

Celebration Series

Marriage and Family

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Those who are willing to take the risk, make the necessary sacrifices, and apply the biblical instructions concerning marriage will find identity, security, unity, intimacy, and personal growth beyond any other human relationship.

—Lesson 3, page 24

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Adult Teacher's Manual

Summer
2014

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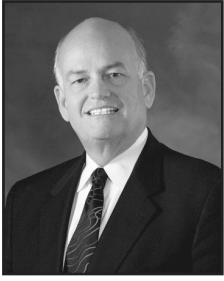
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WORD AFLAME
PUBLICATIONS
United Pentecostal Church International

Adult Teacher's Manual

Editor: Richard M. Davis • Cover Design: Dennis Fiorini • Design: Karen Myers
Manufactured in USA, June 2014, 194411.

www.wordaflame.org



A Salute to Pro-family Values

by Richard M. Davis

Never has there been a time in my life that a study of marriage and family has been more timely, needed, and important to true Apostolic believers and to our world. This is such a time and I rejoice in the presentation of this vital quarter of lessons.

The post-modern culture has taken aim at the pro-family values of the church. Satan is determined to undermine the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what better assault could he initiate against it than to attack the very concept of the family? That is exactly what he is doing within the context of the popular North American culture today.

I am happy to announce that the Bible has not expired or gone out of style. Its principles and truths are timeless—just as true and applicable to our day as any throughout all human history.

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). (See also Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33.)

What the Bible has to say about marriage and the family reflects the enduring

truths of one of God’s first ideas and plans for the human family. Society did not invent the concept of marriage and raising families. Nations and individuals did not come up with the idea of marriage. Marriage was God’s idea, and He instituted it shortly after the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden. God performed the first surgery—taking from Adam’s side the initial material from which He shaped and created the first woman, Eve. She was to become the mother of all the living.

God understood how vital to culture and society would be the idea of monogamy, faithfulness, and unending commitment to family. He understood that commitment to marriage and family would be the glue of society—holding together the very fabric of civilization.

The winds of adversity will continue to blow against familial relationships because it is the best hope Satan has of destroying the church, but we can rest assured: the church is secure in Christ Jesus. He built it firmly upon the rock of truth and nothing can prevail against it. The winds will howl and adversity will endeavor to rock it, but it stands on the unmovable Rock—Jesus Christ. It shall stand against all attacks, even unto the end of time itself!

May you benefit from our study together of marriage and the family!

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**UNITED PENTECOSTAL
FOUNDATION**

The Foundation of a Family

1
week of
06.01.14

Lesson Text

Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-21

1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:

2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

.....

20 And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Focus Thought

Unity in the family and a strong commitment to God's purposes, principles, and oneness are prerequisites for a strong family.

Focus Verses

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Big Brother—Little Brother

by Gary D. Erickson

My brother is eight years older than I. While growing up, this age difference put strains on our relationship. When he was interested in girls, I was interested in shooting my BB gun. When he was trying to get his driver's license, I was strategizing toward getting a new bike. We experienced all the rigors of the big-brother-little-brother syndrome.

My brother was a fun-lover. He enjoyed joking and teasing, and I was the target of many of his adventures. I remember many frustrating occasions when my brother would have his fun tormenting Little Brother. When my younger sister and I got into arguments, Big Brother would always take her side. We loved each other, but I can't say we were bosom buddies growing up.

When I was about nine years old, something revealing happened. I was enjoying adventures with friends at the Louisiana Camp Meeting when our brotherhood was tested. One afternoon, behind the concession stand, an older boy decided he would bully me. The bully was about a foot taller and a couple years older. He was shoving, hitting, and verbally abusing me as I backed away from his advances. Just when I thought all hope was lost, I heard a familiar voice behind me. I turned to see Big Brother. He took the bully by the arm and spun him like a top down the side of the little hill where we were standing. When the bully reached the bottom, my brother was in his face with a challenge: "You want to pick on somebody? Pick on me!" The bully's challenge was being met!

Now I understand this verse of Scripture: "A brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). We may have argued and squabbled at home, but in public we were family. There is a special bond between family members. Families form the basic building blocks of a civilized society.

I can say today, "My brother is my best friend."

- I. GOD'S COMMANDMENTS FOUNDATIONAL
- II. FAMILY COMMITTED WHOLLY
- III. GOD'S STATUTES TAUGHT DILIGENTLY
- IV. GODLY PRINCIPLES REFLECTED
 - A. Personal Adornment
 - B. Physical Home
- V. SPIRITUAL HERITAGE BESTOWED
 - A. Meaning Given
 - B. History Recounted
 - C. Commitments Renewed

Contemplating the Topic

Every society is just one generation from barbarism. Failure to pass along the wisdom, traditions, and culture of a people to the next generation is societal suicide. This is no less true of families than of societies. Loving parents teach their children what it means to be a Gonzalez, Jones, or Ahmed and how those familial distinctions are lived out in a thousand details of daily existence. Some of these familial traits are negative. They are destructively passed on from generation to generation unless the pattern is broken. Other traits are favorable and provide a sense of identity, belonging, and loving security. Preserving and

passing along those commendable traits is a primary purpose of family. The Book of Proverbs proclaims, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1).

For Christian families, the importance of interweaving godly traits into familial patterns and passing them on to our children cannot be overemphasized. As demonstrated by His relationship with Israel, God's primary plan for evangelization is through the rearing of believing children in a home of faith.

The Barna Group found that nearly half of all Americans who claim to have "accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior" did so before the age of thirteen. While this does not discount the church's mission to a lost world, it emphasizes that the church is not meant to grow one *person* at a time, but one *family* at a time. Research by Thom Rainer (*High Expectations*) found that churches that intentionally seek to reach children *and* their families are most effective in assimilating new converts into the church body. The strength of a local church—indeed its very continued existence—depends on the strength of its families.

This quarter we will be examining the biblical examples and specific teachings that help

us to grow strong families. We can no longer expect the traditional model of two married parents rearing their own biological children to be the overwhelming norm within the church because it is no longer the norm in the culture at large. Today, “family” frequently means blended and single-parent families. Added to this are the increasingly common phenomena of life-long singleness and of multi-generational households required by economic challenges. These social changes put extra stress on the modern family.

However, the Bible does not speak only to the nuclear families of the 1950s. In fact, the nuclear family is seldom seen in the pages of the Bible. All sorts of family arrangements appear in Scripture, and many families in the Bible were dysfunctional. No matter what one’s past, current, or future family circumstances may be, every Christian can gain insight, wisdom, and maturity from studying and applying the biblical principles about family.

Searching the Scriptures

I. GOD’S COMMANDMENTS FOUNDATIONAL

Moses began chapter 6 of Deuteronomy with the declaration, “This is the commandment” (singular in Hebrew). The Commandment was the covenant made by God with the people of Israel. It consisted of statutes (limitations, prescribed acts, and decrees), and judgments (justices, procedures, and decisions) (verse 1) and the promises and blessings that accompany obedience.

Keeping the Commandment was not the coin with which to purchase blessings from God. God is not an indifferent vending machine demanding payment, nor an unjust judge expecting bribes. Instead, the Law itself, if it had been kept out of a pure heart and in love for God and one’s fellow man, would have produced a utopian society in which justice, mercy, and righteousness prevailed.

That Israel was unable to keep the Law is in no way a condemnation of the Law. Neither is it an indication that the people of Israel were any more wicked or thoughtless than are we. Their failure should help us understand that we cannot live righteously without the power of the Holy Spirit and the loving grace of God. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:2-6).

Righteousness cannot come from keeping the Law. Rather keeping the Law comes from righteousness.

“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:21-26).

The purpose of God’s righteous decrees is to bring about life, peace, joy, love—all of those godly characteristics that bring personal fulfillment and social harmony. The people of Israel were to be taught the Commandment of God, and in turn they were to teach it so that obedience could bring blessings generation after generation (Deuteronomy 6:2). A major contributing cause of Israel’s continuing cycle of backsliding was the failure to teach the Commandment to each succeeding generation. It was fundamentally a problem in how families brought up their children. In a similar fashion, problems the church may experience such as increasing secularization, lessening fear of the Lord, and disrespect for

God's commandments are all symptoms of weakening family structures.

II. FAMILY COMMITTED WHOLLY

Observance, fear, and obedience to God's commands require a wholehearted commitment to Him. It demands love for Him that consumes all of our heart, soul, and strength. It requires a love for each other that rivals our love of self. If these two aspects are true of us, all the law is fulfilled in us (Matthew 22:37-40). However, love of God and man has its greatest expression in community. God did not intend us to be isolated Christians. Both the Old and New Covenant are covenants with a community of believers, and to fully experience these covenants one must be a part of that community. Under the New Covenant, that means full integration with the church, the body of Christ.

Being Oneness in our theology is not enough. We must also be one with fellow believers in our commitment, love, and dedication to service. We seek a oneness of shared experience, shared doctrine, and shared traditions—a unity that brings about change in every individual, recognizing we do not change as individuals without the vital links to family. Those who do not have a believing family are called upon by the Word of God to establish links with fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers in the Lord and, having obtained Christian maturity, to willingly take the role of fathers and mothers to others in the body of Christ.

III. GOD'S STATUTES TAUGHT DILIGENTLY

The image in Deuteronomy 6 is not of a synagogue-centered or even a temple-centered faith, but a faith that is family-centered. Moses did not command the priests to "teach them diligently" to those who worshiped at the Tabernacle. The primary responsibility for creating and nourishing believers did not rest on a professional staff of trained clergy, but on mothers and fathers just like us.

Although most Jews recognize Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) as the most significant annual "feast," Shabbat (the Sabbath) is usually recognized as the most important holy day of the Jewish calendar. The significance is that the annual Yom Kippur was centered on the sacrificial system of the Temple and speaks to the Christian of the sacrifice on the cross, while the weekly Shabbat is centered on the family as the most basic religious unit and

speaks to the Christian of closeness within the faith community.

Jews are to celebrate Shabbat primarily by engaging in pleasurable activities such as eating, singing, and spending time with the family. While we often associate Shabbat observances with attendance at Synagogue, this was an extra-biblical addition instituted during the Babylonian captivity and in no way lessens the family-centric nature of the holy observance. The two key elements of Shabbat are *zakhor* (remember) and *shamor* (observe). At Shabbat, children are individually blessed, giving each of them a moment every week when their father's voice, their mother's prayers, their siblings' attentions, and their God's loving care is focused on them alone. These weekly rituals, prayers, blessings, special meals, songs, and family activities of Shabbat are lessons in words, music, and experiences of what it means to be a person in covenant with God.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 shows a family and emphasizes that parents should talk about God and His precepts during everyday activities.

Such lessons were not reserved just for once a week. Deuteronomy 6:7 commanded parents to talk to their children about the covenant while sitting, walking, reclining, or rising; in the privacy of the home and the public life of the way—in other words, at any and every opportunity. The purpose of these talks was to teach "these words" to their children. These were conversations, not a set of lectures. The Hebrew word translated "teach" is the verb *shanan*, which means to sharpen swords or arrows (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). In the *King James Version's* translation of Deuteronomy 6:7, the words "talk of" accurately express the concept God was giving as a commandment to the parents as they were to "speak about" the covenant.

Children were to learn the commandments through hearing them recited at public feasts, new moons, and holy days. These blunt recitations were to be sharpened by discussing them with their parents. In other words, parents were to sharpen their children by repeated and continual interaction that, depending on the maturity of the child, would increasingly become a reciprocal discussion about living in covenant as opposed to a recitation of

requirements and restrictions of the law. This continually brought the parent's attention back to the child and encouraged interaction that treated the child as valuable and worthy to be listened to as well as spoken to. Such interaction fills a child's heart as well as his head. It produced a love for the Word of God rather than just a memory of the words.

This model of childrearing seems much easier in a pre-industrial society where children received most of their education at home and worked alongside their parents in family agriculture or business. Since the time Moses spoke the words in Deuteronomy, the common school movement has removed children, the industrial revolution has removed fathers, and the information economy has removed mothers from the home.

When they are together, families must overcome barriers to communication such as diverse interests, goals, experiences, and peer groups. No longer can we merely assume all family members share the common foundations needed for meaningful interaction. Even the demands of church (age-related groups, worship services, and worthy Christian activities) seem to leave little time or energy for families just to be families. It is almost as if Christians spend more time learning to be good fathers, mothers, and spouses than they are given time to put those lessons into practice.

While this may not be the case for most of us, there are still times when we all feel the frustration of modern pressures that disrupt the family. We all fall short of our goals as parents. In the face of difficulties and failings, we must maintain our focus on our God-given responsibility to bring up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Parents must remain totally committed to bringing up godly children by intentionally taking time to be with them, talking with them about the things of God, and living a good example of committed Christianity before them.

IV. GODLY PRINCIPLES REFLECTED

A. Personal Adornment

Deuteronomy 6:8 commands, "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes." The *tefillin* (phylacteries) worn by observant Jews during weekday morning prayers was an attempt literally to keep this command, but Jesus rebuked those who made an ostentatious display of their broad phylacteries

(Matthew 23:5). To "bind . . . for a sign" is literally to "place a mark." This may allude to the custom to tattoo a mark on the hand or forehead of a foreign slave to demonstrate ownership (*Theological Wordbook of Old Testament Words*). The binding of the hand and forehead with the Commandment possibly referred to the fact all their actions and thoughts were to be bound up in God's will and word. Such obedience was the mark that told the world they belonged to God.

Our children cannot see how we think, but they can see the results of our thoughts demonstrated in our actions.

Old Testament Jews were to show an outward difference in the clothing they wore, foods they ate, and customs they kept so they would be easily distinguished from the nations around them. This difference was not to become a presentation of mere outward obedience or self-righteous duty, but it was to be a true external expression of an inward change.

Believers should outwardly express their holiness of dress and conduct, and also their binding to God through appropriate personal adornment. Our children cannot see how we think, but they can see the results of our thoughts demonstrated in our actions. The parents who constantly are worried about measuring up to the world's standards of beauty, fashion, and success are teaching their children the world is the final arbiter of perfection. However, those who set a pattern of living a separated life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit testify that pleasing Jesus Christ is the aspiration of their lives.

B. Physical Home

In addition to binding the Commandment upon the hand and between the eyes, verse 9 states, "And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." A person can see the literal obedience to this command when approaching the door of an observant Jew and noticing the small box fastened to the doorpost. This box is known as a *mezuzah*,

but it is actually the scroll inside the box that is the mezuzah. A scribe using a blessed quill and ink has written Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 on the scroll so the Commandment may be written “upon the posts” of the home. When an observant Jew enters a home with a mezuzah, it is customary to kiss the fingertips and touch the box while praying, “May God protect my going and coming in, now and forever.”

As believers, we need to be careful that the Word of God protects the entrance to our home. This is not to say we literally should hang Bible verses on our doors and walls (although that is often a good thing to do). Whenever possible, only those things that pass the test found in Philippians 4:8 should be allowed to enter our homes. In addition, we should be careful that entertainment, information, and social networking sources and content we allow into our homes are appropriate for our children’s maturational and developmental stage. Our home should be a refuge of peace, safety, love, and devotion where our children find wholeness in the midst of societal attacks.

V. SPIRITUAL HERITAGE BESTOWED

Many parents fear that rearing their children in an atmosphere too different from that of their non-church friends and acquaintances will lead to resentment or a sense the child is “missing out” on something other children have. This may be true if the only reason the child is given for the family’s lifestyle is “because I said so,” “the pastor makes us,” “it’s our religion,” or even worse “Jesus won’t love you if you do that.”

A. Meaning Given

Sometimes parents may see a child’s natural curiosity about the ways of righteousness as a challenge to authority, or they may fear they are unable to answer questions. God never fears a questioning mind. Deuteronomy 6 concludes with God inviting the child’s question, “What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?” (Deuteronomy 6:20). To such a question God does not leave parents speechless, but provides a model response in these last few verses.

Our home should be a refuge of peace, safety, love, and devotion.

B. History Recounted

It is important to recognize the careful use of pronouns in Deuteronomy 6. In his question in verse 20, the child sees the covenant as belonging to the parent (“hath commanded *you*” [emphasis added]), but by the end of the response, the parent has demonstrated that it belongs also to the child: “the LORD commanded *us* to do all these statutes. . . . he hath commanded *us*” (Deuteronomy 6:24-25, emphasis added). Parents accomplish this by transmitting spiritual heritage across the generations. However, this is much more than just recounting the history of their ancestors.

The parent was to say, “We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (Deuteronomy 6:21). This is one of the defining characteristics of this book. Deuteronomy is Moses’ final sermon to Israel. A new generation was ready to enter the Promised Land. The children to whom chapter 6 directly referred had been born in the wilderness, as had many of their parents.

Except for Joshua and Caleb, there was no one in the group Moses addressed who was over sixty (Numbers 14:29-33). The vast majority of the congregation—all of those under forty—had never seen Egypt, much less been slaves there. Yet, Moses proclaimed, “The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes” (Deuteronomy 1:30), and “he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you” (Deuteronomy 11:4).

This connection of the new generation to the past is emphasized throughout the Book of Deuteronomy by requiring the hearers to identify with their ancestors in each of the important events of the exodus and wilderness wandering. “He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen” (Deuteronomy 10:21). The parent’s declaration “we were

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 illustrates the value and importance of Deuteronomy 6:20-25.

slaves” was the great acquiescence of the heart and mind that this was not just their parents’ or grandparents’ experiences. If it happened to Israel, it happened to them!

C. Commitments Renewed

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states that parents must accept their spiritual heritage before they can pass it on to their children.

Before we pass on the spiritual heritage to our children, we must accept it as our own. If it happened to the church, it happened to us! God challenged the Deuteronomy generation to accept all the miracles, failures, triumphs, defeats, praises, complaints, righteousness, and sins of their ancestors as their own because these events were all vital in shaping the congregation as it was that day and as it would be in the future.

The parental response to a questioning child goes to the very heart of our identity and God’s plan for us. “He brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in” (Deuteronomy 6:23). Verse 24 emphasizes the personal benefits and security of living according to God’s law. His commandments are “for our good always.” Finally, verse 25 (“it shall be our righteousness”) emphasizes the joy of a clear conscience before God. All this begins with knowing, accepting, and transmitting our heritage in the Lord.

“The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day” (Deuteronomy 5:3).

Internalizing the Message

History, society, and even technology seem to conspire to tear the modern family apart.

As a church, we must do everything we can to support and strengthen the Christian family. That may require significant expenditures of time and other resources, but the effort is significantly worthwhile. Beyond that, we have a biblical mandate to love, treasure, evangelize, and disciple our children. This charge is addressed not just to the parents, but to the entire community of believers. No matter our age or in what stage of life we find ourselves, we all have a personal responsibility to help build strong church families. Often this is done by simply modeling a righteous life dedicated to godly service. At other times it requires more active measures, including personal sacrifice.

In addition, we should not forget that tolerating the weakening of the family in society will inevitably lead to greater attacks on families in the church. Carefully building on a firm foundation as described in this lesson assures that the family will survive the floods of cultural pressures, but provides no promise such floods will not occur. We can mitigate the damage of these floods by building levies around the families in our communities and nation to hold back the waters before they even reach the church.

REFLECTIONS

- What might a local church do to intentionally strengthen its families? Discuss.
- Discuss some strategies the church can use to help strengthen families in the communities.
- List some ways the parents of an elementary-aged child can engage that child in discussion of the Bible. What church resources could help support this endeavor?
- Think about some threats to a strong family foundation that are unique to your personal circumstances. How might the church family help to defeat these dangers? Discuss.
- Discuss ways we can strengthen the family of a neighbor who does not attend our church.

Marriage and Family

2

week of
06.08.14

God Made Them Male and Female

Lesson Text

Genesis 1:26-27

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 2:20-23

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Matthew 19:4-6

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Focus Thought

God's plan for marriage is a union between a man and a woman.

Focus Verse

Matthew 19:4

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female.

As God Designed Us

by Richard M. Davis

Being male and female was not a product of evolutionary processes, nor was it an invention of humankind. The male and female distinctive came by the design of the Almighty. We are as He created us: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

From a lesson titled “The Design of the Creator: Man Created Male and Female,” the author wrote, “For thirty or forty years now loud voices in the media . . . school . . . college . . . society have been telling us that there are no real differences between men and women except for the obvious physical differences that no one can deny. Women can bear children and men cannot. Many books from Christian publishers, in fact, have been telling us that as well. . . .

“In the 1960s and 1970s, popular opinion favored the theory that male and female characteristics were the result of ‘social conditioning.’ This opinion states that maleness and femaleness are not inherent in mankind, but rather taught through association with culture. . . . the notion prevailed that male and female characteristics and behavior were the result of being forced into either a masculine or a feminine mold and should be erased” (www.childrendesiringgod.org, accessed April 1, 2013).

Wayne Grudem wrote, “Confusion robs us. It robs us of something very important. It robs us of the joy of being a man or being a woman, so men and women are confused” (John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*).

The radical social agenda playing out in modern culture today would like to erase the biblically drawn lines between men and women, but social constructs will never beat God’s idea: the many differences between men and women.

I. THE GENDER DISTINCTIONS

II. THE ROLES

- A. The Roles of Men
- B. The Roles of Women

III. THE NEEDS

IV. CELEBRATING OUR DISTINCTIVENESS

- A. Distinctives
- B. Completeness

Contemplating the Topic

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 points out God’s perfect idea of marriage: one man and one woman—two separate but complementary sexes.

It was God’s perfect plan as expressed in Creation that humanity be divided into two separate but complementary sexes. God created humankind to be male and female (Genesis 1:27). Men and women are the same in value, dignity, and access to God, but they are different. This should not be a startling revelation to most people, but at the height of the

feminist movement of the 1970s it was not politically correct even to suggest that gender differences went beyond just a few anatomical details. Led by zealots in women’s studies departments across the United States, university researchers sought to prove that “once sexism was abolished . . . the world would become a perfectly equitable, androgynous place” (Christine Gorman, “Sizing Up the Sexes,” *Time Magazine*, January 20, 1992).

Contrary to the idea they promoted, evidence quickly began to mount that gender differences were more than that which was programmed into boys and girls by family and society. Many parents discovered that when their son received a Barbie doll for his birthday, it was not long before he was running through the house with one doll leg pointed straight ahead, yelling, “Bang! Bang!” Further, the more researchers tried to find evidence of gender equivalence, the more evidence accrued that differences were deeply rooted in human physiology.

A plethora of pop psychology books appeared such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*; *Too Good for Her Own Good*; *Sex On the Brain*; *Act Like a Lady*,

Think Like a Man; and Men Are Like Waffles—Women Are Like Spaghetti. These books and many others catered to the public's desire to understand and apply existing research to marriage, childrearing, and social relationships. One problem with the new interest in this subject was that some of what modern psychologists, marriage therapists, and self-help gurus teach about gender relationships is based on false assumptions about biological evolution and fanciful reconstructions concerning prehistoric society.

The Bible has a great deal to say about gender differences. Yet, it has sometimes proven difficult to distinguish between biblical examples and teachings that express God's will from those which merely report or acknowledge the results of sinful human nature. Even Jesus stated the law of divorce recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 was given "because of the hardness of your hearts" (Matthew 19:8) rather than as an expression of God's desire, even though it was a part of the divinely inspired covenant.

Understanding the right relationship between men and women in the home, the church, and society requires that we put aside sinful traditions, false histories, and misinterpretations of the Bible so we can "receive with meekness the engrafted word" (James 1:21).

Searching the Scriptures

I. THE GENDER DISTINCTIONS

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, "Men and women are different from the moment of conception."

Males and females are different from the moment of conception, and the difference shows itself in every system of the body. The human genome has twenty-three pairs of chromosomes. Twenty-two of these are the same for both men and women. Only in the twenty-third pair is there any difference. In that pair, however, women have two X chromosomes while men have one X and one much smaller Y chromosome. The Y chromosome contains a few genes related to being male, including a switch that turns on male development early in the growth of a boy baby. While genetically there is only a tiny distinction between men and women, this miniscule difference makes a

huge difference in who we are, how we think, and what we do.

It is highly unlikely any individual man or woman fits all the differences determined so far. These identified differences are statistical likelihoods rather than definitive characteristics. Yet, understanding these differences can help us in relating to one another and understanding and recognizing the value of members of the opposite gender.

Common knowledge and experience reveal that men are usually stronger physically than women. However, some of the strength advantages men hold over women relates to the fact women usually do not participate in activities that exercise the same muscle groups. When men and women participate in identical strenuous exercise over time, the level of physical differences diminishes, but does not disappear completely. Even when a man and a woman are the same height and weight and have the same exercise and nutrition habits, the man will tend to have about 20 percent more lifting strength, speed, and endurance. In addition, women are more susceptible to overuse injuries such as stress fractures when compared to males engaged in similar activities.

Women are more susceptible to infectious diseases. Women tend to live longer than men and they are less vulnerable to many chronic illnesses and to developmental disorders such as autism or dyslexia. There are very few genetic disorders related to the Y-chromosome, but a relatively long list is connected to the X-chromosome (such as hemophilia, and certain kinds of muscular dystrophy and cognitive disorders). The fact that women have two X's serves as a backup that often cancels out a faulty chromosome. Therefore, many more men than women suffer from these genetic conditions. However, women suffer a somewhat greater incidence of schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, and other mental illnesses, and they are at least twice as likely as men to suffer from depression.

Men tend to be better at mechanical reasoning, mental rotation, and visual-spatial relationships. This explains their generally better performance in tasks that involve aiming and throwing. Women often are better at verbal abilities and some forms of memory. Women tend to be more trusting, agreeable, and tender, and they are better able to recognize the emotions of others, but men are much more likely to help others in distress. Women are more likely to smile, especially in social situations. They are more likely to speak to

others, but men more frequently interrupt during a conversation. Men are more assertive but only slightly more aggressive. Male aggression is easier to see because men are more likely to resort to verbal or physical

aggression, whereas women are more likely to use indirect aggression.

Some of the more important generalized contrasts between men and women include the following:

Men communicate in order to make a point.	Women communicate in order to make a friend.
Men see the home as a place of refuge and tranquility.	Women see the home as an extension of themselves and their place in society.
Men link romantic love with warmth and pleasure.	Women link romantic love with self-esteem.
Men are primarily task and goal oriented.	Women are primarily people oriented.
Men seek fulfillment through achievement (work, hobbies, and so forth).	Women seek fulfillment through others (children, husband, and so forth).
Men are competitive.	Women are cooperative.
Men project their public image.	Women adopt their public image.
Men identify themselves by what they do.	Women identify themselves by what others think of them.
Men are troubled by feelings of inadequacy.	Women are troubled by feelings of loneliness.
Men withdraw when facing overwhelming problems.	Women reach out when facing overwhelming problems.
Men seek an answer.	Women seek a process.

II. THE ROLES

God made men and women different for a purpose. At least part of that purpose is to prove our inadequacy apart from each other. However, the differences just noted prepare men and women to achieve their different roles in the family, church, and society. A man often is hard pressed to take on the roles belonging naturally to a woman as is a woman to take on those belonging naturally to a man. While it can be done, it adds extra stress to daily life and requires greater support from friends, family, and church.

A. The Roles of Men

Immediately after God created him, God gave Adam the dual responsibilities of dressing and guarding the garden that was in Eden (Genesis 2:15). Because this was before the formation of Eve, it is unclear if these roles

were to be exercised by both the man and woman or by the man alone. Generally, by virtue of their strength, stamina, and psychological makeup, men are well suited to being providers and protectors.

The spiritual order places men as the priestly mediator between God and humanity (Ephesians 5:22-24). However, the priestly role of men does not mean women have no direct access to God. Rather, the mediator role is one of intercession, instruction, and loving guidance. That this role is exercised by men may have to do with the fact that men are more likely to sacrifice a relationship in order to defend a principle while women are more likely to sacrifice a principle in order to defend a relationship. The Bible explains it by pointing out the primacy of Adam's creation and the nature of the fall into sin. Eve came from Adam, but Adam came from God. Eve was

tricked into sinning by the inability to discern the lie of the serpent, but Adam knowingly rebelled against God (I Timothy 2:14). This may seem like a good reason to disqualify men from spiritual leadership until one realizes that while Adam's decision was devastatingly wrong, it was still a rationalized calculation.

B. The Roles of Women

The first time God judged something in Creation to be "not good" He referred to the isolation of Adam (Genesis 2:18). While this is true of the human need to form societies, it is more specifically true of the personal need for deep companionship. Eve was created to be the companion of Adam. Her companionship was more than that of the animals and less than that of God. She was unique in that she was equal to Adam—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23). God had specifically formed her to be a matching helper for Adam.

In most societies it often seems men have a much wider choice of life roles than do women. Women's physiology has uniquely prepared them to be mothers and nourishers; therefore their traditional roles often revolve around the home. In many non-Christian societies this has meant women have been severely devalued and expected to remain under the domination of men. The nominally Christian societies of the medieval period adopted these twisted values and used misinterpretations of the Bible to support their sinful viewpoints. Women were both put on a pedestal as prized possessions and put underfoot as little more than breeding cattle.

Neither of these views of womanhood is biblical. Women do not belong on a pedestal or underfoot, but they belong alongside as equal partners. Although a woman certainly may choose to (or by necessity) take on roles outside the home, the roles of motherhood and nurturer are not insignificant or demeaning; they are vital roles to the functioning of the family and society. Women have a special relationship to the home that often cannot be fully understood by men. Frequently women derive more self-worth from a well-kept and regulated home than from any activity outside of the home.

The Greek word translated "keepers at home" (*oikourgous*) in Titus 2:5 describes competent management of the household. It is one of the skills older women of the church are commanded to teach the young wives so "the word of God be not blas-

phemed." They are also to be taught "to love their husbands" and "to love their children" (Titus 2:4). While the word "love" is translated from the term for affectionate attachment (*philos*) rather than self-sacrificing love (*agape*), it is obvious more than emotion is under consideration. If this were a simple emotional attachment, there would be no need to receive instruction from the older women. Rather, a young wife needs the skills to become a close friend and confidant of her husband, and a mother needs to skillfully weave a bond of lasting friendship and understanding with her children.

III. THE NEEDS

The core psychological needs of men seem to be (1) to feel they belong and are connected to a group, (2) to feel a sense of autonomy and self-determination, and (3) to be competent at something that lets them feel a sense of personal pride. It is unclear how much of these needs are the manifestation of sinful human nature. Obviously, God calls upon men to be connected to Him, to feel a sense of dependence on Him and His guidance, and to rejoice in godly pride. Most often men struggle with issues of inadequacy, which leads to the sinful responses of fear and shame, often manifested in anger, stress, addiction, depression, and relationship problems.

In general, a man needs respect, companionship, and a home that is a sanctuary from the stresses of the world. Many adult men feel a basic sense of security and even love simply by the very presence of the significant people in their lives. Men tend to have fewer friends than women, and when they do, they tend to focus on activities rather than verbal interactions with friends. A man needs a wife who understands and accepts the male relationship between sexual intimacy and nurturance, acceptance, and security. Sex for men is a primary attachment need. A man needs a wife who needs him. He needs a wife who will nurture his children and teach them to respect, honor, and love their father.

In general, a woman is primarily validated verbally. She needs opportunities for meaningful conversations and simple chitchat. She needs to hear regular, truthful expressions of her worth. She needs someone who will show her kindness and understanding. Women have a natural psychological defense that expresses itself in caution toward men. This is part of what the *King James Version* calls "shamefacedness" or modesty. However,

novelty-seeking is an important female psychological trait, so women desire spontaneity and excitement. Unfortunately, some women often express this by an attraction to reckless and dangerous men.

A woman needs someone she can trust to respect her privacy and protect her secrets. She needs to feel secure in her husband's love. For most women, sexuality is responsive rather than spontaneous; therefore women need a husband who will initiate intimacy through romance. Sexual intimacy for a woman is an expression of the health of the relationship. A woman needs a husband she can respect and trust as her partner and guide. She needs a husband who will be a good example and loving father for her children.

IV. CELEBRATING OUR DISTINCTIVENESS

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states that Satan endeavors to erase the lines of distinction between men and women.

A. Distinctives

Satan's major goal is to erase lines of distinction. His attacks almost always blur the lines between good and evil, right and wrong, light and dark. Both his original rebellion and his temptation of Eve were based on distorting the distinction between Creator and creature so he could become "like God." One major area of ongoing attack is in his effort to distort gender distinctions. Wherever possible, sinful society seeks to obscure the distinctions between male and female, making men uncomfortable with or unsure of their masculinity and influencing women to compromise or reject their femininity. This is seen in matters as apparently innocuous as male-tailored shirts for women and as socially devastating as radical homosexuality and lesbianism. This is not just a problem outside of the church, however. The styles, fads, and fashions of the world that confuse and distort gender distinction keep a continuous application of pressure on many believers.

One biblical distinction clearly commanded by Scripture is hair length. I Corinthians 11 tells us God has established the hair of our heads as a gender distinctive. He has placed within human nature itself natural preferences regarding the length of hair on the

opposite sex. (See I Corinthians 11:14-15.) Generally, men desire long hair on women and women prefer short hair on men even though fads sometimes have greatly pressured the culture to depart from those norms. However, Paul went on in that same chapter to define long hair on women as uncut hair through his particular choice of Greek words. He also demonstrated that short hair on men involved hair that was closely cut. Further, hair length goes beyond natural preferences to a testimony of and agreement with God's creation. A Christian woman's uncut hair declares her agreement with the Divine plan of spiritual authority, as does a man's refusing the "shame" of having long hair.

Another area of gender distinction is in distinctive apparel. Every known society has determined standards of distinctive dress for men and women. God declared His approval for this practice in the Jewish Law when He commanded that a woman should not wear a man's clothing, nor a man wear a woman's clothing (Deuteronomy 22:5). Although what is defined as male and female clothing is determined or influenced by social convention, it is important that Christians stand against any cultural drift that weakens those distinctions.

A society that abandons long-held distinctions between the genders in dress, blurring once impermeable lines, is opening itself to unpredictable gender confusion. For such changes in apparel to be accepted by the society, they must appear innocent in comparison to more radical challenges. For example, women's slacks would never have begun gaining in popularity in the 1930s if not preceded by the nineteenth-century suffragettes who wore their husband's suits and the 1920s flappers who bound their chests and bobbed their hair to appear fashionably boyish. Such bending of long-established gender differences made it easier for the general culture to compromise accepted distinctions.

Before Christian men or women adopt a fashion trend or cultural norm, they should carefully seek to determine if the changes maintain biblical gender distinctions or contribute to the clouding of those distinctions. Christians should resist the breakdown of gender differences. This means supporting cultural patterns that societies have established for gender distinction as well as maintaining the biblical principles and commands for gender distinctiveness.

B. Completeness

When God divided mankind into male and female by taking Eve from Adam's side, He strengthened humanity by providing for a partnership that allows the full expression of complementary dissimilarities. Men complement women and women balance men. The overwhelming scriptural testimony is that marriage is the superlative state for adult believers and unbelievers alike. Yet, not everyone will find or choose to have a lifelong marriage partner.

Whether married or single, each man and woman needs the company and support of others. But most of all, each of us needs God. Only in Him do we find the fullness of completion.

In Matthew 19:10 the disciples pointed to the great difficulty men and women have in forming a lasting marriage and suggested it was better for a man not to marry at all. Jesus' reply in verses 11 and 12 implies that the ability to remain single is a special gift granted to an exceptional few. Later New Testament teaching (I Corinthians 7:25-38) revealed that singleness often is preferable during times of repressive persecution of the church, and may also be chosen by some to dedicate themselves to a special work for God. Ultimately, whether married or single, each man and woman needs the company and support of others. But most of all, each of us needs God. Only in Him do we find the fullness of completion (Colossians 2:10).

Internalizing the Message

We live in a society in which boys and girls often grow up with inadequate or twisted ideas about what it means to be men and women. Gender equality has become confused with gender uniformity. The Bible treats men and women differently because we are different. Due to a host of physiological gender differences, we tend to think differently, value differently, and act differently. The roles we assume in life are either enhanced or made more difficult by our sex. Even the ways we express our spirituality and call to service in God's kingdom is influenced by gender.

Sometimes societies reflect the satanic call to chaos by attempting to erase the lines of gender distinctions. At other times human societies have institutionalized gender warfare by subjugating one sex, usually women, at the hands of the other. The church is called upon to recognize and celebrate gender dissimilarities as a call to equal partnership. We are incomplete without one another; we all are members of the body of Christ. As part of that celebration, the church should be careful to guard gender distinctions in dress and conduct within the church body and act as a preserving and conserving force to maintain proper gender distinctions within the broader society.

REFLECTIONS

- Galatians 3:28 says there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus. Discuss this statement in light of the information in this lesson.
- How do the general differences in strengths and needs between men and women complement each other? How do they make it more difficult to relate to one another? Discuss.
- Discuss some examples of cultural drift in gender distinctions that have occurred since your parents' time.
- How can believers determine if they have a true call to remain single? Discuss.

Mandates for Marriage

3
week of
06.15.14

Lesson Text

Genesis 2:23-25

23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Ephesians 5:28-32

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Focus Thought

The God-given mandates for marriage are based on principles that reflect His relationship with His bride.

Focus Verse

Ephesians 5:31

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

Legal Union

by Gary D. Erickson

I was discussing marriage with a non-Christian father of two young sons when he boldly declared, “I’m going to insist that my boys live with their fiancé at least six months before they marry.” Then he said to me, “I know what the Bible says, but this is my opinion.” This is a philosophy held by many people in today’s society.

The institution of marriage is an ancient one. For centuries marriage was more a legal covenant than a love bond. In many cultures today, marriages are arranged by parents with little input from their children.

Romantic love is a strong motivation for marriage in North America. Perhaps this is a significant reason for many divorces. Romantic love is foremost and the legal covenant is secondary. In our culture, love trumps everything else. Many people use the love that exists between two people as justification for same sex unions, divorces, adultery, and fornication. At times it appears that many in our society believe if love is the motivation, no one should question the behavior.

I agree the world needs more love. When a husband and a wife are committed in a covenant relationship, it should include both romantic and agapé love. Paul exhorted men to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

Commitment is essential for a successful marriage. It is a covenantal bond that holds families and societies together. Real love transcends sensual feelings. Feelings come and go, but commitment remains. The marriage covenant provides security, financial stability, and extended family ties for the children.

I. THE MIRACLE IN MARRIAGE

- A. Compatibility Takes Time and Effort
- B. Spiritual Compatibility Is Foundational

II. THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE

- A. Severance
- B. Permanence
- C. Unity
- D. Intimacy

III. THE MYSTERY IN MARRIAGE

Searching the Scriptures

I. THE MIRACLE IN MARRIAGE

Many people label Genesis 3:14-19 as “The Curse.” However, God’s pronouncement of judgment as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve only mentions a curse on the serpent and the ground. His statements to Adam and Eve were more predictions than punishments. Sin’s effects are evil not because God is punishing the sinner, but because sin itself ultimately produces evil results. The statement “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16) describes the depth of sin’s damage to marriage.

The combination of these two words (“desire” and “rule”) are best understood by God’s use of them again in Genesis 4:7: “Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (NKJV). In both locations the word translated “desire” carries the idea of a ravenous beast seeking to overcome its prey, and the word translated “rule” refers to exercising dominion. Thus, in this single phrase we see the broken partnership between a husband and wife replaced by the long “battle of the sexes” in which each attempts to dominate the other.

Against this backdrop of sin it is miraculous so many marriages do work and survive. In an age when divorce is common, relatively easy

Contemplating the Topic

Most married Americans never divorce, but the statistics are far from rosy. Divorce strikes about one out of every three people who have ever been married. According to the Barna Group the divorce rate for Pentecostals is much higher than the general population. Forty-four percent of all Pentecostals who have ever been married also have divorced. This compares to just 28 percent of those individuals who identify themselves as politically and socially conservative. Sadly, Pentecostals are among the most likely of all Christians to have divorced. Since the Bible assures us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16; Mark 10:2-9), perhaps one of the most pressing needs of the modern church is to educate its couples about what the Bible says concerning marriage.

to obtain, and much more socially acceptable, two-thirds of all married persons still remain together for their entire lives. Both social research and historical experience has demonstrated that following the patterns and mandates laid out in the Word of God results in the healthiest and happiest marriages.

A. Compatibility Takes Time and Effort

The American Psychological Association (APA) website lists nine “psychological tasks” that research has shown must be completed to assure a healthy marriage. Unsurprisingly, all nine also are found in Scripture. Also of no surprise, none of them is a quick fix. They all require time and effort on the part of both parties. A good marriage takes a lifetime to build as two individuals learn to adjust, adapt, compromise, value, and accept their differences.

Marriage changes a person in ways that are sometimes difficult to predict. The union of two people in a relationship so intimate and profound is neither automatic nor rapid. Because this process is long and is assisted by an initial level of premarital compatibility, many people falsely believe they can test their compatibility and hurry along the bonding process by living together before committing to marriage. *Bridal Magazine* recently estimated that two-thirds of all couples now getting married lived together prior to the wedding.

Contrary to popular opinion, living together before marriage does not provide the opportunity to determine or increase compatibility and thereby reduce a couple’s chance for divorce. Research has consistently shown that cohabitation prior to marriage significantly increases the probability of divorce. In contrast, those who live together within marriage are sharing a holy state, protected by mutual commitment to a covenant sealed by public oath. When troubles come, it is harder to simply sever the relationship and walk away. With more at stake, both parties are more willing to put the necessary time and effort into building mutual compatibility.

The establishment of mutual compatibility can be either hindered or aided by the initial conditions of the marriage. In recognition of the importance of the initial period, the Law commanded a one-year “honeymoon” period during which the groom was to live freely, exempt from military service and public business (Deuteronomy 24:5). He was to uniquely devote himself to his wife’s happiness during this time. God saw the fortification and defense of marriage as more vital to the long-

term health of Israel than the defense of the land (*Woman’s Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson). However, the bride and groom were not exempted from public worship (Joel 2:16).

B. Spiritual Compatibility Is Foundational

While one should always love the person one marries, romantic love is one of the worst reasons to get married. Couples that marry because of romantic love are much more likely to divorce than those who marry because of shared values. Divorced couples often report little or no change in their level of love for each other. However, if their values are at odds, especially those values that are central to their identities, there is little hope the marriage will endure.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states, “If a couple’s values are at odds, there is little hope the marriage will endure.”

Because Christians derive their central identity from their relationship to Jesus Christ, there is no question that shared spiritual values are paramount to maintaining a Christian marriage. Further, should a Pentecostal seriously entertain entering into a marriage covenant with someone of another faith, it is clear there are serious spiritual problems. Such individuals are rejecting or have not developed a personal identity that places Christ and His Word at the center of their being.

Even Apostolics have different callings, different experiences in the Spirit, and are at different places in their spiritual journeys. We do not need the same calling or the same level of spirituality as our spouse; but if our calling is incompatible with our spouse’s, the extra pressure on the marriage brought about by a lack of shared central values and experiences will greatly threaten the marriage bonds and hinder growth in compatibility.

II. THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE

Adam’s pronouncement upon receiving his wife from God stands as a definitive statement on the biblical mandate for forming a lasting union: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This verse presents four vital aspects of marriage.

Transparency 2 lists four biblical requirements for marriage.

A. Severance

The first step in forming a godly marriage is separation—both spouses separating themselves from their old familial relationships with their parents in order to form a new family complete with new loyalties and responsibilities. Obviously, this does not mean they cease to be the children of their parents or they have no continuing relationship with them; it means a dynamic change to the relationship. The responsibility to honor one's father and mother (Ephesians 6:2) does not end because of marriage.

The first of the APA's nine tasks to assure a healthy marriage is this: "Separate emotionally from the family you grew up in; not to the point of estrangement, but enough so that your identity is separate from that of your parents and siblings." The man or woman who is unwilling to physically and emotionally leave father and mother to establish a separate home is not ready for marriage.

The biblical model from at least the time of the Davidic kingdom was for each family's housing to be physically separated from their parents and siblings. The extended family with multiple generations living together was a common practice during the Patriarchal period. However, care was taken that the couple could establish a life distinct and apart from their parents. For example, Isaac and Rebekah inherited his deceased mother's tent (Genesis 24:67) as their unique domicile within Abraham's camp. Jesus' statement in John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions," refers to the custom of wealthy families to have separate apartments in the family compound for the married children.

The biblical definition of a family includes a husband, a wife, and their children. A family sometimes may include household servants or a single parent, although the Bible states that widows under sixty should remarry (1 Timothy 5:9, 14). Today's difficult economic times increasingly result in married children moving back in with their parents. This may cause divided loyalties and considerable pressure on both marriages unless handled properly.

When the situation requires parents and married children to live under one roof, care should be taken to assure the preservation of

the privacy and sanctity of both marriages—in the physical division of the home and in provision for emotional space. Above all, the child's first loyalty and commitment is to his or her spouse, not to the parents. This is true whether or not the couple lives apart from their parents. In the case of a widowed mother, she often needs a space she can personalize as her own, but she also needs to respect the daughter or daughter-in-law as the keeper of the household and authority over the home and children. Because of the vital importance of the initial period of marriage, a new couple should never attempt to start their marriage with a live-in parent unless it is absolutely necessary.

Sometimes the "intruder" in the marriage home is not a parent, but a child. While the situation is very different, a child can still be a competitor for the time, love, loyalty, and commitment of one of the parental spouses. The wise parent recognizes time and effort spent maintaining the health of the marriage does not take away from, but enhances, the care and attention given the children. Another of the APA tasks is addressed to new parents: "Embrace the daunting roles of parenthood and absorb the impact of a baby's entrance into the marriage. Learn to continue the work of protecting the privacy of you and your spouse as a couple." Becoming a father or mother does not end being a husband or wife, but it does complicate the roles. For this reason, it often is preferable to allow some time before bringing a child into the new family.

B. Permanence

The word translated *cleave* in Genesis 2:24 means "to become joined together or to stick together." It carries the idea of affection, loyalty, and exclusivity (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). The word is used numerous times in Deuteronomy to express the connection Israel was to have with the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). This part of Adam's statement speaks of a commitment that lasts regardless of the circumstances of life. Some young men preparing for the ministry may say they want to marry a girl who can play the piano. One could ask, "So, you plan to divorce her if she loses the use of her arms?" The commitment of marriage is not just made to the man or woman one marries today, but also to what he or she will be in the future. The commitment is not to a set of talents or abilities. It does not expire if one finds the relationship is not meeting his or her needs or fulfilling one's desires.

The Scriptures command us to “cleave”; they never tell us to leave.

Another task on the APA list is to “Confront and master the inevitable crises of life.” Those who have been married for any length of time can testify they have faced a number of small and large crises they never fully anticipated when contemplating marriage. Such crises can either strengthen or destroy a marriage, depending on the level of mutual commitment.

The APA also states, “Maintain the strength of the marital bond in the face of adversity. The marriage should be a safe haven in which partners are able to express their differences, anger and conflict.” If husbands or wives cannot trust their spouse’s level of commitment, they may fear disagreements and suppress feelings of anger or conflict. Over time this leads to an emotionally insecure or abusive relationship. But when the couple is secure in mutual commitment to the marriage, there can be freedom from jealousy, anxiety, and hypocrisy. The couple can freely air disagreements and work out conflicts in an atmosphere of mutual respect and the assurance of a binding commitment.

C. Unity

In a 1987 study subjects were shown a random array of photographs of twenty-four men and twenty-four women, all white newlyweds who lived in Michigan or Wisconsin and who were between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age. Another group was shown photographs of the same forty-eight people after twenty-five years of marriage. The instructions were to match the men with the women who most closely resembled them. Husbands and wives were correctly matched significantly more often by the group shown the photos of the couples after twenty-five years of marriage. Perhaps more interestingly, the rate of successful matches was substantially greater for couples who reported that their marriage was happy.

The researcher, Professor Robert Zajonc, concluded the increase in facial similarity resulted from wrinkles forming in the same places due to decades of shared experiences and emotions that exercise particular facial muscles. The initial study has been repeated several times at other institutions, showing that married couples actually start out with facial similarities because we are subconsciously attracted to people physically like us, and the similarities begin to increase shortly after marriage.

In many ways, the spouse with whom one talks, prays, eats, laughs, cries, and shares

experiences daily is the person one is becoming most like. Somewhere in between the two companions is a new identity made up of both individuals. It is a shared identity that exists without losing sight of each person as an individual. Another of the APA list of psychological tasks is to “Build togetherness based on a shared intimacy and identity, while at the same time set boundaries to protect each partner’s autonomy.” The idea of shared intimacy and identity is clearly represented in the words “they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Physical and emotional intimacy and the acceptance of a shared identity as “self” is essential to the true oneness in a marital relationship of which the Bible speaks. Except in our relationship to Christ Himself, the kind of emotional, physical, and spiritual oneness that is meant to be shared by a married couple can never be found outside of marriage. The parties to a marriage who do not experience this unity are easily tempted to seek marital fulfillment in work, children, friends, church, entertainment, or even an extramarital affair.

Unity is important within the privacy of the marriage, but perhaps even more important when the couple confronts the outside world. A united front in public is essential to developing true oneness. If a husband speaks ill of his wife, he is condemning himself. A wife who criticizes her husband is calling her own character into question. As the APA tells us, we should “Nurture and comfort each other, satisfying each partner’s needs for dependency and offering continuing encouragement and support” both in private and in public.

One key to developing unity is through shared laughter. The APA recommends, “Use humor and laughter to keep things in perspective and to avoid boredom and isolation.” A couple with a good sense of humor is much more likely to weather the storms of life and experience happiness no matter the circumstance. This does not mean we should use humor to mask aggression. It should make us all feel uncomfortable when we hear jokes and mean-spirited teasing at the expense of the speaker’s spouse.

D. Intimacy

The intimacy that leads to unity is not just physical, but it includes the physical. God created man and woman as sexual beings. Our sexuality is expressed as a holy act within the protection of marriage. The Bible tells us, “Marriage must be honored among all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, for God will

judge sexually immoral people and adulterers” (Hebrews 13:4, *New English Translation*). Another task for a healthy marriage is to “Establish a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and protect it from the intrusions of the workplace and family obligations.”

According to the Bible, sexual relations with one’s husband or wife is a right all couples may freely exercise. Further, in sexual matters the Bible assigns to the wife the authority over her husband’s body and to the husband the authority over his wife’s (I Corinthians 7:2-5). There may be other infrequent circumstances that qualify as a legitimate reason for withholding sexual relations from one’s spouse, but under ordinary circumstances the Bible recognizes only one such reason: a mutually agreed-upon season of special prayer for a brief period of time.

Another task for building a healthy marriage identified by the APA is “Keep alive the early romantic, idealized images of falling in love, while facing the sober realities of the changes wrought by time.” The flame of sexual passion may flicker from time to time and health or infirmity may nearly extinguish it, but romance need not die.

III. THE MYSTERY IN MARRIAGE

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes Ephesians 5:30 and II Corinthians 11:2.

The tasks of building and maintaining a healthy marriage are ideally worked out against the background of a profound depth of oneness. The mystical union of marriage is a picture for us of the union between Christ and the church. (See Ephesians 5:30; II Corinthians 11:2.)

Every week on the Sabbath, observant Jewish women assume the role of priest for the family in the lighting of the candles and utterance of the first blessing ushering in Shabbat. Traditionally, two songs begin the Sabbath celebration, one welcoming the holy angels into the home and the other thanking the wife for all the work she has done to bless the family. The husband blesses the wine, the bread, each child individually, recites a special blessing on his wife, and reads Proverbs 31:10-31 (Ronald Isaacs, *Every Person’s Guide to the Shabbat*).

The role of women during the Sabbath stands as a symbol for the authority Christ has

vested in the church. The Shabbat is emblematic of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Isaiah 28:11-12; Matthew 11:28; Colossians 2:16-17) by which the church fulfills its priestly duties under the authority and protection of our High Priest and husband, Jesus Christ.

Internalizing the Message

When God divided humanity into two genders, He already had in view that marriage would be a path to wholeness for mankind. Marriage is the foundation of all social institutions. The most important social relationship any human can experience is the relationship with a spouse. So much happiness in the world comes from good marriages and so much suffering comes from troubled marriages. More and more people are choosing to avoid marriage in hope of avoiding the pain of failure. Others walk out on marriage because of the tremendous effort and sacrifice necessary to maintain a good marriage. But the vast majority of adults still choose marriage, and most people are in marriages that last a lifetime.

Those who are willing to take the risk, make the necessary sacrifices, and apply the biblical instructions concerning marriage will find identity, security, unity, intimacy, and personal growth beyond any other human relationship. Such a marriage is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church.

REFLECTIONS

- What may be some reasons the divorce rate among Pentecostals is one of the highest in the nation? Discuss.
- Why is romantic love one of the worst reasons to get married? Should it also be true that a lack of romantic love is an insufficient reason for divorce? Discuss.
- Discuss the biblical requirements for marriage of severance, permanence, unity, and intimacy (Genesis 2:24). How are the circumstances of modern life making it more difficult to maintain these biblical dictates? Discuss.
- Discuss what kinds of things the church and individual believers can do to help assure the success of new marriages in the congregation.
- What kinds of things should parents do to prepare their children for their probable future as married persons? Discuss.

A Covenant Commitment

4
week of
06.22.14

Lesson Text

Malachi 2:14-16

14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

Hosea 3:1-2

1 Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

2 So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley.

Matthew 19:3-6, 9

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

.....

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Focus Verse

Matthew 19:6

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Focus Thought

*Marriage is a
commitment for
life sealed by
covenant vows.*

In This Weather?

by Scott Graham

On a cold, rainy night, the telephone rang in the home of a doctor. The caller identified himself and said his wife needed urgent medical attention. The doctor was understanding and said he was willing to come and attend to her needs, but his car was being repaired and asked the man come and pick him up. The man angrily responded, "What? In this weather?"

Commitment probably can't be measured too well in good "weather." This is certainly true in a marriage. When the bills are all paid, the roof is not leaking, both spouses are communicating, and the family home is running like a well-oiled machine, it takes very little commitment to make a marriage work. But when stormy weather arrives, the depth of our commitment will be tested. Just ask Glynn Wolfe.

Glynn (a.k.a. Scotty) Wolfe holds the terrible distinction of the most often divorced man in the world. In his lifetime, this man committed this tragedy twenty-eight times. One of his marriages actually managed to reach its seventh anniversary, while his shortest lasted a mere nineteen days! What a mockery of what is meant to be a beautiful, holy picture of the relationship between Christ and His church!

While most people would deem Mr. Wolfe's pattern of behavior unacceptable, it is really just a picture of the casual treatment of commitment by our culture. Most people are quick to abandon nearly any commitment when the storms of life come. God, however, will be a shelter for us, and your marriage can weather the storm!

I. FAMILIES UNDER ATTACK

- A. Lack of Time Together
- B. Lack of Communication
- C. Financial Stress
- D. Lack of Parental Discipline
- E. Lack of Commitment
- F. Cultural Adversity

II. DIVORCE—A TRAGEDY

III. WE ARE COVENANT BEINGS

- A. Society Must Have Rules and Laws
- B. God Takes Covenants Seriously
- C. Marriage Is a Covenant Commitment

IV. MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE

Contemplating the Topic

It is vital that the church do what it can to maintain the integrity of the marriage covenant. There are few things as important to the survival and growth of a local congregation as the health of its families. Also, there are few social covenants we make as human beings that bear such a powerful influence on our identity, happiness, fulfillment, and growth as the covenant of marriage. Our relationship to God is influenced by our relationship to our spouse, and the quality of our marriage directly impacts our level of spirituality. With so much at stake, it is no surprise much of sin's attack manifests itself as an attack on marriage and the family.

Searching the Scriptures

I. FAMILIES UNDER ATTACK

Marriage is under attack from within and without. The internal attack comes from such things as the egocentric attitude of those entering marriage seeking the greatest personal benefit for the "price," the lack of personal commitment, and a sense of personal entitlement. The external attack comes from social phenomena such as the unrealistic romanticism of erotic love, excessive materialism, widespread boredom, social isolation, and the breakdown of traditional family structure.

A. Lack of Time Together

For most of the history of humankind, the majority of families existed in an agrarian society where entire families worked, worshiped, and played alongside each other. In the mid-1800s the American common school movement began to apply a mass-production factory model to childhood education, drawing the children away from home for increasingly longer periods of the day. With the success of the industrial revolution, fathers found themselves leaving home to work long hours apart from their families.

The advent of the two world wars drew many women to the factories, but their exodus from the home was especially accelerated

by the development of the information economy, which opened more opportunities for gainful employment in offices and commerce. With each of these social changes, family members spent increasing amounts of time away from each other, but more importantly they began to find their identity in the interaction with their peer and work groups rather than their family.

B. Lack of Communication

With the modern fragmentation by gender and age group, family members find they share fewer interests, tastes, and experiences than did their forebears of just a few generations ago. In a society where work and entertainment compete for nearly every waking hour, little time is left simply to communicate with one another. Not long ago, opportunities for meaningful communication occurred while family members were commuting to church or other events. Increasingly, even this time is stolen by in-car video players, individual game consoles, smartphones, and other socially isolating mobile technologies. For creative and motivated families, all of these barriers to communication can also provide opportunities for opening meaningful dialogue and uniting together against a vacuous and uncaring world.

C. Financial Stress

Both poverty and riches are socially defined. If almost everyone lives in gold-plated forty-room mansions, the family that lives in a twenty-room silver-plated mansion is in poverty. If almost everyone lives in a mud and grass lean-to, the family that lives in a wooden shack is rich. The immense toll financial stress takes on a family is relatively independent of their absolute level of wealth.

In agrarian societies a family surviving at a subsistence level may be relatively free from financial stress while a North American family may feel nearly overwhelming stress because they can afford only one early-model car. As a result, financial stress is much more common in a modern society where there is a wide range of wealth, greater upward mobility, and a pervasive sense of cultural guilt over world poverty. This is especially true in times of financial instability and uncertainty concerning the future.

Agur, the son of Jakeh, prayed that God would grant him neither poverty nor riches, but only the level of prosperity appropriate for him (Proverbs 30:7-9). Both the rich and the

poor are tempted to trust in riches (Mark 10:24). The poor may think if they had more money most of their problems would disappear, and the rich may think their money makes them immune from most problems. When reality strikes in the form of financial reversal, be it a downturn or a windfall, the resulting stress can, and often does, drive families apart.

D. Lack of Parental Discipline

Sometimes we think the current crisis of parental discipline is due to simple factors such as laziness or a lack of will on the part of the parent. This may occasionally be true, but most parents truly want to do what is best for their children. As in most issues, simplistic analysis of the problem leads to simplistic answers that do not address the root issues. Parents today feel increasingly overwhelmed by their responsibilities because they are battling complex social phenomena. They are increasingly faced with the negative familial consequences of their own poor choices, but they also are increasingly coming from homes in which they had no model of properly functioning family discipline.

Studies have shown that Christian parents depend heavily on their pastors and their church to help them discipline their children, yet Bible schools and seminaries spend little time providing future ministers with the training to deal with the realities of the twenty-first century family, little time is spent in most churches on parental issues, and no church is equipped to assume the parental role for all its children. Social agencies and government bodies spend so much time and effort looking for and dealing with abusive situations that they are ill equipped to recognize and encourage proper discipline. As such, they often become active hindrances, encouraging a social environment of fear and distrust. As a society we too often define discipline as abuse and abuse as discipline.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states, "Abuse is not discipline. Appropriate discipline is not abuse."

E. Lack of Commitment

Since first introduced in the 1987 self-help book *Men Who Can't Love* by Steven Carter and Julia Sokol, there has been an increasing awareness of "fear of commitment." This

concept has moved from its pop-psychology roots into a much-studied psychological concept that affects not just marriage, but any relationship requiring the giving of a long-term personal pledge, including careers and religious faith. Studies have shown fear of commitment is common in adolescents and is related to uncertainty over who they are as individuals.

For a number of reasons, modern young adults are increasingly suffering delayed psychological maturation, which often manifests itself in the inability to make lasting commitments. The increase in the incidence and social acceptance of cohabiting couples is one expression of this trend. More than 60 percent of all young women will have lived with at least one unmarried sexual partner before they are thirty years old. According to Professor Pamela J. Smock of the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan, "From the perspective of many young adults, marrying without living together first seems quite foolish."

Cohabitation requires a very low level of commitment. It has been called "commitment with an escape hatch." The difference between marriage and cohabitation is more than just legal and moral. There are also major spiritual and psychological differences that interfere with commitment even after marriage.

According to the *National Survey of Family Growth*, during the first five years of cohabitation, about half of couples will marry and 40 percent will break up. Whether they eventually marry or not, only one in five couples who start out living together will remain together for more than seven years. A study published in the *Journal of Family Issues* found that those who cohabited before marriage report lower marital satisfaction, less commitment, and lower confidence in their spouse as well as more frequent serious arguments and verbal abuse. They are also twice as likely to see divorce as a solution to marital difficulties.

F. Cultural Adversity

Several long- and short-term cultural trends have a direct impact on the future of marriage in North America. We have already looked at some of the impact of increasing fragmentation of families into disparate social groups, the impact of a materialistic culture, and the problem of delayed psychological maturation of young adults. Other cultural issues include the number of children exposed to cohabitation, the

level of social acceptability of divorce, and rampant eroticism.

According to the 2011 National Marriage Project report, 24 percent of the nation's children are born to cohabiting couples and another 20 percent will live in a cohabiting household with an unrelated adult. This means that for more than four out of ten children, cohabitation is the model of family life with which they are most familiar. Today's child is nearly twice as likely to experience parental cohabitation as parental divorce (*National Survey of Family Growth*, 2010). Children living in cohabiting households are far more likely to suffer physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (*National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*), thus causing them untold grief and suffering and often planting in them a negative sense of family life.

Studies have shown a clear link between social acceptability of divorce and the level of marital stability and sense of marital happiness. The more divorce is seen as a legitimate choice, the less happy couples report their marriage to be and the more likely they are to choose divorce. Concern about the rise in the divorce rate in the 1970s and 1980s helped to fuel a public rejection of divorce, which probably accounts in part for the long decline in divorce rates since then. However, there has been an increase in the social acceptability of divorce over the last decade (*National Opinion Research Center*), leading to the probability more married couples will feel dissatisfaction in their marriage.

As clearly demonstrated by Old Testament history, most societies go through a number of pendulum swings from debauchery to prudence. Before their ultimate fall, they usually experience a long slide into cultural decadence that glorifies eroticism as the ultimate good. That which once was viewed as pornographic becomes mainstream. Access to prurient and categorically disturbing materials becomes widespread. Deviant sexuality becomes acceptable and even somehow heroic.

The effect on marriage and family is obvious. Numerous studies confirm that repeated exposure to pornography distorts perceptions about sexuality, decreases the desire to have children, devalues the importance of monogamy, raises doubts about the value of marriage, and decreases satisfaction with a spouse's sexual performance, affection, and appearance. Repentance and rejection of cultural degeneracy in all its various forms is necessary to turn around this deviant culture before it is too late.

II. DIVORCE—A TRAGEDY

Marriage is threatened on every side. We have all heard the statistics that seem to say marriage is already a dead concept in Western culture. According to the 2011 *State of Our Unions* report, between 1970 and 2010 there was a decline of more than 50 percent in the annual number of marriages of unmarried adult women in the United States; the average age of first marriage had risen from twenty to twenty-six for females and from twenty-three to twenty-eight for males; fewer divorced persons were remarrying; and in addition to the increasing incidence of cohabitation, somewhat more adults were remaining single for life. The percentage of married persons in the adult population declined 16 percent since 1960, with the sharpest decline being 30 percent for black females. Recent US Census data shows all of these trends were accelerating due to the economic recession.

The United States marriage rate in 2009 was 6.8 per 1,000 population and the divorce rate was 3.4 per 1,000. Thus, we hear the commonly restated conclusion “half of all marriages end in divorce.” However, one out of every five adults who has ever been divorced has been divorced multiple times. This means that most married people never divorce. Among those who have ever been married, about one out of every three has also been divorced. In addition, the divorce rate has been slowly declining for the last three decades. In 2009 there were 16.4 divorces per 1,000 married women compared to 22.6 per 1,000 in 1980. Although it is projected that about 40-50 percent of those who are now marrying for the first time will divorce during their lifetime, there are many factors that can add to or reduce an individual’s likelihood of divorce.

marriage is an obvious key to divorce-proofing a marriage. Delaying marriage until at least the late twenties has long been known to produce healthier marriages. This is especially true today with the materialistic culture and the delayed psychological maturation in young adults.

Maintaining good financial stewardship is statistically one of the most powerful insulations against divorce.

Religion also plays a vital part in reducing the likelihood of divorce. Those who identify with a religion are much less likely than non-religious people to divorce. Regular attendance at worship services is a powerful protector of marriage. As one would expect, the more emphasis that is placed on family by the religion, the less likely divorce becomes. Jews are less likely to divorce than are Christians, and Catholics are much less likely than non-Catholic Christians. Among the largest non-Catholic Christian groups, Presbyterians are least likely to suffer divorce. Out of all major Christian groups, the most likely to have been divorced are Pentecostals. Forty-four percent of all adult Pentecostals have been divorced—a rate much higher than the general population.

There are many reasons why Pentecostals are the most likely to have experienced a divorce. We can assume Pentecostal marriages are under specific and special attack by satanic forces. Pentecostals married to non-Pentecostals experience much higher marital pressures due to the centrality of Pentecostalism to personal identity. Pentecostal churches tend to make a significantly higher demand on the time and loyalty of family members than do other Christian groups. Although not as true as at one time, Pentecostals still tend to be drawn disproportionately from poorer and less educated individuals—two of the strongest predictors of divorce. There is still a great deal of social pressure on Pentecostal youth to marry too young and too quickly.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 provides statistics from a national survey listing factors that lower the risk of divorce. Factors in parentheses increase the probability of divorce.

Maintaining good financial stewardship is statistically one of the most powerful insulations against divorce. Somewhat related to that is getting a good education. One owes it to his or her spouse and to God to develop one’s intellectual faculties to the best of his or her ability. Remaining celibate before marriage and faithful to one’s spouse during

The Bible assures us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16; Mark 10:2-9). He spoke through the prophet Malachi against the men of Israel who had put away the wives of their youth to marry foreign women. God equated to treachery and violence their coldhearted indifference to the covenant they had made in marriage. It was an act of murder, killing the individual who was created by the union of two as one flesh. It ignored one of the most important purposes for which marriage had been established, "That he might seek a godly seed" (Malachi 2:15). God told them the tears of the wives they had defrauded by such callous disregard drowned out their prayers so He would no longer receive their offerings at the altar (Malachi 2:13). (See also I Peter 3:7.)

The Israelite men leaving their spouses for personal benefit contrasts sharply with the faithfulness of God as illustrated by His command to Hosea to buy back Gomer, his adulterous wife. "Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine" (Hosea 3:1).

While God allowed divorce under the Old Covenant, and most Christians accept there are still legitimate reasons for divorce given under the New Covenant, it always is true that divorce results from the hardness of human hearts as a result of the sin nature. If there were no sin, there would be no personal conflicts and no sinful social pressures leading to dissolution of marriage. Divorce has never been God's plan for marriage.

III. WE ARE COVENANT BEINGS

If it were not for our sin nature, all interrelationships would be governed by the covenant of love. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:14). Precisely because we are a sinful people, we need principles to regulate our relationships with each other. These principles are described, applied, and attached to rewards and punishments in the form of rules and laws. However, a rule or law is only as good as it accurately, fairly, and appropriately applies its higher principle.

A. Society Must Have Rules and Laws

All human social interactions are guided by covenants. Some of these are understood and shared at a cultural level. They are passed on from generation to generation and are

enforced by social patterns including a complicated system of cultural capital providing rewards and punishments. Others are in the form of legally binding documents such as constitutions, laws, licenses, and contracts. Government itself exists as the result of a social contract, the basics of which are implied by Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Thus government exists to promote justice, order, protection of the innocent, and punishment of the guilty. Failure to maintain its covenant responsibilities places any particular government in jeopardy.

B. God Takes Covenants Seriously

Covenant is a central concept of Scripture. From the beginning, the relationship between humans and their Creator has been guided by a series of covenants that established specific benefits, obligations, and protections. Our salvation is assured by the new covenant sealed in Christ's blood. The Bible clearly teaches that God is a party to all covenants. He is vitally interested in honesty, justice, and faithfulness (Leviticus 19:35-36; Psalm 24:4; Proverbs 6:16-19; Micah 6:8). He pronounces a special blessing on those who keep their word even when it causes them personal injury (Psalm 15).

C. Marriage Is a Covenant Commitment

Marriage is one of the oldest and most central of all covenantal relationships. Without it societies could not be sustained. It is in the best interest of all that marriages be encouraged, protected, and nourished. Those who choose to enter into the covenant of marriage are embarking upon a lifetime commitment.

The level of commitment to each other is a much more important predictor of divorce than the level of professed love for one another. Marriage is the ultimate socially sanctioned expression of devotion and commitment to another person. This begins with an internal commitment, usually chosen freely and entered passionately, that causes the couple to make a religious, legal, and social covenant sealed by vows to one another witnessed by God, family, and friends, which imposes external commitments. As human beings, our internal commitment naturally waxes and wanes over time and circumstances. We are subject to the vagaries of hormonal tides and buffeted by a sinful world and

our own sin nature. Taking seriously the external commitment bolsters a person's resolve and strength to maintain the internal commitment.

The covenant between husband and wife is not just a private contract. It includes government, society, family, church, and God. It speaks to the future and not just the present. It makes declarations and promises that are not easily nullified. It results in a total change of identity, purpose, and fealty.

IV. MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE

Modern popular culture has strange ideas about love because it confuses love with erotic attraction or romanticizes love as some magical property of certain people or events. People supposedly "fall" into and out of love as if it were some sort of accident. Some individuals change their lovers like they change their shirts. Emotional love alone is a poor reason to marry; however, it is also true that a loveless marriage is extremely difficult. Thankfully, true sacrificial love is not an emotion subject to the whims of the ego and driven by hormonal tides. This kind of love is an act of the will. We intentionally decide to love and to react in love to others. Following that decision and the commitment it represents comes the passion, romance, affection, and "magic" of other forms of love. Therefore, we should not merely marry the one we love, but love the one we marry.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 illustrates a song about love and marriage.

As the song says, love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. At times it is the strength and ardency of love that pulls along the marriage, but often it is the marriage

that carries love into new and deeper dimensions. Because of our lifetime commitment to our spouse through the marriage covenant, love can be ours for life.

Internalizing the Message

A healthy church depends on healthy families. Further, a healthy society requires healthy families and frequently the first sign of the fall of a culture is the deterioration of the family. Perhaps more directly applicable to the married person, who we are and who we can become depends to a large degree on the health of our marriage. There are many factors that work against the modern marriage, but God is willing and able to work with us to assure that what God has joined together, no person can tear asunder.

REFLECTIONS

- What aspect of life seems to take the most time away from your family? Discuss the societal challenges caused by breakdowns in family relationships.
- How important to a marriage is financial stability? What can be done to reduce the stress of a lost job or other financial reversal? Discuss.
- How do parental discipline and abuse differ from one another? Why does modern society seem to have trouble discerning between the two? Discuss.
- Discuss the connection between fear of commitment and delayed psychological maturation. What does the Bible say about commitment?
- Discuss the implications for the church of the increasing incidence of unmarried cohabitation.
- Who are the parties of the marriage covenant? Why is it important to recognize it is a covenant agreement?

Marriage and Family

5

week of
06.29.14

God's Great Plan for Marriage

Lesson Text

Genesis 24:65-67

65 For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.
66 And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.
67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Colossians 3:18-21

18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.
20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.
21 Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Ephesians 5:33

33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.
2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)
3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.
4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Focus Thought

God determines roles, lines of authority, and responsibility within the family.

Focus Verse

I Corinthians 11:3

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

Understanding and Performing to Our Strengths

by Richard M. Davis

Did you know God perfectly understood both men and women's differences and their strengths when He made us? After all, He is the Creator. Because of not-so-subtle cultural pressures, couples sometimes sabotage their marriage by failing to recognize and perform within the marriage according to their natural, God-given strengths. Some of those strengths arrived via the characteristics of their individual genders; other strengths came via inherited familial genes; still others were developed through experiences and education. However the strengths arrived, couples benefit greatly by performing in the areas of their individual strengths.

Radical activists within the modern culture want us to believe we are guilty of forcing gender stereotypes upon individuals and conditioning them to think they have to perform certain preset roles. While it is true some gender stereotyping occurs, the radical elements of the culture want to strip away all pre-assigned gender roles and label it all as stereotyping. But God made us with definite strengths and unique abilities for a reason: to add synergistic strength to the marriage.

According to *best-job-interview.com*, "What are your strengths?" is one of the most common job interview questions and can be difficult to answer. . . . Understand your own specific strengths. What is a strength? A strength can be defined as a combination of talent, behavior, skills and knowledge that you apply consistently to produce a successful result" (*www.best-job-interview.com*, accessed April 1, 2013).

If employers recognize that different people have different natural strengths and they endeavor to match individuals to jobs that best suit individual strengths, shouldn't we recognize the potential for genuine synergy within a marriage? When we recognize the roles for which God created us and we perform to our strengths, we optimize the marital relationship and prepare ourselves for greater success!

- I. GOD HAS AN ORDER FOR FAMILIES
- II. ROLES IN THE FAMILY
- III. GOD DETERMINES RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE FAMILY
 - A. Husbands
 - B. Wives
- IV. GOD-GIVEN ROLES MEET GOD-GIVEN NEEDS

marriages are, and always have been, the norm rather than the exception. However, those marriages that strive to maintain the ideals established by God are much more likely to overcome the devastating effects of sin and enjoy a happy, loving, and fulfilled life.

Contemplating the Topic

Marriage is not an invention of humankind. It is not a response to the biological imperative to reproduce and rear children. It did not evolve from primitive instincts to protect ownership of other people. God created marriage. He designed it as a beautiful picture of His relationship to His redeemed people. Marriage is the temporary symbol and His church is the eternal reality. He did not impose a foreign institution on humanity, but He created an arrangement that fit the needs of men and women and created men and women to receive fulfillment by that arrangement.

God's ideal plan for the marriage has never been seen on this earth due to the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Dysfunctional

Searching the Scriptures

I. GOD HAS AN ORDER FOR FAMILIES

I Corinthians 11:3 states, "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use the word "head" in this passage with divine purpose. He was about to speak of the literal head of a man and woman; however, the physical symbols of short hair on a man's head and uncut hair on the woman's head represent important spiritual truths that reflect a symbolic use of the word "head." In addition to the literal part of the body, the word *head* means "supremacy," "power," "authority," or "source" (depending upon the context).

Were it not for the third clause in I Corinthians 11:3, we might conclude this verse is

describing a natural hierarchy of superiority. However, the relationships described here also must explain how the head of Christ is God. *Christ* refers to Jesus as the “Anointed One of God.” It expresses His office as Messiah. Obviously, God is not superior to Jesus in any absolute sense (Philippians 2:6). Jesus is God. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). The authority of the office of Christ is received from the anointing of God: “Christ Jesus . . . made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5, 7-8). Therefore, I Corinthians 11:3 is not speaking of a pecking order from lowest to highest, but of an authority structure based on humble submission in one direction and empowerment in the other. It is a covenant relationship rather than a command relationship.

II. ROLES IN THE FAMILY

God gifted each human being with his or her own set of interests and abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Our environment, education, experiences, and society will sharpen some of those gifts and dull others. The smooth functioning of a family requires that we follow a God-given division of authority and responsibility. For the most part, a husband and wife should assume the roles for which they are most gifted and prepared. If the wife is better at budgeting and enjoys numbers, she should be responsible for the family finances. If the husband is better at cooking and enjoys food preparation, he should be responsible for the family meals.

Marital roles assigned based on gender are often the product of social convention rather than actual gender distinctions. However, God has reserved a few specific roles to be assumed by the husband and others for the wife. These reserved roles are revealed through biblical commands. Whether or not one’s roles have been assumed based on commandment or chosen based on giftedness, they are not to be exercised unilaterally. Rather, each role connects both spouses and must be exercised in partnership.

With the help of God and our spouse we will grow as a result of faithfully carrying out our marital roles. As we discover, accept, and faithfully carry out our individual roles within the marriage, we find greater joy and contentment

in the relationship. Over the years we may trade roles as we explore each other’s strengths. The key is to support each other and work for the benefit of the marriage rather than personal benefit. Of course, we individually benefit from the health of the marriage. It is the work of a lifetime to form a good marriage, but the effort is well worth it.

III. GOD DETERMINES RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY

A. Husbands

A husband is the head of his wife in the same manner as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). To fulfill the role of priest and spiritual leader of the family requires that men love their wives (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19) with a self-sacrificial love. With selflessness at the center of the relationship, the husband should not be concerned about his own needs and desires.

The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes advises husbands to “live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9). The life of vanity refers to the theme of the book, the ultimate futility of trying to find meaning and fulfillment in this life. However, in this section the writer mentions three things that can bring joy in life: good food (Ecclesiastes 9:7), a wife to love (Ecclesiastes 9:9), and work well done (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

The writer does not promise a marriage free from care. Rather, living this life with a wife is “thy labour.” *Labour* is translated from a word meaning “trouble, grief, and toil.” However, living with a wife is also “thy portion” (appointed share in profit or reward) and can be done joyfully and with love. This is repeated in the Book of Proverbs, which instructs a husband to “have joy of the wife of thy youth . . . be thou ravished continually with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19, *John Nelson Darby Literal Translation*).

A husband is commanded to love his wife in the same way Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). Christ exercises His headship by empowering the church, praising her, forgiving her, and most importantly, loving her above His own life. Since Christ loved us while we were still His enemies (Romans 5:10; I John 4:10, 19), this is not a love that demands reciprocation but

one that endures no matter the circumstances. This passage concludes with the command that a husband is to love his wife as much as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:33). This points the reader back to verse 28: “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

The husband is also commanded to honor his wife. “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (I Peter 3:7). A form of the same Greek word translated “honour” here is translated “precious” in I Peter 1:19: “the precious blood of Christ.” The meaning is much stronger than showing respect or esteeming her. The husband is to treat his wife as a critically cherished part of his life. Further, the word “giving” is not referring to just presenting a gift, but to assigning or portioning off a possession. Therefore, husbands are to keep a special place of honor reserved in their lives that belongs only to their wives (*Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*).

A Greek word found only in I Peter 3:7 is translated “dwell with.” The word expresses the idea of interacting together in a marriage. Thus a husband’s interactions with his wife should be guided by consideration of her needs. The parallel passage, I Thessalonians 4:4-5 (NKJV) “that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God,” helps us understand that intimate relations are the primary (but not only) concern here. The husband is responsible for acquiring knowledge that will assist him in fulfilling his wife’s sexual needs.

In what sense is the woman a “weaker vessel”? The word “weak” can refer to a lack of physical, moral, intellectual, or spiritual strength, or to sickness. Over the years scholars have attempted to interpret this verse with each of these concepts in mind, claiming at one time or another that women are inferior to men physically, morally, intellectually, spiritually, or in general health. Cognitively, men and women tend to have different intellectual strengths and weaknesses, but neither is superior to the other. The Bible teaches us that without Christ, both men and women are morally depraved, and there is no evidence women are commonly more susceptible to temptation or demonic attack. It is frequently the case that women express a high level of

spiritual sensitivity, probably related to their superior relational intelligence.

However, there are some physical areas in which women are weaker than men. Pound for pound men are usually physically stronger than women, especially in upper body strength and endurance. Women are generally more susceptible to infectious diseases, but less vulnerable to many chronic illnesses. Women suffer a somewhat greater incidence of schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, and other mental illnesses, and they are at least twice as likely as men to suffer from depression.

Other Bible scholars have pointed out that during the period this verse was written, women typically were at a disadvantage, with fewer social freedoms and legal rights than men. A divorced woman or a widow were often social outcasts and could easily become destitute. In such a society a husband would be tempted to believe he could get along without his wife, but a wife would be dependent on her husband and his good will to negotiate daily life and simply survive.

Whatever is meant by “weaker vessel,” the phrase stands parallel to “being heirs together of the grace of life.” When considered together, this verse points us to the analogy in I Corinthians concerning the unity of the church.

“But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together; having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (I Corinthians 12:20-25).

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 lists five things required of a husband according to I Peter 3:7.

Thus, I Peter 3:7 teaches a husband to (1) become knowledgeable concerning the needs of his wife, (2) be guided by this knowledge in their marital interactions, (3) reserve a special place in his heart only for her, (4) cherish her as a critical part of himself, and (5) recognize her as an equal heir of grace. It warns husbands that these things are required “that your prayers be not hindered.” In the Old Testament, God told the men of Israel He would not receive their offerings on the altar because they treacherously divorced their wives to marry foreign women (Malachi 2:13-14). In the New Testament, the standard is much higher. God closes His ears to the prayers of a husband who does not honor his wife. Maintaining a good relationship with one’s wife is necessary to maintaining a good relationship with God.

Colossians 3:19 again commands the husband to love his wife. With “love” being translated from the familiar Greek word *agapé* here and in Ephesians 5, the command is for a level of love that is selfless and does not shun personal sacrifice. However, as *The Daily Study Bible Series* reminds us, “Any marriage in which everything is done for the convenience of one of the partners and where the other exists simply to gratify the needs and desires of the first, is not a Christian marriage.” The husband’s self-sacrificing love is his parallel to his wife’s submission, and her submission is the natural response to his loving, caring, sacrificial approach to her well-being (*The New American Commentary*).

There are times when the demands of *agapé* love can become frustrating. This is especially true if the wife does not behave in a way the husband expects or she is unable or unwilling to meet his needs. At such times, the husband may become resentful. Colossians 3:19 goes on to say, “Be not bitter against them.” The word “bitter” is translated from a word that means to be resentful, harsh, or provoking anger. The marriage relationship can be poisoned by a “root of bitterness” in a home (Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15). A Christian husband does not express his headship through harsh and authoritarian behavior toward his wife, nor does he allow his actions to become sinful reactions to her imperfections. In a similar fashion, fathers are to be careful not to provoke their children (Ephesians 6:4) or discourage them (Colossians 3:21), and children are to obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-2; Colossians 3:20).

B. Wives

Willing submission is a key element of Christian discipleship. Not only are we to submit ourselves to God (James 4:7; Romans 10:3), to the elders of the church (Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 5:5), and to the laws of the land (I Peter 2:13), but we also are called to mutual submission. Every Christian is to submit “yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). In particular, wives are called to submit themselves to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18). In Ephesians 5:22 the level of this submission is emphasized (“as unto the Lord”), and in Colossians 3:18 the reason for this submission is stated (“it is fit in the Lord”).

As we have seen from our examination of I Corinthians 11:3, the authority of the office of “husband” derives from Christ, and the authority of the office of “wife” derives from her husband. A husband who does not submit to the leadership of Jesus Christ endangers his ability to exercise the authority of a husband. A wife who does not submit to the leadership of her husband endangers her ability to exercise the authority of a wife. The submission of the wife is not the required acquiescence of an inferior, but humble covenant with an equal.

In addition to submission, a wife is also commanded to “revere her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). The word “revere” is translated from the Greek word from which we get the term “phobia.” The primary meaning of the word is to suddenly frighten into running away (Mark 16:8). The term was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to express the concept of the fear of the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:10; 28:58; I Samuel 12:14). The fear of the Lord causes us to stand in awe of Him, adore Him, and seek to do His will. It is the kind of respect with which one treats something that is capable of doing tremendous harm if treated carelessly. Unfailingly, a lack of respect for her husband will do abundant harm to the wife—not because the husband will seek to harm her, but because a man without respect is a broken man without authority, hence doing great damage to the relationship.

Just as the command that a husband love his wife is not contingent upon her love for him or her meeting of his needs, so the wife’s command to submit to and respect her husband is not contingent upon his ability to earn her respect. The quality of the husband should not be a consideration. I Peter 3:1-2 states, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to

your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear." The word "subjection" in verse 1 is translated from the same word translated "submit" in Ephesians 5:22 and the word "fear" in verse 2 is the same word that is translated "reverence" in Ephesians 5:33. Obviously, the commands of Ephesians 5 apply to wives of both believing and unbelieving husbands. By extension, the commands to husbands would apply to those with either believing or unbelieving wives.

According to Titus 2, the older women are to teach the young wives "to love their husbands," "to love their children" (Titus 2:4), to "be wise in mind, clean in heart, kind" (Titus 2:5, *Bible in Basic English*), and to be "keepers at home" (Titus 2:5) so that "the word of God be not blasphemed." The word "love" is translated from the term for affectionate attachment rather than the self-sacrificing *agapé* love husbands are commanded to have for their wives. However, affection is more than just an emotion. If it were a simple emotional attachment, there would be no need to receive instruction from the older women. Rather, the Bible shows us that affection for one's husband and children, wisdom of mind, cleanliness of heart, and kindness are skills that can be taught and learned. A young wife needs these skills to become an affectionate friend and confidant to her husband and a mother needs them to skillfully weave a bond of lasting love with her children.

"Keepers at home" refers to competent household management. This requires a combination of many skills including affection, wisdom, purity, and kindness. Skilled direction of the household is love in action. "The heart

of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:11-12). The roles of mother and nurturer are not insignificant or demeaning, but vital to the functioning of the family and society. Women have a special relationship to the home that often cannot be fully understood by men. Frequently women derive more self-worth from a well-managed home than from any activity outside the home.

IV. GOD-GIVEN ROLES MEET GOD-GIVEN NEEDS

God made men and women different for a purpose. At least part of that purpose is to prove our inadequacy apart from each other. The gender differences noted in previous lessons prepare men and women to achieve their different roles in the family, church, and society. A man is hard pressed to take on the roles belonging naturally to a woman as a woman is to take on the roles of a man. While it can be done to a degree, it adds extra stress to daily life and requires greater support from friends, family, and church.

Men and women not only have talents and abilities that differ, but they have different needs and expectations. Previous lessons in this series have examined common gender differences in both needs and abilities. The following table drawn from I Peter 3:1-10 reminds us of several of those needs and how they relate to the differing roles of husbands and wives.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 shows a chart of the needs and roles of a husband and a wife based on I Peter 3:1-10.

	Needs	Roles
Husband	Respect	Protector
	Companionship	Provider
	Home to Be a Sanctuary	Priest
	To Feel Needed	Lover
Wife	Intimacy	Partner
	Security	Homemaker
	Affection	Mother and Wife
	Companionship	Companion

Because men need respect, God gave them the role of protector. Because they need companionship, He made them providers. Because they need a home that is a sanctuary from the outside world, He called them to be priests of their families. Because they need to feel needed, he made them lovers. Their needs are met as a consequence of fulfilling their roles.

Because women need intimacy, God made them partners with their husbands. Because they need security, He made them homemakers. Because they need affection, they are wives and mothers. Because they need companionship, He made them companions.

The most important human needs are met within marriage as we meet the needs of our spouses.

While this list has some simplifications and overlapping, it illustrates the essential plan of marriage established by God. The most important human needs are met within marriage as we meet the needs of our spouses. God has established the marriage relationship as the temple within which the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of humans can be safely expressed and fulfilled. Humans have twisted marriage, misused the marital relationship, and refused or distorted the God-given roles of husband and wife for millennia. It is not God they hurt with their defiance, but themselves.

Internalizing the Message

When speaking of a man's role as provider, it is often forgotten that for most of human history women worked alongside their husbands or fathers in providing for the families. Agricultural families often saw women and girls taking a primary role in caring for farm animals, cultivating vegetable gardens, and assisting in planting and reaping. Manufacturing

was done in the home with the entire family taking part in the process. Tradesmen were frequently dependent on their wives, and women were often found selling their family's products in the local market. Proverbs 31 clearly demonstrates that the ideal wife brought financial security to the home, even to the point of making important business decisions without the need to consult her husband. Thus the man is not intended to be the sole provider for the family, but is ultimately responsible that such provision be made. I Timothy 5:8 tells us that anyone who does not provide for his or her own family is worse than an infidel.

This example illustrates that a husband or wife is not excluded from exercising a role reserved for his or her spouse. In fact, these roles are not intended to be exclusive, but exercised in partnership. While the smooth functioning of a family requires that we follow a God-given division of authority and responsibility, for the most part a husband and wife should assume the roles for which they are individually most gifted and prepared. It is the relationship they engender and not the specific responsibilities they assume as husband and wife that is of most importance to God.

REFLECTIONS

- Why does the phrase “the head of Christ is God” guide us in understanding the meaning of “the head of the woman is the man”? What might that suggest for correctly interpreting “the head of every man is Christ”? Discuss.
- Discuss the difference between a gender role that is socially constructed and one that is divinely appointed.
- Discuss the difference between the kind of love God commands a husband to have for his wife and the kind of love He requires of a wife for her husband and children.
- At what point, if any, is a husband excused from the command to love his wife? What if she does not meet his needs? Discuss.
- At what point, if any, is a wife excused from the commandment to submit to her husband? Does submission require absolute obedience? Discuss.
- List some specific ways a wife can demonstrate reverence for her husband. Also list some ways a husband can demonstrate that he cherishes his wife.

Lesson Text

Ruth 2:10-11

10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

Ephesians 5:21-33

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Focus Thought

To achieve the optimum in marriage, men need respect and love; women need love and intimacy.

Focus Verse

Ephesians 5:31

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

Fueling the Marital Engine

by Richard M. Davis

One way men and women are different has to do with their differing desires within the marriage relationship. A man desires respect from his wife, which builds his sense of value and worth to the relationship and cranks high his marital productivity! A woman, on the other hand, desires to receive the security that comes from true love and intimacy within the relationship. It fuels the woman's positive contribution to the marriage.

In his article "What Does Unconditional Really Mean?" Emerson Eggerichs observed, "When I talk about unconditional respect being equal to unconditional love (Ephesians 5:33), one of the questions I hear the most is some variation of, 'Are you telling me I have to unconditionally respect my husband's bad behavior and become a door mat? Everyone knows respect must be earned!' Interestingly, in our culture we don't have a problem understanding unconditional love . . . in fact, we see unconditional love as the right of every human being. . . . But mention unconditional respect and some women go through the roof! Immediately, visions of weak, dependent women flood their minds—along with the inevitable label—door mat.

"So is this what Christ had in mind for married women? Not at all! When the Bible reveals that a wife is to respect her husband, it is shown in the same way a husband is to show love to his wife (Ephesians 5:33). Both are unconditional. . . . However, unconditional does not mean you remove all the healthy conditions that make a marriage succeed. . . . Unconditional means that you give the person the gift of love and respect as you confront the issues. In other words, you recognize that a hostile and contemptuous attitude is ineffective in helping resolve the issues" (www.emersonandsarah.blogspot.com, accessed April 1, 2013).

This beautiful design by God empowers the marriage with the man receiving his perceived need, the woman receiving her perceived need, and each contributing to a healthy marriage.

I. HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES

II. WIVES, RESPECT YOUR HUSBANDS

III. GOD LOVES HIS BRIDE UNCONDITIONALLY

A. God Loves His Bride

B. God Desires an Intimate Relationship with His Bride

C. God Desires Submission and Respect from His Bride

to appreciate the differences in flora and fauna, we often are not as quick to appreciate the differences in our fellow humans.

As we have studied in the previous lessons, the differences between men and women necessitate different human needs in each. Hostilities that develop usually are a result of a lack of understanding of these needs. In this lesson we will further explore and clarify some of these deterrents to harmony and compatibility between the sexes, particularly between husbands and wives.

May this lesson challenge husbands and wives to love and respect their mates as the Bible instructs. May it remind us all of just how much God loves His bride, the church; and may it motivate us to respect and love Him as He deserves.

Contemplating the Topic

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? (James 4:1).

For reasons beyond human comprehension, God chose to introduce variety into creation. Variety manifested itself in the flora and fauna, which He made in many different colors, shapes, and sizes. We behold these spectacular differences with wonder.

We are well aware of the differences God created in human beings, especially between the male and female genders. These differences can cause problems in relationships between men and women. Although we are quick

Searching the Scriptures

I. HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, "God commanded husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church."

“Husbands, love your wives” (Ephesians 5:25).

Although Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives, one would think it to be an unnecessary command. If God is love and we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5), it would seem that loving our wives, as well as everyone else, should not require commandment. Apparently God recognized both the woman’s supreme need for love and the man’s weakness in demonstrating love even if it should come natural to him.

Further, men are to love their wives “as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). It should be a joy for a husband to love his wife, but he also should demonstrate it faithfully through actions—living his life in a way that builds their relationship through love and keeps them both connected intimately to God.

The love and intimacy of a husband toward his wife motivate her. Many people seem to understand the meaning of love, but do they really know the meaning of intimacy? The dictionary defines *intimacy* as “close familiarity or friendship.” The adjective form of the word states, “close and friendly; private and personal; involving very close connection; having a cozy and relaxed atmosphere.”

Nothing motivates a wife like love and intimacy. As love lets her know she is the one and only person occupying the closest of relationships in her husband’s life, intimacy convinces her she is enjoying a very close and private connection with her husband. These two vital elements constitute the motivation of every successful marriage. Husbands need to remember that some of the soft and fuzzy words and things that make wives feel romantic are the things that motivate them within the relationship. A husband needs to respect the things that motivate his wife even though at times he may feel them to be frivolous or unnecessary.

A husband’s honoring of his wife is essential to gaining and maintaining her respect for him. Respect is mutually beneficial in a marriage. Although it is one of the highest needs of a man, the woman also requires it. *Honor* means “great respect.” It is difficult for a wife to genuinely respect her husband unless he reciprocates respect toward her. Mutual respect is a key ingredient of a successful marriage.

This kind of marital respect does not happen overnight. Two people probably are drawn toward marriage because they love and

respect each other, but the deepest levels of respect require years to build and develop. For this reason a lot of time is necessary to restore respect when one mate has failed the other morally. Love may continue, but destroyed respect must be reestablished little by little.

Husbands frequently forget how important honor is to a wife. When a husband honors, or respects, his wife, it makes her feel she is adequately fulfilling her role as wife and woman. It gives her the confidence she requires to function effectively as a true companion.

The wife requires unconditional love from her husband, which makes for a strong marriage. It seems love today often is expressed with accompanying qualifiers. Instead of love being just love, often it is identified as conditional or unconditional, true or false, real or make-believe. Although the list of qualifiers could be lengthy, we will consider only conditional and unconditional love.

Unconditional love is love that requires no preexisting prerequisites. There are no qualifications or disclaimers attached. It is simply love that is genuine and true. Neither is it measured in degrees of intensity based on a set of conditions. Unconditional love is steady and static regardless of what happens or is anticipated.

Many have observed the unconditional love manifested in mates having to serve as caregivers after their companions have suffered a debilitating illness. Their loyalty is amazing and admirable as they care for their beloved day and night, with whatever additional help is necessary. If a physical impairment in one’s companion can alter the affectionate response of the other mate, the love is conditional in the attending spouse, not unconditional.

Husbands especially should demonstrate their unconditional love for their wives regardless of circumstances or impairments. This expression of unconditional love gives them security that strengthens their love and care for the husband.

A marriage without unconditional love has little chance of surviving, for existing conditions eventually will destroy or impair the marriage severely. Conditional love is weak and anemic, and it is susceptible to every marital shortcoming.

Paul wrote, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 38-39). This is unconditional love.

When a wife complains or cries, it often is her cry of needing her husband’s unconditional love. In a strong marriage where both participants are happily fulfilled, there is no place for complaining. This is a symptom of a sick marriage. Obviously, the stress and strain of a normal relationship can produce negative words and strong emotions occasionally. But these should be responses to external stimuli and not problems within the marriage.

Sometimes the wife’s complaining or crying may signal to the husband that there are unmet needs. On such occasions the preferable and mature response is to seek to understand the feelings and needs of the companion in pain. Further, a mature husband will recognize his God-given leadership role and seek to resolve any issues that have developed within the relationship. Still, a mate who constantly complains also needs to mature as a Christian.

Complaining and crying can become an emotional tool used to manipulate and get one’s way. When this happens it is not a cry for love. It could be a behavior carried over from childhood when the companion learned to resort to this type of conduct to manipulate one’s parents. It reflects immaturity and can cause great damage to a marital relationship if not addressed and dealt with properly.

When a husband loves his wife, he also is loving himself.

“So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ephesians 5:28-29).

According to Scripture, the husband who loves his wife loves himself, for the two of them are one flesh (Ephesians 5:28-31). Their oneness is an intimate relationship that belies fully understanding. Although it may sound selfish, a husband should love his wife for his own sake if for no other reason. A husband loves his wife; he and his wife are one flesh; therefore the husband loves himself. This truism should cause every husband to treat his wife with utmost respect, for surely he would not consider disrespecting himself.

This scriptural mandate harmonizes with what often is called the Golden Rule: “There-

fore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). The broad application of this instruction means that when we hurt not only our wife, but also others, we actually hurt ourselves. Husbands who understand this will treat their wives and all others with more love and respect.

II. WIVES, RESPECT YOUR HUSBANDS

“. . . and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, “Marriage is never a one-way street!”

The love and respect necessary for a strong marriage is never one-sided. When love and respect are the responses of only one mate, it is like a person clapping one hand. There may be motion, but there is no sound and nothing is accomplished. Love and respect must be mutual.

Reverence is defined as “deep respect.” As the wife needs to be honored and valued by the husband, so the husband needs the respect of his wife. Mutual respect is the substance of which a successful marriage is made. When a husband does not receive the respect he needs from his wife, he has a tendency to feel inadequate. Consequently, he fails to lead in the relationship as he should. It is imperative that a wife respect her husband, for it is one of his most ardent and basic human needs.

It is instructive to observe relationships in the Bible in which the absence or presence of a wife’s respect for her husband had significant effect upon the relationship. Consider the instance in which Michal, wife of King David, demonstrated contempt for her husband’s conduct when he danced in the street with joy as the Ark was returned to Jerusalem. Her disrespect caused her to be barren (II Samuel 6). On the other hand, showing godly respect for the husband is biblical and causes positive results. (See I Peter 3:5-6).

A wife’s respect for her husband and her submission to him motivate him in the relationship. Husbands are inclined to pretend they are strong, macho leaders of the family, when in reality they desire the respect of their wives and family to bolster their manly persona. When a wife respects her husband and

submits to him, it motivates the husband to be the leader God intended him to be.

In marriage God has designed both husbands and wives to be dependent on their spouses to fulfill their needs within the relationship, and mutually upon God for completion of the relationship. This brilliant design of interdependency creates a strong and effective union when joined together with God. Synergistically, when each component of a marriage is perfectly combined, the outcome is greater than the sum of the separate parts.

Without the wife's respect, her husband's love for her is hindered. A woman's respect for her husband encourages his love for her. Of course, Scripture commands him to love her regardless of her level of respect for him. Still, respect is a significant catalyst of love. Increasing measures of love are born out of her respect for him—honoring and esteeming him highly. If a husband does not have the respect of his wife, he may continue to love her, but its absence will hinder his love demonstrated for her.

The wife's respect for her husband is necessary for a strong marriage. A marriage where the wife's respect for her husband is lacking will suffer. Two people who love each other must respect one another; however, the husband depends on the wife's respect as one of his primary, human needs.

A husband's harsh words or withdrawal can often be emblematic of his cry to receive his wife's respect. There are both subtle and noisy signals in a relationship. Some are so subdued the spouse does not always distinguish them. Others are so overt it would be impossible to miss them. It is vital for a mate to be sensitive enough to pick up on the subtle signals of unmet needs and not ignore the noisy ones.

Harsh words do not belong in a healthy relationship, and a husband's use of them is inexcusable. When harsh words or responses do occur, it is important for the wife to recognize they are alerting her to something wrong in the marriage. Further, although words of anger may be a cry for her respect, they also could be an outburst from an immature and undisciplined husband.

A husband's nature is to withdraw from marital discord. It is important that he show the Christian maturity necessary to overcome the flaws of his human nature and composition. He should lead in the relationship by showing maturity and gently addressing sensitive subjects in the marriage when he and his wife need to discuss differences and the basic

meeting of fundamental needs. He should resist the natural male tendency to withdraw and instead show genuine love toward his wife.

Harsh words and withdrawal are not responses that reflect self-control. A couple should be mature enough to talk about their needs without resorting to manipulative tactics or basic human responses. Good communication is vital to a healthy relationship.

III. GOD LOVES HIS BRIDE UNCONDITIONALLY

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 pictures a bride and says, "God loves His bride unconditionally."

God is love (I John 4:8). Not only is He the epitome of love, but He *is* love. His very essence is love exemplified. God loves genuinely and unconditionally.

As humans, we often extend our love conditionally. If people love us, we probably will love them. If they do not love us, we are not inclined to love them. Or we may love someone until that person hurts or disappoints us. All these kinds of responses represent conditional love.

God loves unconditionally. If we do not love Him, He still loves us. Even if we disappoint Him, He keeps loving us. If we serve Him, love Him, and then draw back from Him, He continues loving us just the same. His love for us is not based on anything we do or fail to do. "For God so loved the world. . . ." We fail to fathom the depth of divine love. God did not just love the world; He "so loved the world." The emphatic measure of God's love is encompassed in that tiny, two-letter word.

A. God Loves His Bride

God loves His bride, the church. Further, the Word of God reveals the church is His body (Colossians 1:18). Therefore Christ loves His own body. The oneness He enjoys with His body is His oneness and love for the church.

He not only loves the church but nourishes and cherishes this body of born-again believers. The dictionary defines *nourishment* as "the food or other substances necessary for growth and health." The word *cherish* means to "protect and care for lovingly." How beautifully God provides for and protects His church!

Marriage is the symbol of Christ's love for His church; however, no husband ever is able

to achieve the perfection of the measure of the Lord's love for us. Although many husbands genuinely love their wives, there is no husband who loves his wife as much as God loves His bride. He gave His life for her. Further, He is preparing an eternal home for her (John 14:2-3), and He will return to take her to that wonderful place (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). God has prepared a great marriage supper in Heaven to celebrate the grand occasion of His wife arriving to be with Him for all eternity (Revelation 19:7-8).

B. God Desires an Intimate Relationship with His Bride

As a husband desires an intimate relationship with his bride, so Christ desires an intimate relationship with His bride, the church. Where a husband is fulfilled physically and emotionally in his intimate relationship with his wife, Christ is fulfilled spiritually through His intimacy with the church.

Some church members seem to be satisfied to serve the Lord at a distance. They do not attend church regularly and they fall short in meeting their other obligations to the Lord. Yet they often are quick to assert their rightful place in the membership. This kind of discipleship is like being married and vocally asserting that relationship while remaining distant and without intimacy. As married couples should be close to each other with love and intimacy, so God desires believers to serve Him with joy in an especially close and intimate relationship.

C. God Desires Submission and Respect from His Bride

As a husband desires submission and respect from his wife, so God expects the same from the bride of Christ. He expects the church to submit to Him with respect and reverence, which underscores our dependence upon Him. Human life is unsuccessful and meaningless without a genuine and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We need the Lord more than we can possibly imagine. As we submit to Him with unconditional love and respect, He draws near to us intimately and cares for our needs. There is no greater relationship than this.

Internalizing the Message

If a person reads and studies this lesson without making any personal application, it

becomes just another interesting combination of words and ideas; it will not help one to build relationship—with the Lord or with a spouse. As husbands, we need to analyze our love for our wives. Do we really love her in the ways Christ modeled for the church? While we may not be required to give our very lives, we certainly should live our lives in a way that elevates her with great worth, value, and love.

Is our love for our wives enough to motivate and strengthen them to be the women God has called them to be? Do we respect them as we should? Husbands should realize that their love for and intimacy with their wives provide great motivation for them within the relationship. Husbands have a great responsibility to love and respect their wives with all the strength they can humanly possess.

Wives should consider their fulfillment of Christ's call upon them in the marriage also. Are we really respecting our husbands as they desire and as Christ requires of us? Do we realize that our demonstrating respect and submission for our husbands motivates them within the relationship? If they do not seem to be motivated in their love for us, perhaps a stronger demonstration of respect for them would enhance their level of motivation.

For the husband to love his wife and for the wife to respect her husband are not choices. They are biblical commands. Whether loving the wife or respecting the husband, God has commanded these mutual exchanges in the meeting of the marital needs of both spouses. A couple can only have a strong marriage through mutual giving within the relationship.

Jesus Christ loves us all unconditionally. We are benefactors of His love as He nourishes and cherishes us. Let us give Him the intimacy He requires that we can enjoy the relationship with Him we desire. This will only happen as we, His bride, give Him the submission and respect He desires, deserves, and expects.

REFLECTIONS

- What motivates a wife in a marital relationship? Discuss.
- Discuss the difference in conditional and unconditional love.
- Discuss the biblical idea that when a man loves his wife he loves himself.
- What motivates a husband in a marital relationship? Discuss.
- What demonstrates God's unconditional love for the church? Discuss.

Communication in Marriage

7

week of
07.13.14

Lesson Text

Ephesians 4:23-30

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

1 Peter 3:8-10

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

Focus Thought

Good communication is essential to good marriages.

Focus Verses

Ephesians 4:31-32

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Communication—Key to a Happy and Effective Marriage

by Richard M. Davis

In his article “Learning to Communicate,” Romie Hurley related a humorous, but all too often true, story: “A Non Sequitur cartoon by Wiley Miller pictures a couple in bed. The wife has put down the book she’s been reading and said something to her husband. Here’s what he heard: ‘Time for the annual review of how you make my life a living nightmare.’ All she actually said, though, is, ‘Sweetie, let’s talk about us.’” Hurley went on to pose the question, “Why do some spouses—especially some husbands—seem to view communication as a form of torture?” (www.focusonthefamily.com, accessed April 1, 2013).

Why do men and women—particularly husbands and wives—often struggle to communicate? Further, why do they struggle most in the one area that is the most vital component of marital relationships?

Perhaps there are several reasons for the struggle over communication: (1) men and women think and express themselves very differently; (2) women are much more verbal than are men; (3) generally, men are less emotional than are women, which can dynamically affect communication. These are only a few of the possible reasons for the struggle. Why do they struggle with the most vital component to their marriage? In addition to the mentioned reasons, their struggle probably involves communication most often because it is the most vital element to marriage and Satan often attacks us where we are the most vulnerable.

Communication should not be torture or drudgery to couples; it should be a beautiful time of sharing their hearts—their ideas, their hopes, their dreams. It should be a time of truly connecting in the matters most important to their life together. If we want to be happy and have an effective, cooperative partnership in marriage, communication is key.

I. COMMUNICATION: THE PRIMARY PROBLEM

- A. Communication That Is Shallow
- B. Communication That Hurts

II. COMMUNICATION: A PROBLEM OF THE SEXES

III. COMMUNICATION THAT DESTROYS

- A. Bitterness, Wrath, and Anger
- B. Clamor; Rendering Evil for Evil
- C. Evil Speaking

IV. COMMUNICATION: THREE COMPONENTS OF CONFLICT

- A. The Issue in Contention: The Focus Must Always Be on the Issue
- B. The People in the Conflict
- C. The Relationship of the People Disagreeing

V. COMMUNICATION THAT EDIFIES

- A. Biblical Guidelines for Good Communication
- B. Practical Guidelines for Good Communication

nothing has been spared in their wake. There is no greenery, no flowers, and no foliage. The trees that are left standing are silent specters, grotesque ghosts from the past. Could this bleak, forlorn landscape, now naked of shade or the sound of a bird, still rightfully be called a forest? The earth itself lies wounded and scarred.

“Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members” (James 3:5-6).

What devastation has often been left behind where husbands and wives have used cruel and cutting statements in speaking to one another! How sad that a couple who have lovingly begun a life together can no longer treat each other civilly. Legally they may still be married; they may still be living in the same home. But the real joy of love and companionship is gone. All that is left now are smoldering embers. The husband may still be doing his part as a provider. The wife may still be dutifully caring for the home and for the children. Yet the marriage, to all intents and purposes, is dead—empty of hope and satisfaction.

Contemplating the Topic

When a person drives through a forest that has been ravaged by fire, the scene appears sad and surreal. The sun may be shining brightly, but it shines on a darkened world. The view tells a person that uncontrolled flames must have leaped over the road and

Can anyone do anything for such a marriage? Yes, God can do something. Through God's help—through repentance and forgiveness—a couple can be reconciled and restored. Even as a fire-scorched forest can be restored through time and reseeded, a marriage can be brought back to life. Then the little seedlings of affection and tenderness can spring up and grow once again.

Searching the Scriptures

I. COMMUNICATION: THE PRIMARY PROBLEM

Poor communication has been found to be the most common problem in marriage. It has, in fact, been proven to be the primary cause of divorce.

The word "communication" comes from communion—an intimate and sublime exchange of thoughts and feelings. There is a level of trust where we fully reveal our hearts to someone. This can be dangerous as it was for Samson when he told Delilah "all his heart" (Judges 16:17). In a healthy marriage relationship, however, it can be liberating and truly exhilarating.

More can be said through a gentle touch or a smile than words are capable of saying. The way she straightens his tie or the way he helps her with her coat can speak volumes. The care she shows toward him when he is sick can be priceless to a man. The way he carefully seats her at a restaurant will form part of a memory she will never want to forget. A couple learns to read and interpret one another's gestures. It has been estimated that only 7 percent of communication is in actual words.

A. Communication That Is Shallow

Communication is much more than exchanging a few words as one might do with a passing stranger. Someone has tagged such conversation as "elevator talk," where everything said is impersonal: "How are you today?" or "Nice day, isn't it?" No one expects anything personal to be said in response to such questions. Usually, nothing is revealed about our true feelings, our desires, or our problems in this type of exchange.

We should know something vital is lacking in our marriage when we have more intelligent and stimulating conversations with a neighbor in the backyard or a friend on the telephone than with our mate. Somehow the fire has cooled and the intimacy has diminished. The

keen interest between us has faded in such a case. We answer one another in monosyllables or questions simply go unanswered. When a conversation is begun by one or the other, it trails off like a jet stream in an azure sky.

B. Communication That Hurts

Realizing the person with whom we have exchanged vows of love lacks interest in our personal life is hurtful and damaging. "Why is he always stuck behind the newspaper when I want to talk to him?" "Why is she so taken up with Facebook instead of spending quality time with me?"

Simmering resentments or unresolved disagreements can boil over when a husband and a wife fail to maintain good communication. When she feels her requests are ignored, she may begin to complain and nag. When he feels pressured because of her demands, he may withdraw and bury himself in his work. In such a situation it is possible for the two to meet one another "like two ships passing in the night," impersonally and at a distance. Further, distant communications may devolve into hurtful exchanges in which one or both companions use damaging words, possibly even saying things they really do not mean.

II. COMMUNICATION: A PROBLEM OF THE SEXES

It is the little foxes that spoil the vine. When it comes to males and females, the French have an expression: "Vive la différence." But in married life, the differences between the two sexes are not at first so apparent, nor are they always appreciated. Women are often more emotionally sensitive than men. They tend to show their feelings more openly and more expressively. Often they give vent to their deep feelings through tears, whether they are tears of great joy, sorrow, or pain. Their sensitivity may confuse their husbands and catch them totally off guard. Generally speaking, men are more stoic and far less likely than women to express their innermost feelings to others. The fact is they often have problems understanding their own feelings, particularly with regard to women.

Maureen was struggling for help from a counselor when she wrote: "My husband wants to move out—says he needs time to find out if he wants to stay married. Says he still loves me, but hates living with me. Different in so many ways, can't communicate. Statistically, what are the chances he will come back? Is it a

bad idea to separate if there have been no huge problems like infidelity or abuse?" (www.allexperts.com, accessed December 13, 2012).

Both sexes struggle to understand their partners. Women, for example, question why men feel so challenged when they are given constructive criticism. It may be that the male feels his ego is under attack, that his ability is being questioned. On the other hand, a woman desires constant reassurance of her value to her mate; she may fear her husband's love has an expiration date. Frequently at the very time men want to have some space for themselves, their wives are longing for intimate conversation.

There may have been a blissful courtship, a glimmering marriage, and a romantic honeymoon. It was all so exciting, so wonderful! And yet after the couple is married, the stars can begin to fall from their lofty heights. Someone has said, "Love is blind, but marriage is an eye-opener." Simple disagreements can escalate into heated quarrels. A man generally wants a quick solution to any problem or argument. Just a few confrontational words, however, and he is ready to walk away and forget the whole thing. A woman, on the other hand, wants complete clarification and understanding. She wants to rest assured all is well, that her husband has seriously considered and valued her opinion.

III. COMMUNICATION THAT DESTROYS

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 illustrates a ship navigating rough waters.

Rough waters! We are certain to run into some turbulence within a marriage. The life experiences and expectations of both companions are certain to be different occasionally. Marital conflicts sometimes build over time and over minor misunderstandings until suddenly they erupt into a gigantic storm. Such a conflict can more than rock the boat; it may threaten to capsize and sink the whole ship.

A. Bitterness, Wrath, and Anger

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speak-

ing, be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31).

It is so easy to get into the destructive pattern of constant argument. We may become controlling in our attitude towards our husband or wife, demanding actions on their part they find difficult or impossible to meet. The spouse who is being criticized feels unloved, disrespected, and unappreciated. Hurt feelings eventually rise to the surface. The partner may try to defend himself or herself with forceful words or withdraw into stony silence. The atmosphere by this time has become charged with tension. All it takes for a major explosion of anger to occur is for one or the other to bring up a problem from the past. Money may already have been an issue. The sexual relationship may have suffered because of too many responsibilities. Over time, in-laws may have interfered and become a source of frustration. There may have been an affair in the past that has broken down trust.

Verbal abuse is the destructive process of putting down one's partner, even to the point in some cases of name calling. A verbally abused person is drowning in a sea of disrespect. The abuser disregards the feelings of his or her spouse, disparaging them and crushing their self-worth. Perhaps the reason verbal abuse is common in some marriages is that people have such unrealistic expectations of one another. Some individuals, in their frustration, shout or scream or swear. Losing what little self control they have left, they may even resort to violent actions such as slamming doors or breaking furniture.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, "Often the children suffer most when parents argue."

A famous African proverb states, "When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled." Often it is the children in a home who suffer most when their father and mother clash. The sensitive nature of boys and girls has been called a Geiger counter of their parents' relationship. How well they know when their father and mother are seriously unhappy with one another! Studies have shown that children who are exposed to unresolved and frequent conflicts between their parents are prone to suffer emotional problems. Moreover, these youngsters are more likely to get into trouble with

the law, take up drugs or drinking, or become sexually promiscuous.

B. Clamor, Rendering Evil for Evil

The word *clamor* speaks of a passionate outcry, as when men become involved in a brawl or a tumult. The Greek word *krauge*, used in Ephesians 4:31, is also found in Acts 23:9 when the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin contended against one another and “there arose a great cry.”

Paul taught emphatically that such types of contentious communication, along with the ill will associated with them, should “be put away from you” (Ephesians 4:31). What a change it would make in churches and homes if every true believer followed this instruction!

Words can be a source of rich blessing “like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11), or they can be cruel weapons to the soul and spirit “like a sword” or like “arrows” (Psalm 64:3). The devil is a slanderer; Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted (Luke 4:18). Satan is an accuser of the brethren. The things spoken by Jesus brought peace and joy to the people of Israel. “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). Truly “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

We are to love one another as fellow Christians. I Peter 3:8 encourages us to be tender-hearted and humble, and the next verse says, “Not rendering evil for evil.”

C. Evil Speaking

Evil speaking refers to slanderous, abusive, or blasphemous speech. At times some individuals allow their tongues to get terribly out of control. Most people can remember something they have said in the past that should never have been spoken. Under sufficient pressure, facing great disappointment and frustration, individuals often lash out at those who are nearest and dearest to them because they are the easiest targets. Sadly, they may be the ones most undeserving of their loved one’s anger. Unkind words can come pouring out of one’s mouth like rushing waters from a broken dam.

Evil speaking damages the person to whom it is spoken. Words spoken behind an individual’s back can injure his or her reputation. Both the Old and New Testaments firmly condemn backbiting (Psalm 15:1-3; Romans 1:28-30). Slander runs contrary to the biblical instruction to “speak not evil one of another, brethren” (James 4:11). When we realize how

merciful God has been to us, how He has forgiven all our sins, then certainly we should remember to be kind to others, even if they disagree with us. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour” (Romans 13:10).

IV. COMMUNICATION: THREE COMPONENTS OF CONFLICT

A. The Issue in Contention: The Focus Must Always Be on the Issue

While it may be uncomfortable for us to deal with a marital problem, there are certain times—and timing is vital—we must deal with a difficulty. Whatever the issue, however, a couple must solve the difficulty with courtesy and respect—dealing with the issue and not attacking one another.

Sometimes when a companion believes he or she is not making progress in getting across his or her point of view, that spouse may become frustrated with the partner. In the midst of a sensitive discussion, the frustrated mate may be tempted to raise an unrelated subject. For example, a wife could assert, “I know what you’re saying about my purchasing new clothes, but what about the dent you put in our car fender last month?” A husband can be just as guilty of trying to redirect the conversation. He might say, “Sure, I’m away a lot from you and the kids. By the way, why do you never launder my best shirt?” Neither redirecting the subject nor attacking the partner is productive. Rather, both spouses should focus on the issue at hand, whatever it may be.

B. The People in the Conflict

What kinds of people have marital disagreements? All kinds! The real issue is not whether we will have differences of opinion; all married couples will sometimes disagree. The real question is how we will respond toward each other when we do not agree. Are we mature enough to seriously look at the other person’s viewpoint? Are we stubbornly and furiously contending for things that, in the long run, really do not make much difference? If there is anywhere in our lives where we need to negotiate, to make concessions, it is in our marriage relationship. With the proper attitudes of love and respect, couples can resolve their differences.

C. The Relationship of the People Disagreeing

There is something far more valuable than winning an argument: saving the marriage

itself. Couples should have an understanding between them that when they disagree they will work to maintain the relationship. If they cannot come together in agreement on a particular issue, then they may need to set it aside for a season and deal with it later. Allow the issue to cool down. Give it time and pray earnestly about the matter. We may be surprised at how a solution arises. One or both companions may begin to see the merits of their partner's reasoning and soften on their individual positions.

With the proper attitudes of love and respect, couples can resolve their differences.

V. COMMUNICATION THAT EDIFIES

A. Biblical Guidelines for Good Communication

Charles Swindoll wrote of a couple who got married and who seemingly had everything going for them. She was beautiful and highly talented; he was training to be a doctor. As friction between them grew, they each left their Christian principles behind and became involved in immorality. Then they separated and divorced. In the woman's words, "As I look back, it all started when we were not honest with each other . . . when we failed to come clean and admit our needs. We substituted being phony for being real" (*Strike the Original Match*).

All too easily little dishonesties and exaggerations can creep into the conversations we have with our marriage partner. Many people today talk flippantly of white lies, those statements they consider to be minor or harmless fabrications. But lies, regardless of their color, have no place in a believer's life or in a healthy marriage. Paul wrote, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for ye are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

What did Paul mean when he wrote, "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Ephesians 4:26)? Perhaps he was saying that negative thoughts will arise from time to time, but we do not have to let them control our actions or words. Frequently we discover that an "affront" we have received was not intended the way it sounded to us. If we hold our temper and tongue, refusing to escalate the situation, we will refrain from making matters worse. God will give us a victory we would never have gained had we given way to an angry response.

Couples should clear the air with their spouse as soon as possible when misunderstandings arise. Rather than harboring a grudge and hoping for an opportunity to get even, it is better to get things settled and taken care of for good. A spouse may be irritated, but he or she does not have to be irritable. Paul wisely wrote, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

According to Paul, we are to be kind and tenderhearted in our relationships. And how—with what measure—are we to forgive one another? We must forgive others totally, unreservedly, sacrificially, "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). We should ask ourselves, "With what measure has the Lord forgiven me?" He has fully forgiven us time and again. We also then should forgive others, including our spouse when necessary.

B. Practical Guidelines for Good Communication

There are ways to eliminate distractions and to avoid misunderstandings. We can, for example, let our husband or wife know we are fully attentive to what he or she is saying by using an echo or reflective listening technique. In other words, we first listen intently to what the other is saying and then we repeat or paraphrase what we believe he or she has said. It is an effort to reconstruct and understand the spouse. Instead of imposing our own point of view, we are letting our husband or wife know we are open to and care about their thoughts and feelings. This helps to build trust and increase intimacy.

We need to look past the immediate problems that have arisen in our marriage, past the difficulties that appear insurmountable, and realize circumstances do change. We need to do what we can to reach a better understanding with our companion, and we may have to grope for practical solutions to our differences. However, we need to not be hasty in

making conclusions but to remain calm and rational in our approach. “A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1).

At the height of an argument, a spouse can make statements he or she does not mean. It is always beneficial for both spouses to avoid confrontational language such as “you always . . .” or “you never . . .” because such charges probably are dishonest. Such statements may exaggerate the facts and will definitely escalate the conversation. Couples should seek to use inclusive words such as “we,” “our,” and “together.” Together you can still build bridges that will stand for years to come; separated you will likely tear down in moments what took years to build.

Maintaining a sense of humor is always helpful to both partners—learning to laugh *at* oneself but *with* one’s mate. Smiles and laughter are good indicators the marital partners have not been overwhelmed by a situation. Writing in the nineteenth century, Henry Ward Beecher stated, “A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs. It’s jolted by every pebble on the road.”

We should learn to look for and appreciate the good qualities in our mates. We should often tell them the things we admire about them. Despite their mistakes—and we all make them—we need to affirm our love and respect for the one we married.

Internalizing the Message

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear; slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

Someone has observed that the heart of communication is not so much about what is said, but about what is heard. Do we really take time to listen to what our spouse is saying? Is our attention divided between what really interests us and what our husband or wife may be trying to tell us? Do we look them in the face when they are talking? Do we cut them off in mid-sentence so we can continue our thought, which we consider to be more important? When we were courting we treasured in our hearts the things said by our companion. Now, if we listen carefully, that person still has invaluable words to speak to us.

Transparency 3 states, “Words, written or spoken, can be valuable treasures.”

It takes wisdom to strike the fine balance in the matter of conversation. Ecclesiastes 3:7 says there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” In a healthy discussion there needs to be give and take. We show our respect for another person by allowing the person to talk; we show our interest by contributing some of our own thoughts. “A man has joy in making an apt answer, and a word spoken at the right moment—how good it is!” (Proverbs 15:23, *The Amplified Bible*).

Believers should refuse to allow themselves to be easily offended. During our sinful past we were “sometimes foolish . . . living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). Thankfully, God cleansed our hearts when we were washed by His blood. We are now new creations in Jesus Christ through water baptism in Jesus’ name and through the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Although we still will have our struggles from time to time, our attitudes have dramatically changed. No longer should we feel easily hurt, and no longer should we seek to retaliate. As one lady spoke of her husband after he turned to God, “I don’t know what to do with him now. He’s so different!” If we will live as genuine believers in Christ Jesus and work toward maintaining good communication within our marriage, we will have the foundation to resolve every conflict that may arise.

REFLECTIONS

- What is the basis of most common problems in marriage? Discuss.
- Discuss how distant communications can devolve into hurtful and damaging language within a marital discussion.
- What are some of the fundamental differences between men and women that sometimes contribute to misunderstandings within marriage? Discuss.
- Discuss ways to avoid escalating differences between two spouses and to move toward resolution.
- When difficulties arise, why is it essential to discuss the issue at hand and not attack the individual? Discuss.

Lesson Text

Genesis 21:9-21

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Focus Thought

Many come to Christ in the miracle of redemption, but bear the results of past mistakes. We do not have to live in the past; we can change the results of the future.

Focus Verse

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

Apparently a “Dummy” Can’t Do It

by Scott Graham

It was a creative genius at marketing who got the idea that a publisher could call people “dummies” and still get them to buy his books. But it worked! Recognizing that people would pay for simple instructions for a variety of projects about which they were “dumb,” a cultural phenomenon was born. For about \$20 a pop, advice would be dispensed.

With the title *DOS for Dummies*, the For Dummies series of books began in 1991 to explain a computer operating system. Seventy-five hundred copies were sold. From that humble beginning, an empire has risen until today there are over eighteen hundred titles in this series, and worldwide sales have passed the 250 million mark! Revenues are in the billions of dollars. There are presently more than twenty smart phone apps with instructions for “dummies” as well!

You can find instructions for nearly any topic—everything from *Algebra II for Dummies* to *How to Run a Bed and Breakfast for Dummies* (and hundreds of topics in between).

One title that caught my attention was *How to Fix (Almost) Everything for Dummies*. I looked through the table of contents for this book, and there is clearly one vital item missing. Nothing in that book tells how to fix a broken family! Some repairs are just too complicated for human hands.

Gratefully, God has a book that far surpasses any written by man. The Word of God points us to the only Healer who can perfectly heal our homes and families. And His counsel and services don’t have a \$19.99 price tag attached. He simply asks for our hearts!

I. LIVING WITH YOUR MIRACLE— AND YOUR MISTAKE

- A. God Forgives the Mistakes of the Past
- B. God Allows Many of the Scars to Remain
- C. Responsibilities Continue
- D. Memories Continue

II. LIFE IS NOT ALWAYS FAIR

- A. Hagar Thrown Out
- B. Hagar All Alone
- C. Hagar’s Supplies Depleted

III. GOD NEVER LEAVES US

- A. God Sees Us
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IV. GOD BRINGS HEALING

- A. God Opened Hagar’s Eyes
- B. Hagar Saw the Well
- C. Hagar Filled Her Own Bottle
- D. Hagar Lifted up the Lad
- E. Hagar Gave Her Son Drink
- F. God Blessed the Lad

V. DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

- A. Single Families—Hagar
- B. Blended Families—Abraham
- C. Partiality—Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob
- D. Adultery—David, Hosea, Woman at the Well

beautiful woman, and yes, her husband, Abraham, was rich in cattle, silver, and gold; but still something was missing. Sarah had been constantly reminded of the absence of a baby within her tent, a baby to cradle in her arms. The years had slipped by, and with the passage of years, her hopes had faded that she would bare Abraham a son. Back at Bethel her God-fearing husband had spoken of a tremendous promise he had received from God: his descendants would be as numerous as the dust on the ground. Still Sarah had not conceived. There had been no fulfillment of the promise—nothing to reassure her she would be the mother of a great nation.

Sarah’s barrenness (a source of great embarrassment to any wife in those days) caused her to come up with a plan. She decided to have Abraham go to Hagar, her handmaid, and have a child by her. This was displeasing to God, and it was certain to lead to great disharmony within the home, but Sarah inexorably pushed on with her scheme. “And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian . . . and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife” (Genesis 16:3).

What followed is the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, all enmeshed in a series of regrettable and heartrending incidents. It is the account of petty jealousy and female rivalry. It is the story of cruel hatred and angry

Contemplating the Topic

Day after day, hour by hour, it had been uppermost on Sarah’s mind. Yes, she was a

retribution. Someone might think God should certainly have distanced Himself from these confused people, but instead, through His sovereignty and grace, the Lord patiently revealed a purpose for each of their lives.

Searching the Scriptures

I. LIVING WITH YOUR MIRACLE— AND YOUR MISTAKE

A. God Forgives the Mistakes of the Past

We live in a world where sin is commonplace and excessive, where society's morals often seem to be in a dramatic freefall. Worldwide some 42 million abortions are performed every year. Thirteen percent of those terminating their pregnancy in the United States describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians.

College campuses are notorious for their wild Friday night and Saturday night drunken parties. In the United States there are about 10.8 million underage drinkers. About 1.6 million alcoholics in the United States are women. In Canada the rate of the use of marijuana by youths fifteen to twenty-four is three times higher than it is for adults twenty-five years and older. Eight of ten sexual abusers of children are family members or people whom the child knows.

The statistics are staggering. No wonder when people first visit an Apostolic church they often come in reeling under a load of guilt and shame. No wonder they come in bruised and blighted. They often come to God as a last resort because everything else they have tried has failed. These are the seriously wounded who are looking for refuge, a place where people really care about them. These people's pasts have been filled with pain, and their future is uncertain. Frequently it is hard for them to believe there is anything left to give them hope.

It takes a miracle for God to transform a sinner's life, but the Lord still performs miracles. He is "the God of hope" (Romans 15:13). When He saves us, it is through His mercy (a word that indicates His abundant power to meet tremendous need). Our deepest sins, our greatest offenses against God and against our family members, can all be blotted out through the blood of Jesus Christ.

B. God Allows Many of the Scars to Remain

Our thinking is wonderfully changed through the salvation experience. There is a new joy in our hearts and a new purpose for our living. The wounds, the bruises, and the putrefying sores have begun to close and to heal. (See Isaiah 1:6.) Daily we can be washed and made clean by Christ's blood. Daily we can be refreshed by His Spirit.

Still, while we are fully forgiven of our sins, there may be lingering moments of pain and regret. God allows the scars to remind us of our past. Not everyone will appreciate or understand how our lives have been transformed. Unkind words we have spoken in the past may return to haunt us when we are dealing with an estranged marriage partner or with injured children. We may have left a long trail of debt in the dust behind us. Our physical or even mental health may have suffered because of our foolish ways.

C. Responsibilities Continue

It is in the taxing affairs of everyday living that our faith usually is tested. How will we shoulder our responsibilities now that we are Christians? Our tasks may be no lighter than they were before. Some days may be just as stressful as ever. There may be unexpected problems that challenge our faith and times of crises that shake our emotions. Sometimes we may find it hard to pray or even to focus on the things that need to be done. But we must realize we are accountable to God, He loves us deeply, and with His help we can carry on.

When things go wrong, it is easy to blame circumstances or others for what has happened. However, we need to realize that we are the responsible ones because of past sins. The new Christian must admit to those who were hurt, "I was wrong. Please forgive me." He or she can concede to a former spouse, "It was my fault. I'm sorry."

D. Memories Continue

Unbidden and unwelcome thoughts may crowd into our consciousness, threatening to destroy our peace of mind. But even in this we can be overcomers. The conflicts of the past may not be forgotten, but they can be forgiven. As we dwell on the goodness of God and contemplate His blessings, hope and joy will come into our hearts. The Lord can calm the storm. Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are

honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

As we dwell on the goodness of God and contemplate His blessings, hope and joy will come into our hearts.

II. LIFE IS NOT ALWAYS FAIR

A. Hagar Thrown Out

Hagar must have wondered why everything happened as it did—why she had been forced out on her own. She was the one who had been uprooted. She, with her son Ishmael, had become the outcasts.

Of course there had been serious problems. Sarah, Abraham's attractive wife, had initiated Hagar's unfortunate relationship with Abraham. Hagar had simply been the concubine, a female slave of convenience, who was given no choice in the matter. Still, Hagar was a woman and she had powerful feelings she was not careful to suppress. After Hagar had conceived, she "despised" her mistress (Genesis 16:4). She probably looked down on Sarah because of her barrenness. In return, Sarah began to afflict her servant, and Hagar fled into the wilderness.

Hagar returned to Sarah only because God had specifically instructed her to do so. However, after Sarah gave birth to her own son, Isaac, she once again became incensed at her maidservant. Sarah had heard the teenaged Ishmael laughing at Isaac; it was more than Abraham's wife could bear. She demanded of her husband, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Genesis 21:10). And so, regardless of Hagar's feelings, regardless of the dangers she and Ishmael would face, she had to leave.

B. Hagar All Alone

Traveling away from Abraham's camp, Hagar with her son, Ishmael, entered the wilderness of Beersheba. It was a barren land, fit for little more than grazing animals such as sheep and cattle. There was no one to befriend her there, and in her confusion, Genesis 21:14 says she "wandered." Everything there seemed strange and uncertain.

How often God meets people in desolate places! He met Moses when he was all alone on the backside of a desert. The Lord met Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel, at the entrance of a cave in Horeb. He dealt with Jonah in the dark belly of a fish within the Mediterranean Sea.

C. Hagar's Supplies Depleted

Before she left his encampment, Abraham had supplied Hagar and her son with bread and a water bottle (probably made of goat-skin). But with the oppressive heat the supply of water soon was gone. With her own strength nearly depleted, Hagar watched with growing concern as Ishmael grew weaker. They just could not carry on like this. Hagar placed her child under one of the shrubs and distanced herself from the dehydrated boy. It was too painful to see him deteriorating, to watch him dying in this awful place.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, "God sees us in the most barren wilderness of life."

III. GOD NEVER LEAVES US

A. God Sees Us

When all else fails and one has come to the end of his human resources, God is still there. God sees us in the most barren wildernesses of life.

About sixteen years earlier, when Hagar first fled into the wilderness from Sarah's wrath, an angel appeared to her. As Hagar was by the fountain in the way to Shur, the messenger from the Almighty told her, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly. . . . Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction" (Genesis 16:10-11). Hagar knew the Lord had spoken to her. She proclaimed, "Thou God seest me" (Genesis 16:13). "Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi [A well to the Living One Who sees me]" (Genesis 16:14, *The Amplified Bible*).

The Lord supplies provision before we even see the need. As Hagar sat down for what she imagined were to be the last minutes of her son's life and she wept in the wilderness of Beersheba, she may have forgotten God's promise from years before. But the Almighty had not forgotten. Sometimes the Lord intervenes even when our faith seems infinitesimally small, even when circumstances have all but smothered the last of our hopes.

B. God Hears Us

To a large extent Ishmael was the innocent victim in the tragic scene in the wilderness, and sadly it is often innocent children who suffer most. Frequently they are broken, crushed, and hurting. When the lad cried out in his pain, it was not only his mother who heard the heartrending cries. Twice in Genesis 21:17 we are told that God heard the voice of Ishmael.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, Hebrews 4:15 says, "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." We can be sure the Lord has a sensitive ear when it comes to hearing the needs of His children. Truly God "heareth the cry of the afflicted" (Job 34:28).

IV. GOD BRINGS HEALING

A. God Opened Hagar's Eyes

Sometimes our blessing is just beyond the place where we are looking. Our vision can be clouded by dreadful disappointments from the past; often, painful experiences of the present also hinder our eyesight. Jesus explained to His disciples regarding the multitudes, "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:13).

Hagar was not expecting a miracle, but "God opened her eyes" (Genesis 21:19) to a healing miracle. Her eyes, which Matthew Henry said had been "almost blinded by weeping," now saw a source of hope. An amazing change takes place when we see the Almighty in our situation. The circumstances no longer appear to be impossible, "for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

B. Hagar Saw the Well

When we really see God, we see His provision and His protection. Hagar saw a well of water at the lowest moment in her life. She saw the well, as a sinner for the first time recognizes the abundance that is in the Savior Jesus Christ. There was more than enough water—more than enough for both Ishmael and her. We serve an abundant God, one who provides "a table in the wilderness" (Psalm 78:19). For the nation of Israel on their journey away from Egypt, "he brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers" (Psalm 78:16).

*When we really see God,
we see His provision
and His protection.*

C. Hagar Filled Her Own Bottle

Now she could fill with water the empty skin-bottle. How precious that water must have been to Hagar! She probably rushed to the well but held carefully on to the bottle on her return so none of its priceless contents would be lost. The water meant more than a little refreshment to the desperate woman; it meant life itself.

Water is an apt picture of salvation through the grace of God. The word "thirst" appears thirty-one times in the *King James Version*, and Jesus often used the word in reference to mankind's spiritual need or his desire for God. The invitation to drink at the Lord's fountain is for one and for all.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

D. Hagar Lifted up the Lad

Hagar's greatest anguish resulted from seeing Ishmael in his pitiful condition, but that was about to change. The angel of the Lord commanded the woman, "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand" (Genesis 21:18). Something was about to happen, and Hagar must have sensed it. She held up her nearly lifeless son with a renewed sense of hope and

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, "Hagar saw a well of water at the lowest moment of her life."

purpose. Despite all that had happened, the Almighty had not forgotten Hagar in her dilemma. The psalmist Asaph would one day write of God, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

E. Hagar Gave Her Son Drink

Tenderly the mother would have brought the water to her son’s parched lips. Carefully she would have watched as he slowly drank. Although she realized it might take some time for Ishmael’s full recovery, Hagar knew he would get well. God was faithfully fulfilling His promise before her eyes.

In many cases there seems to be a common scenario in the way the Lord delivers His people. They come to a terrible crisis, they cry out in their anguish, and He delivers “them out of their distresses” (Psalm 107:6).

F. God Blessed the Lad

An angel had told Hagar before Ishmael’s birth every man’s hand would be against him, but Genesis 21:20 says, “God was with the lad.” What a difference the blessing of the Lord makes in a person’s life! The son of Hagar would grow up to be a man of a very independent and untamed nature, “a wild man” (Genesis 16:12). And then, after God intervened to save Ishmael in the wilderness, an angel promised Hagar, “I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 21:18). Ishmael would have twelve sons and a daughter, and modern Arabs claim to be his descendants.

What a difference the blessing of the Lord makes in a person’s life!

V. DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

A dysfunctional family is a family in conflict. It is one in which children often are faced with a parent or parents who cannot function properly.

A. Single Families—Hagar

It is amazing how difficult situations can bring out the strengths as well as the flaws in a person’s character. There have been

many individuals, such as Hagar, who have become single parents due to unwanted circumstances.

These people may have one or more children outside of marriage. They may have had to struggle after the death of a spouse or because they were the victims of divorce. They have had to bear the full responsibility of bringing up a child or children by themselves. They have felt at times they were in a wilderness facing situations with few provisions for themselves or their children. But many have pressed on courageously. Thousands of these single parents have discovered a new sense of courage and a new source of strength as they turned their problems over to God. (See Isaiah 40:31.)

B. Blended Families—Abraham

A blended family? Unfortunately, this expression in too many cases is a misnomer. The “blend” can sometimes seem more of a mix-up of people than a merger of people, more of a collection of divided parts than of an integrated whole. These families often face a number of potential problems including discipline challenges and adapting to the house rules in a different home. The children may not connect with the stepparent and the stepparent may not always relate well to the children. Some spouses hate it when the stepchildren (“skids” in modern jargon) come over. One stepmother said she “hibernates” in her room.

It seems certain things were no better in Abraham’s situation. He had to deal with two women who deeply resented one another. Much of their contention was over their sons, and though Abraham wanted to do what was right by both his children, the state of affairs simply grew worse. Finally God intervened, speaking specifically to Abraham and instructing him so he would know what to do.

C. Partiality—Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob

It is always a sad commentary when a parent shows partiality to one child over others. It was even more problematic when both Isaac and Rebekah held a bias for the two different sons in their family. “And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Genesis 25:28). Favoritism must have been obvious as the boys grew into manhood. Esau and Isaac probably were aware of their parents’ prejudice, and that may help to explain the sharp rivalry that grew between the two.

Jacob, the younger of the two sons, felt no remorse in bargaining Esau out of his birthright. True, Esau had little regard for the birthright—selling it off for a single meal—but nevertheless he later felt cheated (Genesis 27:36). When Isaac was about to give the patriarchal blessing to his favorite son, Rebekah conspired to have the blessing conferred upon Jacob. Her deception worked all too well. Jacob’s mother had her way, but Esau developed such a fierce hatred towards Jacob that he would have murdered him if his brother had not escaped to Padanaram in northern Syria.

D. Adultery—David, Hosea, Woman at the Well

What tragedies occur when a man or a woman falls into moral sin! It is not just the guilty parties in an adulterous affair who suffer from the consequences, however. There are always the innocent victims who have to bear much of the hurt from someone else’s foolishness.

We know David’s heart was crushed by the sickness and death of Bathsheba’s first child, but what about Bathsheba herself and those who were closest to her? What about Hosea, whose immoral wife, Gomer, did so much to destroy the prophet’s home life? What about all those men and their families connected with the adulterous woman whom Jesus met at the well? Adultery comes with an enormous price tag. It carries staggering fees that are paid by many, not just by few.

Internalizing the Message

A child’s favorite toy, though broken, can sometimes be repaired. An athlete’s injured ligament often can be healed. A damaged work of art may be restored to much of its original beauty. But what hope is there for a family that has been fractured by internal divisions, broken by selfish decisions or even blatant immorality?

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes Luke 5:31.

Many of those who met with Jesus during His earthly ministry were people whose lives had been twisted and torn. The biblical accounts tell us the raw stories of many of them and the tremendous suffering they endured before coming to Jesus. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luke 5:31).

Our Lord ministered to the destitute, the distraught, and the discouraged. He spent time talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, though she had lived with six different men. At the Temple in Jerusalem, He gave hope to the woman taken in the act of adultery. At Jericho He went out of his way to minister to Zacchaeus, a dishonest tax collector. In the country of the Gadarenes, the Lord delivered Legion from a host of demons and sent him back to his home a changed man.

There is hope for every family that will turn to Jesus Christ, the great counselor, for He will go out of His way to help. There can be healing and restoration in His presence. Prophesying of the coming Messiah, Isaiah wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

It will take transparency, patience, and forgiveness for all the people involved to even begin the healing process in a dysfunctional family. There will be setbacks, and there will be disappointments. And yet, with the Lord’s help, the broken pieces of a marriage and a family can slowly be put back together.

REFLECTIONS

- What were some of the basic problems in Abraham’s family? Discuss.
- What difficult problems do modern families face today? Discuss.
- Discuss the crisis Hagar faced after being thrown out into the wilderness.
- The story of Hagar is the story of divine provision. Discuss.
- What are some types of dysfunctional families in today’s society? Discuss how these families can be helped.

Parents as Trainers and Restrainers

9
week of
07.27.14

Lesson Text

Luke 2:39-52

39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Focus Thought

Parents are responsible to nurture their children, to guide them in the ways of God, and to restrain them from evil.

Focus Verse

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Parents' Most Important Responsibility

by Richard M. Davis

When God allows a couple to raise children—whether by birth or by adoption—He entrusts to those parents a weighty responsibility: to train their children. Children do not grow up as responsible, productive citizens on their own; they require the loving, gentle guidance of parent-mentors who will firmly guide their steps, instruct them in the ways of the Lord, and train them in biblical principles.

In his article titled “Training Our Children,” Charles F. Stanley stated the following: “What is your goal in raising children? The Bible teaches that parents’ top priority in child rearing should be spiritual. Proverbs 22:6 says, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ Our primary task is to prepare our sons and daughters to walk according to God’s plan, will, and purpose for their lives. We are to instill in them an unshakable faith that will protect them from the assault of the Devil” (www.intouch.org, accessed April 1, 2013).

Why do some parents worry so much about developing their children for engaging in sports activities, expressing their musical talents, belonging to social organizations, or other such endeavors? While some of those activities may be worthwhile and may help the children in life, how do they compare with developing the children’s spiritual lives? As Stanley observed, developing their spiritual lives should be the parents’ top priority; nothing is more important. We have only a limited number of years with the opportunity to instill spiritual values in them. We must give it our best effort and take advantage of every precious moment.

I. PARENTS WHO WERE TRAINERS

- A. Jesus Was Trained in the Law
- B. Jesus Grew and Developed
- C. Jesus Was Trained to Honor and Obey Parents
- D. Jesus Recognized His Mission Early

II. CHILDREN WHO WERE TRAINED

- A. The Training of Moses
- B. The Training of Samuel
- C. The Training of Timothy

III. TRAINING MUST BEGIN VERY YOUNG

IV. TRAINING AND RESTRAINING

- A. Eli
- B. David

V. PARENTS AS TRAINERS AND RESTRAINERS

into this world, they should realize the child is not an entity created for their own benefit or pleasure. Together they have created a human being with an eternal soul, and they bear a great responsibility for that child.

Children do not come with an instruction manual. Learning how to train and restrain children is a process that develops as parents learn by trial and error. Notwithstanding, many helpful how-to manuals are available to parents. Further, the best guide they could utilize is the Holy Bible. Following biblical principles is the best thing parents can do for their children.

All parents need assistance in their parental roles. Unfortunately, many parents feel lacking in knowledge and unqualified as parents until their children are reared. Then ironically their most dramatic opportunity to shape their children’s futures is past.

There are biblical characters who provide scriptural examples of training and restraining their children—both positive and negative illustrations in the lives of real people. For example, we will consider Moses, Samuel, and Timothy. They had parents who were up to the challenge of training exceptional children. Moses grew up to be called the lawgiver, and he led the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Samuel grew up to be an outstanding prophet, priest, and judge; two books of

Contemplating the Topic

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states that great responsibilities accompany parenting.

Parents are not just people who have children; there is more to good parenting than the physical reproduction of offspring. Parenting involves responsibility, and a great part of that responsibility involves training and restraining their children. When a couple brings a child

the English Bible bear his name. Timothy grew up to be Paul's assistant, and his name is borne in the title of two of Paul's epistles.

As we study this lesson concerning training and restraining our children, let us apply the general principles of Scripture. We must train and restrain our children, but we also need training and restraint as parents. If we are not disciplined as parents, we cannot discipline our children effectively.

Searching the Scriptures

I. PARENTS WHO WERE TRAINERS

Although there were numerous parents in the Bible who were good examples as trainers of their children, perhaps the greatest example we have is that of Mary and Joseph. The child they trained was the Messiah, the Great I Am who created the universe. No one will ever be able to understand the challenge these parents faced by having a child in their home unlike any baby ever born. They did their best to train and restrain Jesus as they watched Him grow and develop into manhood.

The interesting paradox about this is the duality of Jesus' identity. He was God and He was man. As God, Mary and Joseph could teach Him nothing He did not already know. As man, however, He had the potential to learn what all children learn. How exactly this dual nature played out in the life of Christ remains a mystery. However, we do know He was fully divine and fully human. We can observe in Scripture that at times Jesus demonstrated His humanity, and at other times He showed His divinity. In Him both existed mutually and compatibly. Hebrews 5:8 states, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." As mortals, it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to understand this. Apparently Jesus was able to differentiate what He knew as God from what He knew as a man.

A. Jesus Was Trained in the Law

Jesus' knowledge of the Law reflected His parents' training. It would appear they both exposed Him to the Law and spent much time training Him in it. In His rebuke of the Pharisees and Sadducees, He referred to the Law numerous times.

The law of Moses was not something in which a child or young person would ordinarily show interest. It was detailed and complicated. Just to read its many passages is laborious, but to understand the nuances of the

Law required much knowledge and effort. The knowledge Jesus had of the Law reflected much study.

This says a lot about Mary and Joseph's efforts in training Jesus. They not only had to be good teachers of the Law, they had to exemplify its precepts. His respect for the Law came from the teaching of its principles and from observing the living example of His parents.

B. Jesus Grew and Developed

As any normal boy, Jesus grew and developed physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially. Anyone observing Him in the home or neighborhood would not have detected anything different about Him. Although some apocryphal writings contained fanciful stories of Jesus doing miracles as a child, the Bible does not support the idea. Had Jesus chosen to, He could have performed miracles as a child, but He chose not to. Under the Mosaic law a priest could not minister until he reached the age of thirty (Numbers 4:3). Theologians believe He respected the age qualification for a priest contained in the Law. Consequently, the first miracle He performed was at the marriage feast in Cana recorded in John 2.

C. Jesus Was Trained to Honor and Obey Parents

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

Although we know little of His childhood, Jesus obviously was trained to honor and obey His parents. Consider what condescension was required for Him to submit Himself to mere mortals. Isaiah 55:9 says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

This should be a challenge to all of us to submit ourselves to one another. If God could submit Himself to a human, surely we humans can submit ourselves to God and to our fellow man. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21).

D. Jesus Recognized His Mission Early

"And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus at twelve years of age to the Temple in Jerusalem, He remained behind when they left to return home. Not knowing He was not with them, they traveled for three days before they missed Him. When they returned to Jerusalem, “They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46).

“And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing” (Luke 2:48).

Jesus’ answer to His mother underscored His knowledge of His mission: “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). Perhaps this biblical account has prompted many Christians to assume the age of accountability begins at age twelve, for Jesus was twelve years old at that time.

It is possible for children to feel God is directing them to a special mission in life without their parents knowing or understanding it. Jesus’ parents had no idea of the scope of His mission. From what the angel had told them, they were aware of His identity; but they evidently did not understand all the ramifications of what He was to do. Parents need to be close enough to their children that the children feel free to discuss their feelings with the parents.

One pastor asked a twelve-year-old girl what she wanted to do or be when she grew up. Without hesitation she said she wanted to be a missionary to China. When he asked her how she knew this and how she could be so positive, she replied the Lord had called her several years previously. This is a beautiful occurrence, but the parents also need to join in such conversations so they can help guide their youngsters.

II. CHILDREN WHO WERE TRAINED

A. The Training of Moses

The Bible contains numerous accounts of children who were trained and grew up to be effective leaders in the kingdom of God. One such man was Moses. Fearing that the Hebrews were going to multiply in Egypt and eventually present a political, if not a military, problem, the Pharaoh ordered all male Hebrew babies to be thrown into the river (Exodus 1:22). Moses’ mother, Jochebed, placed him in a basket in the river’s edge. When

Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe, she discovered the baby and asked Moses’ sister, who was watching him from nearby, to get someone to care for him. Moses’ sister got her mother to come and tend the baby; therefore Jochebed was able to raise her own son.

Although when Moses was grown he officially belonged to the royal family, his parents raised and trained him in their home. The training he received from his parents was invaluable later when he led the people of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness. God knew Moses could not effectively lead Israel if he were not knowledgeable of his heritage and of the customs of His people.

Let us always trust God to prepare us for the tasks that lie ahead. Job said, “He knoweth the way that I take” (Job 23:10). Because He knows the future as well as the present, He knows how to get us ready for what we are going to face in the future. We sometimes wonder why we have to experience some challenges, but later we often discover the reason. God was preparing us for the future.

B. The Training of Samuel

God rewarded Hannah’s overwhelming desire for a son during one of her annual trips to the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Her barrenness was difficult enough to bear, but her husband’s other wife, Peninnah, often provoked Hannah because she was barren. Hannah was plagued for years until she finally had enough. She vowed in the midst of a fast to give her son to God if He would first give him to her. God answered her prayer, gave her Samuel, and she gave him to the Lord. When Samuel was weaned, she and her husband, Elkanah, took him to the house of the Lord and gave him to Eli the priest for service in the Tabernacle. (See I Samuel 1.)

During Samuel’s early years at home, his parents had the privilege of training him in the ways of the Lord. His training continued under the tutelage of the prophet Eli. He reflected his thorough training in latter years when he was a prophet, priest, and judge. (See I Samuel 7:15-17.)

C. The Training of Timothy

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, “Extended family can play a part in positively training children.”

Not only did Timothy receive training from his mother, Eunice, but also from his grandmother, Lois. They were able to put values and character in him that stabilized him spiritually and kept him in focus for the rest of his productive life.

Paul referred to his “unfeigned faith.” How were these godly ladies able to put this wonderful attribute into Timothy? It happened through systematic inculcation. The verb *inculcate* means to fix an idea in someone’s mind by often repeating it. It is obvious Lois and Eunice repeated important truths over and over to young Timothy until he retained them.

As Timothy had values put into him by his grandmother and mother, so parents are putting important substance into their children when they instruct them in the Scriptures and in the ways of the Lord.

III. TRAINING MUST BEGIN VERY YOUNG

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 pictures a toddler and quotes Proverbs 22:6 in the literal Hebrew.

Training must begin when the mind of the youngster is agile and flexible. Although we can learn at any age, as the mind ages the ability to recall slows significantly. Children are able to absorb and recall large amounts of information more easily than their elders.

Some believers have misunderstood the second portion of the verse: “When he is old, he will not depart from it.” Some wrongly believe it is a promise that when a child grows up he will forever remain faithful to the Lord. Perhaps a better understanding would be that he will never be able to fully escape the biblical principles responsible caregivers have put into him.

Charles Berlitz, the grandson of Maximilian Berlitz who established the Berlitz Language Method, was spoken to by eight different people who addressed him in eight different languages when he was a child. He grew up being able to speak all eight languages and thinking every person had his own individual language.

As “partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4), we have the spiritual DNA required to be like the Lord. Because all children are a creation of God, they have a bit of God in them even before they give their lives to the Lord. As every artisan leaves a little bit of himself in everything he makes, God leaves a little bit of Himself in everyone when He brings them into this world. This makes it easier to train children in the ways of the Lord. Children have great potential if they receive the proper training. They will, however, still need the saving power of the Cross in their lives.

IV. TRAINING AND RESTRAINING

Training could be thought of as starting a child in the right direction and restraining would be stopping the child from going the wrong direction. Parents must be active in both areas of child rearing because their children are dependent on their guidance. Because children do not know how to do most of the things they need to do, parents must train them properly. Because children tend to do many things they should not do, parents also must stop them and discipline them properly.

A. Eli

“For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth: because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (I Samuel 3:13).

Although Eli the priest knew his sons were evil and were doing immoral things with the women who came to the Tabernacle, he did not restrain them. Eli’s refusal to restrain his grown sons reveals he apparently did not train them adequately when they were young. God held him responsible for their heinous deeds.

It is true that grown children can be evil in spite of proper parental training when they were young; however, God does not hold parents responsible in such cases. This is the reason parents need to train and restrain their children when they are young. When parents do everything they can do to train their children correctly, they are not culpable when the children, as adults, make wrong choices and go the wrong direction.

B. David

“Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be

king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom” (I Kings 1:5-6).

In David’s declining years his son Adonijah decided he would be king instead of his father. David had promised the throne to another son, Solomon, but Adonijah continued to plot against his father, going so far as to have himself ceremonially declared king.

Although Adonijah’s conspiracy failed, David displeased the Lord by not restraining him. He never questioned Adonijah or displeased him. In other words, David did nothing to restrain him. This is another example of a failure to adequately train a child when he was young. Consequently, David was unable to restrain him when he was grown.

V. PARENTS AS TRAINERS AND RESTRAINERS

Discipline is “training or experience that corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects especially the mental faculties or moral character” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*). *Discipline* originates from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means teaching or instruction. Parents are teachers. “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).

There is more than one way to instruct a child. It can be done with love and firm limits, or it can be done harshly with no tolerance. Obviously, discipline should be balanced. The ideal way to discipline is with love and kindness yet with understood firmness. If a child feels love from an instructing parent but experiences no restraint, the child will experience confusion. A child needs to receive clear signals as to what is expected of him. Parents also need to make sure their exercise of discipline is consistent.

Most children believe restraints curtail their freedoms, and children always want more freedom. However, freedoms bring responsibilities.

Parents often experience frustration when rearing a child because they sense they are not getting across to their children the necessary instructions and help they need. But parents need to be encouraged; more of their training is being received by the children than they

may realize. After they are grown, many children thank their parents for the good things they put in them at an early age. Instruction at the time often is not understood by the children until they experience a need to apply their knowledge. Therefore it takes time for children to appreciate their parents as trainers and restrainers.

Internalizing the Message

If it was necessary for Jesus to receive parental training as a child, how much more do our children need it! Further, Mary and Joseph needed to discipline or restrain Jesus when they found He had remained behind in Jerusalem. Let us not think parents today are exempt from these same responsibilities. As children grow and develop physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually, they need large doses of instruction.

Many notable children in the Bible were well trained and later became effective leaders, which reminds us there is a reward for training and restraining our children effectively. If parents will be faithful in their responsibility to train and restrain, they will one day be rewarded as they watch their children reflect those instructions and principles. A child may not always serve the Lord faithfully, but parents will, at least, see evidence of training as the child makes important life choices.

If training is difficult, sometimes parents find restraining even more difficult. But even great individuals in the Bible suffered for not properly restraining their children. Parents need to restrain their children and then commit the results to the Lord. If parents have properly trained their children, but the grown children make wrong choices, the parents will not be held accountable.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss how Jesus, who as God knew all things, could be taught anything as a child.
- Discuss the training of Moses and Samuel and how their training affected their future.
- Why should training be done at an early age? Discuss.
- How did Eli and David displease the Lord relative to their children? Discuss.
- What does the word *discipline* mean? Discuss.
- Discuss the relationship between freedom and responsibility.

**Parents
as Encouragers**

10
week of
08.03.14

Lesson Text

Genesis 37:1-3

1 And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seven-teen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

Genesis 50:18-21

18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Focus Thought

Give a child an inch of encouragement and he will take a mile of accomplishment.

Focus Verse

Genesis 37:3

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

Culture Connection

Parents—Being Our Children’s Greatest Source of Encouragement

by Richard M. Davis

Parents should be their children’s biggest fans, greatest source of human strength, and strongest encouragers! Nobody can better persuade them of their worth and value as individuals than their parents, and nobody can more quickly tear down that self-esteem.

In an article titled “Developing Your Child’s Self-Esteem,” the website KidsHealth offers the following: “Healthy self-esteem is like a child’s armor against the challenges of the world. Kids who know their strengths and weaknesses and feel good about themselves seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. . . . In contrast, kids with low self-esteem can find challenges to be sources of major anxiety and frustration. Those who think poorly of themselves have a hard time finding solutions to problems. . . . Parents and caregivers can promote healthy self-esteem by showing encouragement and enjoyment in many areas. Avoid focusing on one specific area; for example, success on a spelling test, which can lead to kids feeling that they’re only as valuable as their test scores.”

The article goes on to identify seven tips to help foster healthy self-esteem in a child:

- “Be careful what you say.
- “Identify and redirect inaccurate beliefs.
- “Give positive, accurate feedback.
- “Help kids become involved in constructive experiences” (www.kidshealth.org, Michelle New, PhD, accessed April 3, 2013).
- “Be a positive role model.
- “Be spontaneous and affectionate.
- “Create a safe, loving home environment.

Hebrews 12:1 reminds us of the importance of having our own “cheering section” to encourage us onward in life. That, too, is what parents can provide their children when they give them positive, faith-filled encouragement daily.

I. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL ACCEPTED AND LOVED

- A. Feel Unconditional Acceptance
- B. Feel Worthy in the Sight of God and Parents
- C. Feel They Belong
- D. Feel Listened to and Understood

II. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL SPECIAL AND UNIQUE

- A. Every Child Made to Feel Special
- B. Every Step Forward Is to Be Celebrated

III. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL THEY HAVE INPUT INTO THEIR DEVELOPMENT

- A. Allow the Child to Struggle and to Succeed
- B. Allow the Child to Make Decisions

IV. CHILDREN NEED THE SECURITY OF FIRM LIMITS

- A. Firm Discipline with Dignity and Respect
- B. Fair Consequences Consistently Applied
- C. Strong Values Yield Confidence

V. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL CAPABLE

- A. Children Feel a Healthy Self-confidence
- B. Parents Have Realistic Expectations
- C. Parents Need to Capitalize on Child’s Strengths

Contemplating the Topic

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 states, “Give a child an inch of encouragement and he will take a mile of accomplishment.”

If there is anyone of the human family who needs encouragement, it is children. Because parents usually are the people closest to them the majority of their early life, it is paramount that parents be encouragers. The Lord has given this role of encourager to parents, and by all means they never should be a source of discouragement to their children.

Facing a brand new world in which they feel like aliens, children need the constant encouragement of their parents. They face new challenges daily that create feelings of inadequacy and fear. Parents are well positioned to effectively guide them through these “mine fields” of change, and they can encourage and challenge them to be strong.

Searching the Scriptures

I. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL ACCEPTED AND LOVED

It seems some individuals forget children are real human beings with normal feelings and a wide range of emotions. They need to feel accepted and loved. These emotions combine to form the necessary catalyst of development.

All individuals not firmly established in the role of their identity need acceptance and love to help them to find that identity. Since children are in that category of seeking their identity and place in the human family, it is imperative they receive this necessary bolstering.

A. Feel Unconditional Acceptance

Children are sensitive to the emotions of acceptance and rejection. Before they are able to articulate their thoughts intelligently, they feel these emotions. For this reason, parents need to express their genuine love and acceptance for their children.

Not only do parents need to reassure their children of their acceptance, but they need to reassure them unconditionally. Only unconditional acceptance creates confidence in a child. Parents should never suggest to their children that they will love them *if* they are good, which is conditional. Parents should love their children unconditionally—whether or not the children always please them. Unconditional love demands no prerequisites. True love keeps loving regardless of circumstances or situations.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 says, "Conditional love always has a price tag. Children need unconditional love!"

Conditional love always has a price tag. It suggests that if a person acts in a particular way or does a specific thing, someone will love that person. This kind of love is cheap and shallow. Adults and children alike easily detect this kind of conditional love, which is not genuine.

B. Feel Worthy in the Sight of God and Parents

A feeling of unworthiness is one of the innate emotions with which all individuals struggle. This emotion pervades human nature and children are not exempt from feeling it.

Words are not necessary to express to others a feeling of worthiness or to crush their sense of worth. Even pets, such as the family dog, can sense acceptance or rejection. Rejection, obviously, creates a feeling of unworthiness in people and animals. Emotions express feelings without a vocabulary because they have a language all their own.

When parents fail to extend to their children the encouragement they need to convince them they are accepted and loved, it exacerbates their innate feelings of unworthiness. When they feel unworthy of their parents' love, it also is easy for them to feel unworthy of God's love. Parents and God are two important authorities in their lives. If they feel unworthy for one of the two they often feel unworthy of both.

C. Feel They Belong

Acceptance and love create a feeling of belonging in children. They may not be old enough to understand or even think of the words "acceptance" or "belonging," but they are old enough to feel the emotions attached to them.

Connection to parents is what God intended when He planned the nuclear family. The familial connection creates the feeling of belonging every child needs. When they feel they belong, a normalcy that produces proper development pervades them.

The feeling of belonging benefits the child in his physical as well as mental health. It is clinically proven that lack of tension can promote healing both physically and mentally.

Parents with adopted children find that convincing them of belonging in the family is one of their greatest challenges. When children discover their birth parents did not want them or for other reasons surrendered them for adoption, it usually creates a crisis in their sense of worth; and it is difficult for their adoptive parents to free them from that struggle.

D. Feel Listened to and Understood

Every person desires for others to listen to him. To be ignored causes the same feeling as rejection. It makes the speaker feel inferior to the listener. In a child it creates insecurity.

What children talk about may not be very interesting to adults, but children still want them to listen. We are presumptuous when we deem as unimportant the things children have to say. The things they talk about are important to them. If parents listen to what they have to say and try to understand them, it enhances the camaraderie between parents and children.

II. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL SPECIAL AND UNIQUE

A. Every Child Made to Feel Special

Regardless of a child's intelligence, excellence in academics, or exploits in athletics, he is special and unique. There is not another child like that child. Parents need to communicate to their children how special they are.

Mediocrity is the bane of excellence. If children feel they are just average, they will not feel challenged to excel. If parents can make them feel special, however, it removes the label of mediocrity that acts as an obstacle to their success. They all need to hear often that they are special and unique and are capable of accomplishing great things.

When children make mistakes—minor or major—parents need to correct them properly. Children need their parents to express to them that the behavior was inappropriate and they are capable of better behavior. But the parents should also let the children know they still love them. Many children feel unloved when their parents correct them. We should remind them they are special and they are capable of much better conduct.

Parents need to compliment their children to create in them a feeling of self-worth. When children feel special, it creates self-confidence. Criticism accomplishes the opposite. Not only does it make them feel bad, but they begin to feel inferior.

B. Every Step Forward Is to Be Celebrated

Nothing makes children feel more special than proper accolades when they have excelled. We should bake them a cake, have friends over, throw a party, or do something to celebrate their achievement. We should compliment them in the presence of others, which makes them feel special. When the celebration marks a milestone, it gives a feeling of accomplishment. It will be something the child always will remember and cherish.

Children need to be taught the importance of small, incremental steps, which some call "baby steps." When parents celebrate even the smallest accomplishments in their children's efforts to excel, children realize their parents place importance on small amounts of progress. This empowers them not to be as demanding of themselves as they realize they can rejoice over small steps forward.

We teach our children they can accomplish great things through important small steps.

Physically, children grow at such infinitesimal amounts we cannot witness their growth, no matter how fast it may be. We can only observe it by periodically checking it over time. The same is true of trees. The giant sequoia trees of the west may grow to three hundred feet, but their growth is painstakingly slow and their progress not immediately observable. Parents should remind their children that through just a little bit of progress at a time they can accomplish a lot.

"Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths . . . and we turn about their whole body" (James 3:3).

III. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL THEY HAVE INPUT INTO THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Nothing is quite as interesting as the physical development of a child. It is a study in the handiwork of God. To watch children grow and develop from babies unable to walk or talk into children in elementary school walking, talking, and solving problems is nothing short of amazing.

During this growth process, children need to feel they have input into their own development. They want to know they have a hand or major part in what is happening within them.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 pictures a thermostat and states that humans, including children, need to feel some control.

When children feel they have some control, it takes away the frantic feeling of being controlled. It allows them to make choices. Once they are old enough to exercise some responsibility in their own lives and development, parents should give them some latitude for growing and maturing.

A. Allow the Child to Struggle and to Succeed

When a butterfly is struggling to leave the pupal stage of its development, it needs to be left alone. Any attempt to assist in its exit from the cocoon results in damage to the butterfly. The struggle to leave that stage and move to the final stage of the butterfly strengthens the muscles to be used later in flying.

Children must be allowed to struggle in their various stages of development. In their struggles they are developing emotional

“muscles” that will assist them later in life. They learn from their mistakes as we lovingly guide them by pointing out good and bad results.

B. Allow the Child to Make Decisions

Long before children are ready to make decisions, they desire to do so. Anyone who has held a small child's hand while walking together has felt him pulling his hand loose so he can walk on his own. He often says, “Let me do it.” Clearly, children desire to make their own decisions as they grow towards independence. First, however, they need much training in learning how to make the right choices.

When should a child be given the freedom to make his own decisions? Obviously, the process must start and develop slowly. At first the parent will have to deny the child's request, for it always precedes his ability to perform.

IV. CHILDREN NEED THE SECURITY OF FIRM LIMITS

Fences contain and define limits for animals that are incapable of defining those limits for themselves. Until a child develops enough to be able to define limits for himself, he must receive parental control by the establishment of firm limits in his life.

The rancher is the one who establishes limits for his animals, and parents must be the ones to establish limits for their children. Children will push to build their own “fences” and define their own limits, but they can only receive that freedom once they have matured to the point of being capable to establish them responsibly.

As much as children may resent the limits imposed upon them, they need the security such limits provide. The fences that keep the animals confined in a defined area are the same fences that keep the animals away from unknown dangers and also keep the hazards away from them. The restrictions that limit the children also provide protection. The children are kept from things that would harm them. With the passing of each developmental stage of the child's life, parents are able to push the boundaries out farther and unlock more of the gates.

A. Firm Discipline with Dignity and Respect

Establishing limits for our children is not like corralling cattle. Parents should administer firm discipline with dignity and respect. Children are not animals; they are miniature adults with sensitive feelings.

Children need firm, steady, and consistent guidance through parental discipline. Rigid is one adjective that is out of place in the home when dealing with children. To be rigid means to be stiff and inflexible. Rigid discipline refuses to consider extenuating or mitigating factors that may have merit in parental determinations. Rigidity affects children negatively by convincing them of their parents' closed minds and their own inability to discern the circumstances at hand.

B. Fair Consequences Consistently Applied

A child knows if discipline administered to him is consistent. His thought processes may not be fully developed, but he has a natural sense of fairness.

Because human nature tends toward inconsistency, it is one of the greatest challenges a parent faces. No wonder Shakespeare said, “O consistency, thou art a jewel.” To treat each child the same in discipline is as difficult as treating the same child consistently each time he needs discipline.

C. Strong Values Yield Confidence

Parents desire that their children possess strong values because strong values yield confidence. However, strong values do not just happen. They result directly from parents properly training their children.

Confidence is self-assurance that comes from a person's belief in his ability to achieve things. Confidence is the subflooring of our personal house whose foundation is our belief system, or core values. When there is a solid foundation of strong values, confidence becomes the covering that allows us to build a structure of character.

V. CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL CAPABLE

A. Children Feel a Healthy Self-confidence

Children need to feel they are capable, which means “having sufficient power, prowess, intelligence, resources, strength, or other needed attributes to perform or accomplish” (*Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*). They need to be efficient and competent. Capability does not just appear in children; parents must help to establish and develop it.

Capability empowers children to attain freedom and independence as they grow into them. Parents do not want their children to

remain forever dependent on them, for it handicaps a child emotionally. Parents desire for their children to become responsible and productive adults. Part of the process of growing children into responsible adulthood involves allowing them to succeed and to fail, and allowing them to relish and celebrate their successes. They depend on consistent and constant parental encouragement.

Still, while children need to become capable young people, which breeds self-confidence, parents need to guide them toward temperance in their confidence lest they become prideful. It is important to help children to understand they are no better than others. It may be difficult to help them to maintain a balance between confidence and over-confidence. The attitude that will create balance in their sense of confidence is the biblical admonition of Paul to the believers in Philippi: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). It is vital that we all recognize the need to anchor our ability to achieve and accomplish to the strength of Jesus Christ operating within us.

B. Parents Have Realistic Expectations

Parents like to feel their children are the smartest, most intelligent, and most attractive, but such measurements and expectations are unrealistic. Not every child can perform in the top percentiles of achievement of any category. Still, parents can love their children unconditionally, feel pleasure at their achievements, and do everything they can to encourage their children's excellence.

It is difficult to discern a child's potential based on his natural ability and refrain from trying to push the child beyond that limit. All parents need to challenge their children to accomplish more without pushing them beyond their limitations. Even that can be a rather arbitrary judgment, however, since it is difficult to know their exact limitations.

If parents push a child beyond what he is naturally capable, he becomes frustrated. Therefore parents must have realistic expectations. We should let children know "the sky is the limit," but God's will always is the most important factor for their lives.

C. Parents Need to Capitalize on Child's Strengths

When God made people, He did not make them all alike. They vary in appearance, strength, and abilities. Children are born with different abilities, and the variety of their

strengths and talents makes the world more interesting.

It is the parents' duty to try to discern the strengths each child possesses and to guide that child to capitalize on those strengths and develop them. This is not an easy assignment because some abilities remain hidden until the child is older, or they may be masked by personality or temperament.

Internalizing the Message

Other than guiding the child in his relationship with God, perhaps the parent's greatest mission is to provide the courage a child needs to make it successfully through the challenging changes of his physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development. Parents as encouragers can be the difference in their children making the journey successfully or miserably failing and falling by the way. Many children have not grown up to serve the Lord and to be successful in life because they lacked parents who encouraged them.

Children are fragile undeveloped entities that parents must handle with extreme care. They need lots of love that they may feel accepted. They need to be told they are special and unique to establish their self-confidence.

In their developing stages they need to have firm limits that will give them security, yet the parents must administer the limits in love with respect and dignity. Allowing the children to struggle and succeed gives them a feeling of some control of their development as well as their destiny.

Parents need to encourage their children that they may develop a healthy sense of their capability. As parents celebrate the successes of their children and help them to overcome their failures, they will watch their children develop into strong and independent adults who know how to make right choices. All of this is possible through parental encouragement.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss conditional and unconditional love.
- Why do children need unconditional love?
- How does it benefit a child to feel special and unique? Discuss.
- Discuss the delicate process of giving children more freedom as they grow in maturity and responsibility.
- What do strong values yield? Discuss.

Parents as Role Models

11
week of
08.10.14

Lesson Text

Luke 17:26-32

26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

31 In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

32 Remember Lot's wife.

Psalms 78:4-8

4 We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:

6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

Focus Thought

The examples children see in their parents form the moral character of future generations.

Focus Verse

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Please Do It Better

by Scott Graham

A prominent newscaster told of a letter she received one day from a young fan. The little girl was only eight years old, but she had already decided on her career. She wanted to be a newscaster and had set her heart on mirroring the famous recipient of her letter. Her words present a striking lesson for us. “Dear Mrs. _____,” she began. “When I grow up I’m going to do what you do. Please do it better!”

The newscaster wrote that from that moment on, any time she was tempted to give less than her best, she remembered her little fan out there watching her. She was constantly reminded that what she did today was setting the pattern for what a young person might do tomorrow. So she always tried to “do it better!”

As parents, we are given that same sobering responsibility. We are living before young mimics whose tomorrows will largely be a reflection of how we live in front of them today. Whom they will become is greatly determined by what they’ve observed. If we show them love and gentleness, they will live out the same. If we show them harshness and criticism, they will pattern that instead. If they see consistency in living for God, they will be committed. If they see hypocrisy, they will be disillusioned.

I. PARENTS OF CHARACTER

- A. Integrity with God
- B. Integrity with Self
- C. Integrity with Others

II. PARENTS OF FAITH

- A. Faith Required
- B. Faith Possessed
- C. Faith Transferred

III. PARENTS OF INFLUENCE

- A. Influence for Evil
- B. Influence for Good
- C. Parental Traits Tend to Follow
- D. Parental Examples in Worship

the ones who decide they are role models; they are role models by the nature of their position.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says that parents are role models of character, of faith, and in worship.

Parents are role models of character. We will study three areas they should model positively for their children: integrity with God, with self, and with others. When these areas are positively patterned by parents, children will have good role models. Good parents raise good children. Obviously, this does not mean the children will always make the right choices when they grow up, but the character they see in their parents will not leave their memory. The pattern children see modeled in their parents will be the character template that will challenge them in adulthood.

Parents are role models of faith. To be a positive role model of faith, however, they must have and demonstrate faith. There is no way parents can challenge children to have faith without having faith themselves. Parents need to have faith and transfer the faith to their children. Having and exemplifying faith is the greatest teacher of faith. Parents transfer character and faith to their children mostly through their influence. However, the door of influence swings both ways—both for good and for evil. Whether for good or for evil, parents are role models through their influence.

Contemplating the Topic

When professional athletes mess up their lives, they immediately want to remind the public they are not role models. They make this disclaimer because they know many people, especially children, consider them to be role models and seek to emulate them. But the label of “role model” is not designated by the individual being modeled; it is given by those who model their lives after the person. Unfortunately, because of the youth who idolize professional athletes, they are role models by nature of their highly visible position and influence.

Because children look up to their parents and follow them, parents are also role models. At times parents may not want to be considered role models. They may want to make a disclaimer otherwise, especially when their lives are poor patterns to follow. Still, parents are not

Traits of families are self-propagating.

Parents pass certain traits to the next generation for at least two reasons. First, children watch their parents and mimic them. Second, some traits are inherited genetically. Nothing exempts the children from inheriting the traits of the parents and family, but they can intentionally choose to reject negative traits through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Parents are role models in worship. As parents worship, young children watch them and duplicate their actions. Long before children understand worship, they mimic worship. Believing parents watch their children play church before they understand the significance of what they are doing. How important it is for children to see the right patterns to follow!

Searching the Scriptures

I. PARENTS OF CHARACTER

Although character can be good or bad, we most often think of character as being positive traits worthy of emulation. One definition of the word *character* is “the good qualities of a person that usually include moral or emotional strength, honesty, and fairness” (*learnersdictionary.com*). As role models, it is imperative that parents have good character, for they are examples to the children.

As we study the influence parents’ character has upon their children, we will consider the term *integrity*, which means “the quality of being honest and morally upright; the state of being whole or unified” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Simply stated, integrity means to be good all the way through.

“Ephraim is a cake not turned”
(*Hosea 7:8*).

Hosea 7:8 presents a vivid picture of the absence of integrity in Ephraim. In the time when cakes were baked on open fires instead of in ovens, they had to be turned to be cooked through and through on both sides. A cake “not turned” was done on one side, but it was not cooked on the other.

Good character with integrity demonstrates that a person is good through and through. For parents to be good role models, they must be good “through and through.” If they are not, not only will their children be able to detect it, but it will negatively affect the children.

A. Integrity with God

Believers need to have integrity with God. Although we need to have integrity with self and others, integrity with God must exist before such a relationship with self and others is even possible. Jesus commanded, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Parents who desire to be positive role models to their children must have integrity with God.

A person’s righteous relationship with God is the basis of all other successful relationships. When we are right with God, it is much easier to be in right relationship with others. Being right with God creates in us an attitude that is peaceable and harmonious, which makes compatibility with others easier.

The opposite also is true. When a person lacks a righteous relationship with God, it sabotages all other relationships. When we are out of harmony with the Lord, it is difficult to be in harmony with others, which makes compatibility with others difficult.

B. Integrity with Self

*“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man”*
(*Polonius to his son Laertes in Shakespeare’s Hamlet*).

Many people do not understand the necessity of having integrity with themselves. Whether or not they try to have integrity with God and others, they fail to see the value of integrity with oneself.

When individuals are not honest with themselves, they become victims of self-deception. Not willing to be true, they create a false environment in which they masquerade fiction as fact. Those who refuse to face reality are candidates for psychosis, a mental disorder indicating impaired contact with reality.

Being honest with oneself requires personal honesty—the ability to admit mistakes and poor judgments. This involves self-judgment, which Paul referred to in I Corinthians 11:31: “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”

C. Integrity with Others

When we have integrity with God and self, we have accomplished the most difficult parts of the three-pronged challenge of having good relationships. Two-thirds of our responsibility

of having integrity is fulfilled, leaving only the responsibility we have regarding our integrity with others. That should be easy once the other two areas are in right relationship.

Integrity with others should be an automatic result of our integrity with God and ourselves. When we have a proper relationship with God and we are living with personal integrity, then having integrity toward others follows as a byproduct.

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

As love for God is our vertical responsibility, love for our neighbors is our horizontal responsibility. Having integrity with God mirrors the biblical requirement to love God. Having integrity with others mirrors the requirement to love our neighbors.

II. PARENTS OF FAITH

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 quotes Hebrews 11:6.

Faith is basic to the existence of anything relating to God. We could call it “the basic building block of relationships.” It is the common denominator of everything spiritual. One should expect nothing from God without faith. For this reason parents should have faith in God and model that faith for their children.

A. Faith Required

God had a purpose in requiring faith as the necessary key for opening the door to Him. He could have required knowledge, but then only the astute and intelligent would experience salvation. Instead, He provided for every person who believes in Him, and obeys His plan, to enjoy salvation and its benefits. If knowledge were the key to having a relationship with God, human pride would flourish.

Contrary to this, however, faith flourishes in an atmosphere of humility.

Not only is faith required for salvation, but it also is necessary for raising children if they are to be brought up in the ways of the Lord. Consequently, parents must be parents of faith and lead their families through many situations in which only God is the answer.

Unbelievers find it difficult to accept the biblical account of Creation. They tend to embrace theories of evolution that exclude the involvement of the Creator. When believers quote the Bible to convince unbelievers of God’s role in creation, unbelievers often want extra-biblical proofs. Believers accept the Word of God because they have faith in God. The Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), and believers accept the truth of Scripture. To counter the atheistic curricula in liberal school systems, parents need strong faith in God, which they need to convey to their children along with scriptural truths.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3).

B. Faith Possessed

Having faith is necessary for spiritual role-modeling for children because possessing it empowers parents to be effective. It is possible to be a parent while not having faith, but one cannot be a good role model without faith.

Parents must be certain they hold onto the faith with which they began their Christian life and which is essential to the welfare of their children. “Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

A person either has faith or he does not have faith. There is no middle ground. It is impossible to fake genuine faith. Others may be fooled into thinking a person has faith in God, but only true faith produces the results believers desire. For example, consider Acts 19. When Sceva’s seven sons attempted to cast the devil out of a person, “The evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” (Acts 19:15). Faith is essential to producing the works of faith. Although the devil did not know the sons of Sceva, the demons in the maniac of Gadara readily recognized Jesus (Luke 8:28-29).

C. Faith Transferred

It is commendable for parents to possess faith as believers, but they also are responsible

to transfer that faith to their children. If parents expect to be good role models for their children, they must transfer faith to them.

If there is no transfer of faith from parent to child, generations to come will feel the effect. It is possible for children to have faith in God without a transfer of that faith from their parents, but it is a primary role of Christian parents to ensure the transfer of faith to their children.

There are numerous ways parents transfer faith to their children. Some transfers may occur verbally; some occur visually. Other times the transfer of faith may happen slowly by implication as the children begin to observe the role of parental faith in producing positive results for the family. Parents should live their faith, practice their faith, and teach their faith that they may transfer it to their children.

III. PARENTS OF INFLUENCE

Whether parents realize it or not, they are influencing their children either for evil or for good. Children are receptacles ready to be filled by influence. They will receive whatever their parents and other influences in their lives pour into them. It follows then that parents need to be vigilant in watching over their children.

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 emphasizes that parents influence their children.

A. Influence for Evil

There is a popular aphorism that says, “Monkey see; monkey do.” Children are not monkeys, but they often will try to replicate what they see their parents do. They parrot and mimic their parents’ words and actions. For this reason parents need to be cautious of the content of their words and actions.

Because of the fallen human nature, children unfortunately duplicate and repeat evil actions and words more readily than the good actions and words. Young children may repeat bad words they hear their parents using even though they have no idea what the words mean or how to use them. Evil actions, responses, and attitudes enter their eyes and ears, creating patterns for them to emulate.

“Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem.

His mother’s name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly” (II Chronicles 22:2-3).

A classic example of the influence of evil is found in II Chronicles 22. The son of Jehoram, Ahaziah, became king of Judah at his father’s death. We do not know what kind of a king Ahaziah would have been without the evil influence of his wicked mother. Following the evil counsel of his mother, “He did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction” (II Chronicles 22:4).

A New Testament example of the influence of evil coming from a parent appears in Matthew 14. As a favor for her birthday dance before Herod, the daughter of Herodias was promised a gift of her choosing. Acting on her mother’s advice, she chose the head of John the Baptist. John had offended Herodias by telling Herod he had no right to marry her.

B. Influence for Good

We have the privilege and obligation to influence our children for good. When children begin to parrot and mimic their parents, they do not filter the actions to determine which are evil and which are good. To them it is only words, actions, and responses they see and hear. Much like a voice recorder that hears and then repeats with no knowledge of the quality of content, children see, hear, and repeat their parents. If they hear and observe good things, they usually will repeat good things.

A classic illustration of parental influence for good appears in Genesis 6. Noah was a just man who walked with God. His three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, were on the ark with him when the Flood came. I Peter 3:20 says they were “saved by water.” Their father influenced them for good, and the New Testament calls Noah “a preacher of righteousness” (II Peter 2:5). Positive role modeling by the parents is important.

C. Parental Traits Tend to Follow

It is interesting to observe the different family traits. Siblings often resemble one or both of their parents. Also, they may have their uncle’s height or their aunt’s unusual hair color. All this occurs because families are related by blood.

Not only do family members often resemble other members of the family in appearance,

but they also pick up other familial traits such as actions and responses. They learn some of their behaviors through close association. Would it not be great if our children learn many wonderful, spiritual behaviors through our close association with them!

D. Parental Examples in Worship

At the Passover the angel of the Lord passed over the houses of Egypt, and every house not properly marked by blood lost their firstborn male. God told them, “When ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped” (Exodus 12:25-28).

The Sabbath provided an excellent teaching opportunity for Jewish parents. Not only did they teach their children by example, but they also taught them through verbal instructions and explanations. Children are always watching their parents and wondering what they are doing. Parents should utilize every possible life moment to provide biblical lessons for their children, modeling for them the principles of Scripture.

When Israel passed over the Jordan river on dry ground, God told them to take twelve stones from Jordan and erect them where they lodged that night as a memorial of the miracle. He said, “This may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel for ever” (Joshua 4:6-7). The memorial stones from Jordan were a perpetual mute testimony of God’s miraculous intervention for Israel and their children.

Internalizing the Message

Good parental role models do not just happen. They evolve over time and through much effort. These gradual changes occur through many processes that build character

and eventually produce godly parental role models. These good role models have integrity with God, self, and others. Character and integrity are acquired only by living daily by right principles. They are neither automatically assumed by an individual nor conferred on a person because of that person’s prominence, position, or wealth.

Good parental role models are parents of faith. This faith is required for parents to be acceptable role models for their children, and they also should transfer that faith to the children. The most effective way succeeding generations can come to possess faith is through their parents’ instructions and by their modeling examples in worship.

Good parental role models are parents of influence. Children are influenced by their parents for evil or for good. Ahaziah was influenced by his evil mother as was the daughter of Herodias. But Noah was a model of good influence on his three children. David’s life influenced his great-great-great grandson, Jehoshaphat, and the influence of Timothy’s grandmother and mother had a great and positive influence on him.

Parental examples in worship also are vital. Through the Sabbath the Jewish parents were able to instruct their children both verbally and by example. Other times of positive modeling came through the Passover and the memorial stones taken from Jordan at the crossing of Israel into the Promised Land. As their children asked about these practices and memorials, parents had further opportunities to acquaint them with the importance of faith and worship. Parents are vital role models in the lives of their children.

With all the challenges of biblical examples, effectively becoming positive role models for our children is still a matter of devotion and dedication by every parent. There is no easy road to being role models. It is a long, arduous road, but vital and a blessing to the children.

REFLECTIONS

- What is the difference between character and integrity? Discuss.
- Discuss why it is necessary for parents to be good role models.
- Whose responsibility is it to transfer faith to the children? Discuss.
- Discuss how parents can positively influence their children.
- How can parents be examples in worship? Discuss.

Marriage and Family

Parents as Protectors and Providers

12
week of
08.17.14

Lesson Text

Exodus 1:22

22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

Exodus 2:1-10

1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.

2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.

4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.

6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Focus Thought

God commissioned parents to protect and provide for their children.

Focus Verse

Ephesians 6:4

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Helicopter Parents

by Scott Graham

The term “helicopter parents” traces its roots to a book published in 1969 titled *Between Parent and Teenager* by Dr. Haim Ginott. In it he cites a young man who stated, “My mother hovers over me like a helicopter.” And so was born the term “helicopter parents” to describe moms and dads who are too overly protective of their children and who do not allow them to mature normally.

Summer camps have had to learn to deal with these people who call daily to check on their children’s welfare or to intervene to get them a different bunk or activity schedule. Colleges tell of parents calling their “children” each morning to get them up for classes or to complain to professors about grades they received. Quite often such parenting is the result of good intentions gone astray. That good intention is to protect our children!

While it is unhealthy to be consumed with protecting our children from getting the wrong bunk at camp or oversleeping for a college class, it is altogether appropriate to protect our children from wrong spiritual influences. Our responsibility is to shelter their minds and hearts from spiritually destructive forces and voices. Even Paul stated we should be “. . . simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19).

So while you don’t want to be a “helicopter parent,” you do want to always be a parent aware of spiritual traps and dangers. Your responsibility and mine is to do our best to help our children navigate an unrighteous world while serving a holy God!

I. CHILDREN ARE GIFTS FROM GOD

- A. A Gift to the Family
- B. A Gift to the Church

II. SOCIETY UNDER STRESS DESTROYS CHILDREN

- A. Child Abuse and Abortion
- B. Drugs and Alcohol
- C. Pornography
- D. Secularism and New Age
- E. Materialism
- F. Dysfunctional Families

III. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Parents as Protectors
- B. Parents as Providers

day primarily involves protecting and providing for their young.

God has also placed a natural and instinctive desire in the heart of human parents to protect and provide for their children. They are gifts from God to the family and to the church; therefore, families and churches have a great responsibility to protect and provide for them.

The offspring of humans face challenges unknown to animals because they face the turmoil caused by sin and cultural upheaval. Child abuse, abortion, drugs, alcohol, pornography, secularism, New Age philosophies, and materialism combine to create a frontal assault on the mind and morals of our young. Contributing to these problems, dysfunctional families are becoming more common.

Contemplating the Topic

By watching the behavior of animals, we can learn a lot about people. Animals, especially the females, are very protective of their young. Many people have been harmed or killed by getting too close to the offspring. Recently the media covered a story about a forest fire in which little ones scampered out from under the charred body of a mother bird. She had given her life protecting her young from the fire.

Not only do animals protect their young, but they provide for them. It is intriguing to watch birds bring food and feed their babies in the nest. Birds and animals busy themselves daily foraging for food and bringing it to the young in the nest or lair. Their whole

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, “Parents need to protect and provide for their children.”

The issues of our day underscore the importance of parental responsibilities to protect and provide for children. They need parents to provide food, shelter, and safety. They need protection from the world, physical danger, and spiritual and mental hazards. Satan does not want our children to be safe; he is doing all he can to destroy them.

Protecting for our children and providing for them are challenging and time-consuming responsibilities, but these responsibilities are of utmost importance. Parents need to give their children their full attention and care. After parents have done all they can do to protect and provide for their children, they need to put them firmly into the hands of the Lord and trust Him to do what they cannot do.

Searching the Scriptures

I. CHILDREN ARE GIFTS FROM GOD

“Don’t you see that children are God’s best gift? the fruit of the womb his generous legacy? Like a warrior’s fistful of arrows are the children of a vigorous youth. Oh, how blessed are you parents, with your quivers full of children! Your enemies don’t stand a chance against you; you’ll sweep them right off your doorstep” (Psalm 127:3-5, The Message).

God has given a great gift to the family and to the church: children. However, they are gifts that require much effort and care to fully cultivate, develop, and maintain. The recipients of this great gift should recognize the tremendous responsibility to care for them because children cannot care for themselves. Children require not only constant care, but also the right kind of care. Parents should cultivate the gift of children by raising them to love and serve God and His people. Further, the church should value the gift of children and should assist in providing for their spiritual needs within the church family.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 indicates that children are a gift to the family and to the church.

A. A Gift to the Family

Children are not given to a neighborhood or community; it is not the community’s responsibility to nurture and raise them. God specifically gives children to parents as gifts and for the purpose of nurturing and raising them for His glory.

In near proximity to the parents is the immediate family. Many older brothers and sisters assist in the care of younger siblings in

the home. It is interesting that siblings often have a natural sense of care for their brothers and sisters. Still, siblings are not primarily responsible for the children of the home; parents are because God gave them that responsibility.

God has given a great gift to the family and to the church: children.

B. A Gift to the Church

The church may not be the primary or even the secondary caregiver to the children of the community, but it has a great responsibility to all the children of the community. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and He has called the church to fulfill that burden. When the local church reaches out to the adults of the community, it must not forget the children. In addition, children’s ministries are effective in winning many parents to the Lord.

Although the gift of children is not to the church directly, the church has a responsibility to become involved in the lives of the children for their spiritual benefit. God gives children to families and churches that the children might receive salvation. They have no other means of redemption because no other institution can supply their spiritual needs. The church must not wait on social agencies and hope they will assist the children. Big Brother and Big Sister organizations, the YMCA and the YWCA, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts—these may contribute positively to youth in the community, but they cannot give them spiritually what parents and the church give them. The church is the propagator of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Whatever things the community may add to the lives of children, without the kingdom of God their lives will be empty.

Obviously, the church cannot be responsible for all of a child’s religious training. The children are only at church a few hours each

week. On the other hand, the parents have them dozens of hours every week. This places a lot of responsibility upon both the church and the parents to make the best possible use of the time they have with the children. Parents should not depend on the church to give their children all the spiritual training they need. There are many spiritual lessons they should learn at home. Further, parents are responsible to conduct Bible reading and prayer with them regularly.

II. SOCIETY UNDER STRESS DESTROYS CHILDREN

Interestingly, society is everyone, yet it is no one. It is difficult to find an individual who is guilty of destroying children, but collectively, it is clear that society bears much culpability. A stressed, twisted, perverted society destroys children through every ungodly means Satan devises. We will consider only a handful of different weapons from Satan's arsenal aimed at children; there are many more.

Child abuse and abortion should have no place in a civilized society.

Biblical examples reveal the evil deeds of societies destroying children in different periods of history. In Egypt the midwives were guilty of killing baby boys as they were born as ordered by the Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-16). Pharaoh also ordered that the boy babies born were to be thrown into the river. (See Exodus 1:22.) During the siege of Samaria the besieged ate their children. (See II King 6:24-29.) When Herod saw he was mocked by the wise men, he ordered all the children two years old and younger be killed. (See Matthew 2:16.)

A. Child Abuse and Abortion

Child abuse and abortion should have no place in a civilized society. Sadly, as Jeremiah observed of the evil in his day, "People love to have it so" (Jeremiah 5:31). Tolerance of evil is one of the greatest deterrents of revival and destroyers of the young.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (II Timothy 3:1-4).

According to *Childhelp*, "Every year 3.3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States involving nearly 6 million children. The U. S. has the worst record among the industrialized nations losing five children every day due to abuse-related deaths."

In December 2012, many Americans shed tears, many flew flags at half mast, and the nation officially mourned the killing of twenty young children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. It was a terrible tragedy and such responses were appropriate. However, where are the tears and mourning for the more than one million babies killed by abortion in the US every year?

B. Drugs and Alcohol

The double standard in modern culture is appalling. Though horrendous, only twenty children were killed in the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, and many outraged Americans began to call for more gun control. On the other hand, the number of deaths directly related to drugs and alcohol is staggering and few complain. Clearly, society wants its drugs and alcohol despite the destructive effects on people. Further, in 2012 two US states legalized marijuana for recreational use.

When parents use drugs and alcohol in the presence of their children, they may not verbally suggest that their children take up their bad habits, but the children will typically follow the parents' example even though it is destructive.

Some parents try to discourage their children from partaking of drugs and alcohol while the parents continue to use them, but this confuses the children. If parents do not want their children to follow the lifestyle they model, they should change their lifestyle for the better.

C. Pornography

According to *Family Safe Media*, "The pornography industry worldwide is larger than

the revenue of the top technology companies combined: Microsoft, Google, eBay, Yahoo, Apple, Netflix, and Earthlink. United States pornography revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.” This same group reports that 12 percent of total websites worldwide are pornographic. They also say the average age of one’s first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.

With the possibility of exposure to pornography through the media, parents need to better guard the activities and exposures of their children. Controlling the content of what children see and hear is challenging, but it is vital. Unfortunately, what they see and hear become a part of them, affecting their thinking patterns and problem-solving processes. Further, parents who view pornography cannot protect their children against it. A clear conscience provides the strongest platform from which to promote abstinence from such evils.

“Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?” (Romans 2:21-22).

D. Secularism and New Age

According to *dictionary.com*, *secularism* is defined as a “spirit or tendency, especially a system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship; the view that public education and other matters of civil policy should be conducted without the introduction of a religious element.” This term, which came into usage in the mid-nineteenth century, is just another attempt of Satan to undermine and weaken Christian homes by ruling out anything religious or spiritual. Secularism is the evil twin of *humanism*, “a system of values and beliefs that are opposed to the values and beliefs of traditional religions” (*learnersdictionary.com*). Both of these philosophic movements are fueled by a spirit of antichrist.

New Age means “of or pertaining to a movement espousing a broad range of philosophies and practices traditionally viewed as occult, metaphysical or paranormal” (*dictionary.com*). Wikipedia defines *New Age* as “A Western spiritual movement that developed in the second half of the 20th century. Its central precepts have been described as ‘drawing on both

Eastern and Western spiritual and metaphysical traditions and infusing them with influences from self-help and motivational psychology, holistic health, parapsychology, consciousness research and quantum physics.’ New Age practices and philosophies sometimes draw inspiration from major world religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Chinese folk religion, Christianity, Hinduism, Sufism, Judaism, Sikhism, with strong influences from Eastern religions, Gnosticism, Neopaganism, New Thought, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Universalism, and Western esotericism.” New Age philosophy is a complete package of diabolical deception, not only damaging to the work of the Lord, but damaging to believers’ children.

As secularism attempts to exclude God from everything, New Age tends to include many things that are not of God. These philosophies and practices are making inroads in the Western world through media, schools, and universities. Parents must be armed with the truth to refute and resist this duet of duplicity. They must also be anointed with the Holy Spirit to defeat these attacks against Christians and their homes.

E. Materialism

Materialism is “preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values” (*dictionary.com*). Materialism involves placing emphasis on everything except God. Materialism succeeds in minimizing, if not excluding, God from the lives of children. It is an evil attitude of the last days.

Materialism and spirituality are incompatible.

Children are greatly affected by materialism because parents submit their children to the environment it creates. When parents are materialistic, they live lifestyles and make choices that reflect their materialistic values, which gradually lead a family farther from spiritual values. The children of such a home become victims because they take the

materialistic philosophy and practices even farther than their parents.

Materialism and spirituality are incompatible. Attempting to mix the two diverse philosophies and lifestyles does not work. When believing parents become materialistic, it is difficult for them to promote spirituality in the lives of their children. Parents must be the ones to decide whether worldly philosophies and lifestyles or spirituality will be at the forefront in their home.

“Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh” (James 3:11-12).

F. Dysfunctional Families

Dysfunctional families are families that do not function normally. When this condition occurs, children become unfortunate victims. They do not choose to be part of a particular family. Children are subject to whatever family they are born or adopted into. If the family is functional, the children benefit, but if it is dysfunctional, they suffer.

Parents need to do everything they can to provide a normal environment for their children. As protectors and providers, parents need to correct the things that contribute to dysfunction. When a family is dysfunctional, the children can do nothing to change the condition other than to pray. “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

One pastor told of a dysfunctional family in a southern city. The local pastor knocked on their door one Saturday and invited the children to Sunday school. A sixteen-year-old boy with long hair was hunched over a guitar strumming a rock tune. The following Sunday that young man was in church. He started attending faithfully and telling the pastor how he was abused by his stepdad. The stepdad would beat him and his brothers and sister with a two-by-four. He hid the toilet tissue from them saying they were using too much.

But this one son repented of his sins, was baptized in Jesus' name, and received the Holy Ghost. The pastor related how this young man was the most dedicated young person he ever pastored. He grew up, married, and is still in the church. His son went to Bible school and became a missionary for the United Pentecostal Church.

The church should give special attention to children in the Sunday school from dysfunctional homes. They may be neglected and abused, but they need salvation; and they may have great potential to be laborers for the Lord. Some of the greatest men of God in the church came out of such homes.

III. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Parents as Protectors

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states, “Parents should be a buffer between the world and their children.”

Parents should be a buffer between the world and their children. With offspring being helpless and vulnerable, protection is necessary for their safety and well-being. Children are not able to provide for their own safety and they lack sufficient knowledge to do so. Parents are their *sole* protection and their *soul* protection.

There would be no need for parents to protect their children from the world if the world were not trying to destroy them; but the threat from the world is real. Its ugly tentacles are trying to reach into every home and drag the children to its lair.

Clearly, parents need to protect their children from physical dangers such as the danger presented by busy streets. Parents should hold their children's hands as they cross the street. But there also are spiritual and mental dangers that constantly threaten a child's well-being. Parents must be spiritually alert to discern satanic attacks. Because children are not spiritually mature enough to know how to repel these, the responsibility for their protection rests on the shoulders of their parents.

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are ignorant of his devices” (II Corinthians 2:11).

B. Parents as Providers

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (I Timothy 5:8).

Providing for their own is the primary responsibility of parents. God has charged

parents with this responsibility because children are helpless to provide for themselves. They have physical needs that must be met. If parents do not provide for these needs, there is no guarantee anyone else will do so.

Parents also are stronger emotionally than their children and are responsible to provide for their emotional needs. Children's emotional needs are not imaginary; they have fears and feelings that need the comfort and support of parents.

Children often need academic help. What child has not had help with homework from a parent or a caregiver? If parents or other caregivers in the home do not help the children, they will struggle with their schoolwork. Someone needs to be there to encourage and help them.

Parents are under a lot of pressure to provide for the needs of their children. Although children may want a lot of things, parents have to make the choices of what things are necessary and try to provide those things. Parents need to have tough love and be able to tell their children when they cannot afford some things the children may want. It does not ruin children not to receive everything they want.

Doing without non-necessities often teaches discipline and patience, and helps to guard against materialism. Many great leaders of the world came from homes in which there were limitations on what they were able to afford. Deprivation does not prevent individuals from building lives of strong character.

The greatest responsibility parents have is to provide for the spiritual needs of their children. If all their physical, emotional, and academic needs are not met, the children may suffer; but if their spiritual needs are unmet, they will be lost eternally. Their suffering will be greater and it will occur in the life to come. Parents need to allow God to help them to be the protectors and providers for their children.

Internalizing the Message

Children are gifts from God. Parents may be procreators, but they are not the Creator. "Every good gift . . . is from above, and cometh down from the Father" (James 1:17).

Children are gifts to the family and to the church, and both have certain God-given responsibilities for the children. Parents are protectors of and providers for their children. The

church's part is to reach out to the children in an attempt to guide them spiritually, building upon the spiritual foundation parents should build at home. What a responsibility this is for parents and the church!

The greatest responsibility parents have is to provide for the spiritual needs of their children.

Children need protection from the evil society that is bartering for their souls. The harm and destruction of children come in many different packages from child abuse and abortion, drugs and alcohol, pornography, secularism, New Age philosophy, materialism, and dysfunction. These evils are lethal, and parents require wisdom and courage to discern them and combat them.

Parents are to provide protection for their children because this is a dangerous world. There are physical, spiritual, and mental dangers from which they need protection. If all the hazards parents had to be concerned about were busy streets, parents would have a much easier job. But the spiritual and mental dangers sometimes are more difficult to identify and protect against. Parents are to provide for all the needs of their children, whether they are physical, emotional, academic, or spiritual. Obviously, the spiritual needs are the most urgent because they will affect the children's eternity.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the inconsistency of the grief expressed over the loss of children's lives in school shootings and the millions of babies aborted.
- What is secularism? Discuss.
- Discuss the dangers of New Age philosophy.
- What are some of the emotional needs of children? Discuss.
- What is the greatest need of a child? Discuss.

Lesson Text

Genesis 13:10-12

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Genesis 19:14-17

14 And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.

15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

John 17:14-18

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

Focus Verse

Romans 12:2

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Focus Thought

God's Word and Spirit are our offense and defense against the influence of an ungodly culture.

The Power of Scripture and Prayer to Guard Against the Culture

by Richard M. Davis

When one observes the rapid decline in many aspects of North American culture, he cannot help but wonder why the great dichotomy between the decline on one hand and strong interest in the Bible on the other hand. I have recently heard and read several reports about the strong success of a History Channel miniseries, *The Bible*. Why does a series about Scripture appear to be so phenomenally successful when a growing number of North Americans refuse to live by its precepts?

According to the Barna Group, *The Bible* series, which premiered on March 3, 2013, “had 13.1 million viewers, according to Nielsen, making it the highest entertainment (read: non-sports) broadcast of 2013.” Barna went on to observe, “The interest in a cable series makes it clear the American public is certainly interested in the Bible. But what do Americans actually think about the Bible? Do they believe it to be sacred, authoritative or merely nonsense? Do they try to follow its exhortations, or do they regard the Bible as antiquated literature? Does the Bible still matter—besides television ratings—to Americans?”

In their survey, the Barna Group discovered the following statistics among others:

- “Nearly nine out of ten (88%) Americans actually own a Bible. Despite such a high number, that’s declined since 1993, though only slightly, when 92% of Americans owned a Bible.
- “On average, American Bible owners have 3.5 Bibles in their home, and one-quarter of Bible owners (24%) have six or more” (www.barna.org, “What Do Americans Really Think About the Bible?” accessed April 3, 2013).

To put it succinctly, owning Bibles will not help individuals to ward off the effects of a rapidly declining culture morally, socially, and spiritually; only living by its precepts and principles can save us. If we truly want to save ourselves and our families from the decline of an ungodly world, Bible reading and prayer are essential.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON THE FAMILY

- A. Lot’s Response to His Culture
- B. Abraham’s Response to His Culture

II. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON PEOPLE OF GOD

- A. Canaan, the House of Bread and a Godly Culture
- B. Moab, the Land of a Cursed Heathen Culture

III. THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY AND CHURCH ON CULTURE

- A. Believers Are the Light in the Culture
- B. Believers Are the Salt in the Culture
- C. The Stay of Judgment
- D. The Hope of the Lost

Contemplating the Topic

The applicable definition of *culture* as we will study it today is “a : the total pattern of human behavior and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language, and systems of abstract thought; b : the body of

customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (*Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*).

As we study the influence of culture on the family, we will look at Abraham and Lot. Uncle and nephew were submitted to a real test of character. Lot made a choice that determined his future and the future of generations to come. Lot chose the culture of the world, which influenced both him and his family. Abraham, on the other hand, chose to embrace the culture of righteousness regardless of where he lived.

As we study Elimelech and Boaz, we will see the influence of culture on the people of God. They each responded differently to the famine in Bethlehem-judah. Elimelech left and died. Boaz stayed and was blessed.

The two Gentile daughters-in-law of Naomi each told their mother-in-law goodbye as she left Moab for Bethlehem-judah. But Ruth decided to go with Naomi, leaving home and her sister-in-law. Orpah stayed and wept; Ruth left and rejoiced.

Believers are the light and salt of the world’s culture today. Although the culture may not realize it, believers’ positive response

to righteousness is a preserving force that may even cause God to delay His judgment. Righteousness is the only preserving element in the world.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 says, “Jesus Christ is the only hope and cure for the world’s ills.”

The gospel is the only hope of the lost. Society does not have the answer for the crime and severe problems plaguing our world. The church has the answer because Jesus is the only hope and cure for the world’s ills.

Searching the Scriptures

I. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON THE FAMILY

We are a product of our culture. A baby born into a Rwandan family usually learns to speak Swahili. A baby born into a French family most often learns to speak French. Not only do babies normally grasp the language of their nativity, they also absorb the customs of their respective country—for good or for bad. Culture definitely influences the family.

If a culture is not evil, it will not harm people endeavoring to please a holy God. If a culture is basically good but has some bad characteristics, godly individuals can receive the good and ignore the bad. In Noah’s day before the Flood, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The whole antediluvian culture was evil; therefore, Noah and his family had to resist the culture of their day.

When Daniel and the three young Hebrews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were taken into captivity by the Babylonians, they were immediately taken from the culture of the Hebrews to the culture of the Babylonians. There was an immediate clash of two diverse cultures, which meant the Hebrews had to make some vital decisions. Not only were there major differences in the worship of Babylon, there also were differences in the diet and daily life.

To prepare the Hebrews for their roles as part of the king’s attendants, “The king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so

nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king” (Daniel 1:5).

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8).

By special permission from the prince of the eunuchs, Daniel and the other Hebrews were allowed to complete their training period of three years without having to violate their dietary customs. At the end of the three years, “Among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (Daniel 1:19-20).

A. Lot’s Response to His Culture

As the herds of Abraham and his nephew Lot increased, their herdsmen began to wrangle. The situation became so bad Abraham determined separation was the only solution. Abraham gave his nephew his choice of the grazing lands. “Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right” (Genesis 13:9).

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan: and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly” (Genesis 13:10-13).

The bright lights of the city of sin attracted Lot. West was the direction of Canaan, the promised land of God’s will. East was the direction of the plains of Jordan and Sodom, the place where Satan was drawing Lot. The men of Sodom were “wicked and sinners before the

LORD exceedingly.” The world of sin is always worse than we anticipate.

Abraham had to remain in the Promised Land to enjoy God’s covenant with all its blessings, and God’s people today must stay in His will to enjoy and receive His blessings. We must not give in to Satan’s enticing invitation to relocate to places where we would live in sinful practices.

Abraham had to remain in the Promised Land to enjoy God’s covenant with all its blessings, and God’s people today must stay in His will to enjoy and receive His blessings.

Lot was influenced by the wrong culture. To the carnal, Sodom always looked more appealing than Canaan. Even still, it seems Satan often uses cities as magnets to attract and seduce people to live according to the lusts of their flesh. Large metropolitan areas are centers of crime and sin. Many people living in one place evidently increases the probability of sinful behaviors.

Geographically, the cities of the plain were lower than the land Abraham chose. Archaeologists have established that these cities were at the lower end of the Dead Sea, which is the lowest point on earth. When Lot chose Sodom, two cultures were appealing to him. Metaphorically, he looked down instead of up and responded to the lower land and the lower culture.

It is noteworthy that in the scriptural references to travels to and from Jerusalem, it is said, “They went up to Jerusalem,” or, “They went down from Jerusalem.” When anyone left Jerusalem, the geographical center of the worship of Jehovah, they went down. Therefore when Lot left Abraham and Canaan, he went down to the carnal culture of Sodom.

“And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. . . . And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it” (Genesis 19:1, 12-13).

When the angels from God approached Lot as he sat in the gate of Sodom, they warned him of impending judgment from God due to the wickedness of Sodom. They urged him to rescue any family he had in Sodom.

“And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place: for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law” (Genesis 19:14).

Lot immediately went out and warned his sons-in-law by relating the message of the angels concerning the coming judgment, but they disregarded his urgent message. The next morning the angels had to lead Lot, his wife, and two unmarried daughters out of the city, for they lingered and were not anxious to evacuate. On the outskirts of Sodom the angel warned them to escape for their lives and not to look back. “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:26).

It is interesting that the angel told them to escape to the mountain. “Neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed” (Genesis 19:17). Leaving the low environs of Sodom for a higher place effected their physical salvation, but perhaps it also symbolically represented a spiritual salvation. Lot wanted to stay in the plain, but the angel urged them to head for the mountain. The low place of Sodom where Lot had chosen to live was not only low geographically, but spiritually. David said, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help” (Psalm 121:1). God and righteousness will elevate a person to a life of higher living.

When Lot left Sodom, he left almost everything precious and valuable to him. He left his married daughters (two unmarried daughters went with him), sons-in-law, and home, and he lost his wife in the escape because she looked back. As he sat in a mountain cave overlooking the smoldering cities of the plain, undoubtedly the emptiness of wrong choices engulfed him. But that was not the end of this ugly saga.

Lot's two single daughters devised a devilish plan to get their father drunk and to sleep with him on successive nights. Genesis 19:31 says, "Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth." Later they used the excuse, "that we may preserve seed of our father" (Genesis 19:34). Both became pregnant and bore two sons whom they named Moab and Benammi. Their descendants became the Moabites and Ammonites, two tribes that gave Israel problems for years.

B. Abraham's Response to His Culture

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, "Abraham's choice of lifestyle did not depend on where he lived. He chose a culture of righteousness."

As much as Lot made the wrong choice and responded to the culture of unrighteousness, Abraham chose to live according to the culture of righteousness. His choice of lifestyle was not dependent on where he lived; he would have lived for God regardless of where he lived, although he would have avoided the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham wanted a path of peace, and God blessed him. He allowed Lot to have first choice of grazing territory. Not only did the Lord tell Abraham He would give him and his descendants all the land he could see, God told him He would make his posterity as the dust of the earth that no man could number. (See Genesis 13:14-17.)

II. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON PEOPLE OF GOD

The Holy Spirit lives in and guides the people of God, setting their standard of values and correcting their course of direction. They are led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14). Nevertheless, they are not immune from the subtle influences of culture. The culture of the world acts on everyone, but believers are to resist its evil influence.

In attempting to resist the culture of the world, some professing believers choose to isolate themselves from society. They form cloisters and live completely cut off from the world. But isolation is not God's idea of the Christian walk. He encourages insulation, not isolation, from the world.

The Holy Spirit lives in and guides the people of God.

A. Canaan, the House of Bread and a Godly Culture

Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, migrated to Moab during a famine in Bethlehem-judah. Ironically, the name of the area they left, *Bethlehem*, meant "house of bread." Not only did they leave the house of bread, they left a godly culture.

While in Moab, Elimelech and Naomi's two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married two Moabite girls, Ruth and Orpah. In the course of time Elimelech and his two sons died. After three funerals Naomi heard the Lord had visited His people and had given them bread. She decided to return home.

The ironic side of this story is that Elimelech left and died while Boaz stayed and was blessed. Were they supposed to remain in the land and trust God for bread in the famine? Ideally, that was what they should have done, but God turned their choice into a blessing.

B. Moab, the Land of a Cursed Heathen Culture

If Elimelech and Naomi were out of God's will in Moab, He did not forsake them. Although their faith may not have been perfect, they still loved the Lord and held onto their faith. Moab was an evil land with a heathen culture, but Elimelech and Naomi were people of God.

This narrative should offer hope and encouragement to people who are living outside the will of God. It also should bolster the faith of people of God who have family members not living the righteous life they once lived. God's hand is still on these people. They continue to benefit from the limited protection and blessing of a God who is merciful.

When Naomi announced her departure to her daughters-in-law, they decided to return with her until she reminded them of the desperation of such a response. It was then Orpah kissed Naomi and returned, but Ruth would not leave her. She said, “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

It was obvious the culture of Moab was the determining factor in Orpah’s decision to remain in her homeland. Yet we see Ruth rejecting her heathen culture and deciding to assume the culture of Naomi and the Lord. Orpah stayed and wept while Ruth left and rejoiced, for she ended up marrying Boaz and becoming the great-grandmother of David. (See Ruth 4:13, 17.)

III. THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY AND CHURCH ON CULTURE

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 illustrates that the church can influence the culture of the world instead of the culture influencing the church.

Too often we become preoccupied with the threat the culture of the world presents to the church without considering the opposite. The church can have a strong influence on the culture. Jesus said, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4). Paul said, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Galatians 5:17), but he also said, “The Spirit [lusteth] against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17).

The Holy Spirit is the most powerful force on earth. When a Spirit-filled family functions in a community, they represent a real force. Their influence on culture is more than they realize.

A pastor related how a teenage Christian girl in his church refused to wear shorts when participating in athletic functions. She was the only one wearing a skirt. Instead of her being tempted to wear shorts, the other girls asked if they could wear skirts. When the teacher gave them permission, all the girls wore skirts instead of shorts.

Satan wants Christians to feel they are oddballs for not conforming to the popular culture of the day. Living a godly lifestyle and not conforming to the culture of the world is accomplished by heroes of faith who are influencing the opposite culture more than they realize.

A. Believers Are the Light in the Culture

“God is light” (I John 1:5).

“Ye are the light of the world. . . .

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16).

Believers reflect the light of Jesus Christ into the dark world, and they positively affect the culture. If the church were not in the world, it would be a dark place indeed with no hope or help.

The world does not realize how much of a deterrent to evil the presence of the church presents. The Word of God says, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [hindereth] will let [hinder], until he be taken out of the way” (II Thessalonians 2:7). Many theologians agree that the “he” spoken of is the church. The next verse explains, “Then shall that Wicked [or antichrist] be revealed” (II Thessalonians 2:8). Simply, the church is the only factor hindering the antichrist from doing his complete work of deceiving the world.

Believers reflect the light of Jesus Christ into the dark world, and they positively affect the culture.

Many forces work to eliminate the Bible and the church from contemporary culture, but they fail to realize how valuable these entities are in holding back the horrible things soon to come upon the world. Thank God for the light of the church in our dark world!

B. Believers Are the Salt in the Culture

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour; wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13).

The church is the salt of the world, momentarily preserving it from impending doom. The church is seasoning an insipid culture, making it palatable enough to be tolerated for a while longer. Because they are the salt of the earth, godly people also add flavor to the world.

The church must not lose its saltiness. If it does, it will be good for nothing. The church’s saltiness is its power and influence. Without its influence, the world would not feel the effect of its presence.

C. The Stay of Judgment

Perhaps the greatest example of God’s mercy relative to the presence of God’s people holding off His judgment appears in Genesis 18. When God sent angels to Abraham to inform him of the impending destruction of Sodom, Abraham asked, “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?” (Genesis 18:23-24). Not only did the Lord say He would spare Sodom for fifty, He agreed to spare it for forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten righteous people. The Lord said, “I will not destroy it for ten’s sake” (Genesis 18:32). Ten righteous people in Sodom would have saved the whole city, but there were not even ten who were righteous.

D. The Hope of the Lost

The greatest influence the family and church have on culture is the exposure to truth that opens the door to salvation. Without the church the world has no hope of being saved. Since people cannot be saved without hearing the gospel, and preachers preach the

gospel, (Romans 10:13-14), the world needs the church. Preaching is part of the five-fold ministry of the church (Ephesians 4:11).

It would be foolish for a snake-infested region to want to destroy the only antidote for the poisonous snakes of the area. In similar fashion, it does not make sense for people to be angry at the Bible, churches, preachers, and Christians. Rather, they should try to preserve and protect their only hope of being saved.

Internalizing the Message

The culture of Sodom had an evil influence on Lot’s family. When given the choice, Lot chose the well-watered plains of Sodom and Gomorrah, but in that wicked environment he lost his two married daughters, sons-in-law, and ultimately his wife. He and his two unmarried daughters escaped the destruction of Sodom, but those daughters were victims of the evil culture once again as they induced their father to become drunk and they committed incest with him to produce two sons. Those descendants were thorns in the sides of God’s people for centuries.

Contrary to the wrong choice of Lot, Abraham chose the way of righteousness. As a result he, his family, and his descendants were blessed beyond measure for generations. In fact, the blessing still continues on the descendants of Abraham by faith.

Family and church have a positive influence on the culture. Being the light and the salt of the world, believers are influential in staying God’s judgment. Also, believers possess and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the hope of the lost.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss Lot’s wrong choice.
- Why did God bless Abraham? Discuss.
- Discuss Ruth and Orpah’s choices.
- Discuss how believers, as salt and light, influence the culture of the world.
- How does the church stay God’s judgment? Discuss.

**The Home—A
Center of Worship**

14
week of
08.31.14

Lesson Text

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:

2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Focus Thought

Of all the important truths we can learn about family and the home, none are more important than making our home a center of worship for every family member.

Focus Verse

Deuteronomy 6:7

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Worship in the Home

by Richard M. Davis

Where better than the home for our children to learn how to really connect with God in worship? I remember when my girls were very young how they would often “play church” at home. The interesting thing about it was no matter how much “play” may have been involved, their sessions always ended up in total sincerity with tears streaming down their innocent faces. There was not a more precious or beautiful sight in all the world than to see my children sincerely loving and worshiping God in our home.

From the publication *A Simple Guide to Family Worship*, the author writes, “The importance of the home in discipleship is prominent throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, fathers are commanded to teach their children throughout the day, even if that training is informal. . . . In summary, family worship in the Bible is rooted in the idea of responsibility. Parents, especially fathers, are primarily responsible for the spiritual instruction and vitality of their families. The task is great and weighty, but God’s grace is greater and the eternal rewards are beyond anything this world can offer” (www.radicalexperiment.org, accessed April 3, 2013).

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is a home where worship is comfortable and prevalent. It will establish a priceless principle and habit in the hearts of the children, and it will glorify God in the way He surely deserves.

- I. THE WORD—A SURE FOUNDATION
- II. DEEDS OF LOVE—OUR HOME’S FRAMEWORK
- III. PRAISE—A JOYFUL ATMOSPHERE
- IV. FAMILY DEVOTIONS
- V. ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS—RESTFUL FURNISHINGS
- VI. RELAX—YOU’RE HOME

Contemplating the Topic

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 asks the question, “What is a center of worship to you?”

What do we see when we hear the words “a center of worship”? Is it blue wisps of smoke rising from the altar of incense in the Tabernacle? Or is it hundreds of Christians on a Sunday evening lifting their hands, hearts, and voices in jubilant praise?

Once a Samaritan woman asked Jesus where people should worship. Jesus answered, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). True worship is a lifestyle where we align our

attitudes, what we think, what we say, and what we do with the Word of God. Since we spend more time at home than any other place, our homes should be the center of our worship.

The foundation of our worship center will be the sure Word of God. Deeds of love will make a strong framework for us to build on the foundation. We will create a joyful atmosphere of praise in our center of worship. Finally, we will furnish it with the restful attitudes of acceptance and forgiveness. We will attain our goal of making our homes centers of true worship only as we build, rebuild, and repair our attitudes about home and exercise genuine faith in the Master Builder, relying on His guidance and assistance.

Searching the Scriptures

I. THE WORD—A SURE FOUNDATION

We can build our homes on no better foundation than God’s Word.

“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Luke 21:33).

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

We as believers have a mandate to fill our children with the Word of God. Fulfilling this commission should evidently consume much of our time at home. Apparently this should involve more than just scheduled daily devotions.

One mother was rocking her two-year-old and reading fairy tales to him. Quite unexpectedly, the Spirit of God spoke quietly to her heart, “Why don’t you make this limited time count by telling him about Me?”

Our time with our little ones is short, but we can make it really count by giving them true heroes from the Word of God. Stories read or told on their level of comprehension are usually our first building tools as we build a house of faith and worship.

Scripture memorization was David’s stronghold against the enemy: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). Parents should select verses to meet needs on the child’s level. They should make memorization an adventure with the whole family joining in the fun.

For small children, charts, stickers, goals, and rewards are great tools. They could learn the verse of the week on Saturday and practice saying it after breakfast each morning. The verse and the date memorized could be written on an index card. Parents should praise the child for his ever-growing Scripture box. Games played at devotions with the memorized verses keep their interest high. Let each family member give his interpretation of the verses. No time spent at home will be of greater value than the time spent putting the Word of God into our children’s hearts. Also, Bible quizzing programs teach young people responsibility, discipline, and the ability to lose and win gracefully while they spend much time memorizing the only eternal words they will ever learn.

Although we hear the Word of God regularly at church, home is where the Bible is lived daily. We should give our children the invaluable experience of observing faith and the Word of God in action at home, proving the practical truths of Scripture.

We need to show our families that God’s Word is the standard of conduct for all the family. A father whose hand is on the pulse-beat of his family can plan a devotion around a much-needed area of improvement. Suppose the topic is responsibility. After a Bible story that relates that truth, he could let each family member choose two areas of life he needs to improve upon, letting Dad and Mom go first. Charts of needed improvements could be hung on bedroom doors as reminders.

The next devotion could be check-up time. We could examine sibling fussing in the light of letting the law of kindness be in our mouths. The possibilities are endless since God’s Word has a relevant answer for every aspect of our lives.

Home is where we learn by example and practice to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. The Lord commanded Joshua to have twelve men take twelve stones from the Jordan riverbed. The reason given was so the children would have occasion in the future to ask, “What do these stones mean?” It would open the door to an opportunity to share their faith with the children.

One couple collects figurines of potters to remind themselves of a particular time of molding in their spiritual lives. Someday their son will ask what the figurines mean. An opportunity to give valuable teaching to their son will be the result. Visible symbols in our homes, such as the figurines, can be constant reminders to us and our little ones of the blessings and promises of God.

A family can gradually build a home library until they have many books with inspirational writings, devotions, Christian biographies, and study helps for the family’s continual reference. Our children will judge what we deem most important by what we read. One pastor’s daughter said, “I heard all my life we should pray and read our Bibles, but everyone was usually too busy at home to really do it.” Children would rather see a sermon than hear one. The best example children can see of how to build a marriage is to see their parents have Bible studies and prayer together apart from family devotions.

Parents nurture at home the importance of and appreciation for the preaching of the Word of God. Families could designate one dinnertime a week as a time for family discussion of the pastor’s sermon. What was said? How does it apply to our lives?

The Bible is full of examples of godly parents who built a strong foundation of God’s Word

for their homes. Elkanah and Hannah built a godly home so well that at a young age Samuel could leave home and serve God all his life. Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's commandment. (See Hebrews 11:23.) Is it any wonder Hebrews 11:27 says Moses "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king"?

Eunice and Lois carefully planted and nurtured in young Timothy's heart the faith that was in their own hearts. Joshua boldly declared he and his household would serve the Lord. The Lord gave a great commendation for Abraham that revealed his faithfulness: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Genesis 18:19).

We need to remember that to little ears and minds, Bible terminology often is beyond their understanding. During an intense time of seeking the Lord for guidance concerning a pressing decision, a Christian mother often played the piano and sang Jeremiah 29:13: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." One night at dinner, her four-year-old son prayed with such earnestness, "And, Lord, when You are lost, please help us to find You." Although we may have to translate the Lord's precious promises to little ones, the main thing is to continue to build our homes on the sure foundation of God's Word, using any available tools we can find.

II. DEEDS OF LOVE— OUR HOME'S FRAMEWORK

Now that the foundation is dug and poured, it is time to begin "framing" our center of worship. The Scripture admonishes us to "not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions" (1 John 3:18, NLT). Jesus taught that the role of a servant is the best choice of all. A family who uses its time and energy to serve others in deeds of love is probably a fulfilled, happy family.

Families can turn dull, routine chores into blessed opportunities to serve by a change of attitude. One mother stated she prays for each child as she irons or folds his or her clothes. We should be careful not to let orderliness and cleanliness make our home a prison for our family. Family relationships should always take priority over acquiring and preserving material possessions.

By opening our homes to our neighbors, we have a marvelous opportunity to let the "saltiness" of our lives make them thirsty for the Lord. We should entertain not only our friends

but also those who cannot return the favor such as widows, the elderly, servicemen, college students away from home, and the fatherless. Jesus said we have blessed Him if we bless the "least of these." (See Matthew 25:40.)

We should always beware of developing an "our four and no more" philosophy of life. Selfless deeds of love are a vital part of making our homes centers of worship.

III. PRAISE—A JOYFUL ATMOSPHERE

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Every beautiful home has its own unique atmosphere created by the people who live there. Let us check up on the words spoken in our homes. If we placed a whole week of our family's words through a sieve of Philippians 4:8, how many words would be left? There is such power in what we say! (See Proverbs 12:18, 25; 15:1, 4, 7.)

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

Words of praise create a joyful, restful atmosphere; murmuring and arguing create a heavy, depressive atmosphere. We know from Israel's history how the Lord hates murmuring. Asaph said that when he complained, it caused his spirit to be overwhelmed (Psalm 77:3). Our words affect our emotions.

Christians know they should praise God, but sometimes they fail to focus on particulars. A praise list will help a Christian encompass the realm of praise. There is something so enlightening about seeing our thoughts written on paper. Negativism is the voice of unbelief; praise is the voice of faith.

- First on our praise list is God. Praise Him
- for what He is (His character);
 - for blessings (past, present, and future);
 - for His promises.

A good praise session, telling the Lord aloud of His greatness and goodness, brings joy both to our hearts and to His. It is wonderful to refer to the praise list on days when the clouds hang low and we feel discouraged. The

psalmist referred to offering the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving. (See Psalm 116:17.) Many times we offer praise when we are void of emotion. Faith is not affected by how we feel, but it has its foundation in what God promised to do in His Word. Our homes should be filled with praise on dark days as well as on days filled with victory.

Second on the praise list is to praise yourself. That is not a misprint. Jesus said we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Before we can love others, we must love ourselves. We can thank God for our place in the body of Christ. (See I Corinthians 12:18.) When we remember where we were as Christians last year, we can thank the Lord for the progress we and He have made together. Before we can build healthy self-esteem in our children, we must have healthy self-esteem.

Third on the praise list is to praise others. Since we are discussing the family, there is no better place to start. How is it we sometimes tend to be less merciful to those we love most?

“Don’t flatter yourself that friendship authorizes you to say disagreeable things to your intimates. The nearer you come into relationship with a person, the more necessary do tact and courtesy become” (Holmes).

Psychologists state that labels we put on our children, such as “sloppy” or “clumsy,” usually stay with them for life. Since we are to teach our children, it is easy to fall into a pattern of perpetually pointing out only their failures. Parents ought to catch their children doing right things and then compliment them appropriately.

On his list, a person could begin with his spouse and then his children. He could write what he likes about their character and about their behavior. Then comes the fun part! He can use his imagination to think of ways to tell his family the things he recorded on his praise list about them. It could be a family project: “Next family devotion, we’re all going to tell something we really like about each family member.” When members compliment each other as freely at home as they do their friends at church, the family will grow closer together. We need to check and see if we have “church manners” and “home manners.” They really should not differ.

Our “praise others” list should extend to people we speak of in our homes. The adage

“If you’ve nothing good to say, say nothing” is a good family rule. One preacher had to refuse a mother’s desperate cry for help for her teenage daughter. He knew the girl had no respect for him because for years the parents had been critical of him in their home.

We need to consciously seek to build others up in our children’s eyes. They will follow our example. A regular practice of praising others will repel spirits of comparison, criticism, jealousy, envy, and covetousness that would seek to tear down our homes.

Prayer in our homes should be as natural and as habitual as eating. If we take all decisions and all problems to the Lord, our children will view prayer as a lifestyle rather than as only a Christian duty.

Example is so necessary, but we need to actively include our children in prayer, praise, and fasting so they too will have memorials in their relationship with God. We should teach older children to keep a personal notebook, which can be a diary of their own experiences with God. They may record key verses, prayer requests and dated answers, promises the Lord has given, and experiences where they grew in learning about God and His ways.

IV. FAMILY DEVOTIONS

There are many excellent books on developing a family devotion time. Family devotions should become a top priority, or the cares of life will move it farther down on the to-do list. Consistency is even more vital than frequency. Parents should not set their goals too high at first. One night a week is a good beginning. Planning is essential so the family has something to look forward to each week.

Topics covered during family devotions should meet family needs. We should be flexible so that if in the middle of a series on Moses’ life our family needs a devotion on forgiveness, then we can have it. The material a family covers should be shared on the children’s level of understanding.

It is best that family devotions are not so long that squirmy little ones dread them. They should not be preachy. One girl recalled devotions as “Dad’s hour-long sermon.” Parents should be creative in their approach, using skits, Bible games, panel discussions, buzz groups, sermonettes, or puppets.

Interaction is always an important characteristic of an effective family devotion. Through interaction parents may find out what their children think, how they feel about topics, and their level of comprehension. The

family can sing together, testify, and take prayer requests. It is family devotion time, and all Heaven watches because home is where most children make up their minds to serve God. There are no cords as strong as the ones that connect the family when it prays and praises together. Children can be filled with memories of precious moments spent together in the sweet, healing presence of the Lord.

V. ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS—RESTFUL FURNISHINGS

Just as every home needs couches, beds, and chairs where weary physical bodies can rest, so do our centers of worship need the furnishings of restful attitudes of acceptance and forgiveness. The first piece of furnishing could be the grace of God where the entire family may sit and rest: “Even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Family members should share with others the same acceptance, unconditional love, and endless forgiveness they have received from God. According to the parable of the unmerciful servant, the Lord wants us to be mindful of the acceptance and forgiveness we owe others. (See Matthew 18:23-35.)

Because we live so close together, the family provides endless opportunities to practice the art of forgiveness. For example, there comes a point when tile cleaner will no longer whiten the caulking in a tiled shower. The only way to fix it then is to scrape it out and put in fresh white caulking. In a similar way, we must sometimes “scrape out” the old relationship with confession and repentance, restoring the relationship with genuine forgiveness.

Children need to see their parents forgive each other. No parent stands taller in a child’s eyes than the one big enough to kneel at eye-level with the little one and say ten key words: “I was wrong. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?”

VI. RELAX—YOU’RE HOME

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 states, “The home should be a center of worship.”

It takes quite a bit of energy, love, discipline, and time to build a home as the center of worship. Just like our physical houses, they need constant maintenance and periodic repairs.

But, oh, what a haven we have when our families build on the sure foundation of God’s Word, do deeds of love for others, speak words of praise, and have hearts full of acceptance and forgiveness!

Internalizing the Message

Consider creating a praise list for each family member to use in personal daily devotions. The basic divisions of a praise list should be (1) God, (2) yourself, and (3) others. Completing and using this list can improve our communication with God and with our family members. The purpose of acknowledging ourselves on the praise list is not for egotism but to maintain a healthy self-image. Before we can fully appreciate others, we must be able to appreciate certain qualities about ourselves. If we suffer from a poor self-image, we will likely resent and disapprove of others.

We also should think of unique ways to express our appreciation for other members of our family. We may be surprised how positively our family is affected by just a few fundamental expressions of love.

We should seek other ideas from various sources to help strengthen our homes as centers of worship. We can obtain many outstanding, creative ideas for family relationships through several family-related Christian radio broadcasts. Using creative ideas to make and keep our home a place of family worship will make a lasting impact upon our children and set in them some wonderful patterns for life.

REFLECTIONS

- Since we spend more time at home than anywhere else, our homes should be the very center of our worship. Discuss.
- Discuss whether or not obeying Deuteronomy 6:6-7, filling our children with the Word of God, should be accomplished primarily at church.
- Discuss the advantages of Scripture memorization in our homes. How did it assist David when he faced strong enemies?
- What is the primary place where the Bible is lived daily? Discuss.
- Discuss the idea that family relationships should always take priority over acquiring and preserving material possessions.
- What type of atmosphere does murmuring and arguing in the home create? Discuss.