many things, enter thou into the joy of thy lord 9 Here we find the answer to that question which has always gripped the religionist Is there a reward for righteousness? Indeed the whole question of why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer is another form of the same question Religion answers this question with an insistence that there is a reward for faithfulness

(a) Now it must be stressed that this reward is not necessarily material Some of the most unfaithful and even wicked people enjoy material prosperity Many of these even go to their graves prosperous

(b) Deal with the Deuteronomic Idea The Deuteronimist did catch hold to an eternal truth 10

(c) The true reward for faithfulness comes first in terms of an inner peace There is a sort of unsurpassable joy that comes when a man lives consistently with his own ideals

Preached at Dexter Jan, 1954

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 68, "Opportunity, Fidelity, and Reward"

9 Cf Matthew 25:21, 23
10 King refers to the argument formulated during the Babylonian exile that explained God's judgment of Israel as punishment for the nation's disobedience of Mosaic law He answered a test question on this subject for George Kelsey's class on the Bible at Morehouse (King, Examination answers, Bible, 3 December 1946)
11 King wrote this in a second pen

“The Crisis in the Modern Family,”
Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[8 May 1955]
[Montgomery, Ala]

In this typed Mother's Day sermon, King blames war, urbanization, industrialization, and individualism for the disintegration of the family. “In the average modern family,” King affirms, “there is a civil war in progress in which the parents are revolting against each other and the children are revolting against the parents. In the modern family individualism has gone mad.” He concludes by challenging his listeners to develop some practical ways to increase intimacy within the family, such as developing a family altar and attending church together.

1 King wrote “Preached at Dexter on Mother's Day 1955” on the outside of the folder containing this document. His announced sermon topic for 8 May 1955 at Dexter was “Crisis Facing Present-Day Family Life in America” (“Special Mother's Service,” Montgomery Advertiser, 8 May 1955)
8 May 1955

Every well-thinking American is deeply concerned about the decadent state into which the American family is falling. For sometime now, both religious and secular thinkers have sought to find the cause and cure of this disintegration that is gradually mortifying the American family. They are mindful of the fact that this decay in the family is the first step toward the decay of the nation, for the family constitutes the basic unit of the nation.

It would be impossible for me to go into the broad ramification of this immense problem this morning. Such a venture would require a book, and I should have to speak of marriage problem, of many sex problems, of the training of children, and of the basic structure of the family generally. But perhaps even in the limited time before me I can touch some of the more pressing aspects of this great problem. I would like to have you think first of the nature of the crisis confronting the family and some of the causes of its development.

Much of the disintegration of family life can be attributed to the war. It is true that the disintegration of home life began before the war, but the war years immeasurably complicated the situation. Many boys and girls were taken out of the atmosphere of a fine home and placed in an atmosphere filled with wild adventures. This situation placed them in contact with immorality of the basest sort. Gambling, sex promiscuity and all sorts of pathological vices were constantly presented as alternatives to loneliness. Many boys and girls, caught in the shackles of the system, embraced these habits, not wholly aware of the fact that they would inevitably lead to their moral and spiritual doom. One of the greatest objections that I have to war is that it leads to a breakdown of the moral and ethical standards of society.

Again, the general frustration that comes as a result of war caused many persons to make unwise links with the opposite sex. War engagements and war marriages took place between people who never had a chance to know each other under normal conditions and for a sufficient length of time. Even worse, many young persons indulged in sexual intimacies who did not have the slightest intention of making a home together. Further, many a beautiful and wholesome marriage together were (was) separated for many years. This separation often lead the man to become emotionally and sexually attracted to other women, while the women become attracted to other men, so that the relatively smooth sailing that had characterized the marriage prior to separation was now interrupted by the tidal wave of unfaithfulness, resulting in deceit, suspicion, and misunderstanding.

But even more, the long separation often brought about a change in the personalities of those who were separated. I have heard so many times in counseling with people "He just isn't the same since he has returned from the army." This is often true. No two individual, often after being separated for several years, can take up where they left off. Personality is not a static thing. It is dynamic, constantly growing and developing. So even when there has been complete fidelity and love, it was necessary to make new adjustments and attempt to know each other over again.

As strong as the war was in leading to the breakdown of American family, it was not the only factor. A second source of the problem was the fact that the growing industrialization of our society and the complex structure of the economic system made it necessary for many wives and mothers to go out and aid in securing the economic means of the family. This has led many women to a position of economic independence. The role that the woman once played in the family was now greatly...
She could demand more rights and privileges than she had heretofore enjoyed because of her general economic status. Unconsciously, she was aware of the fact that if things didn’t go well she could go out and make it on her own. The era in which the woman was completely dependent on the husband gradually passed away under the demands of a growing economic and industrial system. Another factor which lead to the crisis in the modern family was the fact that the growing trend toward urbanization and industrialization led people away from the home for recreation and social outlet. There was a time when the home afforded the highest form of recreation. Families assembled together and had great joy in chattering [talking] and laughing among themselves. But with the emergence of the movies, automobiles, and night clubs, individuals were slowly pulled out of the homes for social outlet.

Probably a more basic source of the present crisis in the family is found in the modern emphasis on individualism. Ever since the coming of the Renaissance the watchword of modern man has been individualism. In economics, this emphasis expressed itself in Laissez-Faire capitalism; in politics it expressed itself in democracy; in religion it expressed itself in Protestantism, and in education it expressed itself in progressive education. Now this emphasis on individualism was a healthy revolt against a crippling authoritarianism. But the tragedy was that modern man allowed individualism to run wild. He indulged in the tragic luxury of rugged individualism. This rugged individualism seeped into the family. And so today every individual in the family asserts his or her rights with little regard for the thoughts of the family as a whole. All persons in the family are individualists in their pleasures and individualists in their suffering. Their rights are individual rights, their problems individual problems, their responsibility individual responsibility. Home is now merely a useful place to eat and sleep. It is not the center of communal life where the interests of one are the interests of all, where the joys of one are gladly shared by all, and where the troubles of one are regarded as burdens of all.

In the average modern family there is a civil war in progress in which the parents are revolting against each other and the children are revolting against the parents. In the modern family individualism has gone mad. [There is an individualism that destroys the individual.] All of these factors have converged to make for the breakdown in the American family. Homes have disintegrated like stacks of cards. The National Office of Vital Statistics reports that in 1950 there were 1,669,000 marriages in America. In that same year there were 385,000 divorces. Now you can see that in that year there was approximately one divorce for every four marriages. In 1946 the marriage records reached an all-time high. In that year there were 2,291,000 marriages. But compare that to the fact that in that same year there were 610,000 divorces. In that year there was approximately one divorce to every three marriages.

Now think of the tragic consequences of this. It means that hundreds and thousands of young people are forced to be brought up in broken homes. We all know the possible psychological difficulties that might arise as a result of being brought up in a broken home. It is God’s plan that every child shall have a good father and a good mother. If either goes, the child’s sense of security is undermined and his emotional stability threatened. A family should be an intimate group of people living together in an atmosphere of good will, where the joys and successes of one are the joys and successes of all, and where the problems and fail-
ures of one are the concern of all. This sense of unity is threatened in the modern world.

The tragic disintegration of the modern family also means the possible loss of our national security. Family life is still the basic unit of the life of the nation, and on healthy family life depends the moral and spiritual life of the nation. You will remember that the historian Gibbon, in his analysis of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, held that one of the main things that brought Rome to the junk heap of destruction was not the opposition of the enemy without the gate, but the disintegration of family life within the homes. Home life in Rome frequently descended into orgies of sexuality and licentiousness in which the true value perished. If we aren't careful the same thing will happen in America and our nation will sink to the level of a third or fourth rate power in world affairs. The relentless lesson of history cannot be escaped, and that is when the family structure begins to break down the structure of the nation itself begins to crack and crumble.

I think I can best use the time that remains by attempting to set forth some of the things that we can do to restore the family to the noble position that God intends for it. I may say at the outset that I do not think we will get at the problem by making a dogmatic decree that there should be no divorces. Such an easy solution fails to get at the root of the problem, and fails to see that there are times when divorces are not only necessary, but even healthy.

The first thing that can be done to restore the family to a harmonious unit is for each individual to respect the dignity and worth of every other individual in the family. The parents must respect each other, and the children must respect and be respected by the parents. Men must accept the fact that the day has passed when the man can stand over the wife with an iron rod asserting his authority as "boss." This does not mean that women no longer respect masculinity, i.e., strong, dynamic manliness, woman will always respect that. But it does mean that the day has passed when women will be trampled over and treated as some slave subject to the dictates of a despotic husband. One of the great contributions that Christianity has made to the world is that of lifting the status of womanhood from that of an insignificant child-bearer to a position of dignity and honor and respect. Women must be respected as human beings and not be treated as mere means. Strictly speaking, there is no boss in the home; it is no lord-servant relationship. The family should be a cooperative enterprise where all members are working together for a common goal.

The child must also be respected as a member of the family. The day has gone forever in which parents could afford to live in a haughty, superior world of their own, in which "children are seen and not heard." This does not mean that children must not be disciplined; nor does it mean that children should not be taught to respect their parents. It does mean, however, that children [a child] must be respected and treated as [a] persons with utmost significance. He has his little thoughts and his little rights that must be respected. When each member of a fam-

\[2\] King refers to English historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) and his work The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776–1788)
ily begins to respect the dignity of every other; that family is moving toward the start of love, and harmony and mutual respect which God intends for it.

A second thing that needs to be done to restore the family to its central position is for each individual to instill within himself a new awareness of the sacredness of marriage and the family. Marriage for so many has been relegated to a state of sexual experiment when people live together until the fascination has worn off. Hollywood has become the Holy City for many Americans, and thousands have bowed before its shrine, feeling that the more divorces they receive, the more they would receive the grace of glamour. Love has been eliminated as a necessity for marriage, and in its place has appeared such things as economic security, status, physical attraction, etc. All of these things have led to an almost complete disregard for the sacredness of marriage. But if the impending doom into which the family is gradually being plunged is to be avoided, we must again stress the sacredness of the marriage. In a sense marriage is man's greatest prerogative, for in and through it God allows man to aid him in his creative activity. For this reason marriage will always stand as one of the most sacred institutions of mankind. That is why the marriage vows insist that it be entered into wisely, discreetly, reverently and in the fear of God.

A third thing that needs to be done is to seek some conditions way to re-establish the intimacies of the family:

1. Family altar
2. Make the children know you are concerned
3. Get connected with some church together

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3 King wrote this section in pen.