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## Seeing Family in the Light of the Cross: A Review of the Storm-Tossed Family

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# Seeing Family in the Light of the Cross: A Review of the Storm-Tossed Family

## **Abstract**

"The deep and yet practical insights included in this book can provide valuable direction for families, but also is a 'must-read' for pastors, counselors, and anyone who works within the church."

Posting about the book *The Storm-Tossed Family* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/seeing-family-in-the-light-of-the-cross-a-review-of-the-storm-tossed-family/>

## **Keywords**

book review, The Storm-Tossed Family, cross, home, Russell Moore

## **Disciplines**

Christianity

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

# in things

August 29, 2019

## Seeing Family in the Light of the Cross: A Review of *The Storm-Tossed Family*

Erin Olson

**Title:** *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*

**Author:** Russell Moore

**Publisher:** B&H Books

**Publishing Date:** September 15, 2018

**Pages:** 320 (Hardcover)

**ISBN:** 978-1462794805

I love hearing about people's families, learning about their parents, siblings, and childhoods. Regardless of whether or not someone grew up in what they'd call a "normal" family, all family experiences are unique and varied. You can learn quite a bit about someone's family experience when you ask them about it. Usually, if people have had good family experiences, they light up when they talk about their families, but if their experience has been less than ideal, they often struggle knowing how to respond. In the Christian church, it seems that we've made family somewhat of an idol, idealizing what it means to belong to a family. We picture a safe and secure place where we are free to be ourselves and receive love and nurture as we progress—through childhood, and even as we move towards establishing our own families through marriage, then child-bearing or adoption. We find it difficult to understand how someone may have had a different experience. We don't know how to wrestle with the fact that family can be a thing of inconsistency or even violence.

Russell Moore's book *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home* is honest and direct right from the start. The title says it all and sets the stage for a book that speaks truth into a social institution mostly assumed to be sunny and safe. A theologian from the Southern Baptist denomination, Moore covers the gamut of topics in his book—highlighting gender relations, marriage, sexuality, divorce, and also how the church can function as a family. He approaches all of these topics from the lens of the cross, demonstrating how the cross can reshape how we view families as a social institution and also how we function in our families.

Christians are quick to say they support the family as an institution and often cite ways the family seems to be “under attack” in today's world. The nuclear family is changing, which Moore says is because of spiritual warfare. This warfare is nothing new. The devil has always been in the work of attacking social institutions that have strong spiritual significance. We may be tempted to despair when we see high divorce rates, children born to unmarried parents or single parents, abuse and neglect, and people delaying marriage. Moore says this is the reality of living in a broken and sin-filled world, but that we should not fear. When we begin to see family in the light of the cross, we find that God can also redeem any seemingly hopeless state of affairs.

Moore's writing provides a deep and hopeful theological perspective to families as a social institution, yet also gives very practical application to a variety of areas within family life. Moore's chapter on parenting provides an encouraging but honest perspective on the joys and sacrifice of raising children, and how the Christian church can stand in a place on the margins culturally by delaying having children until marriage, and then by valuing and honoring those children after they're born. In our “me first” Western culture, people are often afraid that having children or having too many children will mean giving up the American dream. Moore isn't saying that all Christian families need to include multiple children, but the way we approach having children and parenting them can—and should—be different than the broader societal approach. Children are a promise from God that He will continue to bless His people in the future, but they are not everything. Just as God calls some to be parents, he also calls some to singleness and childlessness.

The most powerful and insightful chapter in the book was one titled “Family Tensions, Family Traumas.” Moore again is both honest and practical as he approaches the ways that the family experience can be difficult and, in some cases, harmful. Not unlike God's people who stray time and time again from God's will, we will have family members who too might stray. Just as we continue to be treated with God's grace and mercy even though we disobey and dishonor him, we must treat our wayward family members with the same grace and mercy. Moore is quick to recognize, however, that when trauma has happened within the family it may mean walking away from destructive family members

and then the grace and mercy with which we are called might be directed more toward the way we think of and treat ourselves as we heal.

In situations of family tension, however, Moore provides the reader with practical and Biblical ways to respond. First, he says, “the gospel calls us to *peace*” (243). Even in situations where a family member has strayed from the faith of their parents, Moore says this is not a time for belligerence, but for peace and tranquility. The gospel also calls us to *honor*—we are called to honor God, but also to honor those who have been made in his image including the family member who is living in a way we can’t seem to bear. Moore says, “[they] still bear the imprint of the God you adore.” (244). This calls us to live a life of *humility*. We can’t strive to be the one to have the last word and we can’t want to be right more than we want our family members to be right with God. Moore goes as far to say that some of us might be veering toward Satanism in the way we look around at our extended family members and highlight all the ways we are doing, living, and acting better than them.

*Maturity* is also required as we face temptations in following the way of the cross. Sometimes, Moore says, these temptations are not the “big, monumental things... [but this] testing will be in those seemingly little places of temptation—like whether you will bear patiently with the belching brother-in-law at the end of the table who wants to talk about how the Cubans killed President Kennedy or about how he can make you rich by joining his multilevel marketing business selling herbal laxatives” (246). Even if you were part of a different family and had a different brother-in-law, you would still experience tensions, although different tensions than those you’re experiencing now.

Moore ends the book highlighting the freedom that can be found for families when we view our family in light of the cross, and let that perspective guide our thoughts about and interactions with our families. Recognizing that family isn’t everything, but that it can be powerfully shaping whether we currently have or don’t have a family is key if we are to consistently keep our perspective guided by the cross and the gospel. Those without families might be tempted to perseverate on their lives being better if they only had a family, and those with families often compare their own families to those around them, looking for ways theirs are flawed.

The church often acts as if family is the safe place it was intended to be, but overlooks the fact that some people may have no family or may have a family that has deeply hurt them. Christian churches want to be pro-family, but by doing so often alienate people whose family experiences are less than perfect. Even those families who may seem to have it all together may feel hesitant to talk about their inevitable struggles with their pastor or fellow congregation members.

What does it mean to view family in the light of the cross on a day-to-day basis? Here are some practical takeaways from Moore's book that can help us as individuals, family members, and churches keep a cross-shaped perspective:

- *Be Honest and Vulnerable.* Talk with others about your struggles with parenting, marriage, caring for elderly family members, and the like. Ask people to share with you their worries, anxieties, and struggles as well. Being honest and vulnerable often leads others to feel more confident to do the same.
- *Put Family in Perspective.* Recognize that while family is important and powerful, it is not the gospel. Go out of your way to be family to those in your church without a spouse or children. Encourage your church to see itself as a family to all its members and to those outside your congregation.
- *Pray for your family and for all the families you know.* Realize that families are often involved in spiritual warfare and prayer is a powerful weapon against this battle. Recognize that each family is facing its own unique struggles and it's not just families with young children who are tired and weary, but that each family is often in a period of transition that leaves its members feeling confused and concerned.
- *Pray for the institution of family.* Not only are individual families involved in warfare, but Satan seeks to undermine the power of the entire social institution.

While the Bible was not meant to be a guidebook for marriage and/or parenting, *The Storm-Tossed Family* provides a Biblical and gospel-shaped perspective on many topics relevant to families today. The deep and yet practical insights included in this book can provide valuable direction for families, but also is a "must-read" for pastors, counselors, and anyone who works within the church. As we all search for meaning in sex, in our families, in our jobs, or in a variety of other places, this book reminds us that we will never find our fulfillment in any of these things, but that true peace, contentment, and fulfillment are found only in "Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).