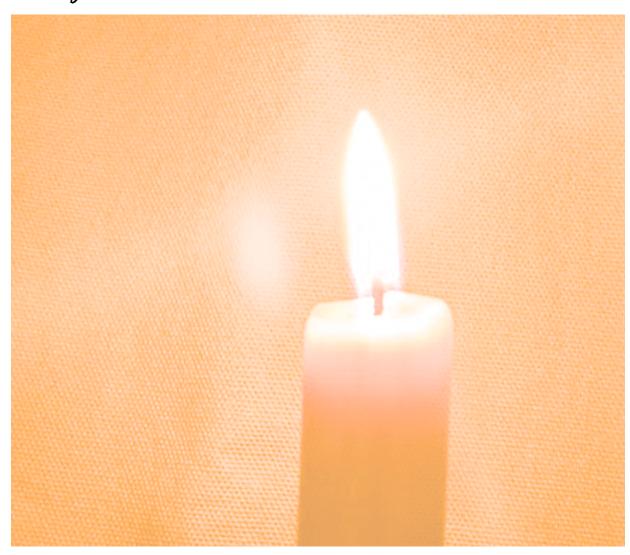
Family Life and Marriage Encouragement

KEEPING THE SPIRITUAL FIRE BURNING BRIGHT



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Introduction

Keeping the Spiritual Fire Burning Bright

FLAME is for everyone. The principles and inspired teachings of the Bible give us a way to live and experience the greatest life possible on this earth. The amazing truths of the Bible not only transform our own personal lives but also transform the lives and atmosphere of our entire family.

FLAME is all about encouragement. Everyone needs extra encouragement in making life work in our homes. FLAME is about training and coming alongside parents for the purpose of implementing a vision of loving and serving God within the family. The hope of FLAME is to see families light a spiritual fire in their home and keep it burning bright.

FLAME is about connecting. Connecting with God and connecting with our family brings about a deeper sense of fulfillment, peace, and purpose.

FLAME is about communication. Learning healthy ways to communicate in a family provides each family member with a feeling of safety and love. Parents practice ways to listen to the heart of their spouse and child.

FLAME is about serving. When a person takes their eyes off of themselves and serves another person, the result is an overflowing joy. Families are training grounds for serving the world. A purpose-filled life starts in the home, and FLAME is about parents creating an atmosphere of service.

The takes an on-going commitment. Everyone has a tendency to start something new and then slowly drift back to our comfortable habits. In order to keep a spiritual flame going in the home, parents need everyone on the team to push toward the goal. Everyone has to work hard for victories, to depend on the strength and wisdom that comes from God, and to be open to hear about areas of growth. A strong wind can blow out a flame, so the flame needs to be protected. The spiritual fire in families needs to be protected so that the home becomes an environment of peace and encouragement.

Let's light a flame in our own hearts and in our homes! This choice could be the most crucial decision of a person's or family's life. Do not wait for later. The later is now.

Light the flame today.

FLAME LESSON #1

Leading by Example

Write down the general word *Family*. Next, write down words, phrases, or a paragraph description of what comes to your mind when you think of the general word family.

Now, write down the words My Family. Again, write down words and phrases that describe your own immediate family.

A leader leads.
But a leader also follows.
Before parents can
lead in the home,
they need to follow God.

As a parent, we are leading even if we are not aware of it. Our children are using our lives as a model for their lives. Every word or action that we say or do has an affect on those around us. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, our words and actions will either encourage and build up or they will discourage and tear down. We are responsible for our words and actions and cannot blame anyone else. As a parent leader, we need to be following the correct set of "rules" in our own life in order to lead our children in the right direction.

MY PERSONAL STORY

When my daughter, Morgan, was ten years old, we were experiencing a lot of conflict. She was being defensive to things that I said and was showing a bad attitude with me. One day, I decided to pray for her with a friend. On that same evening, I told my husband, Ernie, that I had been praying for Morgan to change her rebellious behavior. As soon as I finished talking, I heard a voice in my head that said, "You are the problem!" Shocked, I literally looked up to God and wondered why I would hear these words. In the days and weeks following this experience, I started asking God, "Why am I the problem?" Slowly and sweetly, God showed me that my expectations for Morgan were unrealistic. If she brought home a B on a paper, I would ask her why she did not make an A. I was asking her to not yell at me, yet I was yelling at her.

God showed me that Morgan needed encouragement to be who she was created to be and not who I wanted her to be. He showed me that I needed to put myself on the same "rules" that I was imposing on Morgan and on my other daughters. From that time on, everyone in the family (especially Ernie and I) are now under "God's rules" of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. We are all under God's command to serve one another and put others' needs above our own.

Putting myself on "God's rules" has helped to transform our home. This decision has helped to unify our family and keeps us accountable to one another. If one of my daughters wants to do something like go to a movie, I will say, "Pray about it, research it, and ask God if this is something that you should do." It is more important for children to learn to obey "God's rules" rather than "My rules." I cannot be with them all the time, so my girls need to learn to make decisions based on what God says. Although hearing the phrase, "You are the problem" was not a pleasant experience, I now understand why God says to take the log out of our own eye before trying to take a spec out of someone else's eye (Matt. 7:5). As a mom, I know that I am an example to my girls, for good or for bad, so I am trying to love God and love others with my whole heart, and I am continuing to pray that they will do the same. By His Grace we can all follow Christ in every area of our lives.

It is more important for children to learn to obey "God's rules" rather than "My rules".

- How can you relate to this story?
- Where do you see conflicts in your home and how are you the problem?

WHAT GOD SAYS

Read Leviticus 6:12-13. Leviticus is the 3rd book of the Bible and describes many laws about bringing offerings to God. Thankfully, for us, Jesus became our offering through his death on the cross, and through His resurrection we can live each day with freedom and thankfulness. We are going to use this passage as an analogy for our role as a parent.

"The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out."

A parent is like a priest in their home. Parents are responsible to keep the spiritual "fire" burning at all times. It must not go out. Parents must "arrange" the schedules and atmosphere of their home in such a way that keeps the "fire" burning.

- Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest in your home? Explain.
- Can you see yourself as the one who represents God to your family members? Why or why not?
- How can you "arrange" or maybe rearrange your home to make room for Jesus?
- What does it mean to **not** let the flame go out?



LET'S GET PERSONAL

- What am I **not** doing that I am asking my children (or my spouse) to do?
- What do I need to change in my own life?
- How can I live out my faith through my actions instead of just through my words?

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Commit to reading God's Word every day just for yourself. After reading a verse or verses, ask these questions: What do the verses say? How do I feel about what the Bible said? What do I need to do in response to what I read? Who can I tell in my family about what I learned from the Bible?
- 2. Commit to catching yourself doing what you have asked others <u>not</u> to do. Ask God to forgive you, ask your family to forgive you, and ask your family to keep you accountable to do what you say.
- 3. Commit to following God's Word yourself. Do not worry about what anyone else is doing. Just keep your eyes on yourself. Let the fire of God's Spirit burn in your own heart. Listen to God and what He says in His Word and do what He says.

We cannot pass on what we do not have. Let's get real with God so that His love will fill our home and us.



FLAME LESSON #2

Leading Through Listening

Write down some "life" questions that you would ask a friend.

Examples of questions might include:

"What feels good about your life right now?"

"What are you looking forward to this year?"

"What is something that is hard about your life right now?"

Now, write down a question that you would like someone to ask you.

Leaders know the people that they are leading. How do they know them? They listen to them. Leaders ask questions and seek to understand before telling. Leaders know the right questions to ask. Leaders are not quick to judge. A listening leader is a loved leader.

As parents, we cannot lead our children in a loving way without intentionally asking them questions in order to show them respect and understand their feelings and opinions. Asking questions is key to any relationship. It is so easy to interject our own solutions into others' problems without listening to the entire situation. Listening does not feel natural. It is a skill that has to be developed. Listening requires having a humble heart focused on the needs of others. We all have a tendency to want others to hear our thoughts or opinions and to want our needs to be met. As a listening leader, a parent will put away their needs or thoughts in order to understand the needs of their child. Listening takes practice, so let's make a commitment to start and continue conversations with questions. It will be incredible to see what we will learn about ourselves and about our children.

MY PERSONAL STORY

After I picked up my daughter Madison from her private Christian school, tears slowly began rolling down her cheeks. Just as a leaky faucet seems to never stop dripping, the tears continued to flow from her beautiful green eyes. Trying to be strong, Madison tried to hold back the tears as she explained her feelings, but the pain was coming from a deep spring. We sat in our driveway for over an hour as Madison talked, cried, and even hit the door. I wanted to tell her that she was going to be OK. I wanted to guote scripture and say that she needs to rely on God more. I wanted to get out of the car and go on with my busy day, ignoring the issues. I wanted to tell her what I thought that she should do or think. I wanted to do a lot of things instead of just listening and feeling Madison's tears. But, I loosened my seat belt and turned to look at her knowing that I could not rush inside. I decided to be intentional and only ask questions. "How did that make you feel?" "Can you tell me more details of what happened" "How long have you been feeling this way?" "What can you do to overcome this situation?" "What would God say to you right now?" "How can we pray?" Asking guestions leads to longer conversations, but those conversations can lead to healing. My afternoon with Madison in a stuffy car in Texas led to a deeper understanding of her heart. I am thankful for this moment. We all have them. Sometimes we need someone to just listen and help us to know that we are loved. Through the tears. Madison figured out what she needed to do. Through questions and some good 'ole Truth, she finally decided that she could move on, forgive, get out of the car take a step toward the front door of our home, and even go to school the next day. Although her eyes might have been more red than usual, her heart was more prepared for the new challenges that a new day brings.

Asking questions leads to longer conversations, but those conversations can lead to healing.

- How can you relate to this story?
- What is the value of asking questions?

WHAT GOD SAYS

Read James 1:19. (Notice that it talks about being quick and slow).

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

This verse in James speaks loud and clear into how we should respond to people, especially our children. The Bible knows that our tongue expresses what is in our heart. If we are quick to use our tongue or speak, then we will usually not say the right thing. As James says, we need to be quick to use our ears instead of our tongue.

Bite down on your tongue. God has given us an easy way to stop our tongue from speaking. Sometimes, we have to literally bite our tongue so that we do not say the wrong thing. The battle of the tongue is in our hearts and mind. We need to fight it out with God in our minds before we should let our tongues speak. Just as we cannot put toothpaste back in the tube, we cannot take back our words. Words have the power to hurt or to heal. We need to be quick to use our ears and not let our tongue go out of control as it follows our thoughts.

Read Romans 12:2.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is- his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Read II Corinthians 10:5. 7

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up again the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ... You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do."

Here are some questions to help us understand these verses better:

- What is the key phrase that we must do with our mind from the verse in Romans?
- How can "renewing" your mind transform a person?
- What do we need to do with our thoughts from the verse in II Corinthians?

- How is taking a thought captive actually done?
- What other facial feature does II Corinthians talk about in these verses?
- How can our eyes see things in the wrong way or judge?



LET'S GET PERSONAL

- How am I trying to "conform to this world?"
- How are my thoughts not obedient to what Jesus says?
- Who am I judging by appearances?
- What do I need to do to be quick to listen instead of speak or judge?
- How can I practice and improve my listen skills by asking good questions?

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Ask God to forgive you for thoughts that are not right. Ask Him to give you a heart of grace and love toward people. Ask God to forgive you for the words that you have spoken that have hurt others. Ask God for forgiveness for judging other people.
- 2. Ask family members or friends to forgive you for the words that you have spoken that have hurt them. Ask them to forgive you for not renewing your mind with thoughts from God but having thoughts of this world or your flesh. Ask them if there is a time that they can remember when you have hurt them. Listen to what they say and ask for forgiveness.
- 3. Make a commitment to start practicing listening. Before you speak, ask two questions. Really seek to understand the thoughts and feelings of others. Listening just might make us say something different!
- 4. Watch out for your thoughts. Be aware of negative thinking and selforiented complaining. Quickly, try to renew your mind, so that your words will be life-giving and encouraging instead of hurtful and destructive.

Remember, our children are following us. We need to be the leaders in listening!

FLAME LESSON #3

Leading Through Connection

Write down how you connect as a family. How do electronics and media such as cell phones, TV, movies, video games, etc. affect your connection? How do sports or other activities help or hinder your connection? What are the times that you feel the most connected in your family?

List the three top ways that you feel connected as a family.

Having a "connection" with family members are powerful. These connections are powerful because of valuable words that can change a person's life. In addition to conversations, a "connection" can involve doing activities together such as playing games or sports, taking a walk, cooking, or reading. Connections might involve a time a prayer on the back porch or reading God's Word on the way to school. It might be a hug or a pat on the back. It might be as simple as saying "I'm proud of you and love you" before bed. The *how* of making a connection is not as important as simply making a connection.

When was the last time that you made a "connection" with your spouse or a child? We all need some kind of connection every day. In our world of technology, sending a quick but meaningful text can make connections. The key to connecting is being intentional. Connections do not just happen. We have to consciously decide to connect with people, especially family members. We need to be intentional about being relational. God made us to be relational. Relationships or connections are important for each person to feel loved. Even if someone does not seem relational, that person needs it because we were created for it. We were created with a desire to know God and know others. It is part of us.

One of the best ways to connect as a family is to have a family devotion. Having a family devotion can be hard with everyone's schedules (and attitudes), but a devotion time is well worth the enormous effort that it can take. Start small, a quick verse

with one question once a week before bed as a family. This small step will lead to more times together for longer times around the Bible, the written Word of God. Because we live in a culture of changing values, we need to know what God says. We need to know how the Creator of this world says to live in this world. A creator of something would know best, so that is why we need to know what God says about His creations.

MY PERSONAL STORY

Finding ways to connect with my children has always been difficult because of our busy schedules. With school events and homework, extra activities and sports, church programs, family and social gatherings, housework and repairs, and work schedules, I am usually just trying to survive. When I finally sit down at the end of a long day, I want to veg and relax. Sometimes, I just want some Me-time. When my oldest daughter, Morgan, started high school, she asked me something that was a big surprise. She asked me to be home with her in the afternoons after school. In my mind, Morgan would be more independent in high school and be consumed with her friends and the difficult curriculum of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program that she had been accepted into at her school. Why would she want me to be around? Afternoons were my work time. As a music teacher, I had to be available when my music students were available. I taught music lessons in the afternoons, so this simple request from Morgan meant a big change for me. I decided to try to teach music during the day so that I would be available for Morgan and my other daughters in the afternoon, and I found a private school that allowed me to teach lessons during school hours. This change helped me to be more available and have more connection with Morgan. When my second daughter, Meredith, started high school, she needed me even more when she came home from school. We had moved to a new city, so Meredith came home with lots of tears as she encountered a new culture and transition. Although it was hard to change my schedule, I am very thankful for my afternoon connections with my girls over tea and a snack that have given us time to share what is going on in our hearts. And although l always have other distractions going on in my head such as making dinner or doing laundry or running off to another activity. I try to intentionally spend time with my girls. Another prime moment to connect is before bed, so I try to make bedtime another connection time of the day and ask questions that reveal what is going on in their heart. When we make time for a family devotion, I am always amazed how a little time of "togetherness" brings out deep conversations and feelings of unity as a family. I keep praying that my husband and I will make more time for each other and for our daughters. Lord, please help us to let go of projects in order to focus on people.

- How can you relate to this story?
- Why are connections important?

WHAT GOD SAYS

Read Hebrews 10:24, 25

"And let us consider how we many spur one another on toward love and good deed, not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another..."

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-7

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

These verses from the Bible tell us to meet together in order to encourage each other to love and do good things for God. Every business, school, or organization has a time for its people to meet together. A family functions like a small organization and needs times to meet together in order to be unified, trained, and connected. Like the verses in Deuteronomy say, these "meetings" can take place at home or on the road and can be done in the morning or evening.

- What does the Bible say about meeting and talking together?
- According to the verses, what is the purpose of meeting or talking together?
- How can you "consider" for your family about encouraging each other?
- Why did God say that He wanted His commandments to be on our hearts?
- What is involved in making sure that His commandments are actually on our hearts?
- What are ways to "impress" God's truth on our children?



LET'S GET PERSONAL

- How do I spur my children on toward love and good deeds?
- What can I do to truly connect with my spouse or with my children?
- What do I need to change in my heart, schedule, or mindset in order to be more intentional in my relationships?

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Be intentional at least one time of every day to connect with your spouse and children. Look for ways to encourage them and pour God's Truth into them.
- 2. Ask questions that do not have a YES or No answer in order to connect from the heart.
- 3. Find time in your schedule to have a family devotion. As a "priest" of your home, arrange your schedules so that you can connect as a family and be encouraged to obey what God says.
- 4. Write a note or Bible verse for someone or everyone in your family. Put the note in their lunch, on their bed, on the mirror, or somewhere that you know that they will see it. Connections can be created even if you are not around.
- 5. Decide as the "priests" how you want to choose to obey what God says in His Word. Talk about it as a family. Here's an example question: If God says that we are to love one another, how can we love each other in our home?

Remember, be intentional about making a connection. You will be amazed at what happens in your relationships.



FLAME LESSON #4

Leading by Serving

Describe a time when someone served or helped you. How did it make you feel? How did it make the situation better? How are you different because of someone serving you?

Serving does not come naturally to most people. Our wish or natural tendency is to have someone serve us. Very seldom do we wake up with the question, "Who can I serve today?" Although as parents, we are always trying to meet the needs of our children, we sometimes forget to find joy in serving as well as encourage our children to serve also.

In the hierarchy of society, a "servant" is not at the top. Who would want to purposely put themselves in a servant position? Because everyone wants to be the best or be at the "top," an intentional decision must be made to serve. If someone does not serve, they will never experience the joy that only comes from serving others. God planned an up-side-down way of thinking about being great! He says in Matthew 23:11 or Mark 9:35 that the one who serves will be the greatest! Let's try to be the greatest by serving the most.

We cannot serve effectively outside our home until we start serving inside our home. Having a home that focuses on serving each other becomes a home that has joy, unity, and the accomplishment of great things.

MY PERSONAL STORY

God has worked on control in my life through miscarriages. I reluctantly learned about humility and serving after one of those unwanted moments. When I married Ernie and we started thinking about having children, it never crossed my mind that I might loose a child. Our first daughter, Morgan, was born in Kenya while we were serving as teachers at a missionary boarding school. We were not planning on having children in Africa, especially our first child, but God had other plans for us. After we came back to the U.S. after two years in Kenya, we found out that we were pregnant again. Unfortunately and sadly, we lost that baby at 13 weeks. We moved to Pennsylvania where Ernie became the pastor of Grace Community Church. About a year later, we were pregnant again and so excited. We had gone through a tough time in our marriage, and I believed that this baby was a sign of hope coming out of the pain. Once again, sadly we lost this baby at 14 weeks. I really questioned God about what He was doing. My plans were going out of control. Another year went by and finally, I became pregnant and carried our second daughter, Meredith, to full term. She was even two weeks late, arriving on January 1, 2000 and became the first millennium baby to be born in Poylestown, PA. What a blessing! Another year went by and guess what? Another miscarriage. This time the baby was 16 weeks when we lost it. After another P&C to remove the baby, I started feeling dizzy and passing out. I was rushed to the hospital to check for a blood clot. As the doctors put dye into my body, I began to have an allergic reaction. At this point, I really felt like I was dying. It took a couple of days in the hospital to recover from this experience and the doctors discovered very low levels of blood but no clots. When I came home, I started having strange things happen to my body. I started having panic attacks due to hormones and all the stress that had been on my body. Marriage issues contributed to these attacks as well. Before all these health issues happened, we had planned to move to Tennessee in order for Ernie to begin a Ph.D. program, and we decided to move forward with the plan. But because my body was in a state of panic, I could barely function. Now is where the serving part comes into my story. Ladies in our church came over to pack up our house. Men in our church loaded a trailer with all of our things, including a grand piano and two harps. I will never forget a lady named Connie coming over with her broom. She did not say anything much but just started sweeping out our house. This beautiful lady had been through cancer. She knew about suffering from her own health issues. Watching her serve me was a humbling moment. I could not repay her in any way. A "thank-you" seemed so small. Connie has been my example of what it means to serve. Just show up. Bring a broom if you can, but be there. Even in our busy schedules and overwhelming issues that each of us face, we can put those aside and take time to help someone else in need. Serving does not just happen, but as we practice serving in our homes, it will feel more natural to develop a lifestyle of service. Thank you, Connie, for your example to me.

- How can you relate to this story?
- Who has served you?

WHAT GOD SAYS

Read Matthew 20:28

"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Next read John 13:1-17

"It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'

Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'

Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'"

Jesus gives us our example about serving. As we humble ourselves and serve, God raises us up. As Jesus humbled himself to even death on a cross, he was raised to life and now sits with God in heaven. Mother Theresa has become a saint for her life of serving the poor. The scripture passage about Jesus washing His disciples' feet shows how a respected leader, the Lord, bent down to serve His disciples. Jesus told them to "wash one another's feet." As we serve one another, especially in the family, God will raise us up in love and freedom. He will give us a new heart. A heart that is not focused on ourselves, but a heart that also sees the needs of others.

He will give us a new heart.

A heart that is not focused on ourselves, but a heart that also sees the needs of others.

Read Philippians 2:3-11

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- How has the example of Jesus shaped your understanding of what it means to serve?
- What mindset does a person need to have in order to serve?
- Why does Jesus say to serve others or that the greatest will be the servant?
- How does Peter react when Jesus starts to wash his feet?



LET'S GET PERSONAL

- How can I lead as a servant to my spouse and children?
- How can I instill a heart of serving in my home?
- What does it mean for me to value others above myself?
- What are the barriers for me or my family in serving?
- Why is serving so hard or so easy for me?

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Start leading your family by serving each person with a cheerful heart.
- 2. Meet together as a family to discuss the idea of serving each other. Read Philippians 2 and John 13 about how Jesus serves. Talk about needs that each person has and ways to serve each other.
- 3. Start noticing and encouraging each person who serves another family member.
- 4. Ask each family member to serve with joy instead of obligation.
- 5. As you learn to serve inside your home, look for needs outside your home where your family can serve together.



Concluding Comments

These four FLAME lessons provide a basis for family discipleship. Each lesson must be reviewed and practiced. Having a loving and connected family does not happen without intentional effort and without the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of each family member. Prayer also plays a major role in the family. Pray alone and pray together. Always find other families to walk the journey with you and to provide accountability so that you will not feel isolated or alone. FLAME seeks to encourage every family to keep the spiritual fire of Jesus burning bright in individuals, marriages, and families.

Let's light up our home!