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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Purpose of this Document

The Bible says:

Prov. 4:26: *“Ponder the path of your feet, and let your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.”*

Prov. 14:15: *“The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”*

Prov. 25:8-10: *“Do not go hastily to court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbor, and do not disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation be ruined.”*

This document is a vision and a plan for how to honor God by honoring each other within the \_\_\_\_\_ Family. It is an attempt to ensure that our family lives up to the apostle Paul’s admonition to *“Let all things be done decently and in order.”* (1 Cor. 14:40). It establishes privately and confidentially between the spouses or prospective spouses the path mentioned in Prov. 4:26 that this family will take to ensure that they meet this goal in every way. It emphasizes faith, respect, responsibility, and love in defining all the implications, rules, and consequences, or “steps” resulting from the sacred marriage that is or will be its foundation. It is intended to be signed preferably before two people marry. It describes the most important aspects of the spiritual, personal, and legal relationships that exist or will exist between the members of the \_\_\_\_\_ Family. It keeps the marriage and family relationship in the spiritual and religious realm where it belongs and prevents involvement of the parties with the secular/godless state or the legal system under all possible outcomes. This document also embodies the approach advocated by Dr. James Dobson in his *Love for a Lifetime* book, who said:

*The key to a healthy marriage is to keep your eyes wide open before you wed...and half closed thereafter.*<sup>1</sup>

This constitution was and will continue to be developed and refined with the involvement and consent of every adult in the family. Other than section 9, Legal Agreements, it is not considered legally binding, but we do swear and affirm before the Lord to do our best within our abilities to honor every part of it and to ensure that every part of it and our actions are conformed to His will and the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a living document, not unlike the living water that Jesus talked about in John 7:38. It is as fluid and modifiable as the relationship between the spouses that is its foundation, and which is expected to evolve and mature over time. Dating couples who receive it who are not married are expected to collaborate in editing and refining it so that it accurately reflects the collective views of *both* parties in the relationship. Spouses are welcome and even encouraged to edit it after it has been signed and after they are married, but any edits will need to be approved by *both* spouses to emphasize that the marriage is a team effort and not a dictatorship. If the document is already signed by the spouses, then its contents are considered sacred and the members of the family agree not to question any part of it or the Bible that is its foundation until a new version that everyone can better agree on has been authored and approved by all.

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<sup>1</sup> *Love for a Lifetime*, Dr. James Dobson, Multnomah Press, 1987, ISBN 0-88070-174-9, p. 17.

Note that the purpose of this constitution is *not* to do any of the following: 1. Make divorce easier to get or encourage divorce; 2. Control or oppress any member of the family; 3. Gain undue or unfair advantage of one individual over another; 4. Create an oppressive, legalistic environment devoid of love or compassion within the family. To the extent that it achieves any of these adverse goals, the parties who sign it should feel encouraged and obligated to modify it to eliminate any of these problems preferably prior to signing it.

Instead, this constitution is meant to emphasize *liberty* for every member of the family, which is simply *freedom with personal responsibility*. The goal of this constitution is to define the extent of the freedoms that each family member has and the responsibilities that go with those freedoms. The members of the family agree to respect and enforce these freedoms and each other, but also to ensure that the responsibilities that go with these freedoms are honored and properly exercised by each member. We as a family also commit ourselves to temper and balance these liberties within our family mentioned above with *love*, as the apostle Paul pointed out in Gal. 5:13-15, because if we are following God's teachings, then we will act lovingly regardless of how we feel or how other people act as it states in 1 John 4:8 "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." We acknowledge and define as a family that love is an act and a choice we make more than it is a feeling we are victimized or controlled by. Love is not something we can or will "fall into" or "fall out of". Instead, it is a commitment and a choice God *commands* us to make every day of our lives on how to act as described in Matt. 5:43-48, Mark 12:31, and Romans 13:9. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that God expects us to choose to demonstrate daily as His spiritual children. We acknowledge that love the feeling is produced by choosing continually and daily to act in a loving way towards each other. No matter how we feel about other family members, if we always choose to act in a loving way, love the feeling will be the inevitable consequence.

Because we are all imperfect sinners, we know that the works of the flesh may operate at least occasionally in our lives in a way that may not allow us to live up to every aspect of this idealistic constitution. For such situations, we need to follow God our Father's example in recognizing our fallibility as humans and be loving and patient with our family. We recognize that the love that we show for others will do a *much* better job of motivating them to improve than the most carefully or consistently administered rebuke or punishment or the most strict laws or rules. We think it is always important to show a personal interest in the physical and emotional welfare of everyone in the family.

The members of this family include the following individuals:

**Table 1-1: Family Members**

<i>Full name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Date of birth</i>	<i>Social Security Number</i>
	Husband		
	Wife		
	Child		
	Child		
	Child		

## 1.2 What We Believe<sup>2</sup>

The \_\_\_\_\_ Family is and shall forever be a Christian family. This means that they agree that:

<sup>2</sup> Family Support Foundation Statement of Faith, <http://www.fsfministries.org/doctrinal.html>

1. That there is only one God, Creator and Lord of all, who has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. The Bible to be the only inspired infallible and authoritative Word of God. We believe that BIBLE stands for the following:
  - Basic
  - Instructions
  - Before
  - Leaving
  - Earth
3. We want to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. (Deu. 6:5)
4. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God , and God in him. (1 John 4:16)
5. God commands us that he who loves God must love his brother also. (see 1 John 4:21).
6. We are all imperfect, fallible sinners and fall short of deserving the grace of God. (see Romans 3:23-24)
7. That God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)
8. In the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ as true God and true man, His incarnation and virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His imminent personal return to earth.
9. That the Lord Jesus Christ died and shed His blood as a sacrifice for our sin, and that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone apart from any human merit.
10. That the regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for the salvation of lost and sinful man, through the repentance from sin and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior and Lord.
11. In the present ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is able to live a godly life.
12. In the resurrection of both the saved and the lost: they that are saved unto the resurrection of eternal life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of eternal separation.
13. That the Church, the spiritual Body of which Christ is the Head, is bound together by the Holy Spirit consisting of all who are born again, and that, as the Body of Christ He is constantly purifying and preparing it for His return.
14. It is not through works, but through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace that we achieve salvation and eternal life. (Romans 3:38)
15. We evidence and demonstrate our faith to God by keeping His commandments. Faith without works is dead faith, which is not faith at all.

### **1.3 Family Priorities**

The priorities of *every* member of the \_\_\_\_\_ Family shall be as follows, listed in decreasing order of importance. This list derives from our beliefs as described in the previous section:

1. God/religious faith. This is because in Eccl. 12:13-14 it says:
  - “Fear God and keep His commandments.*
  - For this is man's all.*
  - For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

Proverbs 8:13 says that *“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” Therefore, to fear God is to loathe these kinds of bad behavior but to love the person who is doing them.*

2. Spouse. This is because in Eph. 5:25-29 it says:

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”*

3. Child. This is because in Matt 18:5-6, it says:

*“5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. 6 But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”*

4. Job. Job comes before self because in 1 Tim. 5:8 it says:

*“8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

5. Self. This is because in 1 Cor. 3:16-17 it says:

*“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”*

6. Relatives.

*“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

7. Church/religion.

By this we mean going to church or strictly following the rules and dogma of a specific faith. Churches are not the way to our salvation, faith in Jesus Christ is. No one ever went to hell for not going to church. Churches are only a means of fellowship with God and the members of God’s spiritual family, but we can enjoy His fellowship without being in a church by having a personal relationship with him on a daily basis through prayer. Jesus said in James 1:27 about church/religion: *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”*

It is important to realize that we agree that every aspect of how members of the family relate to each other should be a reflection of these priorities, which are not subject to change or renegotiation. In particular, the following behaviors will be a reflection of these priorities:

- How we spend our money. How we spend our money says more about our priorities than any other aspect of our behavior. We will spend more of our money on the more important things.
- The things we do first, when we have multiple obligations. We will do the most important things first.
- The respect we show for others. More important things will get more of our respect.
- How we spend our time. More important things will get more time and attention.

## 1.4 Family Mission Statement

Below is the vision statement for our family, which derives from the beliefs we described in section 1.2: What We Believe. The items listed are in descending order of importance and priority:

1. Divorce is not an option. We agree to conform our behavior to what God says about divorce, which is:
  - 1.1. Mal. 2:16 says God hates divorce.
  - 1.2. Romans 7:2-3 says that death of a spouse can free a person from the bonds of marriage.
  - 1.3. 1 Cor. 7:15 says an unbelieving spouse can divorce a believing spouse, but not the other way around. Both parties to this Constitution profess to be believing spouses so this is not an option.
  - 1.4. Matt. 5:31-32 says sexual immorality or adultery is the only basis to initiate divorce by either party if both are believers.
2. We will honor the Ten Commandments to the best of our ability:
  - 2.1. We will put God first in everything that we do. Exodus 20:2-11.
  - 2.2. We will not lie or deceive or exaggerate or tell a partial truth. Instead, we will tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”. Exodus 20:16.
  - 2.3. We will not covet what other family members have earned. Exodus 20:17.
  - 2.4. We will not murder. Exodus 20:13.
  - 2.5. We will not commit adultery. Exodus 20:14.
  - 2.6. We will honor our father and our mother. Exodus 20:12.
3. We will not use or abuse guilt to manipulate family members:
  - 3.1. If a person has sincerely apologized for a sin they committed, we not bring the issue up again. We will instead forgive those who repent as the Lord requires.
  - 3.2. We will not criticize or complain about family members in front of others if they violate this constitution, unless they have already been approached privately and refuse to try to improve the situation.
4. We will maintain and renew our faith in God continually. We will make prayer and reading the Bible an important part of our life. We will put God and his commandments first in everything that we do.
5. We will respect and honor God by honoring His plan for the family and for marriage. God's plan for marriage requires that:
  - 5.1. *Husbands must exercise spiritual and moral leadership (also called headship) in the home.* The absence of leadership is the reason why women frequently feel that they need to take charge in the home.
  - 5.2. *Husbands must honor and love their wives as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25-29).* The love they show for their wives should be in spite of the response and must be unconditional, or it is not love, but is selfishness disguised as love. Loving one's wife means that husband's should consult their wives for important decisions and be interested in their needs and opinions and defer to those desires if they will not harm anyone in the family and will maintain peace and satisfaction in the family. However, it doesn't mean that they must be "mind readers", and they shouldn't be expected to know what their wives want without being told.
  - 5.3. *Wives must submit to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph. 5:23-24).* This submission should not be conditional, but absolute, or else it will be selfish and sinful manipulation craftily and deceitfully disguised as love. Conditional love is not love at all. Love is not something you can trade or barter with, because love isn't selfish or proud and doesn't seek personal gain at other's expense.
  - 5.4. *Spouses should submit sexually to the needs of their partner at all times, regardless of how they feel (1 Cor. 7:3-5).* We cannot make the affection we give dependent on what we receive from our partner or on what we want that we aren't getting, or it will be selfish manipulation

deceitfully disguised as love. Failure to observe this requirement can and often does cause the end of marriages, anger, and resentment.

- 5.5. *We will always try to give more to our spouse of what they want than we receive of what we want, so that there will always be symbiosis in the relationship.* This is part of the concept of "going the extra mile" we talk later about in section 2.5.3: God's Memorandum to Us. For instance, husbands will try to give wives more of the affection women want than of the sex that husbands want or receive, so that the wife will feel rewarded for submitting herself to her husband. Likewise, wives will give more of the sex that husbands want than of the affection wives expect or receive in return.
- 5.6. *Children must honor and obey their father and mother (Eph 6:1-3).*
6. *We will continually demonstrate our love, both verbally and non-verbally.* We will both ask how we can help the other each day. We will be patient, unselfish, kind, and proactive in our dealings with other family members. We will consider the interests of other family members to be at least as important as our own.
7. *We acknowledge that love is both a choice and a feeling. However, we take full and personal responsibility to always act and think in a loving way toward everyone and especially towards each other, regardless of whether we have love the feeling.* By doing love the act, we produce love the feeling. To be loving means to *choose* to act in a loving way regardless of how we choose to feel or how our partner affects the love that we feel. Our behavior and our feelings and the beliefs that produce those feelings are our choice and our responsibility, and not something that we allow to victimize us or the people around us. We refuse to act lovingly toward someone only when we get something we want back from them because that is selfish manipulation disguised as love. Our love for each other must be unconditional or it simply isn't love.
8. *We will be frequently and continually affectionate with each other, even when other family members do not reciprocate:* We acknowledge that being affectionate is the way that we show to each other that we accept and value our spouse. We may be distressed by some sin they have committed, but rejecting affection or love or sex, even when we are angry at them, is to reject them as a person, which we agree never to do. We will always initiate and respond positively to the affection that is offered to us by our spouse and other family members.
9. *We will demonstrate empathy towards each other.* We will practice doing a task the way another family member does it at least once before we encourage them to do it our way. When we speak, we will consider how the other person might react to what we want to say before we say it and modify what we say to accomplish the desired result. We will work hard and in humility towards admitting when we're wrong and not being defensive.
10. *We will show respect toward each other.* We will show interest in one another when we first meet at the end of the day. We will give each other at least one compliment a day. We will patiently listen to one another without interruption even when we don't agree with what the other is saying. We won't nudge or draw attention to other family members if we are in church and the pastor is criticizing or convicting the congregation about some sin.
11. *We will act responsibly, honorably, and courteously with other family members.* We will clean up after ourselves and not expect other people to do our work for us. If we take something out, we will put it away. If we are expected to perform a chore, we will do it cheerfully and promptly and won't make excuses for not doing it. We will always try to leave things in better shape than we got them. We will not expect something for nothing from someone else. We will always tell the truth about our feelings and be willing to share our feelings tactfully with other family members. We will not use marriage or the parent-child relationship as an excuse to not work or contribute financially to the family or to our own needs. We will not expect spousal support from our spouse, unless we are so physically ill that we can't work.

12. We will honor our father and mother. We will do this in spite of how they treat us, because the Bible commands us to do this.
13. We will be flexible. We will demonstrate an open mind to the opinions and feelings and needs of others. We will not insist that others see the world the way we do. However, we will also expect them to responsibly honor all of their commitments and oaths, and especially the sacred marriage commitment.
14. We will hate the sin but never hate the sinner. We won't devalue anyone because of the sins they commit. Instead we will demonstrate love for them at all times, even when they are deep in sin. If they are committing sins, we will rebuke, exhort, and reprove them respectfully and in love, but we will be firm and fair in how we deal with sin by focusing on their best interests and the best interests of everyone in the family rather than selfishly promoting our own interests. See section 2.3.5 for further details on hate of sin.
15. We will be without hypocrisy. For instance, we will never ask anyone to do anything we ourselves wouldn't be willing to do, and if we ask someone to do something, we ought to be willing to help them unless we are physically or intellectually unable to, in which case we should assist them with other things we are good at to show our appreciation. We also will examine and judge ourselves by the same standards by which we examine others, and we will look at our own bad behavior *before* we say a word about other's behavior in accordance with Matt. 7:1-7. See section 3.5.2 for further details on righteous judgment. When we criticize others, it will be constructively with a focus on how to fix the problem and on cooperatively committing to at least one solution rather than on who is to blame and how people will never change.
16. We won't live in the past and use blame or guilt for sins that have been repented for as a way to use guilt to continually control, oppress, manipulate, hurt, or discourage other family members. When another family member admits their sin and repents, then we promise to forgive them, never again be angry or resentful over the sin, and never bring up the sin again. We will also do our best to bear the fruit of true repentance as described in section 2.3.15 when we have sinned against other family members or others.
17. We will take the time to notice, complement, and reward behavior we like and which is good. This will incentivize family members to habitually do the right thing.
18. We will actively participate in family meetings and family court. We will work diligently to improve the family environment to make it better for everyone without advantaging any one family member over the other.
19. We will do our best NOT to do any of the behaviors described in section 8.3: Types of Sin. If we slip and do any of these sinful behaviors and are made aware of it by someone else, we will repent immediately and ask for the forgiveness from the person or people who were hurt by these behaviors. We will also ask for God's forgiveness and attempt to compensate fully and completely for the harm we may have done.
20. We will do our utmost to understand and know the will of the Lord about how He wants us to act in the process of glorifying Him in everything that we do. We will do our utmost to demonstrate our faith and repentant and thankful attitude continually through good works and good behavior by demonstrating the behaviors documented in section 2.3: Christian Character and Behavior.