
SERMONS

Building Lasting Memories

ELAINE AND WILLIE OLIVER

The Texts

Song of Solomon 2:7; 4:7; 8:7; 1:2

I CHARGE YOU, O DAUGHTERS OF
JERUSALEM BY THE GAZELLES OR BY THE
DOES OF THE FIELD, DO NOT STIR UP
NOR AWAKEN LOVE UNTIL IT PLEASES.
v. 2:7

YOU ARE ALL FAIR, MY LOVE, AND THERE
IS NO SPOT IN YOU. v. 4:7

MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE,
NOR CAN THE FLOODS DROWN IT. IF A
MAN WOULD GIVE FOR LOVE ALL THE
WEALTH OF HIS HOUSE, IT WOULD BE
UTTERLY DESPISED. v. 8:7

LET HIM KISS ME WITH THE KISSES OF
HIS MOUTH—FOR YOUR LOVE IS BETTER
THAN WINE. v. 1:2

Introduction

To celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary a few months ago, we spent five days at the beach. We love beach vacations. Especially where there is beautiful fine sand and clear blue water.

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Our time together was simply incredible. We relaxed, caught up on some reading, ate food we didn't cook, enjoyed swimming and snorkeling, body-boarding and kayaking. While there was much to enjoy, our favorite lasting memory was learning to sail.

As soon as our sailing lesson began, we realized there was much more complexity to this sport than appeared on the surface. It was at once stressful and relaxing, challenging and rewarding. We quickly realized we would need to work together as a team and be on the same side of the catamaran (sail boat) if we were to experience gliding smoothly across the beautiful waters.

God created marriage so that human beings would have an opportunity to build lasting memories, leaving a legacy onto the third and fourth generations. While the process has challenging moments, the rewards are out of this world.

Our sermon today is titled, *Building Lasting Memories*, let us pray.

The Reality of Marriage and Its Problems

We still remember our honeymoon as if it were yesterday. While we could only spend a few days at the beach because of our budget, we had a fantastic time. Not that everything was flawless.

Nevertheless, we were finally married after dating long distance for a year. Life felt settled, serene and still. We were now ready to face the rest of our lives together.

Although just married for twenty-four hours, we knew we would be fine as long as we were together. We loved each other, and nothing and no one could disturb our harmony. We had arrived at a place of contentment and satisfaction in our lives.

But is it possible within the domain of human capacity to keep love always sheltered from injury or hurt? And even if we could, is *love*—we are talking about the romantic feelings and ecstasy of early marriage—enough to sustain a marriage? The answer in our opinion is no.

The Meaning of Love

What is love, after all? It seems to be the catch-all in relationships. We fall in love and fall out of love. But is that really what love is?

These days the word *love* seems to be used to refer to all kinds of situations. We hear people say: “I love apple pie,” or “I love to exercise every day,” or “I love to nap after lunch,” or “I love to cook and bake,” or “I love to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.” It is amazing how love is used in language to convey people’s affinity to something or an activity.

We propose it is probably one of the reasons we have such difficulty in marriage. For if you love your husband or wife the way you love to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; or the way you love to exercise or cook and bake, it is a bit problematic, and chances are it won’t make your marriage a success. Consequently, we must come to grips with the true meaning of love; at the very least, come to terms with what role God meant for love to play in our marriage relationships.

Love in the Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon provides us with a sequence of snapshots of the relationship between a man and a woman. The ecstasy and complexity that convey what love—*real love*—is all about.

LIKE GEN. 2:23–25, THE SONG CELEBRATES GOD’S GIFT OF BODILY LOVE BETWEEN MAN AND

WOMAN. HERE THE CREATOR’S WISDOM AND BOUNTY ARE DISPLAYED. THUS, THE SONG IS BEST TAKEN AS AN EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL’S WISDOM POETRY (CP. PROV. 5:15–20; 6:24–29; 7:6–27; 30:18–20). LIKE MANY PSALMS THAT PRAISE GOD AND ALSO TEACH, THE SONG’S MAIN PURPOSE IS TO CELEBRATE RATHER THAN TO INSTRUCT. (VAN LEEUWEN, 2003).

Song of Solomon 2:7 states: “Oh, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem, by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer: Don’t excite love, don’t stir it up, until the time is ripe—and you are ready.” (The Message)

THE MEANING OF THE REFRAIN IS THAT LOVE CANNOT BE FORCED BUT MUST BE PATIENTLY WAITED FOR. IN OTHER WORDS, THE BELOVED REMINDED ALL THOSE DESIRING A RELATIONSHIP LIKE THE ONE SHE AND SOLOMON ENJOYED WAITING PATIENTLY FOR GOD TO BRING IT INTO THEIR LIVES. GAZELLES (2:17; CF. V. 17; 3:5; 4:5; 7:3; 8:14) AND DOES ARE GRACEFUL, AGILE ANIMALS. IT WAS NATURAL FOR A BELOVED ONE, THINKING OF THE FIELDS AND FORESTS (2:1, 3), TO MAKE AN OATH BY MOUNTAIN ANIMALS. (DEERE, 1985).

The message is clear. Love—the love God wants us to experience in relationships—is so delightful, so magnificent, so superb, He wants us to be truly ready for it—spiritually, physically, financially, emotionally—or we will just mess things up. Beware of puppy love; it will lead to a dog’s life.

The Song of Solomon, originally written in Hebrew, has at least three words for our English word love. The first word we share is *rayah*; which is literally translated *friend* or *companion*—somebody with whom you enjoy hanging out. Song of Solomon 4:7 says: “You are beautiful from head to toe, my dear love, beautiful beyond compare, absolutely flawless.” (The Message)

SOLOMON SUMMARIZED HIS PRAISE BY ASCRIBING PERFECT BEAUTY TO HIS BRIDE. SHE HAD NO FLAW, OR PHYSICAL DEFECT. SHE WAS PERFECT IN

APPEARANCE. (LATER SHE CALLED HIM “MY FLAWLESS ONE,” 5:2.) SOLOMON PRAISED EIGHT PARTS OF HIS BRIDE’S BODY... COMPARED WITH THIS LAVISH PRAISE OF THE BELOVED’S BEAUTY, SOME WIVES TODAY MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THEIR APPEARANCE. HOWEVER, ONE MUST REMEMBER THAT INITIALLY THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM DID NOT SEEM TO REGARD THE BELOVED AS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. UNLIKE THE OTHER ROYAL LADIES SHE WAS NOT FAIR-SKINNED, A PREEMINENT SIGN OF BEAUTY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD (SEE COMMENTS ON 1:5–6). YET IN HER LOVER’S EYES SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL, EVEN THOUGH SHE DID NOT MEET THE OBJECTIVE STANDARDS OF BEAUTY IN HER SOCIETY... THOUGH FEW PEOPLE IN ANY AGE MEET THEIR PARTICULAR CULTURE’S STANDARD OF BEAUTY, A WOMAN IS BEAUTIFUL IN THE EYES OF HER LOVER SIMPLY BECAUSE HE LOVES HER. EVERY HUSBAND WHO GENUINELY LOVES HIS WIFE CAN SAY, “TO ME YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL AND THERE IS NO FLAW IN YOU.” (DEERE, 1985).

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We love to spend time together. Married for over 30 years now and having the privilege of working together—it is not for the faint of heart—we have all kinds of favorite things, activities and places. We have favorite restaurants, favorite parks, favorite museums, favorite beaches, favorite cities, favorite malls, favorite zoos (the Serengeti), favorite flowers, favorite meals and many more than we have already shared. We are simply grateful God brought us together, and we try to celebrate that reality every day. I (Willie) think Elaine is absolutely beautiful. Now, to others she may not be all that. They may not see what I see. But to me, there is none better. I am talking about inside and out. She is mine, and she is beautiful!

Working with couples and families is gratifying to us. It is hard work, but it is rewarding work. However, after spending a weekend on our feet speaking at a couples’ retreat, or spending several days training pastors or church leaders, one of our favorite things to do is to find a good Indian restaurant to have a meal together. While we try

to be temperate and careful, we simply enjoy food and find it a reason to celebrate God and life while eating a great meal of chana masala, baigan bharta, dal makhani—rice, of course—and tandoori roti. The truth is, it is simply about hanging out with each other and enjoying each other’s company. It is all about the *rayah* love.

Another Hebrew word for love is *’ahabah*, which is much deeper and reflective than temporary amorous feelings. We are talking about more than a short-lived desire or lust for another person—perhaps someone you see from a distance on the street or in the grocery store you happen to think is attractive. *’Ahabah* is making a conscious choice to join your life to the life of another person. It is an emotion that guides you to commitment—a relationship that is priceless. Song of Solomon 8:7 declares: “Many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised.”

THE FINAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE LOVE DEPICTED IN THE SONG IS THAT IT IS PRICELESS. ALL ONE’S WEALTH WOULD BE TOTALLY INADEQUATE TO PURCHASE SUCH LOVE. IN FACT, SUCH MONEY WOULD BE ... SCORNE, BECAUSE LOVE CANNOT BE BOUGHT. ANY ATTEMPT TO “BUY” LOVE DEPERSONALIZES IT. IF LOVE IS PRICELESS, HOW THEN CAN IT BE OBTAINED? THE ANSWER IS THAT IT MUST BE GIVEN. AND ULTIMATELY LOVE IS A GIFT FROM GOD. (DEERE, 1985).

The notion of *’ahabah*—love as commitment—is an important one, often missed in marriage, to our demise. It is a concept we need to give much more attention to if we are going to be able to be involved in *building lasting memories* in our respective marriages.

Scott Stanley, a leading marriage and family researcher in the United States, suggests there are two faces of commitment we should consider: dedication and constraint. Personal *dedication* refers to the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the marriage. It is demonstrated by a desire to not only remain in the marriage,

but also to make it better, to sacrifice for it, to invest in it, to link personal goals to it, and to seek the spouse's happiness, not simply one's own. On the other hand, *constraint* commitment refers to forces that compel individuals to preserve their marriage regardless of their personal *dedication* to it. *Constraint* may come from either external or internal pressures, and they favor relationship stability by seeing the end of their marriage as more economically, socially, personally or psychologically costly. If *dedication* is low, *constraint* can keep people in relationships they might otherwise want to leave. (Stanley 2005, pp. 23, 24).

Because we are human, we make mistakes, even in our marriage, and unless we have commitment love in our relationships—the *'ahabah* factor—it would be impossible to sustain a marriage and build lasting memories for the future. For marriage to thrive, we need to have *dedication* and *constraint*.

The third Hebrew word for love found in the Song of Songs is the word *dod*, which is translated in English as to carouse, to rock or to fondle. *Dod* is the physical, sexual ingredient of a relationship, as exemplified in Song of Solomon 1:2, which states: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—For your love is better than wine”.

THE SONG BEGINS WITH A SOLILOQUY BY THE BELOVED IN WHICH SHE FIRST EXPRESSED HER STRONG DESIRE FOR HER LOVER'S. . . PHYSICAL AFFECTION. . . THE RAPID INTERCHANGE BETWEEN THE THIRD PERSON (HIM, V. 2A, AND HIS, VV. 2A, 4B) AND THE SECOND PERSON (YOUR AND YOU, VV. 2B–4A) IS CONFUSING TO MODERN READERS, BUT IT WAS A REGULAR FEATURE OF LOVE POETRY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST. THIS STYLISTIC DEVICE GAVE A STRONG EMOTIONAL QUALITY TO THE POETRY. WHEN SHE SPOKE OF HIS LOVE (V. 2B) SHE WAS REFERRING TO THE PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF HIS LOVE (THE HEB. WORD FOR “LOVE” IS THE PL. DŌDĪM, ALSO USED IN 4:10). THE STATEMENT YOUR LOVE IS MORE DELIGHTFUL THAN WINE MEANS THAT HIS PHYSICAL AFFECTIONS WERE EXHILARATING, REFRESHING, AND A GREAT SOURCE OF JOY (CF. 1:4). (DEERE, 1985).

In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 the Bible states:

NEVERTHELESS, BECAUSE OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY, LET EACH MAN HAVE HIS OWN WIFE, AND LET EACH WOMAN HAVE HER OWN HUSBAND. LET THE HUSBAND RENDER TO HIS WIFE THE AFFECTION DUE HER, AND LIKEWISE ALSO THE WIFE TO HER HUSBAND. THE WIFE DOES NOT HAVE AUTHORITY OVER HER OWN BODY, BUT THE HUSBAND DOES. AND LIKEWISE THE HUSBAND DOES NOT HAVE AUTHORITY OVER HIS OWN BODY, BUT THE WIFE DOES. DO NOT DEPRIVE ONE ANOTHER EXCEPT WITH CONSENT FOR A TIME, THAT YOU MAY GIVE YOURSELVES TO FASTING AND PRAYER; AND COME TOGETHER AGAIN SO THAT SATAN DOES NOT TEMPT YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR LACK OF SELF-CONTROL.

God wants our marriages to experience the flames of *rayah*, *'ahabah* and *dod*, not for our marriages to be consumed, but for our marriages to be able to *build lasting memories* for the future, so we can impact to the third and fourth generations of our lineage. One flame burning all by itself, will never accomplish the connection, commitment, and passion God wants each of us to enjoy in marriage, so we'll experience, joy, peace, satisfaction and security.

How many marriages in our church have you witnessed where all the flames of love are burning as one? When we separate the flames, that love can never truly create a rewarding and fulfilling marital experience. It's like living outside the framework God designed and wired us to live by.

Conclusion

Why is it that life changes after the honeymoon? What happens to our love that was so strong and true? If we stop to think about the matter, we realize no one can sustain the fantasy of a honeymoon. Think about it! We are often in a beautiful place away from home where someone else is making the beds, cooking the food and washing the towels. We have enough clean clothes for the trip, so we don't need to do laundry. We can sleep late, get up late, and do almost anything we wish.

When real life sets in, things change. And the real challenge of being responsible—washing clothes, cooking meals, paying bills, working long hours, going to sleep at a reasonable time so you can wake up on time to get to work become a reality. Living with reality, where from time to time you or your spouse might be less than mature or responsible, is the kind of situation that knocks the wind out of your marriage, because the flames of *rayah*, *'ababab*, and *dod* may no longer be burning as brightly as they once were. We get careless and it becomes difficult to build lasting memories for the future.

Illustration

Several years ago when we were on safari in the Serengeti we came upon a pride of lions in the middle of the savanna. Our driver stopped, and our guide spoke up and said: “There are lions over there.” We didn’t see the lions and asked: “Where are the lions?” The guide pointed and said: “The lions are right over there.” We still couldn’t see the lions until one of them stood on all fours. Then we could see the lions. We quickly noted the reason we could not see the lion. The lion’s mane and the grass of the savanna were the same color. To be able to see the lions we needed to look carefully to intentionally distinguish the grass from the lions.

The Bible states in 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” We like the clarity that comes from The Message paraphrase: “Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping.”

The reality is, every human marriage will fail to meet the standard needed to preserve a *building lasting memories* attitude in the home. It is on this note that Ellen White declares:

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST ALONE CAN
MAKE MEN AND WOMEN HAPPY. ALL THE

COMMON WATERS OF LIFE CHRIST CAN
TURN INTO THE WINE OF HEAVEN. THE
HOME THEN BECOMES AS AN EDEN BLISS;
THE FAMILY, A BEAUTIFUL SYMBOL OF THE
FAMILY IN HEAVEN. (WHITE 1952, P. 28).

To be *building lasting memories* for the future in our respective marriages then, we need the presence of Christ to make us accepting, affectionate, appreciative, attentive, calm, caring, compassionate, considerate, committed, dedicated, devoted, dutiful, enthusiastic, faithful, friendly, gentle, intentional, kind, loyal, passionate, patient, perceptive, sympathetic, self-controlled, supportive, tender, thoughtful, and understanding. These attributes and actions can only be accomplished as we depend on the power of God each day.

May we daily invite God into our lives and marriages, so we will be granted the power and grace for building lasting memories.

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The Gift of Memories

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

THE MEMORY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS BLESSED
PROVERBS 10:7

Introduction

We probably have heard those words at many a funeral. It is at those times when we pause to express and hear all those memories of the person being memorialized. Children speak of the camping trips, or the first bicycle, or maybe the funny faces their father used to make. Or perhaps they remember those delicious pies, or the warm hugs, or the trips to buy clothes with mom. Wives speak of the way they met their husband, and of their romantic evenings together.

At every one of those sad events the good, happy memories bring laughter, and most importantly, a sort of comfort to the grieving family.

Yes, “The memory of the righteous is blessed.”

Of course, we don’t have to talk about the good memories we have only at funerals. Some of

our favorite times happen when we get together with family or friends and talk about things that happened when we were growing up, or while attending school, or time spent as neighbors.

We call that, “reminiscing.”

Uncle Steve recalls the good old days when a Ford coupe was \$500, gasoline cost 19 cents a gallon, a postage stamp was three cents, and penny candy was a treat.

Grandma June tells stories about growing up on the farm and walking three miles to school every day – uphill both ways.

Theresa fondly remembers the days of anticipation before boarding the train to visit her grandparents on the other side of the country.

Everyone frequently reminisces and reviews events of their life. It is a natural part of our lives and it is essential to our existence. But it is also extremely important for our children because those memories connect generations together and provide the kids with roots upon which they will be grounded for their future.

1. Just A Ceremony?

In the second book of the Bible, Exodus, there is another story which shows how important it is for us, as parents, to build memories for our children.

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God wanted to free His children from their slavery in Egypt, but the Pharaoh stubbornly refused.

Systematically, God's plagues began to wear down the Pharaoh's and the Egyptians' will until they finally let the Israelites go; in fact, they almost pushed them out.

The night of their exodus from Egypt, God instituted a ceremony; what is known as the Passover.

IT WILL COME TO PASS WHEN YOU COME TO THE LAND WHICH THE LORD WILL GIVE YOU, JUST AS HE PROMISED, THAT YOU SHALL KEEP THIS SERVICE. AND IT SHALL BE, WHEN YOUR CHILDREN SAY TO YOU, 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THIS SERVICE?' THAT YOU SHALL SAY, 'IT IS THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE OF THE LORD, WHO PASSED OVER THE HOUSES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT WHEN HE STRUCK THE EGYPTIANS AND DELIVERED OUR HOUSEHOLDS.' SO THE PEOPLE BOWED THEIR HEADS AND WORSHIPED.

EXODUS 12:25-27

The Passover commemorated that last night in captivity and how the blood painted over the doorposts of every home served as the sign of protection from the death of every first-born in the land.

The Passover was not simply a national holiday, or a celebration. In reality, the annual celebration of the Passover is a reminder, a vivid lesson, directed to the children in every home where it is celebrated. It is a service not to be held at a synagogue, but a special family time at home.

The order of service for the Passover, called the Passover Seder, includes several features; songs and readings of some specific psalms. The children are involved several times when they ask questions about the meaning of each of the symbols on the table.

One of the favorite parts of the service for children is the hiding of the "afikoman", which

is a piece of the unleavened bread, a reminder of that unleavened bread the Israelites were supposed to eat, standing up, waiting for the order to leave. In some families, the head of the household hides the afikoman for the children to find, and rewards them with money or candy. In other families, the children "steal" the afikoman and ask for a reward for its return. Either way, the afikoman has become a device for keeping children awake and alert during the Seder proceedings, until the time it is needed for dessert.

For some four thousand years, children in observant Jewish homes have been reminded that their ancestors were slaves, but God miraculously delivered them. And it should have also served as a reminder of the coming of the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

When Jesus, the Messiah, came and died, the Passover service was no longer needed to remind the Jewish people of the future coming of the Messiah. In its place, Jesus instituted another ceremony, what we have come to call "The Lord's Supper," or the communion service.

This is how Paul relates the events of that evening:

FOR I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD THAT WHICH I ALSO DELIVERED TO YOU: THAT THE LORD JESUS ON THE SAME NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD; AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT AND SAID, "TAKE, EAT; THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU; DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." IN THE SAME MANNER HE ALSO TOOK THE CUP AFTER SUPPER, SAYING, "THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD. THIS DO, AS OFTEN AS YOU DRINK IT, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." FOR AS OFTEN AS YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CUP, YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH TILL HE COMES.
1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

It is interesting to note that Jesus didn't simply say, "Remember my death," or "gather every so often to think about the meaning of my sacrifice." Instead, He provided some powerful visual reminders – the foot-washing, the bread, and the wine. Much like the Passover, Seder has many elements to serve as a reminder of the events of that night when the Egyptians were delivered from slavery. The communion service has a number of elements to remind us of that Friday afternoon when the Lamb of God died to deliver us from our sins.

But we would like you to consider something. If the Passover service was designed by God as a teaching tool, especially for the children, is it possible that Jesus also had in mind that the communion service would serve as a teaching tool for our children? And if that is the case, shouldn't we then ensure that children get to participate as much as possible so that each of the elements of this special service will teach them about Jesus' sacrifice?

Maybe that's what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14). You see, the communion service is not just a ceremony. It is God's visual aid to draw His younger children closer to Him.

2. Just A Pile Of Stones?

There is another story that illustrates how important it is for children when their parents make memories, especially good memories, for and with them.

The Israelites who had been rescued from the Egyptian slavery had wondered in the desert for forty long years. The entire generation of those who left Egypt, except for a few, had died in the desert with only a distant glimpse of the Promised Land.

With Moses now dead, Joshua, the new leader, prepares the people to cross the Jordan River and to begin the conquest of that land God had promised to give to them.

Among the instructions Joshua gave the large multitude we read:

TAKE FOR YOURSELVES TWELVE MEN FROM THE PEOPLE, ONE MAN FROM EVERY TRIBE, AND COMMAND THEM, SAYING, 'TAKE FOR YOURSELVES TWELVE STONES FROM HERE, OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE JORDAN, FROM THE PLACE WHERE THE PRIESTS' FEET STOOD FIRM. YOU SHALL CARRY THEM OVER WITH YOU AND LEAVE THEM IN THE LODGING PLACE WHERE YOU LODGE TONIGHT.' THEN JOSHUA CALLED THE TWELVE MEN WHOM HE HAD APPOINTED FROM THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, ONE MAN FROM EVERY TRIBE; AND JOSHUA SAID TO THEM: CROSS OVER BEFORE THE ARK OF THE LORD YOUR GOD INTO THE MIDST OF THE JORDAN, AND EACH ONE OF YOU TAKE UP A STONE ON HIS SHOULDER, ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THIS MAY BE A SIGN AMONG YOU WHEN YOUR CHILDREN ASK IN TIME TO COME, SAYING, 'WHAT DO THESE STONES MEAN TO YOU?' THEN YOU SHALL ANSWER THEM THAT THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN WERE CUT OFF BEFORE THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE LORD; WHEN IT CROSSED OVER THE JORDAN, THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN WERE CUT OFF. AND THESE STONES SHALL BE FOR A MEMORIAL TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FOREVER.
JOSHUA 4:2-7

What an interesting command!

Take twelve stones from the middle of the river! Why not from either side of the Jordan? The answer is revealed in verses 6 and 7:

WHEN YOUR CHILDREN ASK, "WHAT DO THESE STONES MEAN?" YOU WILL TELL THEM ABOUT THE MIRACULOUS CROSSING OF THE JORDAN. THE STONES WILL SERVE AS A REMINDER, THE GIFT OF GOOD MEMORIES, NOT JUST FOR YOU BUT FOR YOUR CHILDREN AND FOR GENERATIONS YET TO COME.

John Kunz said, "Each time an individual tells part of his/her life story, those who listen are like a mirror, reflecting and affirming their lives."

Reminiscing is a gift we give others. Reminiscing is a free-flowing process of thinking or talking about our own experiences in order to reflect on and to recapture significant events in our lifetime. Obviously, we all live in the present. At the same time, we also still carry our “past” selves with us throughout our lives. We are part of a rich, wonderful history that needs to be shared and preserved.

But the stories we tell about our lives are also important sources of our self-identity. They enable us to explore and relate our past to the present.

That’s one of the tragedies of dementia, amnesia, or Alzheimer’s disease as the person loses their memories we lose our connection with their history, with their lives, and eventually with them.

But as long as we have the use of our minds, we can continue to create memories for ourselves and for those who follow us.

3. Just A Day?

Those who have experienced a partial or total loss of memory can attest to the fact that remembering is one of life’s greatest gifts and joys.

Kim called to place an order and Krickitt answered. From that very first conversation their relationship flourished and eventually they got married in 1993.

Six months after their wedding they were going to her parents for Thanksgiving. Krickitt was driving when she swerved to avoid hitting a slow-moving truck. A pickup following them smashed into the Carpenters’ car. Their Ford Escort flipped over on its roof and went into a sickening skid.

Her husband, Kim, was in the back seat: “I can remember every split second of that wreck. I screamed and screamed and screamed for Krickitt and got no answer.” Kim suffered a punctured lung, a bruise on his heart, a concussion and a broken hand. But worst off was Krickitt, who had suffered a terrible skull fracture when the roof of

the car caved in around her head. Unconscious and fastened in by the seatbelt, she hung upside down for 30 minutes before rescuers arrived, then 40 more before they could free her. Emergency medic D.J. Combs recalls that her pupils were fixed in a rightward gaze: “She had what we call doll’s eyes.”

Three weeks after the accident, when a nurse asked her what year it was, Krickitt responded: “1969.” She was able to name her parents. But when the nurse asked, “Who’s your husband?” she answered, “I’m not married.” Tests showed that she had maintained most of her long-term memory. As for her husband, he was a complete stranger; she felt nothing for him. “I don’t have a visual memory in my head, and I have no memory in my heart,” she said.

When she was released from the hospital she went to live with her mother, but five months later she moved back in with her husband. But the pressures of trying to figure out how to be his wife and to share their lives were actually putting a strain on their relationship. So their therapist suggested they needed to start building new memories, which is what they did. They started dating again, chatting over pizza, shopping, Jet Skiing at a nearby lake. “I got to know my husband again,” says Krickitt. “There was a point when I really started to enjoy this companion. I would miss him if he wasn’t around.”

And she fell in love with Kim again. But one thing was missing. While she had pictures of their wedding, it made her sad that she did not have memories of it. So Kim proposed again, and on May of 1996 they exchanged vows at their second wedding. Now she has pictures and her own memories of that special day.

Yes, the gift of memories! It is truly a gift to be able to remember! That is one of the reasons God gave us a special weekly gift, the Sabbath, to help us remember what took place when the world was created, to remind us that He created us. Among other things, the theory of evolution has stolen from those God created the opportunity to remember Him.

After the Israelites were made free after more than 400 years of captivity, one of the first things

God wanted the emerging nation to do, before they even entered the Promised Land, was the gift of remembrance. God said, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”. (Exodus 20:8)

Like any other memories, the Sabbath grounds us and connects us with our past, and with our Maker. But the Sabbath is not just about the past. The Sabbath is about building today’s memories for the future. The Sabbath is a weekly opportunity for us to gather here in God’s sanctuary where we meet and worship as God’s family to build more memories. Think about those who have been here with us but are now gone. Maybe they have moved to other cities, or sadly maybe they have died. Just as we think about them and miss them our hearts are also warmed with our memories of them.

The Sabbath is also a wonderful weekly opportunity to build memories with your immediate family. Think of the things you have done through the years with your family.

NOTE:

At this point you can mention some of those little Sabbath traditions and memories with your family – playing Bible games, special food, singing for sundown worship, Sabbath afternoon hikes, etc.

Let’s not make the Sabbath a day when we create burdens and bitter memories. Let’s be intentional about using the precious hours of God’s Holy Day to build the sweetest, most special memories, especially for our children so they will grow up thinking about the Sabbath as the best, most wonderful day of the week.

It’s not just a day! The Sabbath is a weekly opportunity God gives us to build family memories!

4. Just A Book?

Reading is truly a fascinating experience! Nelly Ali reveals how books provide endless opportunities to explore the world we live in, and can also give us other skills to get ahead in life.

A. Imagination.

Reading stimulates our imagination and creativity because we are transported in our mind to places where we meet people and have experiences and live through the eyes and words of the author.

B. Communication

As we read how an author phrases words it can help our own communication style, and reading will give us knowledge about many different topics, so we can talk and interact with more people. Reading also enhances our vocabulary, as we understand new words in context which we can then apply to our own conversations or writing.

C. Understanding

Books give us a deeper understanding and context, which is very useful when we have a genuine interest in learning something. Reading also allows us to develop our skills and give us broader insights into an endless list of topics. By discussing the finer points of something in detail books enhance our comprehension of it.

D. Knowledge

Because of the great variety of books and the topics they contain books broaden our minds and help us to have a wider understanding of the world. Different genres, cultures and languages all combine together to give us experiences of something entirely new. It is possible for us to learn about a subject that perhaps we had never heard of before; in fact, it may even help us to gain a certain amount of expertise on that subject.

E. Concentration and memory

Reading helps our concentration as it requires us to focus, often for long periods of time. Reading also requires concentration in order to gain the fundamental meaning of the words, a skill that we can apply widely in all areas of our life.

F. Application forms

Reading helps us if or whenever we need to fill out job or loan application forms. People who are not used to reading may at times not be able to understand or even misunderstand some of the questions being asked.

G. Personal interests

And last, Nelly Ali says that reading varies for each of us whether we do it for personal pleasure, or to acquire the ability to learn more or even just to display an array of interests, of whether we want to be transported into the history of the British Empire or the life of Nelson Mandela, or perhaps to learn some relationship or parenting principles. The great thing about books is that there is something for everyone's taste, which in itself is a wonder.

Research has also shown that the ability to read well is one of the best predictors of academic performance among students. Reading is one of the most valuable skills developed during childhood. Sentence removed here about research

There is one book that helps us to learn about history, health, geography, psychology, relationships, and so much more. When we read the Bible to and with our children we are helping both in their literacy development but also in their spiritual growth.

Reading a children's Bible or Bible stories is not just a good thing for the children, but another way to grow memories between us. Paul wrote:

FOR WHATEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN BEFORE WERE WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING, THAT WE THROUGH THE PATIENCE AND COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES MIGHT HAVE HOPE.
ROMANS 1 5:4

5. Just Memories?

The stories we find in the Bible were intentionally written there for a reason.

The Passover was not just a ceremony.
The stones from the Jordan were not just a pile of stones.
The Sabbath is not just a day.
The Bible is not just a book.

God established and designed each of these events, each of these things as a reminder, a

memory device. He wanted His people to remember Him and to teach their children about Him.

ONLY TAKE HEED TO YOURSELF, AND DILIGENTLY KEEP YOURSELF, LEST YOU FORGET THE THINGS YOUR EYES HAVE SEEN, AND LEST THEY DEPART FROM YOUR HEART ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. AND TEACH THEM TO YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR GRANDCHILDREN.
DEUTERONOMY 4:9

We can use those things God has given us to teach our children about Him and to create memories about our family and our faith. Creative memory-making brings memories back to life and can be achieved in many different ways.

Please allow me to suggest some:

1. Eat as many of the daily meals together as possible. And do it sitting around the dining room table.
2. Work together on photo albums/collages, scrapbooks.
3. Use different art forms like drawing, painting or using clay as a way to portray words and feelings. One family did a series of hand and foot prints from birth and through the years.
4. Become the family "archaeologist" – in other words, collect some historical items and significant objects like toys, antiques, or clothing that has some special significance (baby dedication outfit, graduation robes, etc.).
5. Learn music or songs together, and sing them together often.
6. Record stories from yours and your children's childhood and life. In some ways they are like your audio autobiographies.
7. Keep a "memory box" for each of your children to present to them either when they turn eighteen or when they get married.

All of these can become great conversation-starters, but also valuable recollections and

outcomes for the family about their past and for the generations that follow.

Conclusion

Connecting the generations gives our children a history of their own. It is the gift of memories which grounds them in their faith and in their family.

REMEMBER NOW YOUR CREATOR IN THE
DAYS OF YOUR YOUTH,
BEFORE THE DIFFICULT DAYS COME, AND
THE YEARS DRAW NEAR WHEN YOU SAY,
“I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THEM”.
ECCLESIASTES 12:1

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Lessons From The Family Of Abraham

JONGIMPI PAPU

Introduction

It is true that Bible stories tend to focus on achievements by individuals rather than of groups of people or families. Hebrews 11 reflects on a list of individuals who by faith pleased God. Little is said of their families. A closer look at these individuals, however, reveals a subtext of support from their families. The ministry of Moses was launched not so much by the faith of Moses but the faith of his parents who, not fearing the King's command, hid him.

We may extol the virtues of Abraham and rightly so, he is known as the father of the faithful, but this should not lead us to think of Abraham as a *Lone Ranger*. What we may forget is that Abraham was a supportive and loving father to Isaac, a faithful and loving husband to Sarah and a good master to his servants. It was through this small and intimate circle that all families of the earth were to be blessed in Abraham.

The assignment given to Abraham was not to bless all nations but to be a blessing in his family. The following text gives a specific mandate to Abraham and it is through the faithful fulfillment of this mandate that Abraham became a blessing to all families of the earth:

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The Text

FOR I HAVE KNOWN HIM (ABRAHAM),
IN ORDER THAT HE MAY COMMAND HIS
CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER
HIM, THAT THEY KEEP THE WAY OF THE
LORD, TO DO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND
JUSTICE...

GENESIS 18:19

Why Abraham was Chosen

The text is very clear on the purpose for the choosing of Abraham. The phrase “for I have known him...” is translated ‘for I have chosen him’ in other Bible versions. In fact Amos 3:2 uses the same phrase where God refers to Israel as the only nation that He has known. It would be incorrect to suggest that God had only known Israel in a cognitive sense, but as far as purpose is concerned, the text makes sense. In other words, Israel is the only nation that God chose. The same applies to Abraham, he was chosen by God for a specific purpose.

The specific purpose was for Abraham to “command his children and household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice”. Abraham’s assignment was to his family and household and it was God’s assignment to ensure that all nations were blessed in him. His faithful discharge of his responsibility within his family would ensure that God’s plans, which included all nations, would be fulfilled.

Did Abraham fulfill the assignment?

This question is relevant, for we can learn lessons from Abraham not in just knowing that he had an assignment but in how he fared in the assignment. The lessons would be learned whether Abraham failed or succeeded for it is often from the results that we can draw lessons.

The area of Abraham's assignment or responsibility was confined rather to his children and household. So the question is, did Abraham command his children and his household after him? Looking at the life of Isaac, the answer is affirmative. Abraham was able to put Isaac on the altar of sacrifice with no remonstrations from his son. Ellen White offers the following on Isaac's response:

IT WAS WITH TERROR AND AMAZEMENT THAT ISAAC LEARNED HIS FATE, BUT HE OFFERED NO RESISTANCE. HE COULD HAVE ESCAPED HIS DOOM, HAD HE CHOSEN TO DO SO; THE GRIEF-STRICKEN OLD MAN, EXHAUSTED WITH THE STRUGGLE OF THOSE THREE TERRIBLE DAYS, COULD NOT HAVE OPPOSED THE WILL OF THE VIGOROUS YOUTH. BUT ISAAC HAD BEEN TRAINED FROM CHILDHOOD TO READY, TRUSTING OBEDIENCE...
(WHITE 1892, P. 152)

The question may be asked, how did Abraham manage to get a teenager to be willing to go on the altar of sacrifice? Some of us struggle to get our children to attend church let alone die on an altar. How did Abraham do it?

The assignment given to Abraham included his household as well and not only his children. Was he able to command his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord? Admittedly, instructing servants to keep the ways of the Lord could be more challenging than instructing your own children. It would be interesting to find out how many servants Abraham had in his household?

In Genesis 14:14 we are told that Abraham armed about 318 servants who were born in his own house. It is clear that not all the servants

were armed but only those born in his house. It could also be argued that the 318 were not the total number of servants born in his house but those he armed from those born in his house. We are not told anything about the children and wives of the servants. One may guess that Abraham could easily have had more than a thousand servants. It was to these servants that Abraham had to show the way of the Lord. What were the results? Did he succeed or did he fail?

When the time came for Isaac to have a wife, Abraham confided in one of his servants—the oldest—to do that very important task. It is interesting to note how the servant viewed the religion of his master, Abraham. In Genesis 24:35, the servant, out of his own personal testimony declared that the Lord had blessed Abraham immensely. His focus was not so much on how rich Abraham had become but who was behind the riches and this is not just what he was told to say but what he knew personally. Secondly, in verse 52 of the same chapter, we see the servant “bowing himself to the earth” and worshipping the Lord. This too was not part of the instruction. The servant worshipped the Lord out of his own heart and for the goodness of God he had experienced and witnessed himself.

So we can convincingly say that Abraham indeed succeeded in commanding his children and his household to keep the ways of the Lord. The question, we need to ask is how did he do it? This is where we learn the lesson that we can apply in our own lives. We ask this question because we realize the difficulty and the challenge inherent in the assignment given to Abraham. We also stand amazed at how well he fulfilled it. Here are the four lessons we can glean from the story of Abraham.

Relationship between the Parents and God

The relationship between Abraham and God and between Sarah and God is the first lesson we might learn from this family. Abraham obeyed God explicitly and without any hesitation. When he was asked to leave his homeland, he

did not delay or even raised excuses. When the Lord instructed him to sacrifice his son, even though that might not have made sense to him, he obeyed. He knew the voice that had spoken to Him even though he may not have clearly understood why he had to sacrifice his son instead of a lamb. This became a living template for Isaac and the servants. They learned to take God's voice seriously.

The assignment may have been given to Abraham but without Sarah's collaboration, it would have been very difficult for Abraham to carry it through. Sarah's life did not contradict the life and commitment of Abraham. We are told in Hebrews 11:17, that "by faith Abraham...offered up Isaac," but in the same vein we learn that "by faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age..." In the book of I Peter 3:6, Sarah is given as an example of the holy women who trusted God. Holiness is derived from a personal relationship with a holy God and not a relationship with a holy spouse. Sarah had a personal relationship with God.

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Isaac did not observe a discord between the life lived by Abraham and the one lived by Sarah. They were in unison and it was this that gave credibility to their lives. Abraham could only command their children and servants after themselves. It was not just the logic of the instruction but the commitment of the instructors that had an influence in the lives of Abraham's household.

I guess it was not difficult for Isaac to trust the choice his father made for him when it came to a life partner. Isaac's wife was not just Abraham's choice; that was God's choice. A child who is willing to die at the voice of a parent cannot find it difficult to trust the choice of the same. The seriousness in which parents take God's voice will determine how serious their children will take their parents' voice.

If we want to succeed in the assignment God has given to us in our families, we need as co-parents or as single parents to have an observable, consistent and growing relationship

with Christ. It is easy to preach in church but preaching at home is a challenge for that is where the rubber meets the road. It is in the home where our preaching can actually be challenged to a point of contradiction by our own actions. A consistent life does not need a long sermon or instruction; it fills the gap in the instruction and makes sense of it.

Relationship between the Father and the Mother

How the parents relate to each other can either be a blessing or a curse to the other members of the family. Sarah, we are told, adorned herself in being submissive to Abraham. This does not mean that Sarah was only a shadow of Abraham with no say or input in how things were done in the family. We know that in more than one occasion Sarah suggested to Abraham a solution to a crisis they faced as a family. She is the one who came up with the idea of Hagar as the solution to their childlessness. Sarah related to Abraham as her equal even though she is said to have submitted to him. Abraham respected and valued Sarah's opinion. She was not only seen but she was heard as well.

Abraham loved Sarah very much. We see this in Genesis 12:11 – where he alludes to the fact that Sarah was a beautiful woman. This was after they had been married for almost 35 years. It was not so much what people were saying about Sarah's beauty. Rather, it was Abraham's appreciation of the beauty of his wife: "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance." It is clear that even after being married to Sarah for several decades, Abraham would still have chosen her again and again. Sarah was still the most beautiful woman in Abraham's eyes. Abraham loved Sarah and that principle alone purifies the meaning of submission and elevates it from a cultural expectation to a Christian virtue.

How we relate to each other as husband and wife has a telling effect on how our children and those close to us will relate to God. Ellen White puts this more succinctly when she says:

THE BEST WAY TO EDUCATE CHILDREN TO RESPECT THEIR FATHER AND MOTHER IS TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY OF SEEING THE FATHER OFFERING KINDLY ATTENTIONS TO THE MOTHER, AND THE MOTHER RENDERING RESPECT AND REVERENCE TO THE FATHER. IT IS BY BEHOLDING LOVE IN THEIR PARENTS THAT CHILDREN ARE LED TO OBEY THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT...
(WHITE 1952B, P. 278).

The seeds of disobedience and rebellion are sown in the hearts of children when their parents treat each other disrespectfully and unkindly. Parents who are always at each other's throats do not only destroy each other but their own children as well. It would have been very difficult for Isaac to listen to a man (father) who had abused his own mother. Isaac could obey Abraham's voice for he (Abraham) demonstrated he had learned to obey God's voice by the way in which he related to his wife.

Relationship between Parents and their Children

The relationship between parents and their children must be intentional and deliberate. Developing a good character in our children cannot be a haphazard work. We learned that Isaac was trained from childhood; the character he developed was not just a coincidence or luck. The best way to train anyone is to show him or her how it is done and share why it is done that way. Both aspects of teaching are important. It is not enough for our children to imbibe the culture of their home but they must have reasons why such a culture is acceptable.

Isaac was not only an imitator of Abraham's faith; we are told that he was a sharer in his faith (White 1890, p. 152). The concept of sharer carries the idea of investment, of ownership of having shares in a company. One who has shares is more than just an employee following the rules and regulations of the company. He or she has the best interest of the company at heart and might even be willing to sacrifice time and resources when called upon to do so. Isaac was not dying for Abraham's faith but his own faith in God. It was also his personal faith in God that was tested.

Isaac was not just taught to know the tenets of his parent's faith; he was led to experience their faith. It was by experiencing this faith that it became his testimony. The same applied to the servants. Not only did they have a cognitive knowledge of God they had started their own walk with Him. Training cannot be judged to be effective until it has transformed the learner to a disciple, a follower and not just a 'knower'.

We need to give our children an opportunity to see us as parents trusting in God. Times of difficulty can provide a child with a learning environment; when they see first hand how their parents manifest trust in God. When children witness a miracle unfolding before their eyes and in their own families; their knowledge of God becomes experiential and not just theoretical. Our children can only stand up for a faith that is theirs. No one can die for a borrowed faith. Martyrdom is a choice not a requirement. The question is whether our children own their faith or are they just cultural Adventists.

Relationship with the Servants

How do we relate to those who depend on us for sustenance? In addition to seeing how Abraham related to his God, how he and Sarah related to each other, and how he treated his own child and also the servants had stories of how he related to them. They had witnessed Abraham's kindness and unselfishness when he allowed Lot to choose the best portion of the land. They had seen how God blessed Abraham, and I am sure they had stories that bordered on miracles on how God took care of Abraham and all that he had.

It is interesting to note that in the book of Ephesians, Paul touches on all the areas of our relationship, and challenges us in each area. In our walk with God, in how we relate to each other as husband and wife, in how we relate to our children and how we treat our servants. This is Christianity in 'overall.'

Conclusion

The lessons are there to be appropriated but where do we begin, you may ask. My response is in understanding the fundamental assignment God has give to us as parents, guardians, and

caregivers. Our assignment is not to be a blessing in the world but to command our children and household after us to keep the ways of the Lord. This assignment is confined, measureable and intimate. It is when this is done that the world can be blessed by our presence. Remember: “All His biddings are enablings” (White 1900, p. 333). God can never assign that which His power is unable to accomplish through us. We can do all things through Christ. Listen to the beat of this statement:

ONE WELL-ORDERED, WELL-DISCIPLINED
FAMILY TELLS MORE ON BEHALF OF
CHRISTIANITY THAN ALL THE SERMONS
THAT CAN BE PREACHED... SUCH A FAMILY
GIVES EVIDENCE THAT THE PARENTS HAVE
BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN FOLLOWING GOD'S
DIRECTIONS, AND THAT THEIR CHILDREN
WILL SERVE HIM IN THE CHURCH.
(WHITE 1952, P. 32)

Indeed the families of the earth will be blessed in such a family. May this be our prayer today.

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How to Enjoy Your Imperfect Family

JOHN MCVAY

GOD LOVES YOUR IMPERFECT FAMILY AND EVERY IMPERFECT FAMILY. HE LONGS THAT EACH FAMILY MIGHT ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AS THE FATHER OF ALL AND LAY HOLD OF THE RESOURCES THAT HE HAS TO HELP THEM LIVE LIFE AS A FAMILY OF FAITH.

Introduction

In planning for your wedding, you decide you're going to follow all 107 wedding tips that you find in *Modern Bride*. Actually, you discover that these tips provide an invaluable time-line—107 tasks to accomplish before that blissful, perfect, joyous, choice day. Under the heading “12 to 24 Months before the Wedding” you find tip # 1: “Together visit your clergy and set the date for the ceremony.” Ah, that's good advice, as far as it goes. You move on down the list. You especially attend to wedding tip # 34. Now please remember, this is in a journal called *Modern Bride*. These words are addressed to brides-to-be. “Decide on your honeymoon destination. Consult a travel agent.” “Traditionally,” the journal goes on, “the groom makes these arrangements, but if you are better at that, don't hesitate to offer.” Gentlemen, the world is changing. Under the heading “Wedding Day” come the last three tips. Number 105: “Rest and thoroughly relax in a nice warm bath.” Oh sure! Number 106: “Allow at least 2 hours before the wedding to dress.” And # 107: “Have a wonderful day and enjoy every moment.” And you do.

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Of the 500 gowns in *Modern Bride* you choose the one on p. 328, the one labeled “Pure Perfection,” the one with the elaborate hand-beading, the one your father has to drive to a small boutique in New York to purchase. But it is worth it. That's what you want your wedding day to be; that's what you want your marriage to be; that's what you want your family to be—“Pure Perfection”. And as you take flight for a honeymoon in the Greek isles, you and your brand new husband imagine that your marriage, your family, will be pure perfection, one joyous port-of-call after another in an unending blissful cruise through life.

Incidentally men, *Modern Bride* doesn't fail you. They give grooms some help also. A section entitled “Planning Your Life Together,” has two short articles. It is interesting that they amount to less than 4 of the journal's 518 pages!

Looking for Pure Perfection, But . . .

Despite the notion of “*life together*” in *Modern Bride*, married couples today cruise straight into a statistical storm. You know the marriage/divorce statistics. Annually, in the U. S. A. there are some 2.11 million marriages and 1.2 million divorces. So, about 4 million Americans will make commitments for *life* this year. Most of those who mumble the words “I do” expect to keep the commitment. Almost every bride and every groom look forward to pure perfection. However, about half of the marriages will break apart before 15 years have passed. The percentage of first marriages

that end in divorce stands at about 40-50 percent, while the percentage of second marriages—or third or fourth marriages—that end in divorce is about 67 percent.

If your idea of a perfect home includes a mom, dad and 2.1 kids, your chances of perfection are diminishing quickly. In 1970, 40 percent of households had a mom, dad and at least one child living together. In 1990, only 26 percent of households in the United States fit that model. By the year 2012, the figure had slipped further to 19.6 percent.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 God's word predicted some rough waters in our time: "You must understand this" the apostle writes. "This has got to be part of your curriculum."

THAT IN THE LAST DAYS DISTRESSING
TIMES WILL COME. FOR PEOPLE WILL
BE LOVERS OF THEMSELVES, LOVERS OF
MONEY, BOASTERS, ARROGANT, ABUSIVE,
DISOBEDIENT TO THEIR PARENTS,
UNGRATEFUL, UNHOLY, INHUMAN,
IMPLACABLE, SLANDERERS, PROFLIGATES,
BRUTES, HATERS OF GOOD, TREACHEROUS,
RECKLESS, SWOLLEN WITH CONCEIT,
LOVERS OF PLEASURE RATHER THAN LOVERS
OF GOD, HOLDING TO THE OUTWARD
FORM OF GODLINESS, BUT DENYING ITS
POWER. AVOID THEM!

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5

What a setting in which to try to maintain a commitment! What a setting in which to raise children who love God and find joy in serving others! What a mess! And, by the way, what a challenge for all who seek to minister to families. If you want a real challenge in life, become a Family Ministry professional.

Every family is imperfect. Sooner or later in the midst of the statistical and moral storm of these last days, you and I will discover this simple truth: Every family is imperfect. The family to which you belong, the family to which I belong, is imperfect. Worse yet, you are likely to discover that at least part of the problem with your family is with you. Once you have discovered those sad facts, what is to be done? Can nothing be done? Is it all over? If

your family is not going to be the pure perfection you had imagined it would be, is there any point to it all?

Bearers of the Divine Name

Ephesians 3 is one of the most important passages in scripture for family ministry. Beginning with vs. 14 the apostle writes, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." Do you like that? There is a little word play going on in the original Greek language that isn't obvious in translation. The word for "father" in Greek is *pater*. You hear it in words like "patriarch," don't you? *Pater*. The term for "family" is *patria*. So Paul is saying, "For this reason I bow my knees before the *Pater* from whom every *patria* in heaven and on earth takes its name." He employs the phonetics of the language. Every family (*patria*) in heaven and on earth takes its name from the Father (*Pater*).

Your family belongs to God. Your family with all of its imperfections belongs to God. That's what the apostle is telling us. By the way, he is also telling us, I think, that all human beings are children of the Father. Our winsome task as Christians is not so much to twist arms to pressure people to come into the Father's family, but to announce to them the winsome message that *they are already members now*. Your family with all of its imperfections belongs to God; your family with all of its imperfections is not in the cruel grip of fate, but in the caring hands of God. That is the apostle's message: God loves imperfect families. They bear the divine name; they carry the mark of God's ownership.

God loves your imperfect family and every imperfect family. He longs that every family might acknowledge Him as the Father of all and become a family of faith. When the dishes are stacked high in the kitchen sink, when the kids are screaming at each other and there is no one to help pull them apart, when the mail box is full of bills, when the relationship is devoid of thrills, when the behavior of the teenagers causes you chills—when all of this is happening—it's easy to see the problems and the impossibilities. But your family, your imperfect family and every family to which you minister is God's family. And God doesn't just hear the screams; God hears the laughter. God doesn't just

listen in on the arguments; He hears the words of affirmation. God doesn't just watch the tears that fall; He sees the ones that are wiped away.

Accessing Divine Resources

Amid the problems and the impossibilities God invites you to consider all the possibilities and the opportunities. God longs to provide an inner strength that will give you resources to match the outward turmoil. God longs to provide you with a divine love that will help you grow. Listen as we continue to trace the thought begun in Ephesians 3:14:

FOR THIS REASON I BOW MY KNEES BEFORE THE FATHER, FROM WHOM EVERY FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH TAKES ITS NAME. I PRAY THAT, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY, HE MAY GRANT THAT YOU MAY BE STRENGTHENED IN YOUR INNER BEING WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, AND THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH, AS YOU ARE BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE.

Understanding growth and commitment. In his book *Caring and Commitment* (1988), Lewis Smedes tells the story of his friend Ralph. Two months after Ralph's divorce, he was overwhelmed with remorse for having failed to keep his commitment. He sought relief in counseling.

"YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL," THIS PARTICULAR THERAPIST TOLD HIM, "YOU'VE CONCLUDED AN IMPORTANT STAGE IN THE JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY. YOUR EX-WIFE HAS TRAVELED WITH YOU UP TO THIS POINT. SHE'S HELPED YOU ALONG AS FAR AS SHE COULD. TRUE, SHE DIDN'T BRING THE PERFECTION YOU SEEK, SO YOU MUST MOVE ON. BUT BE THANKFUL FOR HER GIFT AND TAKE IT WITH YOU AS YOU LEAVE." (p. 73).

You see, for the therapist Ralph chose, a person's commitment to marriage is an investment in his or her own growth. According to this view, when a person's investment has not yielded any growth for a while, it's time to get out of that relationship and to seek another with greater potential for personal profit. Smedes comments about this kind of "personal-investment" commitment and then

offers insight into a kind of commitment that truly leads to growth:

REAL GROWTH IS HEALTHIEST WHEN WE PUT COMMITMENT TO ANOTHER PERSON AHEAD OF GROWTH FOR OURSELF...

WE DON'T GROW INTO MATURE PERSONS BY CHASING FANTASIES. AND ONE FACT ABOUT MARRIAGE IN GENERAL IS THAT EVERY MARRIAGE IN PARTICULAR IS IMPERFECT. NO ONE MARRIES EXACTLY THE RIGHT PERSON; WE ALL MARRY SOMEONE WHO IS ONLY MORE OR LESS RIGHT FOR US. WE ARE ALL FLAWED PARTNERS. AND IF WE ACCEPT THIS REGRETTABLE BUT INVIGORATING FACT OF LIFE, WE MAY BE READY FOR REAL GROWTH.

WE DO NOT GIVE OURSELF A GOOD CHANCE FOR GROWING PERSONALLY IF WE KEEP HANKERING AFTER OUR FANTASY OF THE IDEAL WOMAN. OR MAN. WE GROW WHEN WE KEEP RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ONLY SPOUSE WE'VE GOT. WE GROW WHEN WE STOP DREAMING OF A PERFECT MARRIAGE AND ADJUST CARINGLY TO THE ONE WE HAVE. OUR BEST GROWTH COMES WHEN WE FORGET ABOUT OUR OWN GROWTH AND FOCUS ON CARING INSTEAD. (p. 73).

"Here is a nice twist," Smedes concludes, "instead of giving us a good reason for giving up a lifetime commitment, our need to grow is a prime reason for keeping it" (p. 74). Smedes' words are true not only in the husband-wife relationship, but also in the commitment each family member makes to another.

Returning to Ephesians 3, "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (vv. 16-19).

Growing in love. The age in which we live is not one that's kind to families. Love tends to get drained out of families. But, says the apostle, "I am praying that you might know something of the grand dimension of God's love; I'm praying that you might have a transfusion of love, of divine love that will be more than a match for the turmoil and the temptations of the times. God loves imperfect families like yours, like mine, like the ones to which we minister. So the apostle says, "I'm praying that you will be able to establish a family of love, a family of faith. I'm praying that you will be able to nurture families of faith."

NOW TO HIM WHO BY THE POWER AT
WORK WITHIN US IS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH
ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE THAN ALL THAT WE
CAN ASK OR IMAGINE, TO HIM BE GLORY IN
THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL
GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.
EPHESIANS 3:20,21

Jay and His Imperfect Family

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Consider the case of a man whom I will call Jay. I don't know when Jay first sensed that his family was less than perfect, but it must have been quite early. The family recording tapes had rather faithfully captured past events and, though perhaps no one had intended to deliberately do so, those tapes frequently played and replayed.

Little by little Jay as a growing child picks up sound bites—a sigh of disgust hurriedly stifled, or a smirk on an older sibling's face that is quickly erased when parents enter the room. Slowly, but surely, Jay begins to piece together the story of his family and his own part in it.

Clearly his older siblings regard him as inferior. At a rather tender age he discovers the reason: his mother is not their mother. Though it takes him a little longer to catch this part of the story, the date of his conception apparently precedes the date of his parents' wedding. (This happened years ago when the sense of morality about inappropriate relationships ran deeper. Yet, despite this sense of morality, people did not understand that, though there maybe an illegitimate relationship of a child's parents,

there is no such thing as an illegitimate child.) His older siblings looked down on his mother for seducing their father. They also looked down on her son.

Bearing family pain. Things did not go well in the family. Relationships were not what they should have been. All the family members now sense how imperfect the family is and they begin to provide a classic example of what is commonly called "scapegoating," making one person bear the burden of the family's dysfunction. Our family's having problems, they conclude. There must be reasons for the problems. They focus on Jay. Jay, he's the reason. If only Jay would shape up, or if only Jay were out of the picture, everything would be all right. In families like this, there is no attention to the family as a system, no treatment of the family as a unit, no attention to an unhealthy complex of relationships, only blame heaped again and again upon one who has been designated the scapegoat.

One incident in his early adolescence shaped, or perhaps misshaped, Jay's self concept. He and his family are on vacation at a favorite spot. When it comes time to go, the family packs up and leaves, but something is left behind. It's not just their favorite vacation spot. It's something more than the family cat or the old portable ice-chest cooler. They leave Jay! The experience serves as a kind of metaphor for this family's dysfunction and Jay's place in it: Things would probably be happier if he were not around. If he would just get lost, maybe this family would be, could be, a perfect family.

Grasping a sense of one's specialness. Things only worsen when the father dies. But Jay is quite an incredible person. You know the human spirit can be indomitable. Amidst it all—the tapes of a sordid past, the scapegoating, the conglomerate family, the sneers and smirks, the condescending gestures, Jay manages somehow to grab on to the idea that, no matter what the others believe, he is special. He has a place in life, he has a destiny, a mission, and eventually he founds his own enterprise that meets with amazing success.

His brothers won't let the old stories die though; they jeer at his achievements. They try to get him to over extend his resources to prove his worth to them,

but he refuses. In the midst of his accomplishments, they are able to turn his own mother against him. They manage to get her to support their plot to identify his genius as lunacy. This must have hurt him deeply.

Eventually, the family tapes play again. This time, the sound is loud—at concert levels on a grand scale. Jay becomes the scapegoat, not just for his family but for his nation. He dies an ugly death—on a Roman cross.

How Jay's Family Changed

Something happens, however, at the foot of that old rugged cross. Something happens to the family of Jesus. Have you noticed it? In the Book of Acts, in the introduction to this glorious story about a period in the life of the church following Jesus' ascension, Scripture says, "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). All these people were doing what? Devoting themselves to prayer. And the passage continues, "...together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers."

Moving on through the New Testament we come to a couple of little books that are often thought to have been written by two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude. Notice James' introduction in his letter: "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James, a servant of Jesus! And in James 2:1, "My brothers and sisters, do you . . . really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?" Wow! Then we come to that little letter of Jude. Verses 1, 2 read, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James." Don't you like that? "To those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance." Verse 4 refers to Jesus as "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Something happens at the foot of the old rugged cross that transforms some well-worn footage in the family tapes. Something happens that converts the scapegoating into worshiping. The family of Jesus, imperfect as it is, becomes a family of faith.

Conclusion

The message of the story—the gospel story—is this: the change in Jesus' family is not an isolated case. The same transformation can occur in your family and in mine and in each family to whom we minister.

FOR THIS REASON I BOW MY KNEES BEFORE THE FATHER, FROM WHOM EVERY FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH TAKES ITS NAME. I PRAY THAT, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY, HE MAY GRANT THAT YOU MAY BE STRENGTHENED IN YOUR INNER BEING WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, AND THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH, AS YOU ARE BEING ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE. I PRAY THAT YOU MAY HAVE THE POWER TO COMPREHEND, WITH ALL THE SAINTS, WHAT IS THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT AND DEPTH, AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE, SO THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. NOW TO HIM WHO BY THE POWER AT WORK WITHIN US IS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH ABUNDANTLY FAR MORE THAN ALL WE CAN ASK OR IMAGINE, TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.
EPHESIANS 3:14-21

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All Bible texts are from the New Revised Standard Version. (NRSV)

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What's Love Got To Do With It?

JEFFREY O. BROWN

Introduction

“Someone asked me the other day,” wrote Erma Bombeck (2003), America’s much-loved humorist, “if I had my life to live over would I change anything. My answer was no, but then I thought about it and changed my mind. If I had my life to live over again I would have talked less and listened more. Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy and complaining about the shadow over my feet, I’d have cherished every minute of it and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was to be my only chance in life to assist God in a miracle... I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded... I would have sat cross-legged on the lawn with my children and never worried about grass stains. I would have cried and laughed less while watching television ... and more while watching real life. When my child kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, ‘Later. Now, go get washed up for dinner.’ There would have been more I love yous ...more I’m sorrys ... more I’m listenings ...but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute of it ... look at it and really see it ...try it on ...live it ...exhaust it ...and never give that minute back.”

Oneshotatlife. What are you doing with your one shot at life? Paul understood that we have one chance to get it right. He recognized that

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life is not about marriage, life is about ministry. He understood that life is not about sex, life is about service. And so he wrote 1 Corinthians 7. This is written from the perspective of time running out, with an unmistakable urgency of the immanent *eschaton*, and under the impending certainty of the *parousia*, the second coming of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7, relationships are not just considered from the perspectives of love and companionship, but how they advance the kingdom of God. There seems to be a force propelling us all into a ship called marriage. And even when we see the name *Titanic* written on the side of the ship, we still can’t wait to jump on board. But there are some significant issues which this passage of Scripture addresses. In the first instance, it speaks to us about *underestimated feelings*.

1. Underestimated Feelings

NOW CONCERNING THE MATTERS ABOUT WHICH YOU WROTE: ‘IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A WOMAN.’ BUT BECAUSE OF THE TEMPTATION TO SEXUAL IMMORALITY, EACH MAN SHOULD HAVE HIS OWN WIFE AND EACH WOMAN HER OWN HUSBAND. 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-2

TO THE UNMARRIED AND THE WIDOWS I SAY THAT IT IS GOOD FOR THEM TO REMAIN SINGLE AS I AM. BUT IF THEY CANNOT EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL, THEY

SHOULD MARRY. FOR IT IS BETTER TO
MARRY THAN TO BURN WITH PASSION.
1 CORINTHIANS 7:8,9

Paul says decisions whether to have sex before marriage and when to have sex in marriage are not based upon how you feel; stop making decisions based upon your emotions and never underestimate the power of feelings. There are feelings that are misplaced and there are feelings that are misinterpreted. *Misplaced* feelings are giving God-ordained passions the wrong assignment. Sexual addiction, pornography and homosexual practice are misplaced feelings. Heterosexual singles struggle against premarital sex and heterosexual marrieds struggle against extramarital sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals must join in the same struggle to reserve sex until marriage with someone of the opposite sex and then remain in a committed relationship with that one person till death do us part.

So misplaced feelings are giving your God-ordained passions the wrong assignment. *Misinterpreted* feelings are when you let your body rule without checking with your head and it stems from a faulty definition of love. Somebody said love is a feeling you feel when you feel that you're going to get a feeling that you never felt before. That's basing love on feelings. But it's not about feelings, it's about faith. It's not about the heart, it's about the head. It's not about passion, it's about principle. It's not about emotion, it's about devotion. It's not about contentment, it's about commitment. It's not about happiness, it's about holiness. And it's not about Hollywood, it's about the Holy Word.

A young woman told her pastor she was in love. "How do you know?" asked the pastor. "Well, my heart is beating, my brow is perspiring, and my palms are sweaty." "That's not love," exclaimed the pastor. "You've got the flu." Never underestimate the power of feelings. Ellen White (1901) says in Testimonies Vol. 3, page 500: "There are sacrifices to be made for the interests of God's cause. The sacrifice of feeling is the most keen that is required of us; yet after all it is a small sacrifice."

Not only does the passage speak about underestimated feelings, but secondly, it speaks about undiminished faith.

2. Undiminished Faith

I WISH EVERYONE COULD GET ALONG
WITHOUT MARRYING JUST AS I DO.
BUT WE ARE NOT ALL THE SAME. GOD
GIVES SOME THE GIFT OF A HUSBAND
OR WIFE, AND OTHERS HE GIVES THE
GIFT OF BEING ABLE TO STAY HAPPILY
UNMARRIED.
1 CORINTHIANS 7:7 (TLB)

Undiminished faith says that despite what anybody tells you and despite what you may even tell yourself, you have not been left on the shelf by God, you have not been sidelined, you have not been marginalized, you have not been forgotten, you have not been overlooked. You have been given a gift. In fact authors Holly Virden and Michelle Hammond (1972) wrote a book called, *If Singleness is a Gift, What's the Return Policy?* With the eyes of faith, understand that every believer has a gift tailored to their status. Paul says marriage is a gift; and singleness is a gift. Accept your gift by faith because God doesn't give second-rate gifts.

EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT
GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, AND COMETH
DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS,
WITH WHOM IS NO VARIABleness,
NEITHER SHADOW OF TURNING.
JAMES 1:17

When does a person receive the gift of marriage? When and while you are married. In the Greek, gifts are called charismata, and charis means grace. How many marrieds know that you need the grace of God to help you make it through your marriage? When does a person receive the gift of singleness? When and while you are single. How many singles know that you need the grace of God to help you make it through your singleness? Gifts of marriage and singleness are given to help you survive and thrive in your status. Understand that these gifts are time-sensitive. That means

two things. Firstly, recognize that having the gift of marriage does not mean that you will always be married; therefore having the gift of singleness does not mean that you will always be single. What it does mean is that while you are married or while you are single, God has given you a gift. Secondly, recognize that, like other gifts such as teaching, leadership and administration, these gifts are developed over time. If you are married, Paul says develop that gift. Commit yourself to marital faithfulness, mutual submission, and mutual respect. If you are single, develop that gift. Commit yourself to sexual purity, wholesome relationships, Christian service, and intellectual development.

Gini Andrews (1972) wrote in her book *Your Half of the Apple*, “Some of the most interesting people I know are single. Often they have developed their minds and skills in a way married people have not had time to do” (p.155). If you are 30 now and God sees that at 35 you will get married, He is asking for you to give Him the best of those remaining five years. Don’t bury your gift. There are so many single people who can’t wait to be married and so many mixed-up married people who can’t wait to be single again. God gave you the best He had. Somebody said, Jesus is the best thing that ever happened to me. John said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Ellen White (1908) said in *Steps to Christ*, p. 20: “In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift.” The word from God’s heart to your heart this morning is, with all the faith you can muster, use the gift you’ve got.

Not only does our passage speak to us about underestimated feelings, and not only does it speak about undiminished faith, but finally it speaks about *undistracted* focus.

3. Undistracted Focus

BUT THIS I SAY, BRETHREN, THE TIME IS SHORT: IT REMAINETH, THAT BOTH THEY THAT HAVE WIVES BE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NONE.
1 CORINTHIANS 7:29

A little boy was found crying because he had lost the note his mother had given him for his schoolteacher explaining why he didn’t have a birth certificate. Wailing aloud, the little boy cried, “I’ve lost my excuse for being born.” What is your purpose for being born? The whole of 1 Corinthians 7 is written with a view to the impending doom the apostle Paul believed would soon come upon the world. He says, “The time left is short.” The Greek word translated ‘short’ or ‘shortened’ literally means to draw together or ‘contract.’ The word was used of furling sails, packing luggage, or reducing expenses. It means we only have time to take on board what is absolutely necessary. We can’t afford to carry excess baggage. “I’ve met a man, he pushes me around a little, well a lot really, and I’ve had a black eye or two, but he says he really loves me and I think I love him, Pastor, what do you think?” Two words: excess baggage. “Well, I’ve met a man I would like to marry, he isn’t a fellow Christian, but he’s better than the men in the church anyway, what do you think, Pastor?” Two words: excess baggage. “Well, I’ve met a man. He’s pretty qualified, but he doesn’t plan to work. He says I make enough for both of us. Should I marry him, Pastor?” Two words: excess baggage.

You see, in the final analysis, the focus of 1 Corinthians 7 is not that you should be married or that you should be single, but that you should be singleminded. Look at verse 35: “I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few things as possible to distract your attention from Him.” Jesus says in Luke 9:62, “Anyone who lets himself be distracted from the work I plan for him is not fit for the Kingdom of God.” Ellen White (1901) says in *Testimonies* Vol. 3, page 500, “No earthly ties, no earthly considerations, should weigh one moment in the scale against duty to the cause and work of God. Jesus severed His connection from everything to save a lost world, and He requires of us a full and entire consecration.”

Our focus is not on pleasing ourselves but on building up the kingdom of God in season and out of season. Some people like to choose their season. I’ve noticed that Jesus is decorated in December, and then jostled in January,

forgotten in February, misplaced in March, absent in April, missed out in May, jolted in June, jilted in July, abandoned in August, shelved in September, omitted in October, neglected in November, and then defrosted... dusted down... and dressed up in December. But God is not looking for seasonal Christians, He's looking for reasonable Christians. Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Your excuse for being born, your task, your assignment, your mission -- should you choose to accept it -- is to find the desperate, the desolate, and the destitute, and point them to Jesus.

Appeal

When I pastored in Toronto, one of my Apple Creek church members had a fine tradition. Married to a Christian from another denomination, she would invite her pastor and family to have lunch with her husband's pastor and family. That's how I met John Moore. In the course of our conversing, I asked him about hobbies or if he had written anything. I knew I had written three books, so I was ready for him. "Oh, I've done a little writing," he said meekly. "What book have you written?" "Oh, I don't write books," he responded. "What do you write, then?" "I write hymns." "Hymns!" I said. "What's the name of one of your hymns?" "Oh, I don't think you've heard of it." "Try me." He said, "Days are filled with sorrow and care, Hearts are lonely and drear; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near." I was conscious that my mouth was wide open. I knew the hymn very well. I was humbled. I would gladly have exchanged all my books for that one hymn by my new friend, John Moore.

When the single and single-again person comes to you and says they are marginalized, traumatized, stigmatized, tell them, "Days are

filled with sorrow and care, Hearts are lonely and drear; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near." When the married person comes to you and says the romance, the respect, and the love have gone, tell them, "Cast your care on Jesus today, Leave your worry and fear, Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near." When the parent comes to you and tells you that the child of her loins has turned their back on the church of their youth, tell them, "Troubled soul, the Savior can see, Ev'ry heartache and tear, Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near. Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Calvary, Calvary; Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near."

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Christian Marriage and the Cross

ELAINE AND WILLIE OLIVER

The Text

THEN HE SAID TO THEM ALL,
“IF ANYONE DESIRES TO COME AFTER
ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND
TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY, AND
FOLLOW ME. FOR WHOEVER DESIRES
TO SAVE HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT, BUT
WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY
SAKE WILL SAVE IT.
LUKE 9:23-24

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Introduction

We enjoy food! People frequently ask us what we do about eating when our frequent ministry travel takes us to different parts of the world. Our answer is often the same, we like all kinds of foods.

Over the years we have developed an appreciation for foods from all over the world, and welcome the opportunity to taste diverse cuisines on each of our travel itineraries. Indian, Latin American, Italian, Caribbean, Mexican, Thai, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, East African, West African, Southern African, Russian, Middle Eastern, American and Eastern European dishes. We enjoy them all.

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The biggest challenge with food, however, is when we get home from a trip. What should we eat and where? Shall we go to an Indian, Cuban or Thai restaurant or should we eat at home? Deciding whose palate to satisfy has everything to do with the quality of our marriage at that time.

Our sermon today is titled Christian Marriage and the Cross. Let us pray.

The life of self denial

Luke 9:23-24, records the following poignant words of Jesus: “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.’”

The context of Luke 9 finds Jesus with His disciples dispensing power over demons and diseases, sending them to preach the good news of the gospel, listening to their exciting mission experiences, then performing a miraculous feeding of five thousand on the outskirts of the city of Bethsaida.

After an interlude for prayer, Jesus resumes the conversation with His disciples, asking for a report on what people were saying about Him, apparently triggered by Herod the Tetrarch’s inquiry earlier in the chapter. Some people proposed that Jesus was John the Baptist who

had risen from the dead, while others suggested he could be Elijah. Jesus, however, was really interested to know who the disciples thought He was and what they were saying about Him. In response to the question posed by Jesus, Peter answers: “The Christ of God.”

The conversation between disciples and Master transitions into a reality check about the reasons Jesus came to earth. More importantly, this dialog was about making clear that the power the disciples had received from Jesus and witnessed in amazing splendor at the feeding of the large multitude, was not for personal gain or prestige; it served to convey to lost humanity that God is on their side and is infinitely concerned about their daily cares. Beyond this, the purpose of Jesus’ coming was ultimately to suffer and die to make this preferred life possible, and as disciples of His, their lot would be the same.

Challenges in marriage

Marriage looms prominent in Scripture. In the book of Genesis, marriage appears as the first institution established by God at creation between one man and one woman; and in the book of Revelation marriage is used as a metaphor to describe the relationship between God and His people. The second chapter of the gospel of John finds Jesus performing His first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The fact that marriage appears at the end of the creation week, suggests God’s ideal for the human race. And now a marriage ceremony prominently placed at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry underscores heaven’s regard for this institution.

One of the principal challenges in marriage is that God meant for this relationship to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman. In Genesis 2:24 the Bible states: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In a discussion with the Pharisees about the possibility of divorce, Jesus quotes Genesis 2 when He states in Matthew 19:4-6:

“AND HE ANSWERED AND SAID TO THEM, ‘HAVE YOU NOT READ THAT HE WHO MADE THEM AT THE BEGINNING MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, AND SAID, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH? SO THEN, THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO BUT ONE FLESH. THEREFORE WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN SEPARATE.’”

What is it that makes marriage challenging? Why the preoccupation with divorce? So many relationships that begin with great excitement and euphoria, so much so that the parties feel emotional pain when they are apart from each other, seem to fizzle within a few weeks, months or years after the wedding day.

Not long ago we received a question from a man for one of the magazine columns we write. The question included in our book *Real Family Talk*¹, is the following:

“I NEVER THOUGHT THIS WOULD HAPPEN TO ME, BUT I FIND MYSELF VERY UNHAPPY IN MY MARRIAGE. MY WIFE AND I JUST DON’T COMMUNICATE WELL, AND WHEN WE DO, WE YELL AT EACH OTHER AND THERE IS A LOT OF TENSION BETWEEN US. WE DON’T SEEM TO BE COMPATIBLE AND HAVE VERY FEW INTERESTS IN COMMON. HOW CAN SUCH A DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP SURVIVE? THIS CANNOT POSSIBLY BE HEALTHY FOR OUR CHILDREN. I DON’T BELIEVE GOD EXPECTS ME TO STAY IN SUCH AN UNHAPPY RELATIONSHIP. WHAT DO YOU THINK?”

Interesting question, isn’t it? And one that many married people are asking out loud and sometimes in silence. What happened, we ask, to the excitement and closeness that was so overt before marriage, that was often a little embarrassing to family and friends when the two people in love were almost literally suffocating each other at the dinner table.

What happened is that when people are dating (courting in many parts of the world) opposites attract. On the other hand, in marriage opposites tend to repel. This is what makes marriage so challenging. As sinners, we are inherently selfish. We are in love with our own opinions and want everything to go our way. The Bible states in Isaiah 53:6a: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way...”

And it takes only a few weeks or months after the honeymoon infatuation has finally dissipated, to make the spouses impatient and nasty with each other, everyone turning to his own way.

Choices in marriage

God created marriage for our happiness and joy. For marriage and other relationships to be sustainable, we must follow the principles given by God. In Galatians 5:22-23 the Bible declares: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Think about it. If these principles (fruit) are operative in our relationships—especially marriage—when there are differences of opinion, tastes, likes and dislikes; practicing bearing the fruit mentioned by Paul, will allow us to handle variances with kindness, gentleness and goodness, rather than anger, roughness and indifference.

No marriage in the Bible is a model marriage. Except for Adam and Eve before the fall, every subsequent human marriage has been imperfect. To have a Christian marriage we must choose to be in a Christian marriage, which is only functional when we employ spiritual values given to us by God in the Bible. Choosing a Christian marriage is like choosing to be a Christian. It is a decision we must make every day, like eating and breathing, to remain healthy and strong. For marriage to remain vibrant and viable, the people in the marriage must regularly nurture their marriage, or soon it will become feeble and die.

Making good choices in marriage is choosing to practice the counsel of Ephesians 5:15-17 that says: “See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Also in Proverbs 1:5 it says: “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.”

On the realities of marriage and the choices spouses must make to keep their union strong, Ellen G White² offers the following:

“AFFECTION MAY BE AS CLEAR AS CRYSTAL AND BEAUTEOUS IN ITS PURITY, YET IT MAY BE SHALLOW BECAUSE IT HAS NOT BEEN TESTED AND TRIED. MAKE CHRIST FIRST AND LAST AND BEST IN EVERYTHING. CONSTANTLY BEHOLD HIM, AND YOUR LOVE FOR HIM WILL DAILY BECOME DEEPER AND STRONGER AS IT IS SUBMITTED TO THE TEST OF TRIAL. AND AS YOUR LOVE FOR HIM INCREASES, YOUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER WILL GROW DEEPER AND STRONGER.”

Commitment in marriage

Commitment is at the foundation of every healthy and deeply fulfilling marriage. It is a decision that every married person has to make if he or she is to remain married. Christian marriage in this respect, is not unlike all other marriages that are in it for the long haul. Every person has to decide on their level of commitment, which will be commensurate with their level of marital satisfaction.

Like other relationships in life, marriage also experiences fluctuations. We often say there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. So, perfection is not synonymous to commitment. However, commitment is *sine qua non* (indispensable) for every viable marital relationship, just like oxygen is needed to keep living.

Noted marriage and family researcher, Scott M Stanley³ suggests there are two types of commitments: dedication and constraint.

Dedication is like an internalized commitment to a project or a person. It expresses a person's greatest desire and interest in making sure that something happens. On the other hand, constraint is more like an obligation to do something that left undone would be catastrophic. While dedication is like an influence compelling you to go forward, constraint is like a power pushing you from behind.

Dedication is operative in the Apostle Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, declaring:

“LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. IT DOES NOT DISHONOR OTHERS...IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED, IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. IT ALWAYS PROTECTS, ALWAYS TRUSTS, ALWAYS HOPES, ALWAYS PERSEVERES. LOVE NEVER FAILS...” (NIV)

Every marriage relationship needs both dedication and constraint commitment; the higher the level of dedication in the relationship, the higher the level of satisfaction will be as well. In those moments when dedication is low, constraint commitment will enable couples to make it through the dark valleys that often affect marriage relationships. However, each person in the marriage needs to be committed to regaining dedication commitment as quickly as possible, so that marriage can be, as Ellen White suggests, “a little heaven upon earth...”⁴

Conclusion

We both enjoy food! And while we are intentional about being temperate not only about what we eat, but how much we eat, it is also true that we relish certain foods more than others and eat them with greater frequency.

Deciding where we will eat—what kind of food that is—after being on the road

for several days and finally getting home, determines to a great extent the quality of our marriage at that particular time. This is the test, to a great extent, how well we are practicing what we preach and how close to Jesus we have remained.

The truth is, Christian marriage can only be Christian when like true disciples we take up our cross and follow Jesus in self-denial, self-sacrifice, and being like Him in every way. Being baptized church members is not enough to keep our marriage healthy and strong.

Understanding that to be a disciple means you have signed up to serve rather than to be served; and you are looking for what you can give rather than what you can get, is the secret to having a marriage filled with dedication commitment, that represents Jesus Christ without shame.

A crisis in marriage means there is a spiritual crisis, regardless of how many Bible studies you are involved in or how many people you are leading to baptism. However, when you see your marriage in the light of the cross, you willingly take it up in Christ-like fashion, then you will experience the joy that comes from trusting Jesus to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. This is the kind of marriage that becomes salvific to your spouse, to your children, and to everyone who is within your circle of influence.

As you purpose in your heart to take up your cross today, it is our prayer that your marriage will experience the transformational power that brings joy, peace and love. In the words of John Hugh McNaughton's (1829-1891) song,

LOVE AT HOME

IN THE COTTAGE THERE IS JOY,
WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;
HATE AND ENVY NE'ER ANNOY,
WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;
ROSES BLOOM BENEATH OUR FEET,
ALL THE EARTH'S A GARDEN SWEET,
MAKING LIFE A BLISS COMPLETE,
WHEN THERE IS LOVE AT HOME.

LOVE BECOMES A WAY OF LIFE,
WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;

SWEET, INSISTENT END TO STRIFE,
 WHEN THERE IS LOVE AT HOME;
 GLAD SUBMISSION EACH ONE'S GIFT,
 WILLING PLEDGE TO LOVE AND LIFT,
 HEALING BALM FOR EVERY RIFT,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME.

ANGER COOLS AND PRESSURES CEASE,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;
 CHILDREN LEARN TO LIVE IN PEACE,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;
 COURAGE TO REACH OUT IN GRACE,
 MEET A STRANGER FACE TO FACE,
 FIND A RECONCILING PLACE,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME.

THERE'S NO QUESTION YOU CAN'T ASK
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME;
 THERE IS STRENGTH FOR ANY TASK,
 WHEN THERE IS LOVE AT HOME;
 SHARING JOY IN WORK OR PLAY,
 CONFIDENCE TO FACE THE DAY,

KNOWING LOVE WILL FIND A WAY,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME.

REFRAIN:

LOVE AT HOME, LOVE AT HOME;
 KNOWING LOVE WILL FIND A WAY,
 WHEN THERE'S LOVE AT HOME.

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

Notes

- ¹ Oliver, W & E. (2015). *Real family talk: Answers to questions about love, marriage and sex*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, p. 32.
- ² White, E. G. (1952). *The Adventist home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 105.
- ³ Stanley, S. M. (2005). *The power of commitment: A guide to active, lifelong love*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 23.
- ⁴ White, E. G. (1952). *The Adventist home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 15.

God's Plan for Parents and Children

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

HEAR, MY SON, AND RECEIVE MY SAYINGS,
AND THE YEARS OF YOUR LIFE WILL
BE MANY.
PROVERBS 4:10

Introduction

The Bible is like a road map. God gave us this map so we would have good directions and arrive safely at the destination He has prepared for us. That destination, on this earth, is a good, healthy family.

Jesus told us: “I have come that they (you) may have life, and that they (you) may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10) (*emphasis ours*).

God is pleased to see that our family relationships are strong and healthy.

Yet, divorce still happens—even in the church.

Abuse still takes place—even in Adventist congregations.

Parents still face challenges with their children. There are parents who resort to abortion. And

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there are children who suffer from abuse. In some countries children file lawsuits against their parents, and we even read stories of children behaving aggressively toward their parents.

The apostle Paul refers to the condition of the world in the last days. He begins to set the time frame by saying, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

As we read this list, we might identify negative behaviors that define our relational world. “Proud, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unloving, unforgiving, headstrong.”

Isn't this what we see happening in many homes today?

And it is not just in the homes of people who don't know God. It happens in the homes of people who attend church on a regular basis. After Paul writes this list, describing people in the last days, he adds the following words: “Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:5).

He said that religious people, church people, would have these experiences in their midst.

That's why it's important not to be just religious, but spiritual.

A religious person is one who fulfills religious duties; but does so only outwardly. A spiritual person is one who believes from the heart and whose external expression of religion proceeds from inner convictions. And this becomes evident in how we relate to one another as parents and children.

To help us, as spiritual individuals, the Bible provides a number of *Relational Directives*¹. They are commands intended to help us create a basic framework, a basic pattern for living in relationship with others.

We find these *Relational Directives* scattered throughout the Bible and they can be grouped into several categories. Some are very generic and apply broadly to all relationships. Others are more specifically directed toward people in particular relationships, such as married couples, parents, children, neighbors, or friends.

14

A good example of a generic relational directive is the golden rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you do also to them for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12).

And there are several directives that apply to how parents and children relate to one another.

Let us consider four of those directives.

1. Children, honor your parents.

One of the best-known directives to children comes from the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. It is found in the second half of the Decalogue, which addresses relationships. The first commandment in this second half says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12).

The apostle Paul makes the interesting comment that this is "the first commandment with a promise." (Ephesians 6:2)

Honor your father and your mother! What does it mean to honor your father and your mother? How do we do that? We honor our father and mother by being respectful in word and action and having an inward attitude of esteem for their position.

The Greek word for honor means "to revere, prize, and value."

[HERE YOU MAY TELL A STORY TO ILLUSTRATE THIS PRINCIPLE]

Again, how do we honor our father and our mother? Solomon, the wisest man, urged children to respect their parents. (Proverbs 1:8; 13:1; 30:17).

Although we may no longer be directly under our parents' authority, we can't outgrow God's command to honor them. Even Jesus, God the Son, submitted Himself to both His earthly parents (Luke 2:51) and His heavenly Father. (Matthew 26:39). We follow Christ's example when we treat our parents the way we would reverentially approach our heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:9; Malachi 1:6).

Honor them with both actions and attitudes (Mark 7:6). Honor their unspoken as well as spoken wishes. "A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke." (Proverbs 13:1).

Ellen G. White comments about this commandment, "It is binding upon childhood and youth, upon the middle-aged and the aged. There is no period in life when children are excused from honoring their parents. This solemn obligation is binding upon every son and daughter and is one of the conditions to their prolonging their lives upon the land which the Lord will give the faithful." (White, 1952, p. 292).

As pastor Mark Driscoll shared in a sermon, "To honor means to respect, to defer, to submit. It means to have love, appreciation, and affection towards them. Honor is something that begins internally, and then it manifests itself externally. As you have honor in your heart, it comes out in your words." (Kumar, 2013).²

2. Children, obey your parents.

The second directive applies to how children should relate to their parents:

“CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN THE LORD, FOR THIS IS RIGHT”
EPHESIANS 6:1

[HERE YOU CAN USE A STORY OF OBEDIENCE TO PARENTS]

Parents mean well for their children. They are not being arbitrary when they ask, or tell, their children to do something or when they forbid them from doing something.

Ellen White makes a very important declaration when she writes:

“ONE GREAT REASON WHY THERE IS SO MUCH EVIL IN THE WORLD TODAY IS THAT PARENTS OCCUPY THEIR MINDS WITH OTHER THINGS THAN THAT WHICH IS ALL—IMPORTANT—HOW TO ADAPT THEMSELVES TO THE WORK OF PATIENTLY AND KINDLY TEACHING THEIR CHILDREN THE WAY OF THE LORD. IF THE CURTAIN COULD BE DRAWN ASIDE, WE SHOULD SEE THAT MANY, MANY CHILDREN WHO HAVE GONE ASTRAY HAVE BEEN LOST TO GOOD INFLUENCES THROUGH THIS NEGLECT. PARENTS, CAN YOU AFFORD TO HAVE IT SO IN YOUR EXPERIENCE? YOU SHOULD HAVE NO WORK SO IMPORTANT THAT IT WILL PREVENT YOU FROM GIVING TO YOUR CHILDREN ALL THE TIME THAT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO OBEY AND TRUST THE LORD FULLY.”
WHITE, 1952

The nature and results of obedience to parents is so important that the Bible lists them. Among them we find:

CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN ALL THINGS, FOR THIS PLEASES THE LORD.
COLOSSIANS 3:20 (ESV)

CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN THE LORD, FOR THIS IS RIGHT.
EPHESIANS 6:1 (ESV)

HEAR, MY SON, YOUR FATHER’S INSTRUCTION, AND FORSAKE NOT YOUR MOTHER’S TEACHING.
PROVERBS 1:8 (ESV)

The first two directives give us clear guidelines on how children should relate their parents. Honor them, and obey them, are the overarching principles in these two directives.

3. Parents, train your children.

But the Bible does not provide directives only in one direction — how children should relate toward their parents. The Bible also has directives to parents so they know how to relate to their children.

The third directive we will consider today is found in the Old Testament.

“TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO, EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.”
PROVERBS 22:6

This text has brought confusion and misunderstanding to parents at times.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary shares interesting insights:

MANY PARENTS HAVE TAKEN THIS VERSE AS SANCTION FOR FORCING A CHILD TO FOLLOW THE PROFESSION OR TRADE THEY THINK HE OUGHT TO. THUS THEY HAVE BROUGHT SORROW AND DISAPPOINTMENT UPON THEMSELVES, FOR THE CHILD, ON GROWING UP, OFTEN GOES AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WAY. THE VERSE RATHER COUNSELS PARENTS TO LEARN THE WAY IN WHICH THEIR PARTICULAR CHILD CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE OF MOST SERVICE TO HIMSELF AND OTHERS, AND IN WHICH HE WILL FIND MOST HAPPINESS. THE SPECIFIC STATION IN LIFE APPOINTED FOR A MAN IS DETERMINED BY HIS CAPABILITIES. TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL GOD HAS ASSIGNED A PLACE IN HIS GREAT PLAN. GOD HAS EQUIPPED MAN WITH THE CAPABILITIES NEEDED TO FILL THIS SPECIAL PLACE. THEREFORE THE CHOICE OF A LIFEWORSHIP SHOULD BE IN LINE WITH THE NATURAL BENT. THE EFFORTS OF

THE PARENTS AND THE CHILD SHOULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD DISCOVERING THE KIND OF WORK HEAVEN HAS ALREADY DETERMINED. INSPIRATION DECLARES THAT THIS VERSE ENJOINS PARENTS TO “DIRECT, EDUCATE, DEVELOP,” BUT THAT TO DO THIS “THEY MUST THEMSELVES UNDERSTAND THE ‘WAY’ THE CHILD SHOULD GO.”

NICHOL, 1977

Sometimes parents want their children to follow in their footsteps. A teacher wants his son to be a teacher, a lawyer wants her daughter to be a lawyer, a physician wants her son to be a physician, and a carpenter wants his son to be a carpenter. Parents can push their children to be what they had hoped to be but were not able to do.

But in the process, they can be quenching their own children’s dreams and wishes for their future. Because children have different personalities and talents, their interests may not be the same as their parents; they may end up frustrated because they can’t pursue their own interests.

16 As parents we need to understand that our first and most important responsibility is to lead them to God. This must be our focus rather than pushing our children on a specific career path.

The following passage of scripture is the Shema which is recited morning and evening by Jews to the present.

“HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. AND THESE WORDS, WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY, SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU RISE UP.”

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7

The apostle Paul adds: “Fathers... bring them (children) up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4).

Train your child, through your example. Like a train has an engine and the cars follow it, your children will follow you, wherever you lead them, so lead them with a good example.

Train them with patience, tenderness, and lots of love.

Train them with the thought continually before your eyes that their soul is the first thing to be considered.

Train them to have a good knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

Train them to make of prayer a daily habit.

Train them to attend church services regularly and to be engaged in the life and ministry of the church. Train them to support the church with their time, their talents, and with their treasure.

Train them to learn and rely on faith as the key that unlocks heaven’s gates.

Train them to be obedient, to God and to their parents.

Train them to speak truthfully.

Train them to know God, to trust God, to love God, to serve God, to share God, to live for God.

4. Parents, don’t exasperate your children

In the New Testament we will find the last of the directives we will consider today.

“FATHERS, DO NOT EXASPERATE YOUR CHILDREN, SO THAT THEY WILL NOT LOSE HEART.”

COLOSSIANS 3:21

Paul wrote those words to the church in Colossae, but he also wrote similar words to the church in Ephesus: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4).

In that masterful compilation of Ellen White’s writings about children—Child Guidance—she

makes some very important points about this biblical directive:

Referring to the words used by Paul to the Ephesians, Ellen White gives an example of how a parent provokes her child:

“OFTEN WE DO MORE TO PROVOKE THAN TO WIN. I HAVE SEEN A MOTHER SNATCH FROM THE HAND OF HER CHILD SOMETHING THAT WAS GIVING IT SPECIAL PLEASURE. THE CHILD DID NOT KNOW THE REASON FOR THIS, AND NATURALLY FELT ABUSED. THEN FOLLOWED A QUARREL BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD, AND A SHARP CHASTISEMENT ENDED THE SCENE AS FAR AS OUTWARD APPEARANCE WAS CONCERNED; BUT THAT BATTLE LEFT AN IMPRESSION ON THE TENDER MIND THAT WOULD NOT BE EASILY EFFACED. THIS MOTHER ACTED UNWISELY. SHE DID NOT REASON FROM CAUSE TO EFFECT. HER HARSH, INJUDICIOUS ACTION STIRRED THE WORST PASSIONS IN THE HEART OF HER CHILD, AND ON EVERY SIMILAR OCCASION THESE PASSIONS WOULD BE AROUSED AND STRENGTHENED.”

WHITE, 1954

Sometimes parents devote too much time finding fault in their children for everything they do. Listen to these words:

“YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO BRING A GLOOMY CLOUD OVER THE HAPPINESS OF YOUR CHILDREN BY FAULTFINDING OR SEVERE CENSURE FOR TRIFLING MISTAKES. ACTUAL WRONG SHOULD BE MADE TO APPEAR JUST AS SINFUL AS IT IS, AND A FIRM, DECIDED COURSE SHOULD BE PURSUED TO PREVENT ITS RECURRENCE; YET CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE LEFT IN A HOPELESS STATE OF MIND, BUT WITH A DEGREE OF COURAGE THAT THEY CAN IMPROVE AND GAIN YOUR CONFIDENCE AND APPROVAL. CHILDREN MAY WISH TO DO RIGHT, THEY MAY PURPOSE IN THEIR HEARTS TO BE OBEDIENT; BUT THEY NEED HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT.”

WHITE, 1954, P. 279

I love those words at the end: “Children may wish to do right, they may purpose in their hearts to be obedient; but they need help and encouragement.”

We encourage you to spend time reading the 48th chapter of that book where Ellen White tells us as parents not to be too harsh in the way we discipline our children, not to continually censure our children, not to be arbitrary with our course of action, and much more.

Conclusion

There are many more directives in the Bible to teach us how we should relate to one another as parents and children.

Today we only looked at four.

To children, the Bible says: “Honor your father and your mother,” and “obey your parents.”

To parents, the Bible says: “Train your children,” and “Don’t exasperate them.”

God desires that we may have good, healthy, positive relationships with our children. He wants us to reflect the relationship we have with Him.

[YOU CAN USE A STORY OF YOUR OWN OR THE FOLLOWING ONE TO CONCLUDE THIS SERMON]

17

A story is told of a man who came home from work late, tired and irritated, to find his 5-year old son waiting for him at the door. Their conversation went like this:

SON: “Daddy, may I ask you a question?”

DAD: “Yeah sure, what is it?” replied the man.

SON: “Daddy, how much do you make an hour?”

DAD: “That’s none of your business. Why do you ask such a thing?” the man said angrily.

SON: “I just want to know. Please tell me, how much do you make an hour?”

DAD: “If you must know, I make 30 dollars an hour.”

SON: “Oh,” the little boy replied, with his head down.

SON: “Daddy, may I please borrow a dollar?”

The father was furious and with anger in his voice he told his boy, “If the only reason you asked that is so you can borrow some money to buy a silly toy or some other nonsense, then you march yourself straight to your room right this moment.”

The little boy quietly went to his room and shut the door.

After the man had calmed down he started to think. Maybe there was something his little boy really needed to buy with that dollar. . . and he really didn't ask for money very often.

The man went to the door of his little boy's room and opened the door.

"Are you asleep, son?" He asked.

"No daddy, I'm awake," replied the boy. "I've been thinking, maybe I was too hard on you earlier" said the man. Here's the dollar you asked for."

The little boy sat straight up, smiling.

"Oh, thank you daddy!" He yelled.

Then, reaching under his pillow he pulled out some crumpled up bills.

When the father saw that the boy already had money he started to get angry again.

The little boy slowly counted out his money, and then looked up at his father.

"Why do you want more money if you already have some?" the father grumbled."

"Because I didn't have enough, but now I do," the little boy replied.

"Daddy, I have 30 dollars now. . . Can I buy an hour of your time? Please come home early tomorrow. I would like to have dinner with you."

The father was crushed.

He put his arms around his little son, and he begged for his forgiveness.³

Parents, love your children, train your children, and don't irritate your children.

Children of any and all ages, love your parents, honor your parents, and obey your parents.

And may your relationship be always one of mutual respect, mutual admiration, and mutual learning.

Amen.

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² Kumar, A. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/mark-driscoll-on-why-and-how-to-honor-father-mother-106600/> (accessed 2/10/15).

⁴ Jain, R. (2012). Retrieved from ishikajain.com/2012/06/15/a-beautiful-inspirational-story-on-relationships-message-for-parents/

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Building Marriage And Family

TRAFFORD FISCHER

The Text

“AND I LOOKED AND AROSE AND SAID TO THE NOBLES AND TO THE OFFICIALS AND TO THE REST OF THE PEOPLE, “DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEM. REMEMBER THE LORD, WHO IS GREAT AND AWESOME, AND FIGHT FOR YOUR BROTHERS, YOUR SONS, YOUR DAUGHTERS, YOUR WIVES, AND YOUR HOMES.”

NEHEMIAH 4:14

The Old Testament records several occasions when the kings of Babylon and Persia took residents of Jerusalem captives. We don't know the names of all those who were forced from their homes but we know that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were included among the captives taken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; Nehemiah was taken to Susa by the king of Persia.

We also know that these men were appointed as leaders in their new community even though they were slaves and captives. It is not known how or why, but Nehemiah was appointed a cup-bearer to the king. The king must have considered him a reliable and trustworthy captive.

One day, Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, who still lived in Jerusalem, arrived in Susa with

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some other men to visit Nehemiah. Nehemiah asked them how things were back home in Jerusalem, and the report wasn't positive at all. They replied, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burnt with fire.” (Nehemiah 1:3).

Nehemiah loved Jerusalem and was distressed at this news. He sat down to mourn and weep for his city and its people; he fasted and prayed for several days. Nehemiah had never been sad in the presence of the king. When he returned to the king's service, the king said to him: “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart” (Nehemiah 2:2).

What an insightful king! What an incredible gift—to notice when someone is sad and encourage him or her to share his or her sorrow. We often get so busy we hardly notice when someone is hurting. We rush past and miss their pain. We say hello and don't take the time to see the hurt in their eyes, the furrowed brow of worry or the tears of pain. We need to ask God to help us be as the king of Persia—to be quick to say to those we see hurting—‘You are sad, and it would seem this is not because you are sick—this must be sadness of the heart,’ and offer them appropriate comfort and support.

With fear and trepidation, Nehemiah tells the king how things are back in Jerusalem, and the king asks him what he would like to do. Nehemiah replies that he would like to return and rebuild Jerusalem. It is surprising that the king told him to go back and do exactly that! He also provided Nehemiah letters to the various governors in the territories to guarantee his safety while providing army officers to ensure his security. (Nehemiah 2:6-10).

So Nehemiah headed back to Jerusalem and after three days took a few men with him to inspect the city. His brother's report was accurate. The walls were crumbling and in some places had completely fallen. The gates were burnt and useless. But Nehemiah doesn't get disheartened or discouraged. He rolls up his sleeves and gets to work! He called the city leaders and said, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17). He also told them about the gracious hand of God that was upon him in Susa and what the king had said to him. The people replied, "Let us start rebuilding" (Nehemiah 2:18). Nehemiah gains their support and engages all the families into rebuilding the walls. Section by section they remove the rubble and replace the stones.

In Nehemiah chapter 3, we find a list of many of those who joined in repairing the gates and walls. Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work to rebuild the Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:1); the sons of Hassenah rebuilt the Fish Gate (Nehemiah 3:3); Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section, and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, joined in (Nehemiah 3:8). In verse 12 it mentions that Shallum, son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters. This was a real family-project! And they worked with focus and energy. Nehemiah reports that "the people worked with all their hearts." (Nehemiah 4:6).

There's something exciting about working together as families on a common project and especially when we do it "with all our hearts." Families that join hand-in-hand in service to

the community and minister with love and grace make a profound difference to others and develop a strong sense of family 'togetherness.' Albert Schweitzer said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve."¹ And John Wesley adds this wonderful directive: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."²

Our Churches will thrive when all the families work together in their church "with all their hearts." Some time ago a church member told me that he wasn't happy with his church. He said the church should be doing more for the needy in the community! I said to him, "Which family, or families in your church, should be doing more for the community?" He looked at me with surprise, so I asked him again, "which particular family or families should be doing more?" He thought for a while, and then smiled and said, "I guess I should be doing more." The church is a "family of families."

Our church today is made up of a whole gathering of families. The church isn't some nebulous 'thing' that exists to be complained about or ridiculed or regarded as a supplier of all good things! It's a big family of families! Here is a key reason we need to put time and energy into our relationships and make a real commitment to strengthen and enrich our marriages and families. If we have strong marriages and healthy families, we will have a strong and healthy church. This is something we need to do "with all our hearts."

Well, the wall building in Jerusalem was successful and exciting until Sanballat and Tobiah and a few locals in the community heard about it. These people didn't like what they saw! They didn't want this city getting back into shape. They felt much safer when the city was in shambles. So they created trouble. They harassed the builders and called out discouraging and disparaging comments. Tobiah the Ammonite called out, "If even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" (Nehemiah 4:3). The wall-builders become discouraged and fearful. They

are concerned for their personal safety (Nehemiah 4:10-12). Nehemiah takes this threat to heart and sets out to deal with it!

Now notice chapter 4, verse 14: “After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

Remember The Lord

Nehemiah provides the best answer to his people’s concerns: “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.” Friends, we serve an awesome God. We do not worship a weak or helpless God. We are not disciples of some puff of wind or some pretend god, nor do we serve an unknown god. Our God is great and awesome and we are the apple of His eye; the lost sheep rescued by His own hands; his prodigal sons and daughters who, when He “sees us from afar off,” runs to greet us and welcomes us home (Luke 15:20). He is not a distant, harsh judge; not a callous ruler who reluctantly hands out rewards for the few. Our God is great and awesome and personally invested in us as His people.

Fight For Your Relationships

Now notice what Nehemiah says to the people. After pointing them to their awesome God, he then says, “Fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” (Nehemiah 4:14).

Nehemiah said to the people, ‘Our God is great and awesome. So sit back and do nothing. Just go about life as you always do and leave it to Him!’ NO, this is not what we read in this verse! He said, “Fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

On a number of occasions in Scripture God invited His people to stand still and see His power in action. He said to Moses, “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:14). But on so many other occasions God called for action. When Jesus healed people He called them to action: “stretch out your

hand,” “take up your bed,” “go and wash in the pool.”

Nehemiah was saying to the people, “These are serious times. This is a crisis! We need to stand up for our families and do everything we can to protect them and keep them whole! We cannot afford just to float along and hope for the best. It’s time to act!’

As a child I can recall my mother saying many times, “Don’t just stand there! Do something!” Nehemiah called his families to action. ‘Don’t just stand there and worry or fret: recognise that your God is an awesome God, and step into action.’

When I was a teenager, I joined my older brother and four other friends on a three-day canoe trip down a winding and log-filled river! We had to be alert to the potential danger of obstructions and possible damage to our canoes and our lives. One of my friends sat in the front of our four-man canoe and his task was to alert us of any upcoming dangers so we could take the necessary action to keep safe on the river. This meant that we had to row together to get ourselves out of any danger. Unfortunately my friend didn’t always get it right! If he saw a log in the river a long way off he would call out “log” and row frantically in any direction. But if all of a sudden a log appeared just in front and it was now very important that we all row, he would ‘freeze’! He would become so frightened that he just sat there still.

Nehemiah couldn’t afford to have his people frozen in fear when it was time to act. Nor could he afford to have his people unaware of the need to work together with energy and commitment. This wasn’t the time to just stand there—this was the time to ‘do something.’ It’s time to row! There are dangers in the river and they are straight ahead.

Build And Protect

Now notice chapter 4, verses 16 and 17: “From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour. The officers

posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.”

They ‘built’ with one hand, and ‘protected’ with the other! Nehemiah’s plan is simple but bold—‘build’ and ‘protect.’ He doesn’t concentrate solely on building while leaving his people vulnerable, nor does he spend his energy and resources protecting but living in a heap of rubble. He builds, and protects.

Crumbling Relationships

In our communities there are many marriages and families that are crumbling walls and burnt gates. Sadly, within our church we may have couples that feel their marriage is crumbling and are struggling to hold their marriage together. Families may feel like gates that are falling off their hinges. As God’s families—families who live and serve a great and awesome God—we must work together and fight for what we believe to be important. We need to carefully assess our cultures and customs and not allow ourselves to be squeezed into the mold of a different world. We need to decide what changes we can live with and what changes we cannot. We need to decide where we draw a line and make a stand. We can’t afford to float along with our eyes shut and hope for the best. The old saying is still true—“a dead fish floats with the stream, it’s a live one that swims against the current.”

God-Shaped Marriages

One of the most powerful images God has in mind for us as married couples and families is found in Ephesians. Paul states: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her... In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church...” (Ephesians 5:25-29).

The marriage relationship is a symbol of God’s love for His people. A married couple makes a statement to the world about how much God loves us! This is a very significant challenge presented today to all of us in the church who are married. God has declared that a marriage between a husband and wife is to be a powerful statement to all that God loves His people as we love each other. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people were to look at the way we express our love to each other and say, “God must love His people deeply!”

Paul encouraged the men of the Ephesus Church to love their wives, he encouraged the wives to respect their husbands. “However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). There’s no hint that they should give up on their relationships when times get difficult, or see them as too hard to commit to building and enriching. Paul introduced the principle of reciprocity: Husbands, must love their wives and wives must respect their husbands.

And it’s the same principle for the children. Paul says, “Children, obey your parents.” (Ephesians 6:1). That suggests parents must make it easy to be honoured. Then he says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children” (Ephesians 6:4). In Colossians it says: “Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). Children, that means you will do all you can not to hassle your parents.

Research continues to demonstrate the powerful impact a strong marriage and happy family have on many aspects of life. Happy marriages and families contribute to better health, longer life, a greater sense of personal happiness and well-being. It also contributes to a better quality of life, less difficulties at school for children, less problems associated with drugs and alcohol, and less behavioral problems for children and adolescents.³

We are invited to build and protect our marriages and families. We are encouraged to fight for our brothers, and sisters, and parents,

and children, and our homes. This is a definite trumpet-call to invest in our families, irrespective of their description or shape! Your family may be different from mine! Some of you may have experienced changes in your family that you never dreamed possible. Some of you may have lost a partner and you miss them terribly. Some may have family members who no longer form a regular part of family life. Some of you may be single parents, or you may be ‘grandparent-parents—you are full-time caregivers of your grandchildren!’ Some of you may be dreaming of family and hoping to start as soon as possible! Some of you are happy to be you and feel no current need to be in a permanent relationship.

The invitation to all of us is the same, “build and protect.” We must make a commitment to do all we can to ensure our relationships are the best. Let’s put in the hard work to make them everything God would wish them to be.

Those who are married, here is a message from Hart & Morris (2003): “Staying married and working on your marriage may be a risk, but so is walking away from it. Choosing to try again puts you back in a vulnerable place, but so does casting yourself upon unsheltered waters... Fostering a close emotional connection and working toward a healthy relationship is very possible, no matter how bad your marriage may seem to be. God will hear the cry of your hurting and lonely heart. He will meet you where you are.”

Scripture makes it clear that while our relationships may reflect the brokenness that’s part of our days, they may also, under the grace and encouragement of God, paint a picture of His endless and inexhaustible love and grace.

Conclusion

What a challenge for us as Christians! What a challenge for us as God’s people—to learn to be genuine and true lovers in a world short on love; to learn to encourage and affirm each other in a world short on encouragement and support; to know what it is to love and be loved; to know what it is to be a friend and soul-mate; and to find new ways to build connections with others that declare to the world the immense nature of God’s love.

Wouldn’t it be best if our relationships, our marriages, and our families were strong and resilient and a declaration to the Sanballats and the Tobiahs in our society that we intend to be around for a while?

In conclusion the wise man Solomon gives the following counsel: “Place me like a seal over your heart... for love is as strong as death... Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.” (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). It’s my sincere wish that nothing will be able to quench the love you have for your awesome God and for one another. May nothing at all ever wash it away.

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Mission, Hope, and Healing

PETER N LANDLESS

The Text

JESUS WENT THROUGH ALL THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES, TEACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES, PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM AND HEALING EVERY DISEASE AND SICKNESS. WHEN HE SAW THE CROWDS, HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE HARASSED AND HELPLESS, LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD. THEN HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, “THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW.”
MATTHEW 9:35-37

Every 40 seconds, another life ends through darkness and despair, often surrounded by circumstances devoid of hope. (World Health Organization, 2014). This statistic should jolt us out of our comfort zone, and even more so as we qualify this sad description with the fact that the most vulnerable to the tragedy of suicide are those between the ages of 15 and 29 years. Hopelessness is no respecter of persons, but it is sobering to note that the most endangered are the younger population. Does this surprise us? The devil has long targeted our youth, and his attacks will not wane as we reach the climax of the end times. In many places our young people graduate from school and sadly they graduate from the church at the same time.

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All these thoughts flooded through my mind as we sat in the Executive Board Room of the World Health Organization for two days of high-level meetings, where the imperative of reducing this horrendous suicide statistic was presented to representatives from various sectors of society. My thoughts raced as I considered the opportunities offered by a Church that systematically implements Comprehensive Health Ministry (CHM)—comprehensive, as it addresses wholeness of body, mind, spirit, social, and emotional, but also every ministry embraces holistic well-being—it is so logical and appropriate. Wholeness is intrinsic and foundational to every outreach, mission, ministry, and endeavor of God’s Church.

My eyes then focused on the name boards of each delegation. There were various countries, universities, institutes, and NGOs (Non Government Organizations), but only one faith-based organization: The Seventh-day Adventist Church! What an honor, what a responsibility, what an opportunity to share with these august and focused groups that the actual “elephant in the room” was (is!) the absence of faith initiatives to solve this huge problem or imperative: When broaching this subject, an uncomfortable resistance, mixed with embarrassment, seemed to descend. Health, hope, mental and emotional well-being, ministry, and mission are inextricably linked! A church—not just any church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church—entrusted with the mission and ministry of Comprehensive Health—is

ideally and providentially poised to deliver not only physical relief, but mental health in a time when it is projected that between 2015 to 2020, mental health issues are about to become the single greatest cause of disability in the world (WHO, 2014). What an opportunity; what a responsibility! Every church a center of health education, and every member a health (medical) missionary—comprehensively—body, mind, spirit, emotionally and socially.

Jesus is our “Pattern Man,” the Great Physician, the Great Healer, the Source of Hope. When addressing the imperative and potential of Comprehensive Health Ministry, Ellen White wrote prophetically and instructively:

“I CAN SEE THAT THE MEDICAL MISSIONARY WORK IS TO BE A GREAT ENTERING WEDGE, WHEREBY THE DISEASED SOUL MAY BE REACHED.”
WHITE, 1923, P. 535

“THE UNION OF CHRISTLIKE WORK FOR THE BODY AND CHRISTLIKE WORK FOR THE SOUL IS THE TRUE INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL.”
WHITE, 1902, PP. 14, 15

The secular world is using the following language:

“PREVENTION CAN ALSO BE STRENGTHENED BY ENCOURAGING PROTECTIVE FACTORS SUCH AS STRONG PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, A PERSONAL BELIEF SYSTEM AND POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES.”
WHO REPORT, 2014,
PREVENTING SUICIDE, P. 8

I heard the importance of destigmatization of mental health and all that pertains to emotional well-being; we must be free to talk about these matters in an embracing and non-judgmental way. I heard the words care, compassion, and hope; words that describe our mission and the indispensable ingredients missing from so many initiatives addressing human needs. God forbid that these would ever be absent from the mission endeavor(s)

of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, because without these, our mission is incomplete and will fail.

Jesus, our Pattern Man, demonstrated holistic and comprehensive ministry by embracing the whole person. I am fascinated by the wonderful encounters Jesus had with the different people of His day. Whenever He engaged individuals (or they, Him), the conversation and emphasis focused on the spiritual even, and often especially, when the miracles of healing took place. We so often recount the miracles relating to physical health. Jesus also addressed the emotional and mental—specifically and intentionally. The granting of forgiveness and the removal of guilt are often central to Christ’s ministry of healing. Comprehensive Health Ministry and the message of salvation are inextricably linked.

The mission of Christ was to heal the sick, encourage the hopeless, bind up the brokenhearted. This work of restoration is to be carried on among the needy, suffering ones of humanity. God calls not only for your benevolence, but your cheerful countenance, your hopeful words, the grasp of your hand. Relieve some of God’s afflicted ones. Some are sick, and hope has departed. Bring back the sunlight to them. There are souls who have lost their courage; speak to them, pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the Word of God. There is a soul sickness no balm can reach, no medicine heal. Pray for these, and bring them to Jesus Christ. And in all your work, Christ will be present to make impressions upon human hearts.

THIS IS THE KIND OF MEDICAL MISSIONARY WORK TO BE DONE. BRING THE SUNSHINE OF THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS INTO THE ROOM OF THE SICK AND SUFFERING. TEACH THE INMATES OF THE POOR HOMES HOW TO COOK. “HE SHALL FEED HIS FLOCK LIKE A SHEPHERD,” WITH TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL FOOD.
WHITE, 1898, P. 105

Jesus was tired. Do any of you (us) identify with this? Have your busy eyes ever rested on the following words as recorded in John, chapter 4?

“JACOB’S WELL WAS THERE, AND JESUS
TIED AS HE WAS FROM THE JOURNEY, SAT
DOWN BY THE WELL.”
JOHN 4: 6

“Tired as He was from the journey.” This description probably fits more of those in this audience than we might wish to admit. I am encouraged to know that Jesus felt weary at times, too. His tiredness was probably accentuated by His concern for the brokenness of the planet as the current challenges inside and outside of the Church accentuate our sense of fatigue at times.

Then a Samaritan woman comes to the well. The disciples were off to the “Adventist Book Center” to buy food for the journey—focusing on real, felt needs! Jesus then engages this Samaritan woman in conversation by asking for a drink. I love to imagine the surprise and awe in her expression as she questions Jesus on His appropriateness in asking her, a Samaritan woman, for water. She comes to the well at this hour to miss the penetrating and judgmental gazes of her fellow villagers. You see, she was carrying a load of emotional sorrows and guilt, brought into sharp relief by the attitude of others (and by her own behavior and situation).

Jesus shares with her the importance of salvation and reveals that He is the Living Water, the Embodiment of Salvation. They banter a little about where true worship takes place: “On this mountain,” or in Jerusalem. Jesus describes deep truth to her, and He describes true worship—that being in spirit and in truth.

He reveals Himself to her as the Messiah. Just then, the disciples return, but—although surprised that He was talking to a Samaritan woman—asked no questions. Have you ever wondered why the impetuous Peter refrained from some commentary or even correction? I like to imagine that as the disciples approached the scene, astonished, aghast, maybe even indignant at what they were witnessing, Jesus gave them “the look”—what “look” would that be? The one so well known to parents, children and even, or perhaps especially to spouses—the look that

articulates more clearly and sometimes more audibly than words the message “Don’t even think about making a comment, or fueling an argument!” It is recorded, “But no one asked, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’” (John 4: 27).

They offer him food. He is no longer hungry or tired because He finds His fulfillment and sustenance in mission. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and finish His work.” (John 4:34).

The disciples are surprised! Jesus crossed every boundary of custom, religion, ethnicity, and gender, and ministered with compassion to a needy, guilty soul. The pen of inspiration tells us that, “A mysterious hand was turning the pages of her life history, bringing to view that which she had hoped to keep forever hidden.” (White, 1898, p. 187). She accepted salvation; she ran back to the city, persuaded others to come and meet Jesus, and they were blessed by His witness for a further two days.

“She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples.” (White, 1898, p. 195) What a blessed outcome of holistic, comprehensive ministry—Comprehensive Health Ministry!

WE HAVE COME TO A TIME WHEN EVERY MEMBER OF THE CHURCH SHOULD TAKE HOLD OF MEDICAL MISSIONARY WORK. THE WORLD IS A LAZAR HOUSE FILLED WITH VICTIMS OF BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DISEASE. EVERYWHERE PEOPLE ARE PERISHING FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTHS THAT HAVE BEEN COMMITTED TO US. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH ARE IN NEED OF AN AWAKENING, THAT THEY MAY REALIZE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPART THESE TRUTHS.
WHITE, 1855, VOL 7, P. 62

Come with me now to the experience of Peter and John as they practice and implement mission and Comprehensive Health Ministry, as learned from Jesus. We fast-forward into the book of Acts, chapters 3 and 4. At three in the afternoon, Peter and John are going to

the Gate Beautiful and the Temple. There is a man who has been lame or paralyzed since birth. He is brought to this place each day to beg. He locks gazes with Peter and John, and asks for money. You know how it is, when someone approaches you begging. You can turn your eyes, like a Pharisee and “cross to the other side”. Peter responds in words that have become part of everyday parlance—but first he says, “Look at us!” The man looks with a hopeful expectancy, and then comes the disappointment: “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.” Hope dashed! Have you experienced this? You needed money or something else and the giver changes the game! But the story doesn’t stop there.

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand (notice the words right hand—CHM is the right hand of the Gospel Message), he helped him up and instantly, the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.” (Acts 3:6-8). The man’s demeanor changed—walking, jumping, and praising God. Can you, can I imagine this? Bereft of movement from birth, he now has energy and joyful ability to move, walk, jump, and be exuberant about it all! What a change!

The people noticed; the Pharisees noticed, and questioned—by whose power; how did this happen? Peter, the one who had denied Jesus, boldly speaks up following his commission to Comprehensive Health Ministry, “Feed My sheep.” “It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete [comprehensive] healing to him.” (Acts 3:16).

Body, mind, spirit, social, and emotional—all aspects are being addressed in this event. The Sanhedrin now gets involved, they were in the silos of denial: “By what power?” (Acts 4:7), and Peter, primed and filled by the Holy Spirit, responds:

“IF WE ARE BEING CALLED TO ACCOUNT TODAY FOR AN ACT OF KINDNESS SHOWN TO A CRIPPLE AND ARE ASKED HOW HE

WAS HEALED, THEN KNOW THIS, YOU AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL: IT IS BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, BUT WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THAT THIS MAN STANDS BEFORE YOU HEALED...”

ACTS 4:9-10

And here is the punchline—burgeoning from an act of healing of body, mind, and spirit:

“SALVATION IS FOUND IN NO ONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN TO MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED.”

ACTS 4:11

There it is! No other name, the name of Jesus—in family ministry, education, youth ministry, public campus ministry, chaplaincy, children’s ministry, publishing ministry, health ministry—Comprehensive Health Ministry—no other name than Jesus—central, foremost, foundational, and final!

But look at the reaction of the people, Sanhedrin and all...

“WHEN THEY SAW THE COURAGE OF PETER AND JOHN AND REALIZED THEY WERE UNSCHOOLED, ORDINARY MEN, THEY WERE ASTONISHED AND THEY TOOK NOTE THAT THESE MEN HAD BEEN WITH JESUS.”

ACTS 4:13

Will people be astonished, surprised, pleased, awed, delighted, taken aback that we have been with Jesus—regardless of topic or challenge? Will they be astonished that God’s Spirit can keep His Church united despite the varied viewpoints? Note that there is a subtle, but definite difference in nuance. As I wrote the script, I wrote “untied” instead of “united”, only one letter placement difference. Yet here is the difference between strength and weakness, “United we stand,” “Together we can do more.” “Unity is strength,” or—God forbid—the opposite, personalized by the end result of being divided and conquered! Have you, have I been with Jesus?

Peter and John are apprehended; the saints band together in prayer, they are released. The saints continue to pray—Comprehensive Health Ministry and mission must be marinated in prayer and drenched with grace—they pray “enable your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:30) Then the place where they were meeting was “shaken.” (verse 31). Would that our lives will be similarly shaken!

THE LORD WILL GIVE YOU SUCCESS IN THIS WORK [MEDICAL MISSIONARY WORK], FOR THE GOSPEL IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION, WHEN IT IS INTERWOVEN WITH THE PRACTICAL LIFE, WHEN IT IS LIVED AND PRACTICED. THE UNION OF CHRISTLIKE WORK FOR THE BODY AND CHRISTLIKE WORK FOR THE SOUL IS THE TRUE INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL. WHITE, 1902, PP. 14, 15

Comprehensive Health Ministry, healing (wholeness in brokenness), and mission are inextricably united. You see concepts of ministry embody Christ’s method of ministry in reaching the people.

What does it really and practically look like?

It looks as if Jesus has been here (is here)—lives and circumstances are changed;

It is a mission and a ministry—not just a method;

It reaches within and without—to the needs of all—wholeness and preventive lifestyle initiatives;

It offers a continuum of care—including the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social. We are in for the long haul—until Jesus comes again. Maranatha!

Conclusion

United in prayer, emboldened by His Spirit, claiming the promises and name of Jesus—knowing that there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved, and under Whom we serve, and Who strengthens and gives us hope and healing in mission—let us be a focus of astonishment as we move forward. Astonishment, not because of facile, factious argument, but because we have been with Jesus and are galvanized into bringing hope and healing to a broken planet, groaning to behold His soon return.

May God bless and lead us in our mission to bring hope and healing, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Rock or Sand Builders?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

MATTHEW 7:24-27;

I CORINTHIANS 13:1-8;

EPHESIANS 5:25

Introduction

10

On a recent trip to Cotê d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), for leadership meetings with the Family Ministries Directors of the West-Central Africa Division, our flight from Paris to Abidjan was delayed by a couple of hours. Already scheduled to arrive an hour before midnight, the delay meant the Division driver picking us up from the airport would be having a very long night and early morning, a matter completely out of our control.

To add insult to injury, instead of making up time—which often happens with many delayed flights—our layover in Ougadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, became a disaster. A passenger that boarded in Paris, headed to Abidjan, could not be found, causing anxiety among the crew, and further postponing our arrival in Abidjan. This new reality made us somewhat apprehensive, wondering if our

driver, who we had never met, would still be at the airport when we arrived in the wee hours of the morning.

Our story has a happy ending. We are convinced it had to do with something that happened many years before. Someone obviously poured great values into Charles, our driver. Integrity, honor, and an amazing work ethic, were all on display that day.

Charles was at the airport to meet us, as though it was the middle of the afternoon. A man with a very kind and pleasant disposition, he drove us safely to our lodging place at three o'clock in the morning. There is no doubt in our minds Charles' character was built on the solid Rock.

Our sermon today is titled *Rock or Sand Builders?* Let us pray.

Obedience vs. Disobedience In Everyday Life

In Matthew 7:24-27 we find the following notable words of Jesus uttered as part of what is known in Biblical literature as the Sermon on the Mount:

THESE WORDS I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT
INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS TO YOUR
LIFE, HOMEOWNER IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR

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STANDARD OF LIVING. THEY ARE FOUNDATIONAL WORDS, WORDS TO BUILD A LIFE ON. IF YOU WORK THESE WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A SMART CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT—BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK. BUT IF YOU USE MY WORDS IN BIBLE STUDIES AND DON'T WORK THEM INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A STUPID CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SANDY BEACH. WHEN A STORM ROLLED IN AND THE WAVES CAME UP, IT COLLAPSED LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS. MATTHEW 7:24-27 (MSG)

On the banks of the Sea of Galilee, probably very close to Capernaum, the village where Jesus lived (Matthew 4:13) during His years of ministry; also the place where Peter, Andrew, Matthew, James, and John made their home; Jesus was ending what was perhaps the most prolific discourse He had given about the ethics of the Kingdom of God and the expectations for those who would be followers of His.

The Sermon on the Mount is the frequently used title given to the teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew chapters 5–7. Whether the name can be accurately employed for the fairly comparable portion in Luke 6:20–49 depends upon one's understanding of the literary relationship between the two. Luke's version is habitually called the Sermon on the Plain because it is believed to have been delivered on 'a level place' (Luke 6:17) rather than 'on the mountain' (Matthew 5:1). Nevertheless, both expressions probably represent the same place considered from two different perspectives.

In the past it was commonly believed that the Sermon on the Mount was a single homily delivered by Jesus at a particular time. This unquestionably appears to be the case as it is recounted in Matthew. Jesus and His disciples sat down (v. 1), Jesus opened his mouth and taught them (v. 2), and at the conclusion of it all the crowds were astonished at his teaching (7:28). However, many scholars are of the opinion that the Sermon is really a compilation

of sayings of the Lord—'a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached' (W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1, p. 79). They argue there is too much intense material here for one sermon. That the comprehensive array of issues is too much for a single presentation. They also believe certain segments of the sermon appear unexpectedly. That Luke's narrative seems more coherent and better contextualized as responses to questions raised by the disciples and others. Some scholars suggest that this makes it more likely that Matthew transferred sayings of Jesus into the single Sermon, than the fact that Luke found them there and distributed them throughout his Gospel. Others propose it is distinctive of Matthew to bring together teachings under certain captions and place them into the narrative of Jesus' life (cf. B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, 1930, pp. 269–325), suggesting that the Sermon on the Mount is consequently merely the first of these informative sections.

These reflections, to be sure, do not oblige one to consider the complete Sermon as an illogical masterpiece. The historical context of Matthew 4:23–5:1 directs us to anticipate a notable dissertation presented at a specific time. In the Sermon are several structures that seem to be sermonettes of Jesus and not simply interesting anthologies of isolated maxims. When compared with Luke's Sermon, there are many parallel details. They both begin with blessings, close with the parable of the wise and foolish builders, and the interposing Lucan content about loving one's enemies in 6:27–36, and judging 6:37–42, develops in the same progression in Matthew, proposing that in the wake of both versions there was a shared informant. Prior to the writings of either Matthew or Luke, it is fair to believe that there was an original structure which matched an actual sermon presented at a specific time. The truth is, uncertainties as to whether the Sermon as it appears in Matthew is closer to the original than the account given by Luke, or if Matthew stuck to a structure provided by an earlier source, are still issues of intellectual debate. To be sure, it is sufficient to presume that Matthew took an original sermon source and enlarged it in order to introduce important information for the followers of Jesus.¹

Referencing the portion of Scripture we just read from the Sermon on the Mount, Ellen White shares:

THE SAME DANGER STILL EXISTS. MANY TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT THEY ARE CHRISTIANS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY SUBSCRIBE TO CERTAIN THEOLOGICAL TENETS. BUT THEY HAVE NOT BROUGHT THE TRUTH INTO PRACTICAL LIFE. THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED AND LOVED IT, THEREFORE THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE POWER AND GRACE THAT COME THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE TRUTH. MEN MAY PROFESS FAITH IN THE TRUTH; BUT IF IT DOES NOT MAKE THEM SINCERE, KIND, PATIENT, FOREBEARING, HEAVENLY-MINDED, IT IS A CURSE TO ITS POSSESSORS, AND THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE IT IS A CURSE TO THE WORLD” (WHITE, *THE DESIRE OF AGES*, P. 309)²

Matthew Henry, a noted Biblical commentator, suggests that the gospel writer “shows, by a parable, that hearing these sayings of Christ will not make us happy, if we do not make conscience of doing them; but that if we hear them and do them, *we are blessed in our deed.*”³

Obedience vs. Disobedience In Marriage

The Christian life and married life are not much different when observed from a similar vantage point. Knowing what God expects and doing what God requires are two entirely different realities.

It is difficult to miss that in the heart of the Sermon on the Mount the sacredness of marriage looms large. Matthew 5:27,28 declares:

“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID TO THOSE OF OLD, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.’ BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER LOOKS AT A WOMAN TO LUST FOR HER HAS ALREADY COMMITTED ADULTERY WITH HER IN HIS HEART.” THE

BIBLE WRITER FURTHER EXPLICATES THE INTENTION OF THE PASSAGE IN VERSE 32 BY AFFIRMING: “BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE FOR ANY REASON EXCEPT SEXUAL IMMORALITY CAUSES HER TO COMMIT ADULTERY; AND WHOEVER MARRIES A WOMAN WHO IS DIVORCED COMMITS ADULTERY.”

Referencing the currency of every healthy marriage, the Apostle Paul declares under divine inspiration in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8:

THOUGH I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I HAVE BECOME SOUNDING BRASS OR A CLANGING CYMBAL. AND THOUGH I HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY, AND UNDERSTAND ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE, AND THOUGH I HAVE ALL FAITH, SO THAT I COULD REMOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I AM NOTHING. AND THOUGH I BESTOW ALL MY GOODS TO FEED THE POOR, AND THOUGH I GIVE MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, IT PROFITS ME NOTHING. LOVE SUFFERS LONG AND IS KIND; LOVE DOES NOT ENVY; LOVE DOES NOT PARADE ITSELF, IS NOT PUFFED UP; DOES NOT BEHAVE RUDELY, DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN, IS NOT PROVOKED, THINKS NO EVIL; DOES NOT REJOICE IN INIQUITY, BUT REJOICES IN THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER FAILS.

So many married Christians today have totally forgotten that marriage was established by God at the very beginning of human history as a divine institution of foremost importance, when He declared in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” A few verses later (vs. 24), God declared: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

And lest anyone suggest that this is an Old Testament notion that no longer applies to us as New Testament Christians, we read a

reference of this Old Testament passage in the New Testament, with additional stipulations uttered by Jesus in Matthew 19:5-6: “and said, *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?* So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

These passages of Scripture are filled with indisputable imperatives, including the reality of husband and wife being in the singular, rather than the plural form. It is the normative Biblical injunction of marriage meant to take place between one man and one woman. Anything more or less than that is of human origin, and does not support the model established by God in Eden. And it is certainly difficult to overlook the detail that God’s intention was for marriage to be forever.

Going back to the message of 1 Corinthians 13, Warren Wiersby offers: Christians are ‘taught of God to love one another’(1 Thessalonians. 4:9). God the Father taught us to love by sending His Son (1 John 4:19), and God the Son taught us to love by giving His life and by commanding us to love each other (John 13:34–35). The Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another by pouring out God’s love in our hearts (Romans 5:5). The most important lesson in the school of faith is to love one another. Love enriches all that it touches. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:3, 5, 12, 17, 26). This means we must not think of ourselves, but of others; and this demands love.”⁴

To be sure, as people of God, we have all been endowed with spiritual gifts for the edification of the church; every relationship in the church, including our respective marriages. We cannot speak about love without living the very essence of love, by practicing its virtues in our closest and most intimate relationship.

On the same question, Matthew Henry advances that: The apostle gives us in these verses some of the properties and effects of charity [love], both to describe and commend it, that we may know whether we have this grace and that if we have not we may fall in love with what is

so exceedingly amiable, and not rest till we have obtained it. It is an excellent grace, and has a world of good properties belonging to it.”⁵

Why then, are so many married Christians ignoring God’s intent for marriage? Why do they believe that staying in their marriage or relating to their spouse through the agency of the spiritual gift of love, an option they can afford to ignore?

When it comes to your marriage, are you a rock or sand builder? Are we simply speaking with the tongues of men and of angels to show off and appear to be spiritual or are we practicing patience and kindness in our marriage every day?

Choices In Marriage And The Need To Reach Up

God who created human beings for fellowship and love declared in Genesis 2:18: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” And Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 7:2: “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”

While Paul reflects about many wonderful realities in marriage between verses 2-9 of 1 Corinthians 7; in verses 10-11, he proffers: “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife”.

As we consider the evidence of Scripture, we must ask ourselves if we are rock or sand builders. If we only talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk, are we simply fooling ourselves and missing out on God’s power and blessings?

While we tend to forget God’s design is perfect and was created with our well being in mind, we need to go to Him to learn from Him and receive power from Him to live out His plans for our lives. Because, every crisis in marriage is a spiritual crisis that can only be

solved through the power of God, when we put into practice the teaching He has left for us to build our marriage relationships on the solid Rock.

It is remarkable that social science is catching up with God's intention for intimate relationships in the human race. In a recent article, Dr. Sue Johnson, well known Psychologist and marriage and family expert shared:

NEW SCIENCE IS REVEALING HOW VITAL ROMANTIC LOVE IS—AS WELL AS HOW IT WORKS, WHY IT GOES WRONG AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO MAKE IT LAST. THESE FINDINGS ARE INCREDIBLY TIMELY. SOCIOLOGISTS AGREE THAT PEOPLE ARE BECOMING LONELIER AND MORE ISOLATED THAN THEY WERE IN EARLIER GENERATIONS. WITH THE STEEP RISE OF TECHNOLOGY, THE AVERAGE SIZE OF A PERSON'S REAL-LIFE SOCIAL NETWORK HAS PARADOXICALLY SHRUNK; PEOPLE TRUST EACH OTHER LESS THAN THEY USED TO, AND FEWER AMERICANS KNOW THEIR NEIGHBORS. SOCIOLOGISTS ARE ALSO FINDING THAT OUR LIFE PARTNER IS OFTEN OUR ONLY RELIABLE SOURCE OF SUPPORT AND COMFORT. WE NEED THESE RELATIONSHIPS MORE THAN EVER—AND INDEED, EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT IT'S WELL WITHIN REACH TO IMPROVE OUR ROMANTIC BONDS.⁶

To have a great marriage, it is important to have excellent communication in one's relationship. Of course, this often eludes us because of habits we have developed in our families of origin.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS NOT A SKILL WE OFTEN BRING TO MARRIAGE. MOST OF US CAME UP IN FAMILIES IN WHICH VOICES WERE RAISED—SOMETIMES MORE THAN JUST A LITTLE—WHEN PEOPLE DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER. THIS UNFORTUNATE LEGACY MUST BE DISCARDED TO SURVIVE THE RIGORS OF REAL LIFE IN MARRIAGE.⁷

To be rock builders means to construct our marriage relationship on the solid teachings of

Jesus Christ, rather than on the sands of our own opinions, or those offered by the secular media. To be rock builders means to stay close to Jesus and be sustained by His Spirit, by reaching up to Him daily through prayer and Bible study, to be able to live our lives in obedience to His will.

This kind of life is only possible when we keep in our minds messages like the following ones found in Ephesians 6:10, 11: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." And in Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength to His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace." And also in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Conclusion

As we consider the implications of this message, of late we have been at once intrigued and challenged by the message of Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." While we are mindful of the context of this passage to include vs. 21: "submitting to one another in the fear of God." As well as the very often quoted vs. 22: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." It is vs. 25 that has grabbed us, based on the message of vs. 23: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."

If the husband is the head of the wife, as presented by Scripture, and husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her; then husbands have a pretty awesome responsibility to be in their marriage what Christ is to the church.

When we carefully examine how Christ loves the church, we have to consider Biblical history from Genesis to Revelation, offering exhibit after exhibit of Christ's incredible love for the church to His very death in her behalf. To give you a little taste of our intentions we begin in the book of Genesis

with Adam and Eve—the church—who by the time we get to chapter 3:6 have sinned; and by the time we get to vs. 15 of the same chapter, Christ has already offered Himself—gave Himself for her—to ransom the church from death. “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, despite repeated disobedience of His people—the church—Christ continues to intercede in their behalf until His literal death on the cross, as dramatized in the Gospels, for her—the church. So, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” What an incredible responsibility in marriage for husbands as head—leader—in their respective marriages, to be.

Although we believe in mutuality in marriage—found in the context of this text—we find greater responsibility for the husband, who is a type of Christ to his wife; and the level of love he is expected to give—like Christ loved for the church. This calls for true rock builders, in the context of the Sermon of the Mount. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

May God help us to be rock builders today and for the remainder of our lives.

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A Disciple-making Parent

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

ONE WHO RULES HIS OWN HOUSE WELL,
HAVING HIS CHILDREN IN SUBMISSION
WITH ALL REVERENCE (FOR IF A MAN
DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO RULE HIS
OWN HOUSE, HOW WILL HE TAKE CARE
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD?).
1 TIMOTHY 3:4-5

we can bring God’s message of salvation to people, and bringing them to the foot of the cross.

At the same time, sometimes we are so involved in working for the salvation of others that we tend to forget and neglect the salvation of those closest to us—our children.

In a very succinct way, Ellen G. White writes that, “Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home...” and then she asserts in a very emphatic way, “There is no missionary field more important than this” (White, *The Adventist Home*, p.53).

The work of pastors, teachers, evangelists, or missionaries is extremely important and has yielded marvelous results, but the work that each of us gets to do in our homes is crucial to the salvation of our children.

We all have been sent to the world to make disciples for Jesus. What we sometimes forget is that our children also need to be disciples of Jesus. And we, their parents, are the disciple-makers of our children.

Even in Moses’ day God taught the Israelites about the crucial role disciple-makers parents play in the life of their children. Through Moses, God instructed the Hebrews on the way to the Promised Land:

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Introduction

As Jesus addressed His disciples, He gave them their marching orders:

GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES
OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF
THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,
TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL
THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.
MATTHEW. 28:19-20.

Those marching orders were not only for Jesus’ disciples then; they are also our marching orders today.

Many of us have taken Jesus’ Gospel Commission to heart and have been doing all

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AND THESE WORDS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE IN YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE UP. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES. DEUTERONOMY 6:6–9.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote to young pastor Timothy about the role of parenting among those who are in leadership positions as “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

In the Old Testament we read of Eli the Priest who was disqualified from leadership because he did not restrain his children from doing wrong (1 Samuel 3: 12-13).

So we need to ask ourselves, what kind of parents are we? One who is permissive? Who allows their children to do anything, say anything, go anywhere, without any kind of restraint or guidance?

Or are we the type of parents who, with God’s help and His wisdom, guide and lead our children to be followers of Jesus?

Are we disciple-making parents?

Some parents are...

1. Lifeguard parents – the type that often rescue their child from the consequences of their actions

None of us like to see our children suffer, even if it is as a result of their own choices, their own decisions, their own actions.

And yet, letting them experience failure, letting them experience the consequences of their own decisions may be the best lessons for the rest of their life.

One of those things we need to teach and remind our children of regularly is what Paul said,

DO NOT BE DECEIVED, GOD IS NOT MOCKED; FOR WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THAT HE WILL ALSO REAP. GALATIANS 6:7

Other parents are...

2. Ocean-wave parents – coming and going, inconsistent

Children need the consistency and security of a healthy home. If you tell them they can’t do something one day and the next day you allow it, they won’t know what to expect from day to day.

Two verses in the book of Proverbs remind us of the importance of the fair guidance and correction children crave from their parents:

THE ROD AND REBUKE GIVE WISDOM, BUT A CHILD LEFT TO HIMSELF BRINGS SHAME TO HIS MOTHER.

CORRECT YOUR SON, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU REST; YES, HE WILL GIVE DELIGHT TO YOUR SOUL. PROVERBS 29:15, 17

Your children need the correction, discipline, and guidance from their parents if they will become disciples of Jesus.

By the way, correction and discipline must never become punishment and abuse.

In fact, the word discipline comes from the same root as disciple. The goal of discipline is not to break a child’s will and force them to submit. Rather, the goal of discipline is to guide them to become disciples. Jesus led His disciples gently, wisely, and patiently; not angrily, impatiently, or abusively.

Keep in mind that discipline is not something you *do to* your child, but something you *do for* your child.

The author of Proverbs writes,

DISCIPLINE YOUR SON, FOR THERE IS
HOPE; DO NOT SET YOUR HEART ON
PUTTING HIM TO DEATH.
PROVERBS 19:18, ESV

Discipline, loving discipline, is one of the best things a parent can do for their children. Or as a motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said,

THE CHILD WHO HAS NOT BEEN
DISCIPLINED WITH LOVE BY HIS
LITTLE WORLD WILL BE DISCIPLINED,
GENERALLY WITHOUT LOVE,
BY THE BIG WORLD.¹

Other parents are...

3. Railroad track parents

While these parents may have the same goals and desires in mind, they work separately, without consulting with each other as to the best way to lead, guide, teach, or discipline their children.

Like railroad tracks, they live parallel lives, going in the same direction, but not working in unity as they try to disciple their children. Of these types of parents the prophet Amos asks the question, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Disciple-Making

The best example of disciple-making found in the New Testament is that set by Jesus Himself.

As Jesus began His messianic ministry, He surrounded Himself with a group of men whom He would train to be His disciples.

As Jesus preached His first public message, the first sermon delivered to the multitude gathered on the slope of a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus began to set the stage for His instructions for those who wished to follow Him.

In most cultures today when a teacher delivers their instructions to their students they stand up, but in Jesus' time Jewish teachers

would sit to expound the Scriptures, often with disciples sitting at their feet.

For many, the *Sermon on the Mount* was Jesus' manual for beginner or "rookie" disciples.

While describing the scene, Ellen White writes that:

THE TIME HAD COME FOR THE DISCIPLES WHO HAD BEEN MOST CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH CHRIST TO UNITE MORE DIRECTLY IN HIS WORK, THAT THESE VAST THROUNGS MIGHT NOT BE LEFT UNCARED FOR, AS SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD... A GREAT WORK WAS YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THESE DISCIPLES BEFORE THEY WOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE SACRED TRUST THAT WOULD BE THEIRS WHEN JESUS SHOULD ASCEND TO HEAVEN... JESUS SAW IN THEM THOSE WHOM HE COULD TRAIN AND DISCIPLINE FOR HIS GREAT WORK.²

A look at the methods Jesus used reveals several important aspects:

1. First of all, *Jesus gathered the disciples around Him*. Jesus used a small, intimate group.

While we read of several large gatherings, some as large as five thousand people, His work of disciple-making was done with a small group of twelve and later seventy (Matthew 10:1ff, Luke 10:1ff).

That is why in our home, with our family, surrounded by our children, our work as disciple-makers is most effective.

2. *Jesus spent time with them*. During three and a half years Jesus and His disciples traveled, ate, slept, worked and rested together.

Except for the times when they were sent on mission journeys (Matthew 10:5), or other errands (Matthew 21:2), the disciples were with Jesus constantly. Ellen White points out that this time together was no coincidence but rather very much part of Jesus' training program for His disciples.³

Disciple-making parents spend both quality and quantity time with their children. One cannot be a good disciple-maker unless one invests time in the life of their disciples.

3. In addition, *Jesus taught and trained them*. This teaching and training was done at times privately, like the time the disciples came to the house where Jesus was staying and asked Him to explain to them the parable of the tares of the field (Matthew 13), or when they could not cast a demon out of a child suffering from epileptic seizures (Matthew 17:14-21).

At other times Jesus' teaching and training of the disciples was done while addressing a larger group (Matthew 5, 13, 15).

There were times when Jesus even had to teach them by settling some disputes and questions among the disciples (Matt 18; Luke 9:46, 22:24).

Disciple-making parents must keep in mind that we are always teaching our children. Our daily interactions with others, how we spend our time, what we do and say, everything is teaching them. Our children are watching us, listening to us, learning from us.

4. *Jesus paired them with a mentor*. When Jesus sent seventy other disciples on their first missionary journey (Luke 10:1ff), they were not haphazardly matched, but rather carefully selected for the benefit of the younger, less mature ones.

Ellen G. White writes that usually an older, more experienced man was paired with a younger man, and while they did not live together, as a Rabbi and his disciples might, they often met for prayer and counsel.

As a result both were strengthened in the faith.⁴

In her book *Evangelism*, Ellen G. White shows how Jesus practiced the mentoring method among his own disciples by pairing Peter, whose temperament was impulsive and zealous, with John, the beloved disciple, who was milder in character (Luke 22:8; John 20:1-6; Acts 3:1, 4:13, 8:14).

The result was that the shortcomings of one were partially covered by the strengths and virtues of the other.⁵

As disciple-making parents, we can also pair our children of different temperaments for the benefit of both.

5. *He sent them to work for others*. For Jesus, disciples are co-laborers with Him, so while the other aspects of disciple-making are important, His commission to His disciples is to "go and make [other or more] disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Ellen G. White explains that Jesus, when He sent the Twelve and later the seventy, was training them for the individual labor which would multiply in numbers and reach to the far corners of the earth.

It was crucial for them to learn that they "held in trust for the world the glad tidings of salvation".⁶

Disciple-making parents are preparing their children for future ministry, regardless of what career path they choose to take.

6. One final step in Jesus' training of His disciples was that He left them with the assurance that after *He was gone, He would send them the Holy Spirit* (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; Acts 1:8) to be with them and thus they would continue to grow spiritually and in numbers.

Again, Ellen G. White speaks of this transition from Jesus to the Holy Spirit when she writes that Jesus prepared His disciples for the reception of the Holy Spirit by leading them to feel their need of Him, and it was under the Spirit's teaching that they received the final qualification for their ministry and lifework.⁷

Disciple-making parents prepare their children for the time when they will be on their own, and for the time when their parents may rest in death. Disciple-making parents assure their children that they will never be alone but that the Holy Spirit will be their constant companion.

The result of Jesus' training of His disciples was that they were not the same uneducated,

uncultured men He first called, but had been changed to reflect Jesus in mind and character, and the result was that people noticed this drastic change.⁸ (Acts 4:13).

That is the ultimate goal of discipleship; that His disciples may be like Him.

The role of a disciple-making parent is to nurture the children by loving them and relating closely with them, helping them to love others (cf. John 13:35) so they will grow up to be mature, healthy disciples. Parenting small children is not just about teaching them rules and regulations.

Paul refers to the role of parents in the spiritual growth of the child when he challenges them to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The Greek word for nurture in this text is *paideia* and means “training, learning, instruction.”

This word is used in Hebrews 12:5, 7B8, 11 with a spiritual sense where it is translated as “discipline” or “chastening.”⁹

Therefore, the author of Hebrews urges parents to nurture or disciple their children with the use of God’s Word, the Bible, borne of the parents’ love for God like that described in Deuteronomy 6:5: “you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”

And by the way, your marriage also provides an opportunity for discipleship, even when one is married to an unbeliever.

Paul counsels a church member whose spouse is not a believer to remain married to them, if they so consent, because it provides the church member with an opportunity to witness to their spouse and hopefully to help them be sanctified (1 Corinthians 7:12-14, 16).

The Dust Of Discipleship

I love the phrase “in the dust of the Rabbi.”

It is so foreign to our 21st century ears, but so important for us to understand today.

The implications for disciple-making parents is powerful.

In the dust of the Rabbi. That’s where you want to be.

That’s where you want your children to be.

And when you see where that is, if you haven’t already, you will want to get there as soon as possible.

And you will want your children to be there as soon as possible.

You will want to live there.

And you will want your children to live there, too.

So, what does it mean to be “in the dust of the Rabbi”?

To help us understand that phrase, let’s go back to first century Israel.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to do something very special in the grand plan of God.

He came to save His people from their sins.

While on earth He undertook a public teaching, preaching and healing ministry to show them how to live a righteous and godly way of life in proper relationship with God.

It was His life and message and ministry that led up to the point of his saving act—his death.

Jesus had many important things to say, do and teach.

So important, in fact, that He called disciples to come after him not only so they could witness it all, but so He could impart to them His way of living His faith.

And some of them He specifically charged with the leadership of taking His message to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20).

He called disciples after Him just like the religious Rabbis and sages of His day.

A Rabbi or sage of Jesus' day would take disciples after him whose main job was to follow the Rabbi everywhere he went.

But it wasn't simply to follow him; it was to be with him. It was to learn everything he had to teach.

It was to watch and learn his lifestyle, how he practiced his religion.

It was to ask him questions.

It was to get answers.

It was a first-hand, on-the-job learning and training experience.

Disciples of Rabbis memorized their Rabbi's words.

They literally wanted to become as much like their Rabbi as humanly possible, gaining all his knowledge and wisdom, adopting for themselves how he practiced his religion.

They wanted to eat like him.

They wanted to recite Scripture like him.

They wanted to pray like him.

They wanted to teach like him, serve others like him, help like him and so on.

And they left everything and gave their lives to be their disciple, for life. It was full-time, 24-7-365.

No vacations, no time off, no breaks.

That's why a potential disciple would have to count the cost of discipleship to a famous Rabbi before embarking with him (this is what is happening in Luke 9:57-62).

It was not a fad, a passing interest, or a simple curiosity.

Following a wandering teacher would not always be easy, and often the sleeping arrangements for the night were uncertain.

The next meal could also be uncertain.

If they were married, a potential disciple would need to get his wife's permission to leave her for a set time while he was off following the Rabbi.

Others would need to sell some or all of their possessions in order to be detached from them so they could follow the Rabbi.

It was a 100% life commitment for a set period of time.

It was serious business.

It was a complete honor.

So, the phrase "in the dust of the Rabbi" refers to the disciple following closely behind his Rabbi, so much so that the disciple would literally be walking in the dust kicked up from the Rabbi's feet.

It symbolizes the teacher-disciple relationship which often would become closer than the disciple's relationship with his own father.

It symbolizes the adherence of the disciple to the teacher.

It symbolizes the disciple's deep yearning, desire, passion, and willingness to learn everything the Rabbi has to teach.

It symbolizes where God wants us to be today, and where He wants our children to be.

Jesus still calls us to follow Him and his teachings.

He still calls us to give up everything that gets in the way of our discipleship walk with Him.

He still calls us to count the cost of discipleship to Him before embarking with Him.

He still calls us to watch His life and learn everything He has to teach; this is where Scripture comes in.

He still calls us to be with Him, to learn how He practiced His religion, to memorize His words, to become as much like Him as humanly possible, to gain all His knowledge and adopt His religious practices, to recite Scripture like Him, to pray like Him, to teach like Him, serve others like Him, help like Him, to put Him before any other thing or relationship we have, to make and keep a total life commitment of discipleship to Him for the rest of our lives.

Jesus still expects us to become and live as His disciples.

We can still walk in the dust of the Rabbi; in fact, that is right where He wants us.

And when you are there, the dust that covers you will be the relationship with Him that is closer than a father.

22 The total commitment of the disciple to His teacher.

The deep yearning, desire, passion and willingness to learn everything He has to teach and to strive to put it into practice.

The only thing left to do is to strap on your sandals and come follow in the dust of the Rabbi.¹⁰

When we follow Jesus as His disciples, “in the dust of our Rabbi,” something miraculous takes place...our children walk “in our dust” which is nothing less than the extension of our Rabbi’s dust.

When we walk in Jesus’ dust, our children will also walk in the dust of their Rabbi, Jesus.

That is how we as parents are disciple-makers.

Not simply to make our children into our disciples, but more importantly, to make them into disciples of Jesus.

Notes

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Be Gentle with the Young Man

GILBERT CANGY

Synopsis

This message is inspired from the story of David and Absalom and addresses one of the challenges of modern parenting; namely career success versus family responsibility.

Introduction

A few years ago, I was asked to give the Father's day Sabbath message at our local church. I was very conscious that my children were going to be in the congregation and that made me a little nervous as I prepared. On the preceding Friday night, I wondered what they really thought of their dad. I decided to investigate and started with Emilie, the younger one who was eight years old at the time. As I tucked her in bed, I asked her:

"Emilie, on a score of 1 to 10, what would you give dad on being a good dad?" She thought for a while and then gave me my score:

"9.5 out of 10, dad", she replied.

That was a pretty good score and I really should have left it there. However, the perfectionist streak in me kicked in and I wanted to know why I did not get the perfect score. So I asked, "What would

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it take for dad to get 10 out of 10?" Without a moment's hesitation, she replied,

"Three things dad; 1. Cook something different; 2. Help Mom around the house; 3. Be kind to my brother".

I wished I had not asked the question as I was reminded, yet again, how observant, perceptive and truthful our children are when it comes to assessing us as parents.

There was a time when good fathering was defined as earning a decent living and mowing the lawn on weekends while good mothering meant staying home, looking after the kids, cleaning and cooking. These days both moms and dads are working outside home, sharing the laundry, the house cleaning, the homework, the cooking, the driving, coaching, bedtime stories, the changing of diapers and the lot.

Often in the busyness of running our home, what we tend to sacrifice the most is the time to really get to know and understand our children. They are living in a rapidly changing world we can hardly keep up with. The words of the old song, "The Living Years", ring so true to-day. It is a song written from a son's perspective as he reflects on his journey with his late dad:

EVERY GENERATION BLAMES THE ONE BEFORE.
AND ALL THEIR FRUSTRATIONS COME BEATING
ON YOUR DOOR;

I KNOW I'M A PRISONER TO ALL MY FATHER
HELD SO DEAR
I KNOW THAT I'M A HOSTAGE, TO ALL HIS
HOPES AND FEARS;
I JUST WISH I COULD HAVE TOLD HIM IN THE
LIVING YEARS.

CRUMPLED BITS OF PAPER, FILLED WITH
IMPERFECT THOUGHTS;
STILTED CONVERSATIONS, I'M AFRAID THAT'S
ALL WE'VE GOT.

YOU SAY YOU DON'T SEE IT, HE SAYS IT'S
PERFECT SENSE;
YOU JUST CAN'T GET AGREEMENT, IN THIS
PRESENT TENSE;
WE ALL TALK A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE,
TALKING IN DEFENSE

SO WE OPEN UP A QUARREL, BETWEEN THE
PRESENT AND THE PAST.
WE ONLY SACRIFICE THE FUTURE; IT'S THE
BITTERNESS THAT LASTS.

I WASN'T THERE THAT MORNING WHEN MY
FATHER PASSED AWAY.
I DID NOT GET TO TELL HIM, ALL THE THINGS
I HAD TO SAY.
I THINK I CAUGHT HIS SPIRIT, LATER THAT
SAME YEAR
I'M SURE I HEARD HIS ECHO, IN MY NEWBORN
BABY'S TEARS;
I JUST WISH I COULD HAVE TOLD HIM IN THE
LIVING YEARS.

SAY IT LOUD, SAY IT CLEAR; YOU CAN LISTEN
AS WELL AS YOU HEAR
IT'S TOO LATE WHEN YOU DIE, TO ADMIT YOU
DON'T SEE EYE TO EYE.

I am sure there are many sons and daughters who could echo the sentiments in this song as they reflect on the relationship they have or had with their fathers.

For our message today, I would like to reflect on a biblical story written from a father's perspective. From the perspective of a dad who failed to admit a few things to his son in the living years. The story comes to us from the scriptures in the book of Samuel. Our theme is 'Be gentle with the young man'.

PRAY

Read 2 Samuel 18: 1-5

"Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake".

From the day the young shepherd boy David had singlehandedly defeated the giant Goliath, a star was born in the nation. Overnight, he was thrown from the privacy of the shepherd's life onto the center stage of public life. He received a high ranking position in the army. Rapidly David climbed up the corporate ladder and soon became the one who led the nation of Israel in all its military campaigns. At the death of the king, it was evident that David would become successor to the throne.

He had become a remarkable leader. He was brilliant in the area of foreign relations. He provided sound economic leadership and demonstrated creative leadership in architecture, in the arts and education as well as amazingly strong spiritual leadership for the whole country.

But King David was probably best known as a man of war who led Israel in all its conquests. On this particular occasion we just read about, he had mustered his entire army for another military expedition, but this time it was different.

It was different because the king had taken counsel not to march out with his army.

It was different because he was not sending his army against an enemy nation, but to deal with an internal rebellion. A rebellion that was led by Absalom, his own son.

As he farewells his soldiers from the city walls, he takes a deep breath, and yells out a command that must have sent the entire army in absolute confusion. They all heard him as he blurted out a command that did not make sense:

"Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake".

David's soldiers were the finest of the times; they were known to be as fierce as wild bears

robbed of their cubs. On this occasion David is begging these fierce wild bears he had personally trained to be gentle on the battlefield. Gentle towards the leader of the rebellion, he knew what the outcome would be if his son was to be on the receiving end of his soldiers' blows.

The great King David was torn between his duty as the leader of the nation and his love as a father for his own son.

The question that begs to be answered is this: *how did Absalom get to the place where he had turned against his own father?* I am not suggesting that we can always find a clear answer as to why children rebel and reject parental values. However in the case of David and Absalom, the story is intentionally written in such a way as to expose some tragic parental mistakes that we would do well to pay attention to.

David's name has gone down as one of the greatest leaders in history. In fact, he led the tiny nation of Israel into becoming a world power during that era. However, the expert leadership he displayed outside his home was a far cry from his leadership effectiveness inside his home.

This is quite common in our day and age. Some time ago, Fortune magazine had a cover article entitled "Why Grade 'A' Execs get an 'F' as parents".¹

The article refers to some sobering statistics: 36% of the children raised by leaders on executive levels in the work place require regular forms of treatment for drug abuse or psychiatric disorder as compared to only 15% in the general population. How can fathers who exercise such strong leadership at a high level in the corporate world miss on being an exemplary dad at home?

In the biblical story, David disappointed his son to the point where Absalom was deeply hurt. Absalom took it so badly that he spent much of his life looking for ways to get even with his dad who had hurt him so deeply. Throughout his life, Absalom was filled with overflowing rage and resentment toward his dad. As the result, he was always scheming to get even with the man, who had damaged him so.

And as King David yells out his strange command from the city wall, it is not the cry of an angry king, but it is the cry of a broken-hearted father who had painfully come to terms with the things he had done or not done for his son. For he knew deep down that the end had come for his son Absalom.

And we ask ourselves the question, how could a man as spiritually alive as David, with incredible leadership ability fail to reflect God's character in his relationship with his son? How could a man like that wind up being such a huge failure with his son inside his very home?

David only made a few parental mistakes, but the few mistakes he made were the costly type, the kind of mistakes with huge consequences attached to them. As parents and fathers in this congregation, let's have a closer look at the mistakes he made, and maybe we can avoid the same mistakes.

1. Turning A Blind Eye

In other words, the inability to discipline and to have the courage to do the right thing.

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There is a very sad story early in Absalom's life when his blood sister was raped by his half-brother Amnon who was David's firstborn.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-4

Tamar was a beautiful innocent girl. Amnon her half-brother was smitten by her beauty. He got some advice from his 'so called' good friend Jonadab that went like this:

PRETEND TO BE SICK; WHEN THE KING COMES TO VISIT, TELL HIM HOW SICK YOU ARE AND THE ONLY FOOD THAT WILL HELP YOU GET BETTER IS THE KIND OF FOOD PREPARED BY YOUR SISTER TAMAR AND SHE HAS THIS SPECIAL WAY OF SERVING THAT WILL BRING SOME APPETITE BACK. YOU NEED TO EAT FROM HER HAND.
2 SAMUEL 13:5

So the king agreed to the request and Amnon asked for all the servants to leave and to have the doors locked and when Tamar began

to feed him, Amnon took advantage of her; we pick up the story in verse 12:

Read 2 Samuel 13: 11-20

And this horrible event happened in David's palace right under David's nose.

Of course Absalom fully expected that when David learned of this odious crime he would bring full justice to bear on the perpetrator. He would do everything in his power to support and rebuild the shattered life of his sister.

But when David learned about the crime, he got indignant and furious. He expressed his displeasure about this odious crime. But there is no record whatsoever that he ever lifted a finger to do anything to right the wrong. From the biblical record's perspective, he swept the matter under the carpet and looked the other way. Absalom was devastated by his father's poor response.

David the giant-slayer, the great warrior on the battlefield, the commander-in-chief of the entire military, displays all his courage out in the world. But in his home, he cannot stand for what is right; he becomes passive. He does not have the courage to confront when things get out of hand.

And Absalom's anger grew day after day until he finally defended his own sister's honor by having Amnon killed. Absalom said to himself, "If my father David does not have the courage, I'll get the job done".

That was a breaking point in the relationship between father and son. David's unwillingness to confront and do the right thing triggered Absalom's bitterness.

Parents, let us remind ourselves of something basic about parenting. We are to love our children. Part of that love involves drawing lines, drawing boundaries and holding our children accountable for unacceptable behavior.

The wise man wrote, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" (Proverbs 13:24). The rod here is often misunderstood to mean corporal punishment. However the Shepherd's rod was never used to hit

the sheep; rather to guide and to protect. "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" Psalm 23: 4.

Deep down, our children wonder whether we love them enough. Deep down our children wonder if we love them enough to draw boundaries for them. Deep down they wonder if we have the courage to define those limits and enforce them.

Even though our children express displeasure, stomp and fuss about rules and regulations. Even though they argue about the character lessons that we invoke on them from time to time underneath it, they are breathing heavy sighs of relief that someone loves them enough, and someone has the courage to set the boundaries for their wellbeing.

My wife often tells me that I sound so much like my mother. Growing up in my home, my mother was the disciplinarian and I was often at the receiving end of a real rod. She loved us that much. In fact, when she died, I made the personal reflection that I had just lost the only one in the world who loved me unconditionally. But she had rules in the home and the seven of us feared her greatly.

When I consider the story of David and Absalom, I can see another weakness that plagued their father/son relationship.

2. The Absent Father Syndrome

Let me be quick to clarify that I am not talking about physical abandonment. I'm not talking about leaving babies on doorsteps and I'm not talking about dads who run off and never come back.

Abandonment can happen even if a father is physically present. It is entirely possible for a father to be physically close to his children, while at the same time, be emotionally distant from them. Some have called this "Phantom Fathers"!

When Absalom killed his half-brother, he fled to a hiding place called Geshur and he spent three whole years there.

It must have been three difficult years for him, dealing with what had just happened to his

family and to himself. There must have been a lot of emotions to process: fear, guilt, and anger. It was a time when he really needed his dad. But for three years he was kept at a distance.

The strange thing is that David desired to see his son because he had come to terms with the circumstances for Amnon's death. In fact he was consoled over the whole thing.

Read 2 Samuel 13:38, 39

David wanted to see his son Absalom, but surprisingly, he never made a move to act on it. There was no reason for him to hold back from reaching out to his son, but he chose not to. At a time that his son needed him most, he denied his own paternal feelings.

Like David, there are fathers who tend to shut themselves off when their children make wrong decisions or choose the wrong paths in life. Some fathers deny their own desires to see their children come home.

Is it because of pride? Family reputation? Church reputation? What would other people think?

Maybe Absalom reminded David of his own past mistakes. Maybe the memory was too painful for him to face up to again although God had already forgiven him.

Finally, Joab a trusted friend and commander of his army decided to make a move.

King David was known to deal justly, fairly and with great compassion towards his people. In fact, he was known as the angel of God. But there was something about him whereby he could see very clearly the issues in other people's lives, and give wise counsel, and make right kinds of pronouncement, but he could be blind to his own situation.

So those who knew him best had found a unique way to confront the weaker side of his character.

Joab set up a scenario whereby he sent a wise woman with a story they had fabricated together.

This woman went to the king all distressed and grieving, telling him that she was a widow who had two sons who were involved in a fight. One had killed the other and now the whole family was asking for the dead brother to be avenged. They were asking for the remaining son to be handed over to be killed. But her dilemma was that this course of action would leave her with no descendant. So she had come to ask the king for help.

In response, David, the wise king showed compassion and made three promises to her. This is what he said:

1. I will issue an order to the people on your behalf.
2. No one will ever say anything against you without incurring my judgement.
3. Your son will live and not a hair of your son's head will fall to the ground.

And at that point, the woman said to the King...

Read 2 Sam 14: 13-14

“WHY THEN HAVE YOU DEVISED A THING LIKE THIS AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD? WHEN THE KING SAYS THIS DOES HE NOT CONVICT HIMSELF, FOR THE KING HAS NOT BROUGHT BACK HIS BANISHED SON? LIKE WATER SPILLED ON THE GROUND WHICH CANNOT BE RECOVERED, SO WE MUST DIE. BUT GOD DOES NOT TAKE AWAY LIFE; INSTEAD, HE DEVISES WAYS SO THAT A BANISHED PERSON MAY NOT REMAIN ESTRANGED TO HIM”.

David understood the lessons and he called Joab in.

Read 2 Sam 14:21, 24

The king asked Joab to bring back Absalom, but Absalom has to stay in his own house and not see his father, the king. So Absalom was not able to see his dad's face. Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face.

Can you imagine what it might have been like when Absalom received the news that his father wanted him back in Jerusalem. “At last”, he said, “dad wants to see me”. He was all excited about

the prospect of coming home and he said: “at least things are going to be different”. Maybe now his dad was going to show some interest in him.

So Absalom returns home and upon entering the city he is told that he is not going to be welcomed into the palace to live there with his father, but that private quarters elsewhere have been arranged for him. He should move in these private quarters and then patiently wait for David his father to contact him.

Absalom is broken, and in his broken spirit he moves into his private quarters while he waits. And he waited. He waited in vain. His anger and resentment grew every single day. He waited for two years.

After two years, Absalom takes the initiative to arrange an appointment for him with the King through Joab. Now, even Joab refused him the privilege. He could not even get an appointment with his dad’s secretary, Joab. That redefines abandonment.

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That really put Absalom over the edge. He hires a few friends and charges them to set fire to the secretary’s fields. They do and ruin his entire harvest and the secretary runs to Absalom and wonders what’s going on. And Absalom says, “Now that I got your attention, I want an appointment with my dad”.

So Absalom meets with his dad for the first time in five years.

By then, it is too late. The damage caused by Absalom’s sense of abandonment is not going to be easily fixed. And the stage was set for a lifetime of heartache between the father and son.

Dads and parents, if we bring sons and daughters in this world, we must be involved in their lives. We have to be close to them physically, and we have to be with close to them emotionally. By understanding their needs, we will be able to reach out to them and be present with them relationally and learn about what is happening in their lives. We must learn to talk about feelings, not just share information.

Child development experts tell us that the critical window in the lives of kids is from infancy to age 10. They say what happens in that 10-year season sets up each child for a life of blessings or a life of brokenness. What an opportune time to invest in the lives of our children! Perhaps this could be a time when we choose to slow the pace of climbing the career ladder, or a time to listen the needs of our children whether emotional or otherwise.²

Well let’s go back to Absalom.

Scripture tells us that at that point, he decided to plot an insurrection. He decided to go after his father by undermining that which meant most to him, his throne; the leadership base in his career. Absalom gained the hearts of the people; he lied and undermined his father’s influence for four long years, day in and day out. Shortly after that, Absalom organised an army and when his father got knowledge of that, he realised the seriousness of the situation and he fled from the city temporarily with those who had remained loyal to him.

But King David, for the sake of the nation had to take action. So he mustered his entire army, those who had remained loyal to him, and sent them to restore order.

The king waited on the walls of the city until he saw a man running back towards the city in the distance with news from the battlefield.

The first question the king asked was “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

Read 2 Samuel 18:32, 33; 19:1-4

The great King David’s public expressions of humility, sorrow, grief and genuine brokenness over the death of his son do not fail to touch the hearts of all fathers.

His grief over the loss of his son was so great that victory was turned into mourning. The truth that love, nurture, care and well being of one’s children is of greater significance than corporate success and military achievements finally crashed home for the king. He recognized his mistakes

and even genuinely wished that he had died instead of his son.

Fathers who like David are not perfect and are also wrestling with past failures cannot fail to sympathise with him. Fathers are not perfect. None of us score 10/10.

The amazing thing is that in spite of all his failures, David was known to be a man after God's own heart. In fact, it was God himself who made that pronouncement:

AFTER REMOVING SAUL, HE MADE DAVID THEIR KING. HE TESTIFIED CONCERNING HIM, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID, SON OF JESSE A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART'.
ACTS 13:22

It was certainly not David's perfect performance as a father or as a king that earned him the title. It was his honesty in recognizing and confessing his failures in his dealings with his son. It was the admission of his mistakes and his willingness to humble himself even in the presence of his subjects. It was his intense love for the son whom he loved, awkwardly may be, and who had become his enemy, and the one for whom he would have readily died.

And so we see king David publicly expressing his sorrow as he is fleeing the city.

THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE WEPT ALOUD AS ALL THE PEOPLE PASSED BY. THE KING ALSO CROSSED THE KIDRON VALLEY, AND ALL THE PEOPLE MOVED ON TOWARDS THE DESERT....BUT DAVID CONTINUED UP THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, WEEPING AS HE WENT; HIS HEAD WAS COVERED AND HE WAS BAREFOOT.
2 SAMUEL 15:23,30

And we know of another one who crossed the same Valley, and climbed the same Mount in the same kind of circumstances, and for similar reasons.

So we read in the Gospel of John 18:1.

"When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it".

This was the same Mount of Olives David had climbed.

Mark 14:32 tells us about Jesus, that "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'".

This time though, it was not a father, but a son; not a son who was estranged from his father, but a Son who had been sent by His Father; a Father who was not only wishing that he could die for his rebellious sons and daughters, but had come in the person of His Divine Son to give his life that the whole human family might be reunited to Him.

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.
JOHN 3:16

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It is here that there is hope for the fathers like David like all human fathers, who do not score a perfect 10. There is hope for all sons and daughters who haven't had a human father who to inspire them. We have a father in heaven who knows us by name and loves us too.

There is grace and forgiveness and healing in the Father's love. He promises to make up for when we do not have. He offers us a wonderful parenting partnership.

Notes

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Parents as Role Models for their Children

PEDRO AND CECILIA IGLESIAS

Importance of Home Education

One of the greatest concerns of parents, is to give a good education to their children that is not only temporal but more importantly eternal.

What qualities and concerns must parents keep in mind to be successful with the education of their children? Today we present 'Parents as Role Models' as a significant notion. Whether they choose to or not, parents are role models for their children.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, we read the following:

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. "AND THESE WORDS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE IN YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE UP. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A

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SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES.
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

This famous passage from the Old Testament is a clear testimony to God's sovereignty and is a command from God that should never be forgotten. Living out these commands is a commitment of loyalty to God, and a declaration of our faith.

This portion of scripture speaks to parents of the importance of passing on the sacred legacy of God from generation to generation, and the importance of obedience to God's directives. Just before presenting the Shemá, Moses shares the following with the children of Israel:

NOW THIS IS THE COMMANDMENT, AND THESE ARE THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS WHICH THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS COMMANDED TO TEACH YOU, THAT YOU MAY OBSERVE THEM IN THE LAND WHICH YOU ARE CROSSING OVER TO POSSESS, THAT YOU MAY FEAR THE LORD YOUR GOD, TO KEEP ALL HIS STATUTES AND HIS COMMANDMENTS WHICH I COMMAND YOU, YOU AND YOUR SON AND YOUR GRANDSON, ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE, AND THAT YOUR DAYS MAY BE PROLONGED.
DEUTERONOMY 6:1-2

Later on Moses tells the children of Israel that in order for these objectives to be achieved, these words had to be put into practice in their own lives. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart". (Deuteronomy 6:6). Before teaching the children to fear and serve the Lord, parents must aim to be excellent role models for them. Commenting on this order from God, Ellen G. White wrote:

NOT AS A DRY THEORY WERE THESE THINGS TO BE TAUGHT. THOSE WHO WOULD IMPART TRUTH MUST THEMSELVES PRACTICE ITS PRINCIPLES. ONLY BY REFLECTING THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN THE UPRIGHTNESS, NOBILITY, AND UNSELFISHNESS OF THEIR OWN LIVES CAN THEY IMPRESS OTHERS. WHITE, EDUCATION P. 41.1

After keeping these words in their hearts, parents must ensure that their children and grandchildren should also put them into practice. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

This beautiful statement from God is a clear invitation to all parents to be obedient and faithful adherers to God's Commandments and to be good role models for their children. By following this high calling, they would achieve the objective of the Shemá, which is how this passage from the Old Testament is called, and is organized, in the following way (Deuteronomy 6:4-9):

- Teach our children about God's loving character.
- Claim God's powerful protection over our families and our children.
- Unite our families around Faith and God's Word.
- Transmit our spiritual heritage from generation to generation:

WHEN YOUR SON ASKS YOU IN TIME TO COME, SAYING, 'WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TESTIMONIES, THE STATUTES, AND THE JUDGMENTS WHICH THE LORD OUR GOD HAS COMMANDED YOU?' THEN YOU SHALL SAY TO YOUR SON: 'WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT, AND THE LORD BROUGHT US OUT OF EGYPT WITH A MIGHTY HAND; AND THE LORD SHOWED SIGNS AND WONDERS BEFORE OUR EYES, GREAT AND SEVERE, AGAINST EGYPT, PHARAOH, AND ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD. THEN HE BROUGHT US OUT FROM THERE, THAT HE MIGHT BRING US IN, TO GIVE US THE LAND OF WHICH HE SWORE TO OUR FATHERS. AND THE LORD COMMANDED US TO OBSERVE ALL THESE STATUTES, TO FEAR THE LORD OUR GOD, FOR OUR GOOD ALWAYS, THAT HE MIGHT PRESERVE US ALIVE, AS IT IS THIS DAY. THEN IT WILL BE RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR US, IF WE ARE CAREFUL TO OBSERVE ALL THESE COMMANDMENTS BEFORE THE LORD OUR GOD, AS HE HAS COMMANDED US. DEUTERONOMY 6:20-25

31

It is a challenge to be 'Role Models' for our children

John Sebastian, at 11 years of age, had decided for the first time to start saving. He wanted to buy an MP3 Player. The best way to purchase one was by saving what little money he received from random odd jobs he was given to do around the house. He was counting on his mom to save the money she promised. When he believed he had saved enough money saved to buy his MP3 Player, he asked his mom for the money. To John's surprise, his mom said she had not saved any money, and that he would have to wait until she got paid. Here is where we ask, how can parents expect their children to learn to manage their finances if they themselves don't know how to do so? The truth is, it is important for parents to learn to manage their money so they can teach their children to do the same.

Whether They Choose to or Not, Parents Are ‘Role Models’ for their Children

On this issue Ellen White offers the following:

CHILDREN IMITATE THEIR PARENTS; HENCE GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO GIVE THEM CORRECT MODELS. PARENTS WHO ARE KIND AND POLITE AT HOME, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE FIRM AND DECIDED, WILL SEE THE SAME TRAITS MANIFESTED IN THEIR CHILDREN. IF THEY ARE UPRIGHT, HONEST, AND HONORABLE, THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE QUITE LIKELY TO RESEMBLE THEM IN THESE PARTICULARS. IF THEY REVERENCE AND WORSHIP GOD, THEIR CHILDREN, TRAINED IN THE SAME WAY, WILL NOT FORGET TO SERVE HIM ALSO. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 21 5.2

White also suggests that:

EVERY CHRISTIAN HOME SHOULD HAVE RULES; AND PARENTS SHOULD, IN THEIR WORDS AND IN THEIR DEPORTMENT TOWARD EACH OTHER, GIVE TO THE CHILDREN A PRECIOUS LIVING EXAMPLE OF WHAT THEY DESIRE THEM TO BE... WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME P. 30 5.3

How to be successful as ‘Role Models’

1. Parents must follow their own Role Model

The Apostle Paul wrote: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Here Paul is inviting his readers to imitate him, but in the same sentence, he declares that he is an imitator of Christ. Paul also tells the congregation at Ephesus: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Role Model parents must focus on God in order to reflect His character.

Ellen White continues to say:

THEY SHOULD MAKE IT MANIFEST THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CONTROLLING THEM, BY

REPRESENTING TO THEIR CHILDREN THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 21 5.3

The daily study of the Bible will fill the life of mothers and fathers with its sacred message. This will be evident in their daily lives and relationships.

Meditating on the life of Christ will transform lives into blessings. On this subject Paul shares: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

2. Fathers and Mothers that would be models for their children must have a clear vision of what they want their children to see in them

God’s attributes must be reflected in the home. Ellen White suggests in her book *Education* that love, gratitude, confidence, tenderness, justice, and tolerance are traits of character parents should model in their home.

Ellen White further states that: “The child who by trust and submission and reverence toward his earthly protectors learns to trust and obey and reverence his God. He who imparts to child or pupil such a gift has endowed him with a treasure more precious than the wealth of all the ages—a treasure as enduring as eternity”. (White, *Education* p. 245).

3. Role Model Parents should live in a way that makes the Gospel attractive in the home

The joys and blessings that are experienced as a result of being a committed Christian should flourish and be enjoyed and shared in the home.

Children should see in their parents undeniable evidences that following Jesus is a joyful and worthwhile experience.

Answered prayers, miracles performed in our lives, stories of marvelous conversions, among other things, are testimonies of God’s mercies that should be brought to the children’s avid ears. It is very sad to note that sometimes what is discussed at home are negative things that occur in God’s Church such as mistakes members have made, or long-winded Sabbath sermons.

4. Role Model parents gladly obey God's Commandments

This is how the Psalmist viewed the Law and its obedience: "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).

When we observe the Sabbath we need to approach it with gladness and praise to God and not portray this obedience to God as a burden. We need to make every effort to make the Sabbath observance a delight in our homes. Every opportunity should be taken to highlight and demonstrate the benefits of obeying God. In this regard, a well planned Sabbath day will be a powerful tool to strengthen the connection of our children. An enjoyable sundown worship, will leave an indelible mark on the impressionable minds of the children.

5. Role Model parents convey the joy of the gospel

Discipline administered on the basis of shouting, beatings and physical abuse terribly undermine the gospel's teachings on love, justice and respect.

6. Role Model parents are excellent witnesses of God's love

Take every opportunity in the home to reaffirm how great God's love is for His children.

The Psalmist David, rejoiced about God saying: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

7. Role Model parents are thankful to God for the blessings they receive from Him

In many Adventist churches around the world, a part of the mid-week worship service is dedicated to allowing members to share testimonies about how good God has been to them. God's children should never forget to thank Him for all they receive from Him each day. Paul declares: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

When parents give thanks in their homes for food, clothing, health, shelter, and for all the things that they have received from God, they are teaching their children to do the same. This practice will also teach children to learn to be grateful for what their parents do for them.

8. Role Model parents are confident about representing the character of Christ

Parents should take advantage of every opportunity to respond positively to their children. Each of these occasions should be used to influence their children to be more like Jesus.

On this note, Ellen White shared the following "duties" of fathers and mothers in regards to role modeling:

- In the family, fathers and mothers should ever present before their children the example they wish to be imitated.
- Parents should show a tender respect in word, look, and action.
- Parents should demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is controlling them, by representing the character of Jesus Christ to their children.
- The powers of imitation are strong. And in childhood and youth, when this faculty is most active, a good pattern should be set before the young.
- Children should have confidence in their parents, and thus take in the lessons they should instill in them. (White, *Child Guidance* p. 215.3).

9. Role Model parents grow daily

Despite his supernatural conversion, his close walk with Jesus, and all that He was able to accomplish to advance the gospel, the Apostle Paul, recognized his need to grow even more. On this point he wrote: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Illustration

Several years ago, a marriage retreat was held with almost 100 couples in attendance. As the meeting began, the guest speaker asked the couples among them, who had been married the longest. The older couple sitting at the front with silver hair on their heads and wrinkles on their faces, were the obvious choice. The older couple had one of their children with their spouse in attendance, who pointed at them in response to the speaker's question. There was applause from the group, as well as a special gift for the older couple when they shared they had been married for 65 years.

During the break, the older couple was asked about the secret of their longevity, and why a couple who had enjoyed 65 years of marriage was attending such a retreat. The wife answered: "Our children invited us. Besides, you can always learn something new in an event like this one."

Even after many years of experience as parents and as a married couple, we must always be on the lookout to learn something new. Children grow, and family dynamics change. So, parents need to be constantly adapting new ways of educating their children according to this reality. Praying, reading the Bible, as well as other good books, and attending parenting programs, may be of help in this growing experience.

10. Role Model parents toil for their character building and for that of their children

On this matter, Ellen White says the following:

IT IS ... BY A REPETITION OF ACTS THAT HABITS ARE ESTABLISHED AND CHARACTER CONFIRMED.
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.2

Since character is closely related to good habits, the formation of good habits in our children should have prime importance. However, it is not an easy task to achieve this reality. Consistency, patience and perseverance are needed in order to establish good habits in our children. We must stay on task.

About this Ellen White says:

THE CHARACTER IS FORMED, TO A GREAT EXTENT, IN EARLY YEARS. THE HABITS THEN ESTABLISHED HAVE MORE INFLUENCE THAN ANY NATURAL ENDOWMENT, IN MAKING MEN EITHER GIANTS OR DWARFS IN INTELLECT; FOR THE VERY BEST TALENTS MAY, THROUGH WRONG HABITS, BECOME WARPED AND ENFEEBLED.
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

The earlier years are the right time to establish good habits in the lives of our children.

Illustration

An anguished mother came to a counselor requesting help for her son. Among other things, the son didn't want to work nor help with the house chores. He just spent time playing video games and watching TV. The counselor asked how old her son was, and she answered very sadly that he was 31 years old.

The task of establishing good habits must be started very early in life.

On this issue Ellen White says the following:

THE EARLIER IN LIFE ONE CONTRACTS HURTFUL HABITS, THE MORE FIRMLY WILL THEY HOLD THEIR VICTIM IN SLAVERY, AND THE MORE CERTAINLY WILL THEY LOWER HIS STANDARD OF SPIRITUALITY.
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

Parents must pay careful attention to the negative behaviors small children practice. At times, parents are too indulgent and overlook negative behaviors and bad habits in their children. Bad actions should be corrected the very moment they occur. However it is a mistake to believe that children will eventually get rid of their bad habits.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF CORRECT AND VIRTUOUS HABITS ARE FORMED IN YOUTH, THEY WILL GENERALLY MARK THE COURSE OF THE POSSESSOR THROUGH LIFE.
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

11. Role Model parents live what they preach

Role Model parents don't do things they don't want their children to do.

Illustration

Some friends came to visit an old acquaintance in his home. As they approached the dwelling, they noticed that he was sitting under a tree about 130 feet from the house, and he was eating a snack. Playfully, his friends asked why he was eating in hiding away from his family. He responded he had been given some cookies, and didn't want his children to see him eating between meals.

12. Role Model parents ask for forgiveness when they make a mistake

Illustration

A mother noticed that a piece of dessert was missing. Without any proof, she accused the youngest son of taking it. He was the more avid eater of her two children. When she asked him, the boy said he had not taken it. But the mother didn't believe him. A few days later, the truth surfaced. Her older daughter had taken the piece of dessert.

This mother had made a mistake, just like many mothers and fathers do. The good thing, though, is that she had the integrity and courage to ask her son's forgiveness.

Two Models Role Model Parents Can Imitate

1. Christ. Parents should have Jesus Christ as their Model. They should love their children with unconditional love.

2. The Gardener, Ellen White speaks in the following quotation.

PARENTS, IN THE TRAINING OF YOUR CHILDREN, STUDY THE LESSONS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN IN NATURE. IF YOU WOULD TRAIN A PINK, OR ROSE, OR LILY, HOW WOULD YOU DO IT? ASK THE GARDENER BY WHAT PROCESS HE MAKES EVERY BRANCH AND LEAF TO FLOURISH SO BEAUTIFULLY,

AND TO DEVELOP IN SYMMETRY AND LOVELINESS. HE WILL TELL YOU THAT IT WAS BY NO RUDE TOUCH, NO VIOLENT EFFORT; FOR THIS WOULD ONLY BREAK THE DELICATE STEMS. IT WAS BY LITTLE ATTENTIONS, OFTEN REPEATED. HE MOISTENED THE SOIL AND PROTECTED THE GROWING PLANTS FROM THE FIERCE BLASTS AND FROM THE SCORCHING SUN, AND GOD CAUSED THEM TO FLOURISH AND TO BLOSSOM INTO LOVELINESS. IN DEALING WITH YOUR CHILDREN, FOLLOW THE METHOD OF THE GARDENER. BY GENTLE TOUCHES, BY LOVING MINISTRATIONS, SEEK TO FASHION THEIR CHARACTERS AFTER THE PATTERN OF THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 36.3

Good Role Model parents will always have Christ as a Model and Inspiration. But, they also have clear in their minds that the Gardener's work is theirs.

Appeal

Invite all fathers and mothers to consecrate or reconsecrate their lives to God daily. Ask God for help to be model children of the Model Father. And, ask God to help all parents in attendance to be Role Models for their children.

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What Do You Need From Jesus Today?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

MARK 10:46-52

(MATT 20:29-34; LUKE 18:35-43);

REVELATION 3:18

Introduction

10

A few weeks ago we came back from the Middle East where blind people seem more noticeable on the street than most places we have visited. Blindness, invariably, affects a person's social reality and dims their prospects for upward mobility. To be sure, blindness continues to be a burden to many, often forcing them to beg for food on the streets in order to survive.

Blindness remains a worldwide scourge in spite of medical and technological advances that build on the ancient study of medicine in the Middle East and in Greece. The Greeks introduced us to concepts such as medical diagnosis and prognosis. We owe them a debt of gratitude for advanced medical ethics, such as that embodied in early versions of today's Hippocratic Oath. In spite of all our advances, blindness remains a problem all over the globe.¹

Take the United States, for instance. According to the Centers for Disease Control,

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approximately 11 million Americans aged 12 years and older could improve their vision through proper refractive correction. More than 3.3 million aged 40 and older are either legally blind or suffer with reduced vision in the better-seeing eye. The leading causes of blindness and low vision in the United States are primarily age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma.²

If lack of sight was relegated to the realm of the physical, human beings might yet be able to cope with its debilitating effects. However, the opposite is true. Here's what we mean.

We have been Christians all of our lives. We are theologically, sociologically, and psychologically trained. Married for more than 33 years, we have been ministering to families for almost three decades, yet we still experience moments of blindness in our marriage. One such moment emerged recently when I (Willie) felt Elaine should have made up our bed one morning after being the last one to get out of it. She had "fallen-down on the job," and I told her so when I returned from my morning exercise.

Elaine was gracious. She accepted my feelings, but later challenged me on the merits of my observation. "Willie," she began, "after being married for so many years, how difficult would it have been for you to simply make the

bed when you found it unmade?” Her question cut to the heart of the matter. It took but seconds for me to recognize my blindness, and in embarrassment I apologized.

Truth be told, Elaine does so much more for our marriage day-to-day than I do, and she does it without complaining or seeking recognition. I unthoughtfully decided to call her out on a matter of little consequence that I could have easily addressed. Like Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, I (Willie) called on Jesus and saw the light. Because of “seeing” moments like these, we continue to have a healthy, satisfying marriage that affords us opportunities to share such experiences with you and others who quest to “see” better.

Today it is our hope that we will all be able to identify the true blindness in our lives and declare as we leave this worship experience, “We have seen the light!”

We have titled the few thoughts we will share with you today, **What Do You Need from Jesus Today?** Let us pray.

I. The Text: Mark 10:46-52

Turn in your Bibles with me to Mark 10:46-52:

NOW THEY CAME TO JERICHO. AS HE WENT OUT OF JERICHO WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND A GREAT MULTITUDE, BLIND BARTIMAEUS, THE SON OF TIMAEUS, SAT BY THE ROAD BEGGING. AND WHEN HE HEARD THAT IT WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH, HE BEGAN TO CRY OUT AND SAY, ‘JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!’ THEN MANY WARNED HIM TO BE QUIET; BUT HE CRIED OUT ALL THE MORE, ‘SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!’ SO JESUS STOOD STILL AND COMMANDED HIM TO BE CALLED. THEN THEY CALLED THE BLIND MAN, SAYING TO HIM, ‘BE OF GOOD CHEER. RISE, HE IS CALLING YOU.’ AND THROWING ASIDE HIS GARMENT, HE ROSE AND CAME TO JESUS. SO JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, ‘WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?’ THE BLIND MAN

SAID TO HIM, ‘RABBONI, THAT I MAY RECEIVE MY SIGHT.’ THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, ‘GO YOUR WAY; YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL.’ AND IMMEDIATELY HE RECEIVED HIS SIGHT AND FOLLOWED JESUS ON THE ROAD.

MARK 10:46-52

The context of this narrative finds Jesus on His way to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, but also to Calvary, and to His death on the Cross for your sins and mine.

In Mark 10 we find the Master Teacher using an innovative approach of sharing the gospel. Here He does not use symbols or miracles, neither types, parables, nor proverb. Rather, Christ uses paradoxes to make His point clear. A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself and yet expresses a valid truth or principle. For example, “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10) is a paradox. When the Apostle Paul pictures himself “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:8-10), he is again making use of paradox to make a deeper point.

Instead of preaching a long sermon, Jesus shared five important lessons by uttering five paradoxical statements: 1. Two shall be one (Mark 10:1-12); 2. Adults shall be as children (Mark 10:13-16); 3. The first shall be last (Mark 10:17-31); 4. Servants shall be rulers (Mark 10:32-45); and 5. The poor become rich (Mark 10:46-52).³

II. Explication and Application

In the fifth paradox mentioned by Jesus in Mark 10:46-52, He highlights the story of a poor beggar who becomes transformed when his poverty intersects the abundance of Jesus. He became instantly rich by receiving all he had ever wanted—his sight!

Warren Wiersbe, a noted biblical scholar, suggests that a large crowd on their way to the Passover followed Jesus and His disciples to Jericho, an 18-mile journey from Jerusalem. There were two cities with the name Jericho:

one was the old city that was in ruins. The other was a new city about a mile away where Herod the Great and those of his lineage had built a luxurious winter palace. This reality may help clarify the apparent inconsistency between Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 which says, “as He went out of Jericho,” whereas Luke comments, “as He was coming near Jericho.” Their perspectives were slightly different based on the old or new Jericho, which both gospel writers used as their reference point.⁴

Mark’s account continues in chapter 10 verse 47, “**And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’**” It is worth noting that when someone is blind, their other senses tend to be heightened. This is the body’s marvelous way of compensating for the loss of any sense. Middle Eastern cities tend to be noisy, and Passover time was one of much movement of peoples from the neighboring, and not so neighboring, cities to Jerusalem where the main temple was. I imagine the sound decibels of the crowd were quite high. However, for Bartimaeus whose survival depended on how focused he was on everything happening around him, the chatter that one as powerfully anointed as Jesus was in his immediate vicinity was an opportunity that he could not allow to slip by.

Commentators suggest that the healing fame of Jesus had spread far and wide throughout the countryside. Something in the heart of this beggar—perhaps his measure of faith like the lowly mustard seed—moved him to action at the most opportune moment! Something in the blind man’s soul believed this Jesus was no ordinary man, but the Messiah sent from God! He may have been blind, but he was no fool. He was even up on his theology and his history since he hails Jesus by the well-known national Messianic phrase “**Son of David,**” not once but twice.⁵

His yell was so piercing that it startled those around. “**Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more. ‘Son of David, have mercy on me’**” (Mark 10:48). When the soul is desperate for a change, nothing

else matters. Friends and acquaintances do not matter. The crowd may want to drown out our focus on Jesus, as it did that day for Bartimaeus, but we must not be deterred. Modern distractions such as social media, movies, and pop music all vie for the time and space we should reserve for our relationship with Jesus. Are they winning?

Bartimaeus refuses to be denied by the crowd. He is focused, he is relentless, he will not lose this opportunity to get close to the Master. Some in the crowd were probably offended by the Messiah title the blind beggar used to arrest the attention of Jesus, but Jesus is not offended. In fact, Jesus makes no effort at all to silence Bartimaeus. He is in fact headed to Jerusalem to accomplish his task as Messiah, Savior of the world. Like Bartimaeus, we must keep our eyes on the Prize; we must keep our eyes on Jesus to be healed of our debilitating blindness.

Feeling the plaintive tug of blind beggar’s extremity, Jesus stops. **Mark 10:49** says, “**So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.’**” When Jesus calls, Bartimaeus is ready. There is no hesitation, no lag time, no fooling around, no fear. There is nothing more important for Bartimaeus than to connect to Jesus, the Source of all goodness, the Source of all power, the Source of all compassion, and the Supply of every need. This same Jesus is calling today. Can you hear Him? He wants to heal you of your blindness. Are you ready? The impatient crowd that day recognized the cry of agony from the blind man and felt compelled to facilitate the blind man’s connection to Jesus. Do we feel the need to connect people to Jesus?

Mark 10:50 says: “**And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.**” Some commentators suggest that Bartimaeus’ outer garment was probably also used as a pallet. They further surmise that by employing such language, Mark was seeking to signify the removal of sickness and infirmity. This garment which in the past was Bartimaeus’ “security blanket,” his protection from evening chill and morning dew, probably represented all

his earthly possessions. Yet at the call of Jesus, he gladly casts aside this garment to respond quickly to Jesus.⁶ Are we willing to cast aside the things of this world which are preventing us from getting to Jesus? Bartimaeus cannot see Jesus, but his keen sense of hearing has picked up not only the voice but the very location from which the voice is coming. He casts aside all and runs in the direction of his healing.

“So Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man said to Him, ‘Rabboni, that I may receive my sight’” (Mark 10:51). What an interesting question to pose to a blind man. It is the same question Jesus poses to James, John, and Salome, in Mark 10:36.⁷ It is the same question Jesus poses to you and me every day of our lives: *What do you want Me to do for you?* So, in turn our message today poses this question to everyone who will hear: *What do you need from Jesus today?*

Remember, Jesus is the One who healed the 10 lepers of their terrible disease. He is the One who fed 5,000 men, women, and children with two little fishes and five loaves of bread. He is the One who at the wedding in Cana of Galilee turned water into wine. Remember, He is the One who raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). He has the power to do anything for you and He asks today, *What do you want me to do for you?*

In order to grow spiritually, and in every one of our important relationships, we must answer Jesus like Bartimaeus did that day near Jericho. First, the blind man was unequivocal about who Jesus was—he called Him Rabboni, which means my Master, my Teacher. To call someone Master means that you are ready and willing to follow Him. The only other person in the Gospels who used this term was Mary (John 20:16), and she did so when she saw Jesus in the garden after he had been resurrected. The blind beggar twice called him “Son of David,” a national messianic title, but *Rabboni* was an articulation of personal faith.⁸ As the blind man approached Jesus, he declared his total belief in Him.

Second, Bartimaeus was crystal clear about what he needed from Jesus that day. The Greek word is *anablēpō*, “that I may receive my sight” (NKJV); however, the English Standard Version of the Bible expresses the blind man’s request as “let me recover my sight.” New American Standard Bible conveys Bartimaeus’ request as “I want to regain my sight!” Some commentators suggest that *anablēpō* could mean to recover sight.⁹ This notion is very plausible and closer to the original, which suggests that like most people in the Middle East who are blind, Bartimaeus may not have been born blind, but became blind with age, with lack of medical attention. Remember, there were doctors in Bartimaeus’ day but Bartimaeus may not have had the means to access their help. He lacked health care, but all was taken care of by the grace and mercy of Jesus. Do we believe that Jesus can do the same for us today?

So, we ask the question again: *What do you need from Jesus today?* What is your blindness? Do you realize Jesus has the power, capacity, and willingness to grant the request of your need? Do you see Jesus as your Master, as your Teacher, as your Savior? Is your blindness spiritual? Does it need to be drawn to the light of Jesus so that He might heal you and you can go from ambivalence to full blown faith in Him? Is your blindness relational. Do you need his transforming power in your marriage, parenting, parent or sibling relationships? Do you need it in your relationships with people you dislike?

Mark 10:52 concludes, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.”

Bartimaeus was healed immediately, and you can be too.

III. Conclusion

What is your blindness today? Can you identify it and recognize your need of Jesus? Is it to live an authentic life so you can live your

core commitments of connecting meaningfully with others—including your husband or wife, your children or neighbors, the people at work, and other important relationships? Are you ready to operationalize your commitment of growing in Jesus, as you forget the things that are behind and move forward to the call in Christ Jesus?

Are you able to recognize Jesus as the Master, the Teacher of your life, so you can grow daily in your relationship with Him and we together can grow the church of God? Do you believe in Him? Do you trust Him? *What do you need from Jesus today?*

Bartimaeus could not see, but he could speak, and he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Bartimaeus could not see, but he could run to Jesus. Who needs to run to Jesus today so you can see, bringing light to all the relationships in your life, including your walk with Jesus?

14 Ellen White shares: “Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son.”¹⁰

Revelation 3:18 states, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Our marriage isn’t perfect, but we trust God for patience and kindness each day to deal with each other in a way that gives honor and glory to Him. Every day we ask God to heal us of

our relational blindness so we can see, and have the kind of relationship that brings joy and contentment to our home.

It is our hope you will make the decision to ask Jesus for what you need today. That you will leave this worship experience rejoicing, able to declare that though you were once blind, now you see, and the light that you have received permeates every relationship in your life.

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

Notes

- ¹ “*Visual Impairment and Blindness*.” World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>. (accessed on September 14, 2017).
- ² “*Common Eye Disorders*.” Centers for Disease Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics/ced/index.html> CDC common eye disorders. (accessed on September 13, 2017).
- ³ Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, pp. 143-148.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 148.
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 148.
- ⁶ Brooks, James A. 1991. *The New American Commentary: Mark*, p. 174.
- ⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 148.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Strong, James. 2009. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*.
- ¹⁰ White, Ellen G. Year. 1999. *Steps to Christ*, p. 22.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

SONG OF SOLOMON 5:16

Do you love chocolate?
Do you love milk?
Do you love ice cream?
Do you love the weather?
Do you love your parents?
Do you love your spouse?
Do you love God?

We use the word *love* for so many different things and in so many different ways that it loses its value. Maybe this is why love may not appear to mean much to most people. What we do know is that when it comes to love and commitment, our culture's message is clear: Nothing lasts forever. Love, at least as presented in films, novels, music, and celebrities' lives is a powerful emotion that ebbs and flows and eventually dries up. The Scriptures take a dramatically different view. In the Song of Solomon, the bride exclaims, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

If you are weighing a lifetime commitment to another person, it is this understanding of love you need to consider. But what does it involve?

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From our experience and study of Scripture, we have made some observations about the nature of lasting love.

OBSERVATION 1: Marriage Requires Friendship

One key to a healthy marriage is friendship rooted in common values and interests. That's not the type of love people today typically look for in romantic relationships. The ancient Greeks can give us insight into this dilemma. The Greeks recognized that there were many forms of love, and they used an array of terms to describe them. Two of their favorite terms were *eros* and *storge*.

Eros is powerful romantic love that flares up quickly and expresses itself in dramatic ways. Erotic lovers experience all the soaring peaks and gut-wrenching plunges of an emotional roller coaster. Erotic lovers are adrenaline junkies who desperately seek new thrills.

On the other hand *storge*, or the love between friends, is slow to develop but lasts. Marriage, perhaps more than any other bond, needs this durable love—a love that lasts. When people are dating it is easy to get caught up in the romance of *eros* love. But in marriage, love and commitment are often expressed through mundane, daily responsibilities and sacrifices that are more associated with friends—*storge* love—than lovers.

Scripture confirms this connection between passionate, romantic love and friendship. The bride in Song of Solomon describes her lover as radiant and compares his body to “polished ivory” (Song of Solomon 5:14). When he touches her, her heart pounds (verse 4). And we could ask ourselves, What stirs such powerful romantic feelings? After sensually describing her husband’s body, she states, “[This] is my lover, my friend,” (v. 16, NLT). Her friendship with Solomon and her romantic feelings for him were inseparable.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the French philosopher and humanist once said, “It’s not a lack of love but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.”¹ A lot of social scientists—sociologists and psychologists—agree.

OBSERVATION 2: Enduring Love is Unselfish

For love to last, it must be unselfish, but today self often comes first. We have often heard spouses in troubled marriages ask, “Don’t I have a right to be happy?” Marriage and relationships are good only if they enrich you. If a relationship takes too much time, attention, or sacrifice, many would advise you to throw it away and move on. It’s not surprising then that many of the couples who attend marriage workshops and retreats struggle with selfishness. I like the apostle Paul’s definition of love. You know where it’s found, right? 1 Corinthians 13 is one place. But here’s another place: “Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends . . . Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand” (Philippians 2:3-4, MSG).

We could simply say that marital love is work. Or as Paul states, love is the daily decision to “put yourself aside” and focus on the needs of another. Think about this, there is no switch you can flip on your wedding day that suddenly allows you to look out for another person’s interests before your own. The ability and desire to be selfless is tested in the daily interaction of dating.

As your dating relationship turns serious and marriage becomes a possibility, it’s time to ask some probing questions: “Am I willing to put this person’s needs above my own, even when it’s inconvenient?”

I recall the time a couple came once to my office. They were both from Mexico—a young couple married just three and half years. He came to the United States to make some money to help her so she would be able to finish her nursing training. While in Mexico, a former boyfriend of hers became obsessed with her and raped her. He threatened her, kidnapped her for a week, and only let her go after she promised to have all charges dropped, which she did after he released her. She told her husband and her parents, with whom she was living, what had happened to her. He asked her to come to the States so they could be together. Understandably, the young wife developed some barriers that prevented her from giving herself completely to her husband as she would have in a normal, healthy marriage relationship. When she could not overcome her emotional and psychological barriers, she told her husband that she was not being fair to him and that they should divorce so he could find himself a good wife. That is how much she valued the well-being of the man she loved.

With tears in his eyes, the husband said to his broken wife, “But I love you. I learned from Jesus’ sacrifice for us that because I truly love you, I am willing to give my life for you. And if I have to wait months or years before we can be intimate again, before we can have a good marriage again, I’m happy to do so, because I love you.” This couple—both husband and wife—exhibited the true meaning of unselfish, other-centered love. Not my needs, but my spouse’s needs come first.

OBSERVATION 3: Premarital Sex Complicates Everything

Avoiding sexual intimacy before marriage is another component of finding lasting love. Besides the fact that it goes against God’s directives, premarital sex clouds judgment. Deciding to marry someone is one of the most important steps

you'll ever take; you need to be able to evaluate the relationship clearly. Yet, sexual intimacy often makes a couple feel closer than they are and hinders their ability to see each other in nonsexual ways. The overshadowing power of sex is one reason Scripture instructs us to reserve it for marriage. The Apostle Paul writes, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3, NASB).

When God puts something off limits it is because He wants to protect and provide. In this case, God wants to protect us from making clouded decisions about another. What does it mean to abstain from sexual immorality in a dating relationship? While the Greek word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, *porneias*, covers a broad range of sexual actions, it mainly focuses on intercourse. Paul also adds that we should avoid "lustful passion" (verse 5), or actions that would cause us to desire to have sex.

Because sex and dating are considered synonymous in our culture, pursuing lasting love with someone will require you to ask difficult questions of yourself and your relationship. From the more psychological point of view, there is great value in the privacy and intimacy reserved for marriage. Once that mystery is removed, there is a great loss in the relationship. Sadly, statistics do not lie. Couples that live together before marriage greatly increase their chances of divorce compared to those that do not.

Rabbi Schmuley Boteach writes,

SURRENDERING SEXUALLY TOO EARLY IN A RELATIONSHIP IS ALMOST ALWAYS GUARANTEED TO DESTROY THE BUDDING ROMANCE, CHIEFLY BECAUSE IT UNDERMINES THE SENSE OF MYSTERY. YOUR BODY, COVERED IN CLOTHING, IS A MYSTERIOUS TREASURE WHICH ONLY BONDS OF COMMITMENT CAN REVEAL. WHEN YOU GO AHEAD AND REMOVE IT ALL, YOU ARE A PUZZLE THAT HAS BEEN SOLVED. EROTICISM (FROM THE GREEK EROS) IS LOST FROM THE RELATIONSHIP SINCE THERE ARE NOW NO OBSTACLES WHICH MUST BE OVERCOME IN ORDER FOR PLEASURE TO HAD."²

OBSERVATION 4: Marital Love Requires Commitment

Our culture assumes love will be short-lived, so couples are not expected to commit to each other. That's why more and more couples are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage. Which, by the way, is one of the reasons most cohabiting couples never marry the people with whom they live. And those who do marry have a much greater chance of divorce due to the "no commitment" mentality that follows them right into marriage. Instead, the Bible's picture of mature romantic love, implies lasting commitment: Jesus said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be **united** with his wife" (Matthew 19:5). The word we most often use for united is the word *cleave*. The literal meaning of cleave is to make a covenant. It means to make a public vow of commitment to God and to the person you are marrying.

That is what Ezekiel says God did when He cleaved to us: "Then I passed by you again and saw that you had reached the age for love. I spread my cloak over you and covered your nakedness. I swore a solemn oath to you and **entered into a covenant** with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine" (Ezekiel 16:8, NLT).

The essence of marriage is a covenant! That's why the marriage vows are not really a declaration of a person's feelings for the other but a promise of what they will be and do for the other. Most of you repeated these or similar vows: I, (name), take you (name), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part.

To love and to cherish is not referring to a feeling. It is not to feel love toward a spouse, or to feel like cherishing one's spouse. Rather, it is a decision of the will. This decision forms a covenant bond that controls one's future actions. The way to control and not be controlled by your past is to forgive; the way to control your future is to make a covenant. Both

love and forgiveness are decisions we must make! When we attach our souls, our very beings, to another we become one with that person spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. For all our clamoring for independence and freedom, most of us want to be stuck with someone we love and who loves us—for life.

If you are considering marriage, the relationship described in Genesis should stop you cold in your tracks. It is asking you to put your security on the line and committing entirely to one person, one person with whom you will face a lifetime of challenges together.

One of the movie blockbusters of 2011 was “The Vow,” based on a book by the same title.³ The book tells the story of Kim and Krickitt who met and fell in love over a long-distance phone call in 1992. They bonded over their Christian faith and were married a very short time later. Just ten weeks into their marriage, the couple survived a terrible car wreck that left Krickitt in a coma with severe head trauma.

When she woke up from the coma, Krickitt experienced amnesia and was essentially married to a stranger, forgetting the last eighteen months of her life. Some people encouraged Kim to divorce Krickitt. “After all, she doesn’t know you,” they told him. But he refused. It was the couple’s religious belief in the unbreakable vow of marriage that kept them together. “You make a promise before God with your wedding vows,” said Krickitt Carpenter, “You have to take that seriously.”

You may think, *Where am I going to find the strength to love one person consistently for life?* The answer lies in the most important observation about romantic love.

OBSERVATION 5: Divine Love is the Key

Our ability to love a person—and enjoy that person’s love in return—is dependent upon our experience of God’s love. The reason becomes apparent when we consider the type of love all of

us hope to receive. When I ask young people to describe the person they want to love for the rest of their lives they respond, “A person who will always care for me, always look out for me, always accept me, always pursue me, always be interested in me.” The love they envision is powerfully described in the Scriptures:

LOVE NEVER GIVES UP. LOVE CARES MORE FOR OTHERS THAN FOR SELF. LOVE DOESN’T WANT WHAT IT DOESN’T HAVE. LOVE DOESN’T STRUT, DOESN’T HAVE A SWELLED HEAD, DOESN’T FORCE ITSELF ON OTHERS, ISN’T ALWAYS “ME FIRST,” DOESN’T FLY OFF THE HANDLE, DOESN’T KEEP SCORE OF THE SINS OF OTHERS, DOESN’T REVEL WHEN OTHERS GROVEL, TAKES PLEASURE IN THE FLOWERING OF TRUTH, PUTS UP WITH ANYTHING, TRUSTS GOD ALWAYS, ALWAYS LOOKS FOR THE BEST, NEVER LOOKS BACK, BUT KEEPS GOING TO THE END. LOVE NEVER DIES.”
1 CORINTHIANS 13, MSG

This description of love resonates with us because it was inspired by God for people who were made to be receptors of His divine love. Our fascination with and yearning for perfect love has been embedded into our hearts. But if we’re honest, we realize there’s no way we can always love someone as Paul describes. Expecting an imperfect spouse to love us that perfectly is equally unrealistic and invites disappointment and hurt. Only one person can love perfectly—God. Experiencing His unwavering love is the only way human love can be satisfying. Why? Because when we allow ourselves to be loved by a Divine Lover—who does not have mood swings or bad days—our need for transcendent love is fulfilled. We are then free to be content with the love others can offer. And we’re better able to love others in the way God loves us. If the ability to love someone is dependent upon experiencing God’s love, then it’s crucial to assess your walk with God and that of the person you are dating.

Conclusion

Assessing your views of romantic love and realigning them with God’s perspective takes

time and effort. But think about it this way: If you knew you would drive the next car you purchased for the rest of your life, how would that knowledge affect your decision? What precautions would you take to ensure you were buying the right car? Perhaps you would find out how *Consumer Reports* rates it. Maybe you would pop the hood and see if everything is in place. Surely you would take the car for a long test drive. And yet, the most important thing you could do is take it to an expert mechanic who knows how a car is supposed to run. His exhaustive checklist would trump any list you could put together.

Well, ironically, when it comes to marital love, most people are content to create their own checklists. These lists often reflect an amazingly limited perspective: “Do we have fun together?” “Do my friends like him or her?” “Do we like the same church?”

As Christians we have access to the perspective of the Author of love. God is not just a lover, but love itself (1 John 4:8). His opinion, revealed in His Word, can guide us as we move from dating to love, to a lifetime commitment with another. If you are considering marriage, there is no surer path to a relationship that will not only be deeply fulfilling, but will also provide an example to a culture desperate for lasting love.

So, what’s love got to do with it? If you want to have a lasting, successful, happy marriage, you need at least four facets of love:

- You need **storge** love, a love rooted in friendship.
- You need **eros** love, an attraction for each other.
- You need **phileo** love, a brotherly love, as if we had always been together.
- And most importantly, you need **agape** love, God’s unselfish, everlasting, all-encompassing love for us and through us.

Robertson McQuilkin, at the peak of his career, resigned as president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in 1990 to become the full-time caregiver for his wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimer’s.

McQuilkin did this, he said, because Muriel was much happier when he was with her. As Muriel needed more and more of him, he wrestled with who should receive his full-time attention, Muriel or Columbia Bible College.

As McQuilkin explained it,

“WHEN THE TIME CAME, THE DECISION WAS FIRM. IT TOOK NO GREAT CALCULATION. IT WAS A MATTER OF INTEGRITY. HAD I NOT PROMISED, 42 YEARS BEFORE, ‘IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH, TILL DEATH DO US PART?’ THIS WAS NO GRIM DUTY TO WHICH I WAS STOICALLY RESIGNED, HOWEVER. IT WAS ONLY FAIR. SHE HAD AFTER ALL CARED FOR ME FOR ALMOST FOUR DECADES WITH MARVELOUS DEVOTION; NOW IT WAS MY TURN. AND SUCH A PARTNER SHE WAS! IF I TOOK CARE OF HER FOR 40 YEARS, I WOULD NEVER BE OUT OF HER DEBT. IT IS ALL MORE THAN KEEPING PROMISES AND BEING FAIR, HOWEVER. AS I WATCH HER BRAVE DESCENT INTO OBLIVION, MURIEL IS THE JOY OF MY LIFE. DAILY I DISCERN NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF THE KIND OF PERSON SHE IS, THE WIFE I ALWAYS LOVED. I ALSO SEE FRESH MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD’S LOVE—THE GOD I LONG TO LOVE MORE FULLY. SHE IS SUCH A DELIGHT TO ME. I DON’T HAVE TO CARE FOR HER, I GET TO.”⁴

Notes

- ¹ Quoted by Les & Leslie Parrot in *Relevant Magazine*, Sept/Oct 2008;
- ² Boteach, Schmuley. *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy*. Danvers, MA: Harmony Books, p.172.
- ³ Krickitt And Kim Carpenter, Couple Who Inspired ‘The Vow,’ Talk About Love That Endures. OWN. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/krickitt-and-kim-carpenter-the-vow_n_5676474.html
- ⁴ Zylstra, Sarah Eekhoff. Died: Robertson McQuilkin, College President Praised for Alzheimer’s Resignation. Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/june/died-robertson-mcquilkin-columbia-president-alzheimers-ciu.html>

The Perfect Spouse

DEREK J. MORRIS

The Text

EPHESIANS 5:25-33

Subject

How to love your spouse

Complement

With agapé love: sacrificing, nourishing, cherishing.

Preaching idea

Let your marriage be a reflection of the immeasurable, unending love of God.

Purpose

To encourage my hearers to love their spouse with a heavenly love by sacrificing, nourishing, and cherishing their spouse.

My wife Bodil and I met at Newbold College in the UK. She was 18 and I was 20. We quickly became good friends. I loved her before I ever touched her hand. We shared a wonderful school year together, but soon she was back home in Takoma Park, Maryland preparing to enter the nursing program at Columbia Union College, now Washington Adventist University. I was able to visit her in the US that summer, and just before I left her

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parents invited me to join their family for a ski vacation in New England in December. It sounded like a wonderful idea, but I knew as a poor college student, I could never afford such luxury. Before I'd had a chance to get depressed over my poverty, her parents told me they would pay all of my expenses, including my airfare!

My final semester of undergraduate studies passed quickly and soon I was on my way to the US for an exciting winter vacation. Little did I realize it at the time, but I was embarking on a one-way trip. While on holiday, I was offered a pastoral position in the Pennsylvania Conference. I never went back home. Eight months later we were engaged. A year after that we were married.

It all seemed so perfect, but I was soon to discover what an imperfect spouse I was. After several years of pastoral ministry, my wife wrote me a letter. When I read it, I felt like someone had just punched me in the abdomen. I realize now she wasn't trying to hurt me—she wrote the letter because she loved me and cared about our marriage. Here's what she said, "You tell me I'm at the top of your list, but I don't feel like it." I was an abusive spouse and I did not even realize it. I would never hit my spouse. I don't ever remember shouting at her, but I was abandoning her, working from early in the morning until late at night, and to make matters worse, I was doing it in the name of Jesus.

After that reality check I began to be more intentional about my marriage. I found some wise counsel written almost two thousand years ago by the Apostle Paul. He's writing to husbands in this portion of his letter to Christians in Ephesus, but I'm convinced the counsel is appropriate for every spouse.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Notice again how Paul begins in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives." As you may know, there are several specific words in Greek which are translated by the rather broad English word "love." The verb used here is *agapao*, from which we get the noun *agapé*. It is used whenever God's love is spoken of. So when the Bible says "God so loved the world," the verb *agapao* is used. When Jesus says, "A new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you" the verb *agapao* is used. Paul is saying here, "Husbands, have agape love for your wives." And we might add, Wives, have agape love for your husbands.

Paul is challenging those of us who are married to reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. And the verb is in the present imperative, which is a command and an earnest ongoing appeal. Love, and keep on loving, your spouse with a heavenly love.

Perhaps someone is thinking, *Let your love for your spouse be a revelation of the immeasurable,*

unfailing love of God? What do you mean by that? Well, fortunately, the Apostle Paul outlines three aspects of that heavenly love.

I. Sacrifice for your spouse (Ephesians 5:25)

First, to reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God to your spouse means to sacrifice for your spouse. Look again with me at Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Christ demonstrated His agape love for us, his church, by making the supreme sacrifice for us. He gave Himself up on our behalf. He gave Himself up in favor of us. He took what we deserved, which was death, that we might receive as a free gift what He deserved—everlasting life. And He did not come saying, I'll give 50 percent if you give 50 percent. He gave 100 percent, unconditionally, even though He knew that many would not even appreciate His gift.

That is how we are to love our spouse. Love your spouse with a heavenly love. Sacrifice for your spouse. Unconditionally give 100 percent. You say, "That doesn't sound fair! Why should I have to give 100 percent? What about my needs? My rights? I can't love like that!" You're absolutely right. We can't love our spouse with a heavenly love if our hearts are selfish and unconverted. Unless you have committed your life to Christ and have asked Him to fill you with His agape love by the Holy Spirit, you cannot love your spouse with a heavenly love. It's impossible. You'll fall short every time. But if you pray each morning, "Lord, please fill me with your agape love," then God's love can flow through you to your spouse. Part of loving your spouse with a heavenly love is this: you will sacrifice for your spouse.

Many years ago, I was privileged to baptize a young couple, Gary and Laurie Moyer. Laurie had cystic fibrosis and she had struggled to stay alive as long as she could remember. As a child, she was molested by a hospital employee. Life was hard. But finally she met Gary, a young man who loved her for who she was. Not for what

he could give her, or what he could make of her, but simply for who she was. Laurie treated herself six hours a day just to be able to breathe freely. She was diligent and disciplined, but finally her lungs began to fail. No additional medical options were available, except one—a lung transplant. Her devoted husband offered to give her one of his lungs. That, my friends, is a visible demonstration of loving your spouse with a heavenly love. You sacrifice for your spouse. You love your spouse more than life itself. Such love, my friends, isn't worked up. It's prayed down. Such love is a gift from above, poured through you to those you love.

Laurie wasn't strong enough to go through that surgery. She sleeps in Jesus now, in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection when our Lord Jesus returns in glory. Even so, in this life she caught a glimpse of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God, and she will rejoice in that love throughout eternity.

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II. Nourish your spouse (Ephesians 5:28-29)

A second aspect of loving your spouse with the immeasurable, unfailing love of God is to nourish your spouse. Notice Ephesians 5:28-29: "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."

Paul uses the illustration of a person caring for his own body. He says just as a person nourishes his own body, and Christ nourishes the Church, so as a Christian you should nourish your spouse. The verb used here, *ektrepho*, means to nourish fully or to encourage growth. Loving your spouse with a heavenly love means not only to sacrifice for your spouse but also to nourish your spouse, to encourage her, to encourage him, to grow and develop.

One way to nourish your spouse is to encourage your spouse to grow personally. Forty years ago, on June 26, 1977, my wife and

I were married in Takoma Park, Maryland. We wrote our own vows for the wedding. As part of my vow, I promised to help Bodil become "all that God wanted her to be." That's what it means to "nourish" your wife. Though I've failed many times, that promise has been an important part of our commitment. When Bodil completed graduate school and marched off the platform with a masters degree in her hand, I do not know who was more excited—her or me! It almost felt like we were all graduating! She took all the tests and wrote all the papers, including an extensive thesis, but it took a family commitment to "nourish her," to encourage and support her in her growth. As Christians, loving your spouse with a heavenly love involves not only sacrificing for your spouse but nourishing your spouse as well.

A second way to nourish your spouse is to encourage your spouse to grow spiritually. In fact, listen carefully my friends, I would suggest that nurturing your spouse spiritually is the best way to strengthen and safeguard your relationship. Are you praying with your spouse? Are you praying for your spouse? Are you having worship together? Are you encouraging your spouse to grow spiritually? Those are ways to nourish your spouse, part of loving your spouse with a heavenly love.

III. Cherish your spouse (Ephesians 5:29)

But there's a third aspect of loving your spouse as a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God found in Ephesians 5:29 and that is "cherishing your spouse." "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and *cherishes* it, just as the Lord does the church."

Again, Paul uses the illustration of a person caring for his own body. The verb translated cherish in verse 29 is a unique one. Found only twice in the New Testament, the verb *thalpo* means to cherish, to comfort, to keep warm. The only other usage is in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 in reference to a nurse or nursing mother caring for her children: "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own

children.” What a beautiful picture! To reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God to your spouse means not only to sacrifice for your spouse and to nourish your spouse, but also to cherish your spouse. To comfort. To keep warm. And that’s not just talking about warming cold feet on a wintery night, but making your spouse feel special, precious, cherished.

I read a beautiful illustration this past week of a husband who did just that. He cherished his wife, and she felt it. The story was recorded by a surgeon who witnessed the touching scene. You see, this young lady had just undergone surgery to remove a tumor from her face. In the process of the operation, a facial nerve was severed, leaving her mouth twisted and her face contorted. Her young husband was in the hospital room standing beside the bed as the young woman asked the surgeon, “Will my mouth always be like this?” “Yes,” he replies, “it will, because the nerve was cut.” She nods in silence, but the young husband smiles. “I like it,” he says. “It’s kind of cute.” Gently, her husband stoops to kiss her crooked mouth, twisting his own lips to accommodate hers, just to show her that their kiss still works.¹ I don’t know about you, but that touches my heart. A simple, yet beautiful illustration of what it means to cherish your wife as a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

Conclusion

I have also been blessed with a life companion who has been a revelation to me of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. That hasn’t been easy, because I’m not a perfect spouse. What makes the miracle even more remarkable is this: she isn’t a perfect spouse either! But she asks the Lord to fill her with His agapé love and she loves me with a heavenly love—sacrificing, nourishing, and cherishing me. So today, 40 years and a few days after we said “I do,” I want to publically thank her for a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. [*Note: The speaker would recognize their own spouse now, then invite others to do the same.*]

I bought some flowers to say thank you, but they’re not all for you! They’re also for you to share with someone else here who wants to say thank you to their spouse for a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

If your heart is filled with gratitude for someone who loves you with a heavenly love—sacrificing, nourishing, cherishing—then come, take a flower, and thank that special person in your life for helping you to catch a clearer glimpse of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

Notes

¹ Dobson, James C. (2014). *Straight Talk to Men*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, p. 112.

The Power of Praying Parents

S. JOSEPH KIDDER

The Text

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

Introduction

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I met Larry during Christmas. He was rough looking and heavily covered with tattoos—up and down his arms, on his neck, even on his head. In the course of our conversation, he told me that he was the head deacon at his church. I was taken aback! I don’t normally see myself as judgmental, but I could not understand why a church would let a guy who looked as rough as Larry be the head deacon. That is when he shared his story with me.

He grew up in the Church and was the product of Adventist education from elementary school until the first year of college. When he got to college, he did not feel like he fit in with their strict rules and regulations. He left school and ended up joining the Hells Angels. He totally embraced the gang life—drugs, women, drinking, full-body tattoos.

During Larry’s years away from God, his mother woke up at five o’clock every morning to pray for her son. She had little contact with Larry and often did not know where he was,

whether he was dead or alive—in jail or out of jail—but she kept clinging to hope. For fifteen years, Larry’s mother faithfully prayed for her son and claimed Bible promises on his behalf.

Fifteen years later, Larry finally decided it was time to leave the Hells Angels. He and his girlfriend settled down in the Bay Area. He got a job, but stole from his boss to support his drug addiction. He was caught and fired. Soon after, he ran out of money. He and his girlfriend were evicted from their apartment and shortly thereafter, she left him. Larry, unable to recover, lived on the streets of San Francisco. He ate from trash cans and scavenged for necessities.

Larry became so depressed that he felt suicide was the only option. One Sabbath morning, he took his gun and pointed it at his head. With his finger on the trigger, he heard a voice telling him to go to church. He had not been to church in fifteen years so he ignored the voice. Resetting his grip, he heard the voice again saying, “Go to church.” He tried to ignore the voice again. This happened several times. How did Larry respond? What happened to him? We’ll get back to that shortly.

Covering Our Children with Prayer

Every single day we may find ourselves doing a lot for our children—loving and caring for them, nurturing, teaching, training, helping,

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leading, equipping, encouraging, protecting, and so much more. We spend precious hours just living out life, helping with homework, and driving them to activities. We spend money on sports, lessons, and various classes to help them grow and become all they can be, providing opportunities for them to do what they most love in this world. But in the midst of busy, full lives we have to ask ourselves: Are we praying for our children?

I am not referring to quick prayers that have little thought behind them. I mean *really* praying specific, powerful, promise-filled, hope-inspired prayers. The only thing of eternal significance that will stand the test of time is our prayers for our children. Our prayers for our children never die. They live on in their lives. Their relationship with Jesus is the only thing they can take with them to heaven, and for this we should pray for them.

When my two children were young, after supper we would have family worship. Shortly after that I would typically leave for a meeting or pastoral visitation. My wife would tuck the children in bed after praying with each one of them. When I would return home, I would go into their rooms and also pray with them. Then my wife and I would go into our bedroom and pray for our children's salvation, protection, future, and character. Many times we would claim specific Bible promises on their behalf. To this day, my adult children remain committed followers of Jesus.

There is nothing more powerful than the earnest prayers of parents who humbly kneel down and lift their children before the Lord. Ellen White writes,

“THE POWER OF A MOTHER’S PRAYERS CANNOT BE TOO HIGHLY ESTIMATED. SHE WHO KNEELS BESIDE HER SON AND DAUGHTER THROUGH THE VICISSITUDES OF CHILDHOOD, THROUGH THE PERILS OF YOUTH, WILL NEVER KNOW TILL THE JUDGMENT THE INFLUENCE OF HER PRAYERS UPON THE LIFE OF HER CHILDREN. IF SHE IS CONNECTED BY FAITH WITH THE SON OF GOD, THE

MOTHER’S TENDER HAND MAY HOLD BACK HER SON FROM THE POWER OF TEMPTATION, MAY RESTRAIN HER DAUGHTER FROM INDULGING IN SIN. WHEN PASSION IS WARRING FOR THE MASTERY, THE POWER OF LOVE, THE RESTRAINING, EARNEST, DETERMINED INFLUENCE OF THE MOTHER, MAY BALANCE THE SOUL ON THE SIDE OF RIGHT.”
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In my pastoral ministry I have seen the difference it makes when parents pray for their children. Those children are protected by God. They often decided to follow Jesus and more often than not, come back to the Lord when they go astray.

Prayers are powerful because we have a God who does even the impossible when we pray. Hannah prayed for something that was impossible for her—to have a child—but God granted her wish. The same God who granted Hannah's wish for a child honors the prayers of parents for the salvation, protection, and future of their children. Hannah knew Who had helped her: “I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him” (1 Samuel 1:27). My hope is that every parent will be able to claim this promise on behalf of their children.

Now I would like to share with you seven important areas for which to pray concerning your children. At the end, there is 31-day prayer plan which may help you get started praying for your children. You may repeat it or adapt it as you wish.

1. Salvation

As a father, my greatest desire in the world is to see my children walking with the Lord, and I pray for this all the time. John had it right when he wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

I want to pray that my children have an experience like Paul who said, “I want to

know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11, NIV). When children do this, is there any greater joy that a parent can have?

Prayer for Our Children’s Salvation:

“Father, I pray that my daughter will confess with her mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in her heart that You have raised Christ from the dead.

May my daughter call on Your name (Romans 10:9,13)! Father, lead my daughter in the paths of righteousness for Your name’s sake. I pray that You will shed Your love abroad in her heart, and teach my daughter to delight in You (Romans 5:5).

Jesus, bind Satan and break his power over my daughter for he is a defeated foe. Please send your angels and godly men and women to minister to my daughter.

Holy Spirit, I ask that you draw my daughter to Jesus Christ and into a close, personal relationship with Him.

Thank You, Lord, for Your gift of salvation. Thank You for saving my daughter. I pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.”

2. Character

We desire very strongly for our children to be Christ-like. The Apostle Paul’s prayer was that they would follow his example, as he followed the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). We pray that our children not only know doctrine, but that they would know Jesus and have His character. Our greatest hope is that others will be able to see Him in them, that their light would shine before others, that others may see their good deeds and glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

It is not enough to simply “wish” that our children would be like Jesus. We must be godly examples of Christ to our children, and we

must earnestly pray His character into their lives. In my own Bible study I love to discover the character of God in His word. Whenever I list these characteristics, I prayerfully ask Him to place those characteristics in my children and me. There is no greater act of worship than to be Christ-like, for we were created in His image for fellowship with Him.

Prayer for Our Children’s Characters:

“Father, thank you that my son is Your child! You have chosen him to be holy, and he is dearly loved. Out of that love, may my son’s life be marked by tenderhearted mercy, by kindness, by humility, by gentleness, and by patience. May he grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Let my son’s light shine before others, that they may see his good deeds and glorify You (Matthew 5:16).

I pray that my son will be quick to forgive an offense, forgiving as quickly and completely as You forgave us! And above all else, I pray that he will live a life of love which binds us all together in perfect unity (Ephesians 4:32).

May my son’s heart be filled with the peace of Christ and thankfulness. Let every detail of my son’s life —words, actions, and thoughts— be done in the name of Jesus, thanking You every step of the way.

May my son learn to do right, seek justice, and defend the oppressed. May he take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17).

I pray my son will serve You faithfully with all his heart and consider what great things You have done for him” (1 Samuel 12:24). In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

3. Relationships

Our prayers should be centered on God guiding our children “along the right paths for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3) and leading them in choosing their friends and future spouses. We are to pray that they will have relationships

that are positive and which will lead them to Christ.

Ask God to protect your child daily from those who would be an evil influence to them. “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:1, 2, NIV).

One of the biggest influences on our children are their friends. We pray that God will bring committed Christians like the apostle, Andrew, to their paths who will help lead them to Jesus. We also want our children to be like Andrew and bring other people to Christ.¹ We might even pray that God will miraculously remove a friend of questionable character from our child’s life.

Prayer for Our Children’s Relationships:

“Father, bring to my children’s paths the friends You want them to have. Lord, keep them from the wrong influences. Provide my children with godly relationships and fun things to do that are also pleasing to You.

Father, thank You that my children walk in the way of godly Christians and keep the paths of the righteous. Thank You, Father, that You provide wise and godly friendships for my children. May my children find godly spouses that will encourage them in their faith and walk with the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:14). In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

4. Joy

We desire to bring happiness to our loved ones. That desire is a tiny reflection of God’s desire to lavish our children with happiness beyond measure. The concept of joy is found more than 200 times in the Bible, thus showing the value God places on it.² Joy is even a fruit of the Spirit, a result of having the Holy Spirit in our lives (Ephesians 5:22).

The ultimate joy is having God’s presence in our children’s lives. “You make known to

me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand” (Psalm 16:11, NIV). Picture the unimaginable, eternal delight that God wants to give. Make eternal happiness in God’s presence your reference point and goal as you pray for your children.

Ultimately, only God can offer total, eternal happiness. This joy is not based on material possessions, accomplishments, or circumstances, but contentment in the Lord. Paul says, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-13, NIV).

Prayer for Our Children’s Joy:

“Oh Jesus, You alone know what will make my daughter happy and whole. You alone have set her on the path to eternal happiness in Your presence, so do whatever You think is best. I only ask that You fill her with Your Holy Spirit, as I place her in Your hands. May Your joy be her strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

May she be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that she may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that she may know You (Colossians 2:2). May my daughter keep her life free from the love of money and be content with what she has, because You have said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ (Hebrews 13:5, NIV). May Your presence and eternal delight rest in her heart, mind, and soul forever. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

5. Protection

When I was studying at Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon, a civil war between the Christians and the Muslims broke out. The college was located in the Christian territory at the edge of the battle line. Many rockets would fall on the campus, increasingly becoming more and more dangerous. My mom prayed every day and claimed the promises of protection in Psalm 91 on my behalf:

“WHOEVER DWELLS IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL REST IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY. I WILL SAY OF THE LORD, ‘HE IS MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS, MY GOD, IN WHOM I TRUST.’ SURELY HE WILL SAVE YOU FROM THE FOWLER’S SNARE AND FROM THE DEADLY PESTILENCE. HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS FEATHERS, AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU WILL FIND REFUGE; HIS FAITHFULNESS WILL BE YOUR SHIELD AND RAMPART. YOU WILL NOT FEAR THE TERROR OF NIGHT, NOR THE ARROW THAT FLIES BY DAY, NOR THE PESTILENCE THAT STALKS IN THE DARKNESS, NOR THE PLAGUE THAT DESTROYS AT MIDDAY. A THOUSAND MAY FALL AT YOUR SIDE, TEN THOUSAND AT YOUR RIGHT HAND, BUT IT WILL NOT COME NEAR YOU.”
PSALM 91:1-7, NIV

The reason I am alive today is because she claimed those promises for me. Therefore today, I pray a prayer of protection on behalf of my children for the many dangers they face every day. I also ask God to protect them from sin and evil. Every day they face such temptations as drugs, alcohol, pornography, and even friends who could lead them down the wrong paths. In our struggle against evil we are dealing with spiritual powers. Therefore, we are to put on the whole armor of God and stand against the attacks of the evil one.

“FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN HIS MIGHTY POWER. PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR STAND AGAINST THE DEVIL’S SCHEMES. FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE POWERS OF THIS DARK WORLD AND AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS. THEREFORE PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT WHEN THE DAY OF EVIL COMES, YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND YOUR GROUND, AND AFTER YOU HAVE DONE EVERYTHING, TO STAND.”
EPHESIANS 6:10-13, NIV

One powerful weapon that every Christian parent has is the ability to pray a daily hedge of protection around their children. “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3, NIV).

Be specific in claiming the promise in Scripture that is related to the kind of protection that is needed for your children. For example, for protection from sin you can claim a verse such as Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you (King James Version).” For protection from discouragement, you could claim this promise: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6; and see also Hebrews 13:5).

Prayer for Our Children’s Protection:

“Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray a hedge of protection around my children. I thank You that You are a wall of fire around them. Thank You that You have given Your angels charge over my children to keep them in all their ways. I thank You that Your angels surround them while they are out and away from home. Thank You that You protect them from harm, accidents, and all kinds of danger. In peace may they lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make them dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

“Thank You, Lord, that You are the fortress and the refuge of my children. Thank You that Your Word is a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. Thank You that the wicked one can’t touch them, and no evil will befall them.”³

“Father, bless them and keep them; Make Your face shine on them and be gracious to them; Turn Your face toward them and give them peace (Numbers 6:24-26). In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

6. Future

It is our sincere prayer that our children will now and forever walk faithfully with the Lord as Enoch did (Genesis 5:24) and that Jesus would be their lifelong Friend and Savior.

For our children's future we pray that they will choose Jesus to be their guide in every decision they will make. We want them to make decisions not based solely on logic or the needs of the moment, but based on God's will guided by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:105).

We must ask God to help them make wise decisions. One of the most important decisions they will make is the choice of a spouse. This decision should be made with much prayer, counsel, and wisdom. God promises wisdom to all who simply ask: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5, NIV). We pray that our children will desire God's will, surrender their lives, and ask Him to be their directing agent. Our prayers should be centered on them choosing wisely and choosing someone God would approve, somebody who will encourage them in the Lord.

We pray for our children to have a future that is secure in Christ. He is in control and will be present with them long after we are gone.

Prayer for Our Children's Futures:

"Lord, I thank you that you know the plans you have for my son—to prosper him and not to harm him, to give him hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). May You supply all of his emotional, physical, and spiritual needs according to Your riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). I pray that my son will not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But may his delight be in Your law, and may he meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:1–2).

"I pray that my son will trust in You with all his heart and lean not on his own understanding; in all his ways submit to You, and that You will make his paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6). May my son forget what is behind and always strive toward what is ahead. (Philippians 3:13). May he be confident that the good work You began in him will be carried out to completion until You come again (Philippians 1:6). In Jesus' name, Amen."

7. Faithfulness

Our desire for our children is to be faithful in the small and big things of life. We want them to be faithful to God, their spouses, children, work, finances, and Church.

The Early Church was very faithful in their church attendance, praise and worship, and prayer. "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts," (Acts 2:46, NIV). We yearn for our children to do the same thing.

When the time comes when they must stand for their faith, we want them to stand like Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who had a choice between worshipping the king and avoiding the fiery furnace or worshipping God alone and potentially dying. They said to the king:

**"KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR, WE DO NOT NEED TO DEFEND OURSELVES BEFORE YOU IN THIS MATTER. IF WE ARE THROWN INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE, THE GOD WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US FROM IT, AND HE WILL DELIVER US FROM YOUR MAJESTY'S HAND. BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW, YOUR MAJESTY, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE YOUR GODS OR WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF GOLD YOU HAVE SET UP."
DANIEL 3:16-18, NIV**

In order to make sure we are faithful in the big things, we have to be faithful in the little things. Luke writes, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10, NIV).

When I became an Adventist, I faced a challenging dilemma—be faithful to God and honor His Sabbath or go to the university and take my exams on the Sabbath. I decided that I would be obedient to God and follow His will. When I failed to take the exams for two years running, the university kicked me out. My family nearly beat me to death for becoming

an Adventist. I was abandoned by them and thrown out onto the street. That was 38 years ago. As I reflect on that time, I see that God was making all things work together for good for my family and me. Today I pray that my children will do the same and stand faithfully for God in the small and the big things of life, no matter what the price.

Prayer for Our Children's Faithfulness:

"Lord, You are always faithful to us. Your Word shows us time and again that You are faithful. I pray that my children will be faithful to You, that they would not wander from You. I pray that You teach them what it means to be faithful to You, to Your Word, and to Your Church. Give them steadiness as they follow You. Teach them to be faithful in small, simple acts of faith, as well as big acts of faith. I pray that like Joshua they will declared, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

"Lord, I pray that they would be like Daniel who could have avoided the lions' den, but chose instead to be faithful to God (Daniel 6:10-16). I pray that You will give them Your Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). I pray that they will be strong and courageous and not be afraid, but to stand for You at all times (Joshua 1:9). In Jesus' name, Amen."

The Power of a Praying Mother

Allow me now to return to the story of Larry, the ex-Hells Angels gang member whose mother prayed him back to God. After several suicide attempts and hearing the voice of God, Larry finally gave in to the voice and went to church in San Francisco.

The church was full so Larry sat in the last pew at the rear of the church. Because he was living on the streets with no access to a shower or basic hygiene, he smelled so bad that everyone sitting within a 5-pew radius got up and left the sanctuary. The pastor soon stood up to preach. He put his Bible and notes on

the pulpit and looked out at the congregation. Larry caught his attention. The pastor leaned forward, staring at Larry for about a minute before going back to his notes. But he could not preach. Once again he leaned forward to stare at Larry and once again he unsuccessfully went back to his notes.

Now the whole church began to focus on Larry. Still unable to preach, the pastor left the pulpit and started walking to the back of the church. He headed straight for Larry. He fell at his feet, embraced him, hugging and kissing him and crying for joy. Larry had been his roommate in college. Of all the churches for Larry to go to, he came to one where God had prepared a reception of unconditional love.

One month before Larry gave up his suicide attempt and went to church, the pastor and his wife hosted some of their college friends who were traveling to Yosemite Park. That evening after supper the group reminisced about their college days and pulled out a yearbook. Flipping through the pages, the pastor's wife saw a picture of Larry and wondered aloud what had become of him. They spoke about what they knew of his life—far from God, into drugs and gang life. After a moment they stopped their conversation, feeling convicted to pray for Larry.

The following day, when their friends went home, the pastor and his wife made a commitment to pray every day for Larry in hopes of seeing him again. A month later Larry showed up at their church! No sermon was preached that Sabbath. Instead, the pastor shared this story and the church celebrated.

The evening I met Larry, he and his fiancé rose to leave the dinner table where several people were eating. A few minutes later a couple in their 60s left. Then another guy left. I was curious, so I rose and followed them to see where they were going. They had gone out to a side room. The people who rose to leave, I later learned, were the parents and brother of Larry's fiancée. Larry was giving them Bible studies. Now I understood why this special man was the head deacon.

The faithful prayers of Larry's mother and the prayers of his former classmates did not return void. They were answered in an incredible way. Larry did come back to his family, to the Lord, and to the Church.

Conclusion

As you pray for your children: pray through Scripture; start a prayer journal in which family and friends write prayers for them; form a prayer circle; turn your worries into prayers; develop a prayer war room (putting prayers and answers to prayers on the wall); pray big (intensely, defensively, and offensively with your children and with your spouse). Our children need our persistent Bible-based prayers. When we form our prayers from the Scripture, we are speaking God's own will for them (Hebrews 4:12). We must make a commitment to pray for them all their lives. It is the best gift we can give them.

Being a parent is tough, but God calls us to persevere in this endeavor, fixing our eyes upon

Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). It requires patience, humbleness, selflessness, and truth. Our love for our children must protect, trust, hope, persevere, and never fail (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). My desire is that we will continue to pray for our children and grandchildren until all of us are safely home with Him.

Notes

- ¹ Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Christ (John 1:40-42). He also brought a small boy with his fish and loaves to Christ (John 6:6-9). We also read that he helped bring Greeks to Jesus (John 12:20-22).
- ² There are over 200 verses referring to joy in the NIV translation of the Bible. http://www.faithgateway.com/25-bible-verses-about-joy/#.WWzqTBS_tII. Accessed July 19, 2017.
- ³ Prayer adapted from <http://www.cfaith.com/index.php/article-display/105-featured-c5-articles/21626-prayer-to-stand-in-the-gap-for-your-children>. Accessed July 17, 2017.

31 Days of Prayer for Our Children

1. Salvation—“Lord, let salvation spring up within my children, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” (Isaiah 45:8; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 3:5)

2. Growth in Grace—“I pray that my children may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

3. Love—“Grant, Lord, that my children may learn to live a life of love, through the Spirit who dwells in them.” (Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:2)

4. Honesty and Integrity—“May integrity and honesty be their virtue and their protection.” (Psalm 25:21; Proverbs 10:9)

5. Reliance on God—“May my child grow to trust You with all of her heart and not lean on her own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5; Psalm 3:5).

6. Love for God’s Word—“May my children grow to find Your Word more precious than much pure gold and sweeter than honey from the comb.” (Psalm 19:10)

7. God’s Protection—“I praise You for You are faithful; You will strengthen and guard my child from evil.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

8. Mercy—“May my children always be merciful, just as their Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36; Luke 1:50)

9. Respect (for self, others, and authority)—“Father, grant that my children may show proper respect to everyone, as Your Word commands.” (1 Peter 2:17)

10. Biblical Self-Esteem—“Help my children develop a strong self-esteem that is rooted in the realization that they are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:10)

11. Faithfulness—“Let love and faithfulness never leave my children, but bind these twin virtues around their necks and write them on the tablet of their hearts.” (Proverbs 3:3; Proverbs 14:22)

12. Courage—“May my children always be strong and courageous in their character.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

13. Purity—“Create in them a pure heart, O God, and let that purity of heart be shown in their actions.” (Psalm 51:10)

14. Kindness—“Lord, may my children always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

15. Generosity—“Grant that my children may be generous and willing to share, and so lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19)

16. Peace—“Father, let my children make every effort to do what leads to peace.” (Romans 14:19; Isaiah 26:3)

17. Joy—“May my children be filled with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 1:6; Psalm 92:4)

18. Perseverance—“Lord, teach my children perseverance in all they do, and help them especially to run with perseverance the race marked out for them.” (Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 15:58)

19. Humility—“God, please cultivate in my children the ability to show true humility toward all.” (Titus 3:2; Proverbs 22:4)

20. Compassion—“Lord, please clothe my children with the virtue of compassion.” (Colossians 3:12; Psalm 145:9)

21. Responsibility—“Grant that my children may learn responsibility, for each one should carry his own load.” (Galatians 6:5; Colossians 3:23)

22. Contentment—“Father, teach my children the secret of being content in any and every situation, through Him who gives them strength.” (Philippians 4:12-13; 1 Timothy 6:6)

23. Faith—“I pray that faith will find root and grow in my children's hearts, that by faith they may gain what has been promised to them.” (Luke 17:5-6; Hebrews 11:1-40)

24. A Servant's Heart—“God, please help my children develop servant's hearts, that they may serve wholeheartedly, as if they were serving the Lord, not men.” (Ephesians 6:7; Romans 12:11)

25. Hope—“May the God of hope grant that my children may overflow with hope and hopefulness by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

26. Wisdom—“When my child lacks wisdom, help her understand that she should ask You. You give generously and without criticizing.” (James 1:5).

27. Passion for God—“Lord, please instill in my children a soul that 'followeth hard after thee,' one that clings passionately to You.” (Psalm 63:8; Psalm 42:1; 1 Lamentations 3:25)

28. Self-Discipline—“Father, I pray that my children may acquire a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair.” (Proverbs 1:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6)

29. Prayerfulness—“Grant, Lord, that my children's lives may be marked by prayerfulness, that they may learn to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

30. Gratitude—“Help my children to live lives that are always overflowing with thankfulness and always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 2:7; Psalm 107:8).

31. Obedience to God—“Remind my child to obey You rather than men” (Acts 5:29).