

# The Family Economy

Discovering the Family as It Was Designed to Work

*by* RORY GROVES

*Afterword by Allan C. Carlson*

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THE FAMILY ECONOMY

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Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the The King James Version.

*What therefore God hath joined together,  
let not man put asunder.*

—ST. MARK 10:9 (KJV)

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# Introduction

## *Unthinkable Again*

*When you destroy the given order of the family, you, in short, destroy both the life and the family. An apple tree chainsawed to the ground and then stacked next to the wall as cordwood hardly remains an apple tree, or any sort of tree for that matter . . . . It will never again bear what gave it its identity—apples.*

—BLAIR ADAMS, *WHAT KIND OF FAMILY?*

IT IS SAID THAT when men first started to leave the farm to work in the mines, their families followed. After centuries of working the same ground together, generation after generation, it was unthinkable that a job should separate a man from his wife, a father from his children, a family from its home.

Families worked together. That's how it had always been, and that's how it always would be. Or so they thought.

For most of history, the family economy was the unifying force in human culture—the cement of civilization. Until very recently this societal arrangement was natural, enduring, and unquestioned. It could be evidenced even in the earliest stages of industrialism when whole families were

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hired to operate textile factories in what came to be known as “family mills.” Even as late as the Civil War, it was not uncommon to find soldiers living with their families in military camps.

So when fathers left for the mines, their families came with. They made their homes nearby, prepared meals together, washed laundry together, reared and educated their children, all around the mouth of the cave that swallowed their father daily, from sun up to sun down.

Eventually children were brought into the mines, and factories too, and fitted to tasks deemed suitable for little hands: tasks that bright, young children were only eager to do to win the admiration of their daddy (like days on the farm). Tasks such as opening a mule cart door for twelve hours a day, six days a week, five hundred feet underground. Wives and daughters were brought into the textile mills where, they were told, they would be “more useful than they otherwise would be” at home.<sup>1</sup>

This newfound way of work was welcomed by some and resisted by many, but it was here to stay. “The general industrial growth of communities was . . . an irresistible though a slowly coming tide,” historians would note. “Progressive methods of employment and the introduction of machinery gradually broke down all opposition.”<sup>2</sup>

It was the Age of Prosperity and rising standards of living. The Industrial Revolution demanded, above all, efficiency. And nothing is more inefficient than human relationships.

So, after thousands of years of historical practice, families stopped working together. They left self-sustaining farms

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *History of Wages*, 85.

2. Allen, *Shoe Industry*, 21.

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for jobs in the city. They exchanged generational lands for rented tenements. They traded time together for paychecks apart. And the unbroken cycle of father and son, of mother and daughter, of family and home was put asunder.

Within a few generations family function and integrity would devolve to a state unrecognizable to the preindustrial world. And the rising tide has not abated since: the cement which binds us is crumbling and washing out to sea.

This book is for families who are ready to turn the tide. It is for fathers who do not want to spend the majority of their waking lives separated from their families. It is for wives who desire connection with their husbands and vision for their homes. It is for parents who are tired of watching their children grow and mature and abandon the way of life they hold so dear.

In the flood of fragmentation, this study explores a way forward.

In the chapters that follow, I outline the historical developments that led to fractured families of today. But I do not mean to merely articulate the problems, of which we are all well aware. After years of writing and teaching on the family economy, I wanted something practical that I could put into people's hands, something that both introduces the concept and provides initial steps for those wanting to get started.

All is not lost; indeed, there is much reason for hope. We are reaching a critical moment in the West. An historic moment. Some commentators have said that the next few years will be remembered as the most significant since the fall of Rome. How we respond to these challenges will be felt for generations. We needn't remain as fractured families and

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splintered communities. There exists an opportunity to right the ship, to turn the tide.

There was a time when separating the family in order to subsist would have been unthinkable. Let us make it unthinkable again.

Rory Groves  
December 2023





**“Their families followed.” 31st Pennsylvania Infantry, Fort Bunker Hill.  
1861. (Photo: Library of Congress)**