

A stylized illustration of a family holding hands in a circle against a dark, starry night sky. The family consists of several adults and children, depicted in various shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The background is a deep teal with scattered white stars and a subtle, larger-scale pattern. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

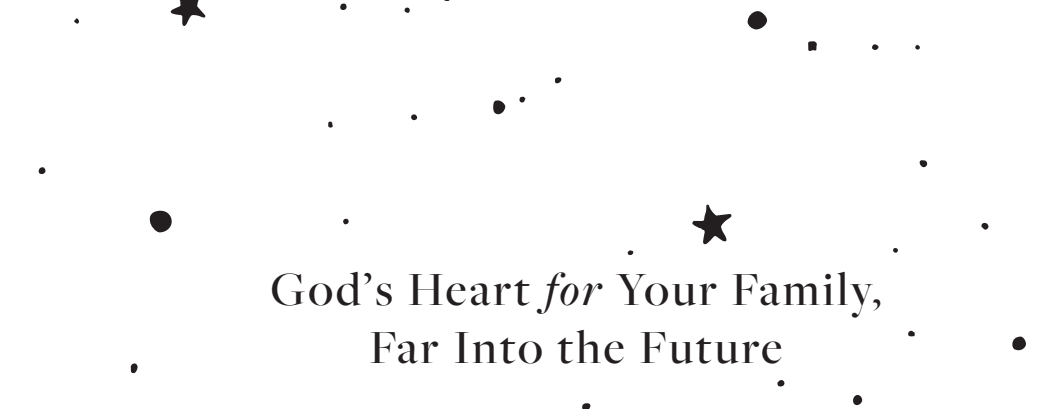
God's Heart *for* Your Family,
Far Into the Future

To the
**TENTH
GENERATION**

RAY & JANI ORTLUND

foreword by Krista Ortlund Scheidt

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RAY & JANI ORTLUND

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To the memory of
Hope Anastasia Ortlund,
our grandchild happy in God's presence above
while we rejoice in him here below

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Foreword

Let me begin by stating the obvious: no family is perfect. Considering this, what would compel a husband and wife to write a book on a potentially sensitive subject and run the risk of inviting scrutiny and suspicion into their own family? Quite simply: faith. This book attests to a faith-filled conviction that amid the potential pitfalls and inevitable shortcomings, building a family with a vision of expanding God's kingdom is a worthy endeavor packed with eternal potential and is actually possible for every one of us.

Because this book is in your hands, I suspect you have a desire to build a family that will echo with redemptive reverberations for generations to come. Read on. You have two trustworthy trail guides in the pages ahead. They are not saying, "Look at us and follow us because we did it perfectly." Rather, they are saying, "Look with us at this vision God has placed on our hearts. With his help you can build a family of generational devotion to Christ, as we are seeking to do."

Proverbs 29:18 can be translated, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people are discouraged." This book, with the prophetic vision it boldly casts, was written to *encourage* you. As

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an Ortlund insider (I am Ray and Jani's daughter), I can testify to the astonishing privilege of growing up in a home of such consistent love, nurture, wisdom, kindness, truth, and grace. It's equipped me well to carry the baton of disciple-making into my own mothering amid very challenging circumstances.

As you read this book, may your heart swell with hope and catch the vision of what your family can become in Christ, and may you be equipped and encouraged in your endeavor.

Krista Ortlund Scheidt

PART I

In Your Family

CHAPTER 1

Your Future Is Bigger than You Think

*“All these blessings shall come upon
you and overtake you.”*

Deuteronomy 28:2

You are a person of historic significance. Maybe you don't see yourself that way. Maybe you feel small. Who doesn't? But if it's true, if it's true that you are *historically significant*, then your life is also *eternally consequential*. You live in a much bigger space and time than you think, bearing a much larger capacity for influence than you might realize.

Let's think it through together.

The world trivializes us. It wears us down day after day. The message coming through the cultural air we breathe is that we're nothing more than our social media following, nothing

more than a unit in a voting bloc, nothing more than a statistic in a marketing niche. And when this world is not trivializing us, it's mistreating us. It leaves us feeling not only small but also damaged, as if we needed any more help causing trouble to ourselves or thinking poorly of ourselves!

No surprise, then, that we sometimes wonder, *Why try at all? Why not just settle?*

But we do matter. *You* matter. You matter right now, this very instant as you read these words, and you will matter forever. Why? Because God himself created you for a purpose so big that only he could dream it up and pull it off.

Almighty God orchestrated your entrance into history. Throughout your preceding generations, he was preparing your very DNA for your mission here in his world. He arranged everything through human events for you to be born in the right place, at the right time, for the right reason. And every single day since then, he's been investing in you, through both your joys and your sorrows. You are the only one on the face of the earth who can fulfill God's mission for *you*.

Why not dare to believe it? You really are a person of historic significance. God thinks so. He has a plan in motion, a plan that he's great at working, and his plan includes you. In fact, he "works *all things* according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). How can that *not* include you?

And if it includes you, doesn't it include your family too?

If your life is no accident of fate, then your marriage and children are no accident either—including that “surprise” baby you didn’t budget for. (We have one of those!) God has a thrilling purpose for your family, a purpose that runs far past the immediate present, a purpose that extends long into the future.

That is why we wrote this book—to get you thinking bigger thoughts about yourself and your family’s place in God’s plan. Bigger thoughts grow bigger faith. And your faith will change the story your life will tell for generations to come.

Decades from now, long after you’re at home with the Lord in eternal glory, your children will remember you. They will forget many things you say, but they will never forget who you were, who you *are*. They will never forget that you saw yourself (and them) the way God sees you and them, as people of historic significance, as part of his big plan for time and eternity. This whole miracle of his grace that you *are*, the glory of the Lord resting upon you even in your weakness—especially in your weakness—this is the “you” your children will never forget. In times of temptation they may *want* to forget. But they can never unsee what they are seeing in you—imperfect but Christlike, weak but powerful, ordinary but significant.

Many years from now, when they are in their fifties and sixties and seventies, facing challenges we cannot even imagine, they will gain courage just by remembering you. They will even turn aside at times to be alone and quietly weep with gratitude,

thinking of your love for Jesus, your reverence for the Bible, your loyalty to your church, your steady faithfulness to earn and provide and give and pray, your sacrificial service to them through the years, your hope in God through thick and thin. They'll remember how you found significance in doing small things that didn't matter to this world, but they mattered to God, like you matter to him, like your family matters to him. By his grace, your children will then hand down that same gift to their children, and on into the future, until it becomes your family's generational story of what God can do through broken people who find their identity as children of the heavenly Father.

And you know what? They might keep telling that story *for a long time*.

Even to the tenth generation.

What Got Us Thinking

For us, long-term thinking about our family was a big change. Thinking out two weeks ahead, even two years ahead—we knew something about that. But thinking out, say, two hundred years? Those were completely unexplored thoughts!

Here is what opened our eyes. Years ago, Jani was reading her Bible . . .

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...just enjoying my morning devotions—reading in Deuteronomy, no less—when something leapt off the page at me:

"No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the LORD. *Even to the tenth generation*, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD. No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. *Even to the tenth generation*, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever." (Deut. 23:2–3)

Whoa, I thought. That's serious! God excluding a group of people from entering his presence? For ten generations? How does that make sense? If every page of the Bible, from cover to cover, is ultimately meant to show us Jesus and his gospel—every story, every law, every prophecy, every bit of it—what part of the good news was I supposed to see in something like this?

Well, we know the book of Deuteronomy is Moses preparing Israel for their future in the Promised Land, having come out of Egypt and traveled forty years through the wilderness. Part of that future included gathering for worship. And if we learn anything about worship from the way it's presented to us in these early pages of Scripture, it's that no

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one can ever just barge into God's presence, right? Everyone needs a sacrifice. Everyone needs the grace of Christ for sinners. Whatever else is going on in this Old Testament passage, it must be preparing us somehow for the assurance of the New Testament, that in Jesus alone, we who do not deserve to stand before a holy God—any more than these ancient sinners from Deuteronomy 23—have been invited and welcomed into his presence (see Acts 11:17–18; Gal. 2:15–16).

Oh, my, the thoughts were really swirling in my mind now. I was asking the Lord for help to see his heart more clearly. That's when a new thought occurred to me: "If God *excluded* certain people to the tenth generation, how much more does

"If God *excluded* certain
people to the tenth
generation, how much
more does he long to
include people to the
tenth generation!"

he long to *include* people to
the tenth generation!" Doesn't
he always delight more to
bless than curse, to receive
than reject, to welcome than
banish? Yes. Much, much
more!

I shared this insight with
Ray, and we began noticing
that this deeply felt eagerness
of God to smile upon his people with blessing is all over the
Bible:

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- “I will *bless* you.” (Gen. 12:2)
- “Say to them, ‘The LORD *bless* you and keep you.’” (Num. 6:23–24)
- “The LORD your God turned the curse into a *blessing* for you, because the LORD your God loved you.” (Deut. 23:5)
- “All these *blessings* shall come upon you and overtake you.” (Deut. 28:2)
- “I have set before you life and death, *blessing* and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.” (Deut. 30:19)
- Our God turned the curse into a *blessing*. (Neh. 13:2)
- Let them curse, but you will *bless*! (Ps. 109:28)
- A faithful man will abound with *blessings*. (Prov. 28:20)
- . . . so that in Christ Jesus the *blessing* of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:14)
- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has *blessed* us in Christ with every spiritual *blessing* in the heavenly places. (Eph. 1:3)

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The bias of God's heart tilts *way* over toward including us in his blessing. That's the wraparound message we want to declare throughout this book. If, back in Deuteronomy, God banned certain tribes and groups "to the tenth generation," *how might the how-much-more heart of God bless our family, and your family, to the tenth generation?*

It's a thought that has really enlarged our categories. The generational blessing of God, stretching out over our family far into the distant future, left us breathless—more excited, and more responsible.

More excited? Yes! We started thinking about our family in expanded dimensions, beyond just the children and grandchildren we know and love right now. *More responsible?* Yes! We began daring to pray more boldly, asking the Lord to bless our family, not vaguely, in general, but to the tenth generation. And if a generation comes of age every twenty years or so, we're now praying that every one of our descendants would love the Lord Jesus Christ with a true heart, above all else, for the next *two hundred years!*

Sometimes this vision for our family feels crazy even to us. But then we remember, God himself has been preparing us for this mission our whole lives. We are preapproved by his grace to "go for it"—in prayer, in purpose. We therefore accept

responsibility to be flow-through-able as parents and grandparents, inspiring our future generations to stand for Christ, far into the future.

And when you think about it, ten generations are not an unimaginably long time. The two of us already have a living experience of *five* generations within our own family: 1) our grandparents, 2) our parents, 3) ourselves, 4) our children, 5) our grandchildren. The story is big, yes. But look how quickly it unfolds.

The more we talked about it, the more thrillingly mind-boggling it became.

Here's what we mean. We got married in 1971. Just the two of us, obviously. And we weren't even thinking beyond our wedding night! The only thing we knew was that we couldn't *wait* to get married. You understand, of course. But then when we got home from our honeymoon, we started living life together, we blinked, and fifty years flew by! We now have a family of twenty-five precious souls spread out across three generations. In so short a time, our family grew from the two of us, to four children, who then married, and now the eight of them have presented us with fifteen grandchildren. That makes us a family of twenty-five. Just like that.

Stick with us here as we do the math out a bit further:

- Two people in the first generation
- Eight people in the second generation
(our kids and their spouses)

- Fifteen grandchildren who, if most or all of them marry someday, become as many as thirty people in the third generation.
- Plus *their* kids? Our great-grandchildren? And *their* spouses? Who knows how big the fourth generation could be?

See how it adds up?

All we did was, we got married. Then, well, look what happened.

And if our family keeps growing at its present rate of acceleration, in ten generations these 1971 starry-eyed lovebirds will have multiplied to around 55,000 people—a city about the size of Sarasota, Florida. *And it's all our fault!*

We can't say to those 55,000 people, "We have nothing to do with you. Why do we owe you anything, sitting here where we live today?" No way! By God's grace, we can, we must, we will *think future*. All those people traceable to our marriage who will appear in this world according to God's plan—they will be facing unimaginable challenges in their time. They deserve, and they will need, all the prayer and all the help we can send on ahead.

The same goes for your family too.

Do you see now why we so confidently say, you really are a person of historic significance? And do you see why it starts changing how we all "do family" right now?

For example, our audacious prayer is that *the whole world will hear about Jesus through our family*. Ridiculous? Maybe. But maybe not, because when you consider God's greatness, *small* prayers are the truly ridiculous ones. We're not asking God for an *ideal* family. Not at all. (We surely aren't an ideal patriarch and matriarch!) We're just asking him for a *saved* family. We realize we're passing down our problems to future generations, same as everyone. But we believe in the grace of God. We believe it's through fallible but saved people—like us—that the whole world will hear about Jesus. Does he have any other kind of people to work with?

So we pray big prayers for our family. We believe it's true to God's big heart: to bless our family, and your family, and every family that turns to him. "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39).

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We have found this way of thinking and praying and dreaming and caring to be energizing, invigorating. We find the true magnitude of our family and your family breathtaking, sobering, stretching, thrilling. In daily life, of course, our simple family routines are hardly impressive. We are boring! You too? But why not

dare to believe that the future of the world is being shaped today through our Christian homes by the quiet grace of God? Nothing, no matter how ordinary, if it's consecrated to Christ, will ever go unused by the one who "works all things according to the counsel of his will." God *loves* to tell surprising family stories that will matter for a long time, even to the tenth generation!

Every time this long-term vision fills our hearts, it reminds us the family God has given us is worthy of our best, for the glory of Jesus.

So is yours.

How This Book Can Help

This book is not a family management guide. It is not a list of handy tips. It is not about self-help. We do hope you will gain insights here for guiding your family into their Christ-centered purpose, but we are not offering a fail-safe plan for family amazingness. God doesn't bless human grandiosity. But he sure does "give grace to the humble" (James 4:6). He pours his big grace into the ordinary lives we actually live. This book, we hope, will encourage you to believe it's true, and dare to live like it's true.

In a way, this book is an investment proposal. God is calling you to live your present life for the sake of your future family—and with an audacious faith in Christ they will be unable

to ignore or forget. There are no guarantees, of course. You can't control the future, but you can invest in it. You can give your heart away to it. And as you do, you will be building a lasting spiritual legacy for the future, a future where you can already be living today.

John Paton (1824–1907) was raised in a devout family in Scotland. He became a missionary to the South Pacific islands now called Vanuatu. He courageously opposed the slave trade that was sinking the people into misery. It was not easy bringing the gospel of Jesus to Vanuatu.

One powerful help that kept him going, through it all, was memories of his godly parents. Paton described the day he left home, “launched upon the ocean of life,” as he himself put it. It happened like this:

My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half-mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence. . . . His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me, and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain.

We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said, "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil!"

Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could, and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him. Waving my hat in adieu, I was round the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road, and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dyke to see if he yet stood where I had left him, and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dyke and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while, he got down, turned his face towards home, . . . his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my

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gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me.¹

Your children, too, will remember you. And they will be strengthened to keep following Jesus—to the tenth generation.

GENERATION BY GENERATION, GOD CAN ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS THROUGH FAMILY

In the midst of family life, most days are too busy to think far into the future. Then once the children are grown, family life can feel like mostly memories, often tinged with regrets. And the future? More worries and fears, laden with unknowns.

But you and your family right now, whatever your ages, whatever you're facing, are living within a much larger story than you realize. Your investments and efforts today matter as part of the grand sweep of God's lasting purposes. His heart for your family can help you create a culture of faith now that can still be reverberating *To the Tenth Generation*.

Sound impossible? Ray and Jani Ortlund help bring such unimaginable thoughts down into the everyday ordinary of home and marriage and parenting—even grandparenting. With refreshing honesty and wise counsel, they invite you to experience the greatness that God can accomplish through a Christian family. It can happen, yes, in your family—now and for many, many, many years to come.

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