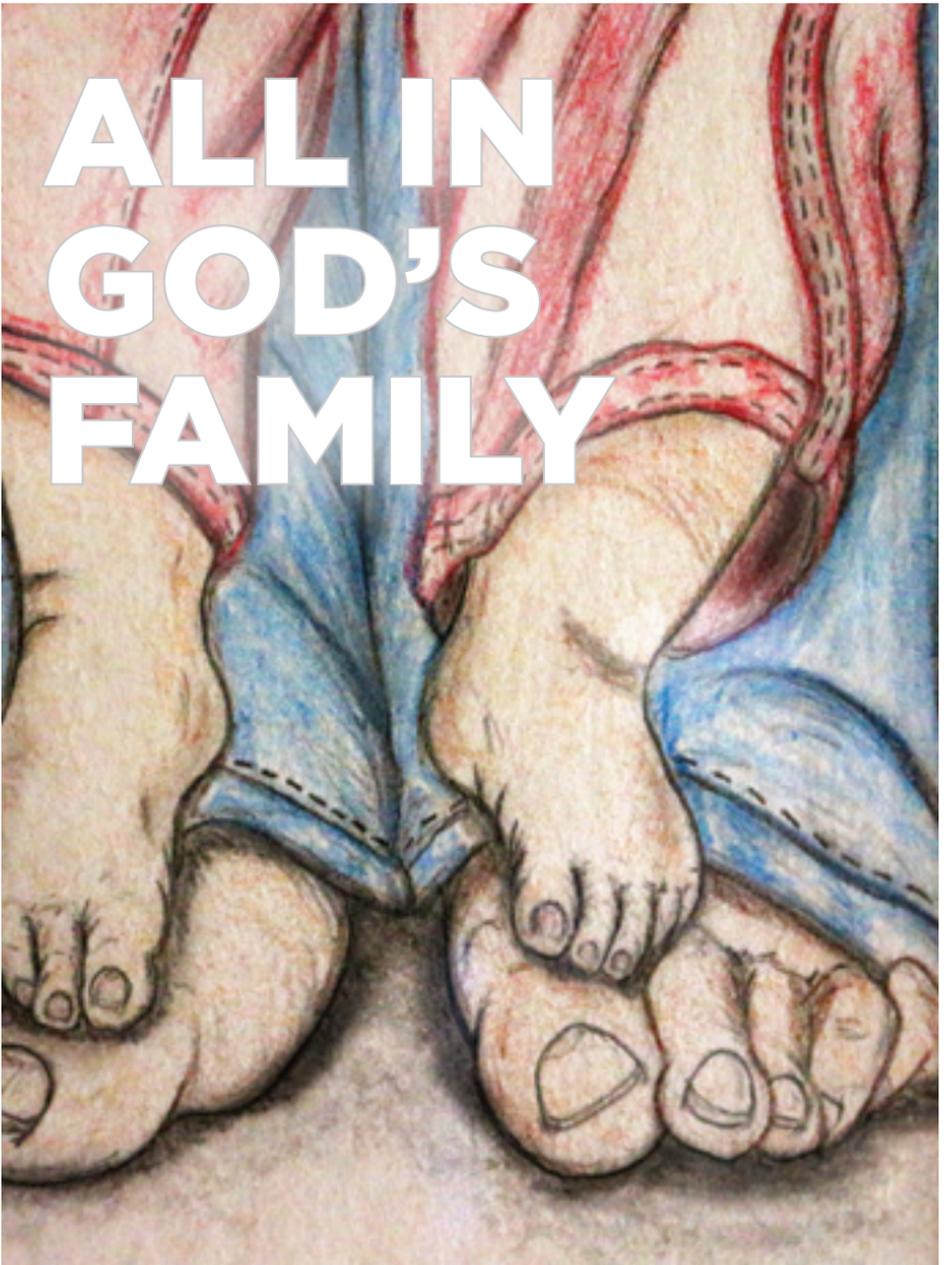


ALL IN GOD'S FAMILY



Cover artwork by Richard M., former Crossroads student

LESSON 1

Trust God's Plan



CROSSROADS

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INTRODUCTION

Jessica sat in the waiting room at her doctor's office. Her husband, Michael, waited by her side. The couple hoped the doctor would confirm what the at-home pregnancy test had already told them: Jessica was pregnant with their first child!

As they waited, Jessica flipped through a magazine. After a while, she set the magazine aside, rested her hands on her belly and wondered to herself, "Is there any hope for our family and this little one growing inside?"

Michael noticed the change in his wife's demeanor and asked, "Everything okay?"

"Yes," she replied. "I just get discouraged when I read about families today. It seems as if every article in this magazine highlights broken or struggling marriages, strained family relationships, destructive habits, unwanted pregnancies, rebellious children or homes in disarray. It's as if someone dropped a bomb on families, and we are all trying to survive in the aftermath."

You've surely witnessed brokenness in marriages and families around you. Or maybe the devastation hits closer to home: Your marriage has failed. Your father or mother left when you were young. Your sister hasn't spoken to you in years. Your childhood memories are polluted by abuse, addiction or violence. Your children have been getting into trouble at home or school, and you wonder what will happen if their bad behavior continues to escalate.

As much as we would like to believe otherwise, Christians are not immune to the problems plaguing today's family. No individual, family or home is untouched by sin and brokenness. We all need Christ. And only through Him do we have hope for a fresh start!

Families matter to God. He wants your family to succeed and thrive. Hopefully your family matters to you, too!

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course emphasizes doing family God's way, trusting His perfect plan and making Jesus Christ the foundation of your home. There are ten lessons in this course, and each contains an important principle for doing family God's way. The following are the principles we will be studying together:

Lesson 1: Trust God's Plan

Lesson 2: Husbands, Love Your Wives

Lesson 3: Wives, Respect Your Husbands

Lesson 4: Make Your Home a House of Prayer

Lesson 5: Make Your Home a Safety Zone

Lesson 6: Speak the Truth in Love

Lesson 7: Weep with Those Who Weep

Lesson 8: Create Order in Your House

Lesson 9: Parents, Disciple Your Children

Lesson 10: Build a Quality Home

Whether you are single, married, divorced, separated, remarried or widowed, whether you are a parent or childless, whether you are young or old, this course has applications for your life. People from every stage of life will find relevant wisdom, guidance and biblical truths about doing family—and relationships in general—God's way.

By sharing ten important principles with you, this course will help you achieve biblical normalcy in your family and show you that it is possible to have healthy and successful relationships.

Since the Bible passages used in this course were taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), the material, particularly the fill-in-the-blank questions, will be most easily completed if you use an NIV Bible. If you do not have a copy of the NIV, your introductory packet explains how to get one.

- I will be using the NIV to complete this course.
- I will be using a different translation of the Bible to complete this course. (Write the name of the translation you will be using here: _____)

A BLEAK PROGNOSIS

The current prognosis for today's family is grim. It is no wonder some lose hope and dismiss the family as doomed.

1. Read Romans 3:10–19. On a scale of one to ten, how hopeful are you about the future of your family? Make an “X” on the line below and then explain your answer.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10
We're doomed! I'm hopeful!

The problems facing families today are no different from those that have threatened families in the past. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us of this.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 1:9 and fill in the blanks.

What has been will be _____, what has been done will be done _____; there is _____ under the sun.

God's people have a long history of getting wrapped up in cycles of failure and despair, but God has an equally long history of rescuing His people from those cycles. We can take comfort that, in Christ, God provides a way out of our patterns of sin.

By digging into Scripture, we will discover God's beautiful design and intention for the family. We will recognize that we are not alone in our struggles—there are no perfect families. And finally, we will learn how, in Christ, we can have a fresh start. There is hope for our families when we do things God's way! This is the first principle for success in the family.

PRINCIPLE #1: TRUST GOD'S PLAN

WHAT IS A “NORMAL” FAMILY?

If you were to conduct a poll of random people on the street, asking them to define *family*, you would probably hear a whole range of definitions.

3. How would you define the word *family*?

Traditionally, we have defined a family as the basic unit of society, a unit that usually consists of a mother, a father and their children. But there are other, broader definitions that cover the wide spectrum of today's family situations. A family could also be defined as a group of people who all live in the same house and who share resources.

4. After reading these two definitions, which one would you say describes your family? Why?

The following is a scenario that illustrates how we all have different definitions of family and of what is normal:

A high school teacher was excited to have visitors in his classroom one day. His out-of-town parents were visiting him for the first time since he had graduated from college and begun this new teaching assignment.

The school bell rang, and the students gradually took their seats. After calling the classroom to order, the teacher greeted the students and eagerly introduced his parents to them.

After the introductions were made, an obviously confused student from the back row of the classroom raised his hand. “Hey! You all have the same last name!” he said. “What’s up with that?”

That young student had never experienced a “normal” family: parents who stay together, who have and raise children together, who grow old together—and who share the same last name!

We often use *normal* to refer to something ordinary, typical or usual. For example, you would use the word *normal* to describe your condition to a doctor when explaining how you felt before you became sick: “Doctor, I felt normal yesterday, but overnight I began feeling so miserable.”

However, the word *normal* actually refers to that which conforms to the norm. A *norm* is a law, standard or pattern derived from a higher source. Therefore, something is normal when it is in accordance with a divinely revealed norm or standard. For Christians, the standard to which we conform our lives is not society’s standard but God’s standard.

5. Read Romans 12:2 and fill in the blanks.

Do not _____ to the _____ of this world, but be _____ by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be

able to test and _____ what God's will is—his good, pleasing and _____ will.

6. Read Psalm 19:7 and fill in the blanks.

The _____ of the LORD is _____, refreshing the soul. The _____ of the LORD are _____, making wise the simple.

A normal family structures itself and functions according to God's norms, as explained in Scripture. Families that align themselves with God's perfect plan in the Bible will be on the way to achieving a sense of normalcy.

WE WERE NOT MEANT TO BE ALONE

In the beginning God created *everything*—including the family. And the Bible tells us that everything God created was very good.

Right at the start, the Bible introduces two fundamental truths. First, God created humankind in His image, or likeness. And second, God intended us to live in relationship with one another.

7. Read Genesis 1:27. In your own words, explain what it means that each of us (male, female, young, old, single, married) represent God as His image bearers.

8. How would applying this foundational truth in your life change the way you treat the members of your family?

9. Read Genesis 2:18. Then mark the following statements either **true** (T) or **false** (F).

- _____ God didn't think it was terrible for Adam to live alone. The only reason God created Eve was so that she could bear Adam's children.
- _____ God said it was not good for Adam to be alone; He created Eve as a suitable helper for Adam.

God did not intend for us to live alone. Right from the start, God designed people to live together as social beings—helping and supporting one another through life. John Donne, a famous Christian poet from the seventeenth century, understood this when he wrote the well-known line “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”

10. How does knowing that God designed us to live for more than just ourselves change the way you view the people God brings into your life?

Optional verses for **in-depth** study:

Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:2–3; Philippians 2:4–5

When God created Eve as a helper for Adam, He knew exactly what attributes this helpmate would need to have because He is the perfect helper.

11. Psalm 27 identifies some qualities of God our helper. Circle the **four** correct answers.

- A. God is our stronghold; we do not have to fear our enemies (verses 1–3).
- B. God provides a safe place for us in times of trouble (verses 4–5).
- C. God hears us and listens when we call to Him (verse 7).
- D. God turns His face away from us when we make Him angry (verse 9).
- E. God never rejects or forsakes us, even when others do (verses 9–10).
- F. God betrays us and turns us over to our enemies (verse 12).

Because God is the perfect helper, we can fully depend on Him, confident that He will never leave us or forsake us. Now God calls us to be helpmates to one another in our marriages, and in our broader families.

12. How can you apply these qualities of a helpmate in your marriage or other relationships (inside or outside of your family)?

Eve was the perfect companion for Adam. The two complemented each other in every possible way.

13. According to Ecclesiastes 4:7–12, what are the benefits of having a close companion?

14. Who is your closest companion and why?

THE FIRST FAMILY

The early chapters of Genesis describe the development of the first family. God is the author of the family unit and intended for it to thrive. As He continued to give shape and structure to the family, God gave Adam and Eve an important assignment.

15. Read Genesis 2:23–24. What does this passage teach us about God’s intent for marriage?

16. In Genesis 1:28, God blessed Adam and Eve as a couple and gave them a specific command. Read the verse and fill in the blanks.

“Be _____ and increase in _____; fill the _____ and subdue it.”

A few chapters further into Genesis, we will discover that Adam and Eve did just that—they had children, and their family grew (Genesis 4:1–2). But you may be thinking to yourself at this point, “Sure, thriving as a couple was easy for Adam and Eve in the garden because they loved God and each other perfectly. They didn’t have defiant children or family issues to fight about in their perfect world.”

And you would be right.

Things were quite enjoyable for Adam and Eve in the garden at first. They had no questionable past to hide or embarrassing mistakes to cover up. They had no inhibitions when they were together, and they didn’t fight. They were able to thrive as God intended!

17. Read Genesis 2:25. What does this verse suggest about Adam and Eve’s relationship in the garden?

Now recall the crucial event that comes next in our history: humankind’s fall into sin. It did not take long for the effects of sin to take root, drastically changing the dynamics between Adam and Eve and their growing family.

18. Read Genesis 4:1–26. What were the names of Adam and Eve’s sons? Circle the **three** correct answers.

- A. Abel
- B. Eden
- C. Cain
- D. Seth
- E. Enoch

19. Describe the condition of Adam and Eve’s marriage and family after the Fall. (Refer to the events of Genesis 3 and 4.)

In the sin-stained, broken world that resulted from the Fall, doing family God’s way is much more challenging. But the pattern God set in place from the beginning remains His desire for us and our families today, even though following His plan is not always easy.

NO FAMILY IS PERFECT

Adam, Eve and their children were not perfect. In fact, there is no such thing as a perfect family. If you searched through all of history, you would never find the perfect husband or wife, the perfect parent, the perfect children, the perfect family. There is nothing untouched by sin.

20. When you hear the word *family*, what words or images (positive or negative) come to mind?

One man in the Bible was described as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). You would think that such a man surely had the perfect family. However, this man (King David) and his family were far from perfect. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel relay many shocking stories about David and his family. These stories shaped David’s life, for better or worse.

Many of David's relationships were fueled by competition, jealousy and trickery. For example, take King Saul, who tried to kill David on more than one occasion, or David's own son, who tried for years to overthrow him.

Lust, immorality and murder consumed David's family. Recall David's affair with Bathsheba, which led to the murder of Bathsheba's husband; recall the time David's daughter was raped by her own brother, which led to a different brother murdering the one who committed the sexual crime.

Talk about a messed-up family! Sin and brokenness tarnished even the family of a man after God's own heart.

21. Amidst all this family chaos, God gave David a remarkable promise when he became King of Israel. Read 2 Samuel 7 and fill in the blanks.

Verse 9: *I have been with you _____ you have gone . . .*

Verse 11: *. . . the LORD himself will _____ a house for you.*

Verse 15: *But my love will _____ be taken away from him . . .*

Verse 16: *Your _____ and your kingdom will endure forever
before me . . .*

Maybe you find yourself relating well to David's story. Maybe your family tree bears signs of hurt and brokenness. Know that God's promise to David is also for you!

22. Describe the hope you have knowing that God promises these things for you, too.

One thousand years after King David, an important genealogy recorded his connection to another man after God's own heart—Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

23. Read Matthew 1:1 and fill in the blank.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of _____ . . .

In His amazing grace and mercy, God chose to use David and his descendants, despite their sin and evil ways, to carry on the line of Christ!

24. What does this story teach you about God and His perfect plan for your life?

25. Reflect on your current family situation and what you have been through. Identify two times in your life when God worked in incredible ways to carry you through difficult times.

a.

b.

A NEW START

Regardless of your past and what family baggage you carry, there is hope for redeeming your family life through the power of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:23–24 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

In Christ, God forgives, God heals and God makes new.

With God’s help, you can turn from the sinful patterns set by fathers or mothers who perhaps failed at family life themselves. You can have a fresh start through faith and do family God’s way.

26. Read Deuteronomy 4:29–31. How will God respond to those who wholeheartedly return to Him?

27. Read Jeremiah 29:11 and fill in the blanks.

*“For I know the _____ I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to _____ you and not to harm you, plans to give you
_____ and a _____.”*

28. Refer back to your answer to the first question of this lesson. Do you want to change your answer now that you have gained additional understanding? Please explain.

29. What do you want to change in regard to how you view your role as a husband, wife, parent or child?

30. Write a prayer of commitment for yourself or your family as you make a new start at doing family God's way and trusting His perfect plan.

CORE TRUTHS FROM LESSON 1

- God's intention is for the family to thrive.
- A thriving family follows God's perfect plan.
- God created us to live in relationship with one another.
- There's no such thing as a perfect family, but families can be redeemed through Christ Jesus.

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