



# Being Christian at Home

---

*“God is the first object of our love. Its next office is to bear the defects of others. And we should begin the practice of this amidst our own households.”*

*John Wesley*

## Laying the Foundation

Being Christian is a full time commitment—everyday, everywhere, with everyone. There are no exceptions. Jesus offers no plan for partial discipleship, no affirmation of a watered-down faith, no description of areas of life that do not come under His lordship. There is no such thing as a casual follower or a part-time disciple of Jesus. At one point in Jesus' ministry, there were large crowds who traveled with Him. They were intrigued by His power, eloquence and compassion. One day, Jesus stopped, turned to them and said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay a foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' . . . In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples" (Luke 14:28-30, 33, TNIV). To be Christian is to follow Jesus wherever He leads us to whatever He leads us for as long as He leads us. No exceptions!

If there are no exceptions, then why do many Christians limit their faith and segregate their discipleship to things associated with "church?" By this, I mean those things that are scheduled, organized and run by the church and her leaders. Sunday worship services, church fellowship times, church-sponsored mission and service activities, and church-led small groups and Bible studies would fit into this category. Many of these activities take place within the four walls of the church (literally and/or figuratively). If we participated in all these programmed activities we could be engaged in "church-sponsored discipleship" anywhere from four to eight hours each week (a little less for some and a little more for others). What about the hundred or so other waking hours available to us every seven days? If following Jesus is a



full-time commitment everyday, everywhere, with everyone, then how do we follow Him when we're not at church?

### Reflect on this...

*Why do you think some Christians segregate their lives into specific arenas of the sacred (church, prayer, the Bible) and the secular or ordinary (home, work, play)?*

*How might you answer someone who says that going to church for an hour or two a week (which is more than many people) is all that God really requires to be "spiritual?"*

## Being Christian at Home

Our homes, the context of our everyday family relationships and activities, provide the most significant opportunities and the greatest challenges to Christian discipleship. The challenges come because it is the place where we are most likely to be our true selves, where our speech is less guarded and our actions and reactions more impulsive, where our emotions are most frayed after "holding it together" at church or at work. Because the most intimate relationships usually are those between spouses, parents and children, they are also the most susceptible to conflict. As wonderful as the idea of home may seem, being Christian at home isn't as easy one might imagine.

But because the challenges are great, home also provides significant opportunities to discover the depths of unconditional love, to explore patterns of speech that build up rather than tear down, to experience forgiveness and forgiving, to learn the virtues of respect, integrity, generosity, and mercy, and to develop the disciplines of a balanced life.

## Biblical Background

Both the Old and New Testaments offer specific instructions to families. Integrated throughout the Old Testament laws are instructions for extended families, husbands and wives, parents and children. Proverbs, a collection of practical wisdom, offers many sensible insights into living together in peace at home. Perhaps the most direct instructions offered in Scripture are those given in the “household codes” of some of the Epistles in the New Testament (the most prominent in Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Household codes like those included in Paul’s and Peter’s letters were common in other religious literature of the first century. Instructions for family life as a part of the social expectations were not unusual at all. What is different about the New Testament household codes is their audience and their purpose. In the Greek and Roman versions of the code only husbands and masters are addressed. It is their responsibility to run their households in such a way as to protect the established social order, guarding the *status quo*.

In the New Testament codes, the intended audience includes everyone in the household: husbands, wives, parents, children, masters and servants. All were expected to contribute to the spiritual, social and economic wellbeing of the household. Further, and perhaps even more important, the reason Christian families were to live responsibly was not to protect the established order. On the contrary, they were to represent a new social order in which Jesus was the Lord of all, including their homes. Christian families in the

first century were examples of what marriages, families and households were like when they “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15). Christian families in the first century were supposed to stand out from the *status quo* because they represented something and someone beyond themselves. They were living witnesses to a different way of living together at home.

### Reflect on this...

*Do you feel a sense of confidence in your knowledge of what the Bible says about having faith at home? Why or why not?*

*Would following the biblical instruction for households be as revolutionary (shaking up the status quo) in the 21st century as it was in the first century? What about the instruction might cause a “social stir” today?*

Strong marriages, families, and households could be one of the most prominent signs of a new way of living, under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

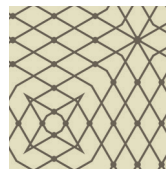
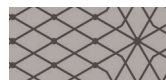
## Christian Homes in the 21st Century

Much has changed in the last twenty centuries. But the character and purpose of the Christian home hasn't. The need for Christians to provide examples of another reality, another way of being a family is as greater (or greater) now than it was in the eras when much of the Bible was written.

In the midst of increasing divorce rates, many children without significant parental role models, decreasing intentional times of family conversation or meal functions—the list could go on—the need for families who reflect the potential spiritual and social vitality of which Christian families are capable is crucial. Strong marriages, families, and households could be one of the most prominent signs of a new way of living, under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

So what characterizes this new way of living and being Christian at home?

- *Marital fidelity.* Christian marriages are characterized by husbands and wives who model the faithfulness between Christ and the church by their faithfulness to one another physically, spiritually, and emotionally (Ephesians 5:22-33). The rate of divorce among Christians may not be as high as the general population, but it is close enough to cloud the reflection of the glory of Jesus Christ (and His bride, the Church) in our homes.
- *Godly speech.* Godly speech is more than just telling the truth. It is telling the truth in love with the purpose of building up rather than tearing down. Learning words of blessing rather than cursing, words of constructive discipline rather than destructive punishment, words of hope rather than despair, words of forgiveness rather than judgment, words of unconditional love rather than hate, words that breathe life rather than pronounce death can be some of the most valuable gifts a spouse or parent can give.
- *Attitudes and acts of generosity and mercy.* The Christian home can be one of the fertile fields for planting, watering, and harvesting the fruits of generosity and mercy. There are a few things more powerful in shaping a generous spirit as a reflection of Christ than observing a parent and/or significant adult role model consistently practicing generosity and mercy to others.



- *Fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22-23). If we were to “cut into” the character of a Christian home, no matter where we chose to take a slice, we should find love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the DNA of Christian character, and especially the character of the Christian home, one of the primary crucibles in which personal character is nurtured. ●

### Reflect on this...

*What are some of other reasons why being Christian at home is such a challenge?*

*Which of these characteristics of the contemporary Christian home is most evident in your own home? Which do you think you need some work?*

## NOTES

