

FAMILY: On and Off the Farm

I remember my daddy often reminiscing about his experiences growing up in a large family on the farm. His earliest memory was on a farm in the Haw Ridge area (between Enterprise and Ozark AL). Their farm, like the farms of many others was purchased by the government when Camp Rucker (currently Fort Rucker) was being built.

I am grateful that before daddy passed away, I was able to go with him to visit that old home place and hear all the stories of his childhood, to see the creek where my grandmother washed clothes, to see the spot where the mule barn once stood, and to see the woods that were once fields where they plowed those mules

After leaving Haw Ridge, Granddaddy purchased a farm in Enterprise where daddy grew up and where my grandparents lived until they died. I got to see for myself this house where they lived, the mule barns, the smoke house, the fields they worked, and the gully where daddy and his brothers caught the hogs to treat them for screw worms. I especially remember one very special large oak tree in the front yard that daddy and all his siblings played in—and that they sometimes used to run around so that grandmother couldn't catch them when they got in trouble! I also got to see my own children play around that same old tree.

Large families were a necessity back in daddy's day when all the work was done by hand and with mules, and when hired help was not an option. These large families experienced a lot of hard work, hard times, and enjoyed a lot of life's blessings and experiences as they all lived together under one roof. Daddy always joked that there were so many of them (eleven in all), that once the syrup can had passed all the way around the breakfast table, the last one to get some just threw the empty can out the window. That's a lot of hungry young-uns and a lot of cathead biscuits!

The family has always been the nucleus of human society. All the way back to when God created Adam, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so God created Eve (a woman), to be his companion and helpmate and the mother of his children. God created and ordained the family as a sacred institution in His eyes and in its role in society. As we read more Scripture, we see that even before the creation of the world, the divine family plan was already in place: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Church (the Bride of Christ). The family was God's idea and His creation.

He established the family to be the classroom where love and respect for God and for one another is taught. It is in the family where values and morals are first established, where forgiveness is always abundant, and where God's Word is to be taught and obeyed. Among family, you love and are loved unconditionally. Among family you can disagree and argue with one another, but at the same time you will come together as one if someone outside the family tries to join in the fight.

I suppose that some of you are thinking to yourself: "My family is not like what you have described. It wasn't when I was growing up and it isn't now!" It is true that many, if not most families in America fall short of God's best for us. In other parts of the world, the problems are even worse than they are here. I am a child of a broken home and I know much of the pain and scars associated with it. Though our culture often devalues the family does not mean that God's plan for the family has changed. Whatever

your current family situation, God will bless you if you surrender your life and your family to His lordship on a daily basis.

Love shared within a family is a very distinct and special love that is a direct derivative of God's love for us and our families. Nothing compares to God's love for us—a love so great that He would send His only Son to suffer and die in our place for our sin. No experience compares to the joy of knowing Him, of walking in His love and His forgiveness. He is Love! In Him we have hope not only for our lives here on earth but for all eternity; regardless of whatever obstacles we now face in our lives or in our families.

Today we are seeing a growing and devastating attack against the home and the institution of marriage. Scripture speaks of times like these leading up to the return of Christ to judge the world and to take His people Home. I do not know the date or the time of His return, but I know from God's Word that the breakdown of the family that we are experiencing today is a sign that the day is near.

I spend a lot of time on the road, not only in other countries, but traveling state to state. As I write this, I am on an Angus Sale marathon in the States of AR, OK, MO, and KY. On these trips I get to meet a lot of people who are suffering from the effects of brokenness in their lives and hurt in their families. I am grateful that the Lord gives me these opportunities to minister to the needs of His people. Sometimes I am the one hurting and I am grateful that He is faithful to surround me with family who are able to minister to me when I need it.

During this particular trip, the Holy Spirit reminded me of Mark 10:29-30, verses that when you first read them are hard to understand. Jesus said; *"I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mothers or fathers or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age and in the age to come, eternal life."*

I find it most interesting and comforting that even though I give up a lot of precious time from my wife and family to serve Him and His people, God is so faithful! He always sends members of our other families to be family for me. I see Him doing the same for my wife and children. Sometimes He uses our church family, sometimes another Christian brother or sister, and sometimes He uses members of other families like our Angus family.

God's promises are true. No matter where I go around the world or within the States, God has provided me with families who love me and are willing to share their lives with me—whether it be to give or receive encouragement, to pray with me, cry with me, laugh with me, or to point me to Christ.

Thank God for loving us enough to give us family. Thank you for allowing me to be part of yours.