

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 16 – Issue 1

Spring Edition

## The Essentials of a Strong Family.

According to the 2000 US Census Bureau figures, the traditional family is in grave trouble. Since the 1990 census the numbers of families with a husband and wife have fallen by 3.8 million households, while the number of unmarried couples rose by 71%. The figures make it clear that many today believe that marriage is unnecessary for family life. People's actions indicate that they believe that it is easier to live together than to make a commitment to one person for life. If this trend continues the complete demise of the two-parent family is a real possibility.

As Christians, what can we do about these facts? How can you have a strong family and not fall prey to these statistics? Do you have the essential qualities that make up a strong family? Does the Bible teach us anything about how to have a strong family? Yes. Let me give you three building blocks from God's Word that are absolutely necessary for a strong family.

**1. Be a strong Christian.** If you want a strong family then you must start with yourself by becoming a strong Christian. A family will only be as strong as the individual Christians within it. If you have only a superficial relationship with Christ, you cannot expect to receive the strength of God you will need in order to give to your spouse or children. Jesus said, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). Jesus made it clear that He must be at the center of our lives in order for anything good or lasting to result.

Therefore, you must begin with the most important building block of a strong family by simply becoming a strong Christian. A strong Christian life is one that is filled with the Holy Spirit whose presence will produce the character and love of Christ in you. If you try to manufacture love, kindness, and compassion, your spouse and children will see through your façade. You must experience the genuine work of God's redeeming grace within or His strength will elude you! This is exactly what Paul told his young friend Timothy. He explained to him how he could become a strong Christian. "*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tim. 2:1). Paul knew that apart from God's grace at work in Timothy he could not stand strong in the hardships he would encounter.

The same is true for your marriage. There are many difficult issues that must be dealt with in any marriage. You have different personalities, different communication skills, selfishness, issues with anger, likes and dislikes of every sort, and different abilities with controlling your emotions to name just a few. But, grace is what allows a person to experience the power of the Spirit to overcome and conquer such issues. Paul believed that anyone could find God's strength by opening themselves up to His power and grace. He taught the Ephesian church, "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*" (Eph. 6:10). So, being filled with the Holy Spirit is where the greatest inner strength is found. His Spirit living in you is what makes transformation possible in your life. He will make you a man or a woman of character and one that can love and give in ways to make

your marriage a joy and not drudgery.

In addition, the strength you are looking for will be revealed in God's Word. John said, "*I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one*" (1 John 2:14). How does the knowledge of the Word of God make you strong? The truth of His Word will always lead you away from self-effort and into a greater reliance upon the Lord. As you depend more on Christ you will naturally become stronger. Therefore, don't expect to know God's grace and see His power apart from allowing Him to teach you in His Word.



***Build a strong family!***

If you want a strong family, then begin with strengthening your own personal relationship with the Lord. How can you do this? Begin by opening up His Word daily and allow Him to teach you His truth. As you study His Word God will show you how to overcome the personal struggles that divide you and your spouse. As you are transformed you will become a source of stability in your family.

**"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14**

If you have not yet surrendered yourself to Christ, this is the first step toward becoming a strong individual that will bring strength to your family. The Apostle John told us where to start: *“As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name”* (John 1:12). This means that you must personally receive Christ before you can begin to experience His strengthening power in your life. Paul told the people how they could receive Christ. He said, *“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom. 10:9-13). Therefore, call upon the name of the Lord right now. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and invite Christ to live inside you. Choose to turn away from your sinful lifestyle and begin to follow Christ with all your heart. Find a Bible teaching church and begin attending so you can learn more about how to follow Him. This is how you and your family will begin to see the strength of the Lord in your life. If you have made this commitment of your life to Christ, please email me today at [scarrck@lightspeed.net](mailto:scarrck@lightspeed.net) and I will send you a new believer’s worksheet to help you begin your walk with Christ.

**2. Pursue a strong marriage.** The second important essential for a strong family is that you must pursue a strong marriage. Have you ever wondered, what are the key ingredients to a strong marriage? Let’s look at six essential qualities.

**a. Mutual respect.** One of the most important qualities of a strong marriage is mutual respect. The attitude

of respect is at the root of every lasting relationship. In fact, the first sign that your marriage is in trouble is when you begin to speak and act in a disrespectfully to one another. Why is this the first sign of trouble? Disrespect is a lack of love. Think of it this way. You will not lovingly give or be submissive to anyone that you don’t respect. This is why both husbands and wives are commanded to respect each other. Peter commanded: *“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered”* (1 Peter 3:7). The word *honor* means to value or respect. Paul commanded wives to do the same thing. *“Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband”* (Eph. 5:33). Without respect your relationship will slowly self-destruct. Won’t you ask the Lord right now for His forgiveness for the hardness of your heart? Continue in prayer by asking Him to change your heart attitude so you can begin to respect your mate? Doing so will greatly help you restore the love in your relationship.

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***If you want a strong family, then begin with strengthening your own personal relationship with the Lord.***

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**b. Loving leadership.** A strong marriage also requires the husband to be the true leader in his home. However, this leadership is not dictatorial in nature. Notice that when Paul explained that husbands were to be the head of their home, in the very next statement he commanded them to sacrificially love their wives just as Christ loved the church. He said, *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body...Husbands, love your wives,*

*just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”* (Eph. 5:23-25). Without this loving leadership there will be a confusion of roles and a constant struggle for power within your home.

So, men, are you taking the responsibility of leadership in your home? If you say, *But I don’t know how to be the leader.* I would encourage you to read my article *How can a husband lead his wife and family.* You can find this article at our website. [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)

**c. Submissive support.** A strong marriage also requires a supportive and submissive wife who works with her husband instead of fighting him for the leadership of the home. Paul taught, *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:22). Just as a wife’s submission to Christ brings strength to her relationship with Him, so she will strengthen her marriage with her submission to her husband. Think of it this way; would any business function well if the employees did whatever they pleased? No! They have been employed for the central purpose of supporting and obeying the head of the business. If you want the blessings of a Christian home then you must fulfill your God-given role and responsibility. Please also read my article entitled *How can a wife support and help her husband?*

**d. Resolve conflicts.** How can resolving conflicts bring strength to your home? The greatest cause of unhappiness, separation, and divorce in marriage is the failure to resolve the issues that divide you. Unresolved conflicts will always destroy the love, companionship, and the intimacy which keeps your marriage alive and strong. This is why James commanded, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”* (James 5:16). Confession, repentance, forgiveness, and prayer together are the only ways you will be able to heal a rift in your relationship. These are the primary ways to restore strength to your marriage. If

you want to learn more about how to resolve those tough issues that divide you, go to our website and you will find many articles to help.

**e. Good communication skills.** Strong families and good marriages will always possess the skill of effective communication. Communication is best illustrated by the blood that flows through your body. Your blood carries everything that is good for you and what can kill you. Your blood carries the bacteria that make you sick and it also carries the white blood cells that fight off infections. Solomon said the same thing about communication. He said, “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Prov. 18:21). Which does your tongue promote in your marriage and family? The skill of communication is a learned experience. Therefore, if you want to learn more about what helps or hinders good communication go to our web site and read further articles on this topic of communication.

**f. Commitment.** Another key to a strong marriage is the depth of commitment. Couples in strong marriages regularly verbalize their love and commitment to each other. A regular reaffirmation of loving commitment gives your spouse a sense of loyalty that only draws you closer together. Think of what it means to you when God affirms to you, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Heb. 13:5). If these words encourage you how much more would your spouse love to hear you say this? The opposite is also true. If you are constantly threatening to leave when a conflict occurs, won’t this weaken your relationship? Of course it would. So, if you want a strong marriage affirm to your spouse today your wholehearted commitment to resolve all of your differences. I would also suggest reading the chapter, “Building Security Through Total Commitment” in my book *Married and How to Stay That Way*.

**3. Seek a strong parent/child bond.** The third essential needed for a strong family is a deep relationship

between a parent and child. You are either growing deeper in your bond with one another or growing apart. If your family grows apart, more and more conflicts ensue which only weakens your bond and weakens the family. If you don’t want to grow more distant from each other, what can you do to keep this rift from occurring? Take these specific steps.

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### ***One of the most important qualities of a strong marriage is mutual respect.***

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**a. Spiritual training.** The most important encouragement and strengthening influence you could ever give your children is to train them in the truths of Scripture. This gives them an understanding of who God is and what His plan is for them. This training must be imparted from the earliest years of their lives. The father is primarily responsible for this training in the home. Paul commanded: “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:4). Mothers are also to be involved in training the children. Scripture declares: “*My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother*” (Prov. 1:8). As you fulfill your role you can be sure that God’s Word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it (Is. 55:11). What is that purpose? It is to give them the light of His wisdom and to set their hearts free from the deception of this world (Ps. 119:130; John 8:31-32). Don’t miss this opportunity to build them up and strengthen their hearts toward God.

**b. Respectful communication.** Many times parents think they can speak to their children any way they wish simply because they are the parents. However, this is not the case. God requires you to speak the truth in love to all people no matter how old those individuals might be.

Many times the harsh words that a parent uses with their children is the very reason for the constant strife in the home. This is why Solomon said, “*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*” (Prov. 15:1). In other words, you may not have rebellious children; the problem may be your harsh words. If you have constant strife in your home you won’t enjoy the blessings God intended. This is why Paul specifically warned fathers not to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). Therefore, speak firmly but softly. In addition, you must also require your children to speak respectfully to you. This is a two way street with anyone and any relationship.

**c. Resolving conflicts.** Just as resolving conflicts with your spouse is essential for having a good marriage, so you must also keep a right relationship with your children. Children can be offended and hold resentment just as easily as an adult. So, do not forget to ask your children for forgiveness when you offend them, just as you require them to ask for forgiveness from you. You should apply the same biblical principles in resolving conflicts with your children as you would with anyone. When you keep your relationship right in this way with your children you have a happier and stronger home.

**d. Equality.** Another way parents can provoke their children to wrath is to show partiality between siblings. This is extremely disheartening to a child because when they see your preferential treatment or neglect they will immediately conclude that you don’t love them as much. And be assured, your child will know when you are showing partiality to their brother or sister. Children have a keen sense of fairness.

In addition to demoralizing your child’s heart you will also create resentment between your children. Remember the conflict that was created between Joseph and his brothers because of Jacob’s partiality? Genesis tells us: “*But when his brothers saw that their father loved*

him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him” (Gen. 37:4). If you don’t want this to happen in your family then you must treat all your children equally and thus strengthening your bond as a family.

**e. The balance of encouragement and discipline.** Getting this balance right in your home is one of the most difficult issues because of the differences between your children. Some children immediately respond when you speak firmly and others will fight you no matter how many spankings they get. But, both encouragement and corrective discipline are necessary for all children, just in varying amounts depending on the infraction. David said of Solomon: “Prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised” (Ps. 72:15). But, Solomon also said: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15).

If you are too harsh in your correction you will drive your children away from you. If you are too lenient with them you will cause them to think they can get away with sinful behavior without penalty. Keeping this balance in your relationship with your children is how they will grow into maturity. Your children will sense you love them but at the same time realize that there are consequences to their disobedience.

**f. Take time to build relationship.** Our lives and families are always busy with many responsibilities and needs that must be fulfilled every day, but time spent with your children is essential. Remember, you can never get that time with your children back again. The special times you have with one another are what you and your children will remember when they are grown and have their own families. When your parenting is done you will remember the baseball and soccer games, the bike rides, the walks together, and the camping trips. It won’t be how much money you made or the deals you have

closed. The only thing you will remember is the time you spent being with one another. Don’t let these times slip away.

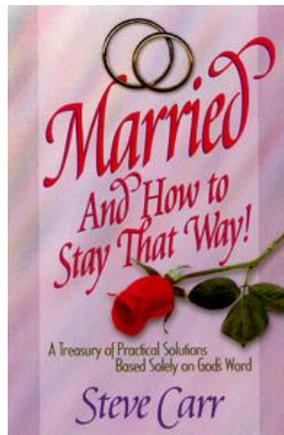
**g. Letting go.** When you begin parenting you have total control over all decision making in a child’s life, but as they grow older you must make the transition from control to reasoning. Then finally you must let them go to make their own decisions and choices in life. The transition from teenager to young adult is the most difficult part of parenting because it requires the growth and transition of both parent and child. To make this transition and to keep your relationship with your teen is very important. You still have a lifetime to enjoy them. But, you say, I don’t know how to do this? I would encourage you to go and read my article “Dealing with Teenagers” found at [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) under online articles and Parenting Issues. May God give you grace to apply these truths!

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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) or by email at [ccag@calvaryag.org](mailto:ccag@calvaryag.org) or at 805-481-2320.

### **Additional Resources**

**Married and How To Stay That Way by Pastor Steve Carr**



**Study Guide for the book Married and How To Stay That Way:** This 52 page study guide will challenge you to gain further insight into how to apply the biblical truths presented in *Married And How To Stay That Way*. \$5.99 plus postage.

**Single DVD Presentations:** Each DVD is designed to encourage couples in specific areas of their marriage and includes a worksheet. \$14.99 plus postage.

Titles include:

- ◆ *Building Understanding with Your Spouse*
- ◆ *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*
- ◆ *The Mystery of Oneness*
- ◆ *How to Fight Fair*
- ◆ *Strengthening Communication Skills*
- ◆ *Developing a Strong Christian Family in a Chaotic World*
- ◆ *Building a Better Marriage*
- ◆ *Developing Greater Companionship*
- ◆ *The Song of Solomon* (3 DVDs)
- ◆ *Realistic Expectations*
- ◆ *How to Become One*
- ◆ *Becoming a good forgiver*
- ◆ *Parenting Principles* (2 DVDs)
- ◆ *The Responsibility of a Husband*
- ◆ *The Responsibility of a Wife*
- ◆ *The Virtues of a Christian Home*
- ◆ *Learning How to Love*

**Counselor Training Manual:** The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying DVD training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis.

If you would like more information about any of Pastor Steve’s resource materials please call (805) 489-9088 or come visit us at our website [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)