



Family Life

Linda Poitras

A Global Association of Theological Studies Publication

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Preface

It is an honor to be asked to write the Preface for this book. Linda Poitras served in West Africa for twenty-eight years. She has been my partner in marriage and ministry for more than thirty. God has blessed me with a wife that completes my ministry—a tremendous helper in the home, and coworker in the Lord’s harvest field.

Perhaps you are wondering what qualities we look for when seeking someone to write a textbook on family life? Let me briefly explain.

1. Example

It has been my distinct privilege to view Linda’s family life principles and teachings firsthand. I can assure you there is a balance between profession and practice. Linda practices what she teaches, and teaches what she practices.

2. Experience

Linda has years of experience as a wife, mother, a national Ladies Ministries leader, and an instructor in African Bible schools. Family life and marriage practices vary from culture to culture. The Word of God remains unchanged despite time and culture and has much to say about marriage. Principles gleaned from Scripture are applicable around the world although methods may vary. Linda has a balanced understanding of all of these components. She has been able to identify the principles of family life and present them in such a way that this textbook can be used globally.

3. Expertise

The author has thoroughly researched the subject. Books on the family fill the bookshelf above her desk. She has a strong commitment to marriage. Linda excels as a wife, mother, teacher, leader, and Christian lady.

4. Education

Linda is a product of a pastor's home with parents who taught and practiced Christian living and family life principles. She has a rich Pentecostal heritage. She is a constant student of the Word of God as well as a graduate of Troy State University, Troy, Alabama, USA.

The world is longing for the day that it will be free from tyranny, corruption, unrighteousness, and dishonesty. When will this happen? It will start in the home. The family is the nation in miniature. As the family goes, so goes the nation. The family is uniquely designed to pass the truth and Christian principles from generation to generation. You and your family can make an indelible impact on your world.

Approach this book with an open heart. Use it as a "How-to" manual. You will not be disappointed.

James G. Poitras
Linda's husband and director of Education/AIM
Global Missions, UPCI

Why This Book Was Written

When I arrived in Africa in 1981, I started looking for something. I searched in the marketplace, on the village road, in the city, and even in the “bush.” I especially longed to find this in the churches where I worshiped, but my search was in vain. It was so precious that in almost thirty years I have found only a handful throughout all my travels in Africa and beyond. My husband joined me in the search as he visited even more nations, but the report was the same. We were looking for something that is rare, and my heart was very heavy.

I was looking for something that had blessed me all my life—something that had nurtured, sheltered, encouraged, and challenged me from birth. It was what introduced me to the gospel and taught me to love God’s Word and truth. It also helped me to live by godly principles in the face of temptation and struggle. It was one of my most valuable possessions, and I longed to see others enjoying it too.

What was I looking for? A godly family—one based on the principles of God’s Word with a father who led his loving partner and encouraged her to be His God-given helpmeet. I was looking for a father who was there to take care of his wife and be an example to his children of what their heavenly Father is like. I was looking for mothers who knew how to submit to their husbands out of love and how to appreciate the man who was leading them to follow God as together they reared godly children. I was also looking for children secure in the love and protection of both parents as they discovered how to love and please the Lord. I looked, but I saw something entirely different.

I saw children—lots of them—beautiful and precious in God’s eyes; but most had no idea what their father was like, since they rarely saw him. They were worshipping with us because of their grandmother or an auntie, or just because they were passing by and had nothing better to do than stop and join the Sunday school class.

I saw women—hard working, faithful, and serious about prayer—but their husbands were not with them. They were sincere and earnest in their worship. They wanted more for their children, but they really did not know how to find what they were looking for because they did not have the proper leader. The pastor tried to feed them spiritually, but they went home with something still missing.

I saw men—serious and loyal, determined to get the job done—but I did not see them working alongside a godly wife. Many times I saw pastors, but could not find their wives anywhere. When I would ask, “Pastor, where is Sister So-and-So?” the answer would be, “She is not here,” “She is already gone,” “She is there in the back of the church somewhere,” or “She is at home in her village, working on the farm.”

This book was born of my search. I know that God has a plan for families, and that plan is good no matter the culture or climate. When God designs something, He always makes it the best. The family is no exception, and God’s plan for families is wonderful, able to make a difference in the life of every family member.

Following God’s family plan will change your family, your community, your church, your nation, and in fact, the whole world.

- It will help restore law and order in a world of war and chaos.
- It will give hope to children with no direction and help.
- It will help remove many of the diseases that our world is fighting.
- It will uplift the economy of every nation.
- It will curb the population explosion that helps spread famine in so many parts of the world.
- It will bring peace and rest to men, women, and children who have known so much strife and heartache.
- It will save the lives of thousands of unborn babies who otherwise would not enter this life.

In short, family life God’s way will make a difference in every part of your life and world. However, if it is going to work, you must follow it. This book does not profess to have all the answers, but it has enough answers from God’s Word to challenge you to move up higher. It is meant to encourage and enlighten you to look to Jesus—no matter what condition your family is in. I wrote this book because of a need, and the greatest need is for each of us to realize that God’s way

is best. We need to remember that God is talking to us. He is speaking about this issue right now, and He is addressing it right here—right where we live.

He is searching too, and He sees much more than I ever could. He sees the hearts of people who are hungry for something better. They have tried the way of the world and it has not worked. God knows there are those who are searching for more, and He has already given it. His Word has every answer to every question you have ever thought or will ever ask. Now you can ask the real “expert.”

I am still searching, but my search has taken a new direction. Now I look for those who will join me in the march toward godly families. I look for men and women who desire to follow where God leads, and to raise their children as the blessing God meant them to be. I look for leaders who will take a stand against the lies of the devil and proclaim that there is hope! God’s Word is true, He cares, and He will help us. With God’s help, we can make a difference in our homes, the community where we live, the church we attend, and the nation we love.

“So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21, NLT).

The smallest light shines brightest in the darkest corner, and it is time to let our lights shine. No matter where you are, what kind of family you came from, or what family situation you find yourself in right now, let the light of Jesus shine through you to bring light to the darkness all around you.

“If we truly want peace in the world let us begin by loving one another in our own families”—Mother Teresa

Personal Study Notes

Introducing Family Life

KEY VERSE

“Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?” (Malachi 2:10)

FOCUS

Families are suffering. All around the world, the failure of the family is causing serious problems. Why are families falling apart? The world has forgotten the Creator of the family and left His design out of their plans. In some cultures:

- The mother is the leader.
- Men legally have more than one wife.
- Women legally have more than one husband.
- Two men are allowed to “marry” each other.
- Two women are allowed to “marry” each other.
- Men (and women) are allowed to have as many living partners as they want, as long as they have them one at a time. (This is called serial monogamy.)

These “family plans” are not working. The attack on the family is actually a direct attack on God, since He designed the family as the basic unit of all society.

Although two-parent families are becoming less common in many parts of the world, they still make up the majority of families globally. Children less than eighteen years of age are more likely to live in two-parent families than in other family forms in Asia and the Middle East compared with other regions of the

world. Children are more likely to live with one or no parent in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa than other regions. (*The World Family Map* – <http://worldfamilymap.org/2013/articles/world-family-indicators/family-structure>, accessed January 29, 2015.)

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

God created the first man and woman, and He began the family institution. Male and female were created in the image of God and were designed to reflect His nature (Genesis 1:27-31). God used the love relationship between a man and his wife as a parallel to His love relationship between Himself and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). When men and women fail to follow God's plan for the family and marriage, they aid Satan in His war against God.

"The goal of marriage is two-fold: to reveal the glory of God and to enhance the glory of one's spouse"—Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III in *Intimate Allies*.

God made a difference in the male and female body, but both were given the same characteristics – physical, social, intellectual, and emotional. God meant for all of these to reflect His image (II Corinthians 3:18). Since the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, man has been trying to plan his life using His own ideas. This was the original temptation of the serpent (Genesis 3:4-5), and it still works.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Corinthians 4:4).

It is time for God's people to recognize this battle for what it is and take a stand against the enemy. We can win the war for our families. We can defeat the enemy. However, we must return to God's original plan and fight the real enemy – not each other.

FIGHTING THE REAL ENEMY

We must always remember that the real enemy of our souls is not any religion, people group, or philosophy. Our enemy is the devil and his cohorts, and we have strategic weapons that we need to bring out and use against him.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

This verse of Scripture lists our enemies:

- Principalities,
- Powers,
- Rulers of the darkness of this world, and
- Spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:14-17 tells us what is in our arsenal of weapons:

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This “whole armour of God” is necessary for winning the battle against the devil. Notice that it first speaks of the armor worn for protection:

- Loins girt about with truth,
- Breastplate of righteousness;
- Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,
- Shield of faith—to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and
- Helmet of salvation.

The offensive weapon of “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” is vital. Without it, we spend all of our time fighting a defensive war. Without strong dependence on the authority of God’s Word to correct the problem with families, people will continue to use their own ideas, and the family will eventually die completely.

GOD’S ORIGINAL DESIGN

When you check God's example of the first family, you find some interesting things:

1. From the beginning, He made them male and female (Matthew 19:4).
2. Because of the desire and need of humans for companionship, God designed marriage (Genesis 2:18)
3. The man shall leave father and mother (Matthew 19:5).
4. The man shall cleave (stick like glue) to his wife (Matthew 19:5).
5. The man and woman shall be so closely joined, they will become "one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). Charles Swindoll said, "The whole idea of mutual acceptance, giving, listening, forgiving and direction was implied [by this verse]. It is two individuals willingly blending into each other's lives, desiring to share with and thereby complete the other."
6. When God joins a man and woman in the true process of marriage, no man should allow that union to be torn apart (Matthew 19:6).
7. The intimate (physical) act of marriage was designed by God to be enjoyed by both men and women (Genesis 2:25).
8. God intended His family plan to bring forth fruit—children (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3). The failure of the family will stop the natural growth process and damage this "fruit" beyond repair.

Marriage rates are declining in many regions. Adults are most likely to be married in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and are the least likely to be married in South America, with Europe, North America, and Oceania in between. Living together without marriage is common among couples in Europe, North America, Oceania, and especially South America. (*The World family Map* – <http://worldfamilymap.org/2013/articles/world-family-indicators/family-structure>, accessed January 29, 2015.)

Understanding God's Word clearly and knowing His design is a weapon we can use to counter the attack against families everywhere. Matthew is not the only writer to share God's family plan (Matthew 19:4-6). Mark 10:6-9 says the same thing, and God's family plan is first mentioned in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1:26-30; 2:18, 21-25). When we use these and many other supporting verses of Scripture as a foundation, the enemy does not stand a chance. God's Word will win.

WE MUST SAVE OUR CHILDREN

We need to fight for God's family plan, and quickly. The death of families is destroying our children at an alarming rate. With the family structure falling apart, the enemy is attacking the minds, bodies, morals, and beliefs of children all over the world.

Worldwide, 3,167 un-evangelized children die every hour.

The following statistics are from *Mission Frontiers Magazine*, March 2001. The article is entitled "Kids Korner," by Gerry Dueck.

- Thirty-five thousand children under age five die every day (of malnutrition).
- Forty million children are aborted yearly.
- Two million child deaths occur yearly because of lack of immunization.
- Two million children have been killed in wars in the past twenty years.
- Four and one-half million children have been disabled in wars in the past twenty years.
- One hundred million children suffer forced prostitution.
- One to two hundred million children are currently involved in child labor.

These statistics are fourteen years old. What shocking increase might they portray now? Following a man-made plan (not God's) causes children to be open to the attack of the enemy, because they are not properly protected by God's original design. It also increases the probability that they will not know how to use God's Word as an offensive weapon.

- Children are supposed to listen to the instruction of their father and mother (Proverbs 4:1-4).
- Children are commanded to honor their father and mother (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- Children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5). If the family does not follow a godly pattern, the parents may regard their children as burdens.

CONCLUSION

The family is more important than we may have imagined. It has been neglected for so long and allowed to follow any design (other than God's). It has been sacrificed on the altar of careers and selfish pleasures.

With God's help, a determination on our part to follow His plan, and some hard work—making sure everyone understands who the enemy is and what weapons we must use—we can build wonderful families.

1. God is more powerful than the enemy (I John 4:4).
2. His Word will last forever (I Peter 1:25).
3. We can defeat the devil (I John 2:14).
4. We must be victorious (I Corinthians 15:57-58).

When we choose God's family plan, we not only save the family, but also our children. In *Color Outside of the Lines*, Howard Hendricks wrote:

- The church has 1 percent of the child's time;
- The school has 18 percent of the child's time;
- The family has 81 percent of the child's time.

Rob Rienow stated:

Family worship was a top priority in the early church because they were passionate about the Great Commission. They knew God had spoken clearly in the Bible that parents and grandparents were to take the lead in the spiritual training of their children and grandchildren. For them, a church could not be serious about the Great Commission if it was not serious about family worship. (Rob Rienow, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-essential-role-of-the-family-in-world-evangelization>, accessed February 23, 2015)

A family that is following God's plan will train their children in the ways of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). This will be passed on to their children's children and generations to come (Acts 2:39). If families use the time they have with their children for this purpose, God's plan will flourish.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:1-6).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What is the basic unit of all societies worldwide? _____

2. Why are families falling apart worldwide? _____

3. Who began the institution of the family? _____

When? _____
4. Name four (4) characteristics in which males and females alike.
A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____
5. What happens when families fail? _____

6. What was the original temptation used by the serpent in the Garden of Eden?

7. What five (5) pieces of the armor of God are used for protection?
- A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
 - E. _____
8. What is the one (1) offensive weapon of the armor of God? _____
9. List at least three (3) Scripture references that can be used to build a godly family.
- A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
10. What four (4) areas of a child's makeup are being attacked more severely because of the failure of the family?
- A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
11. What are two (2) things that can happen to children as a result of not being protected by godly families?
- A. _____
 - B. _____
12. Which institution has most of a child's time? _____
- What percent of the child's time does it have? _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 1

Defining the Family

Key Verse

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

FOCUS

Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language defines *family* as:

1. A group consisting of parents and their children;
2. The children of two parents;
3. A group of people closely related by blood; or
4. A group consisting of individuals descended from a common ancestry.

The Revell Bible Dictionary defines the same term in almost the exact way as *Webster's*:

1. The nuclear unit of a husband, wife, and their children;
2. A larger group of persons linked by common descent;
3. All those dependent on the head of a family.

It is really quite simple. Every person ever born, in any country of the world, is a member of some family. Every government in the world is based on the family unit, and every nation is only as strong as the families that call it home.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

God spoke to Abraham and promised to bless all the families of the earth because of his faithful obedience. We know that Abraham's family produced the Savior of the world. However, Jesus came to the earth in the same way everyone does—He was born into a family.

Noah's sons were sent out from the ark and told to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. Shem, Ham, and Japheth obeyed and fathered every known civilization. From the beginning, the family has been the foundation of every nation. Every empire that has ever fallen did so because of the weakness of the families in it.

In his book *Family and Civilization* (1947), Carl Zimmerman, a Harvard University professor who studies social trends, listed these characteristics found in every major world empire before its collapse:

- Marriage lost its sacredness;
- Alternative forms of marriage were allowed;
- Feminist movements flourished;
- Parenting became more difficult;
- Adultery was celebrated, not punished;
- Sexual perversions abounded, including bestiality (sex with animals), but especially incest (sex with close family members, such as father and daughter), and homosexuality (sex between two men or two women).

Unless we work together, the institution of the family will die. When it does, our nation and world will crumble.

BACK TO THE BASICS

Biologically, all children are a part of a family unit where they should be accepted and needed. They are related by blood to a family that they usually live with—at least until they are old enough to take care of themselves.

According to the article "Family" from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*:

1. The *nuclear family* includes any two or more persons related to one another by blood, marriage, or adoption and who share a common residence.

2. When the unit includes a husband and wife, it is considered a *conjugal family*.
3. The *family of orientation* is where most early childhood experiences and learning take place.
4. When a couple marries, a new nuclear (and conjugal) family is formed, a *family of procreation*.
5. In most societies, the *extended family* is the norm. This type goes beyond the nuclear family unit of parents and children to include relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins.
6. In America, the *modified extended family* is the norm. Newly married couples form a separate household from either set of parents, but keep close ties with their families of orientation.

Extended families (including parents and kin from outside the nuclear family) also appear to be common in Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, but not in other regions of the world. (<http://worldfamilymap.org2013/article/world-family-indicators/family-structure>, accessed January 29, 2015.)

For most of the world, the extended family is the norm. According to Kirabo Lukwago, director of Focus on the Family East Africa, in Swahili (the predominant language of that sub-region) the word for *father* and *uncle* is the same, and the word for *mother* and *aunt* is the same. In an article that appeared in *Focus on the Family Magazine*, Lukwago claims very little difference exists between the nuclear family and the extended family in an African setting. The good news about this is that it brings people together. The bad news is twofold.

- It makes it easy to run away from responsibilities. Both the father and mother have a tendency to leave children with grandparents, aunts, and uncles.
- Children are denied care they should get from the nuclear family.

Even though this article is written from East Africa, this definition of *family* is usually seen all across the continent and rings true in many other developing areas of the world.

Kinship ties are particularly powerful in much of Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In most of these countries, more than 40 percent of children live in households with other adults besides their parents, usually an extended family member. (<http://worldfamilymap.org2013/article/world-family-indicators/family-structure>, accessed January 29, 2015.)

THE NEED FOR A ROLE MODEL

Another problem with the omission of a nuclear family that Lukwago's *Focus on the Family* article did not mention is the failure of children to have a proper role model.

- Little boys need the continuing presence of a godly father at home so they can learn how to be one some day.
- Boys learn about the proper care of a wife by watching their father as he serves as head of the family unit.
- Boys learn how to be men of character by watching their father and mother stand against worldly influence and live according to God's Word, and not popular trends.
- Little girls need a daddy who is always available to give them the security and love they need.
- This enables the girls to choose a husband that loves God and knows how to lead his home as Christ loves and leads the church, unless they live in a culture where someone else chooses their spouse. If this is the case, it is vital for that someone to know and understand the godly characteristics needed in a spouse.
- A little girl needs her mother present to show her the proper role of a wife. Learning to cook, clean, wash and iron, take care of the home and nurture babies is necessary to prepare little girls for marriage.
- The main thing she needs is a mother that loves God and her father.
- A little girl also needs a mother who loves her enough to be sure she is warned against the worldly influences all around her.
- She needs a mother that will train her to resist giving herself lightly to worldly pleasures.

No matter the culture, children need both parents working and praying together to provide a godly example. They need parental training and instruction to become godly men and women. Children can become what God intended them to be without parental guidance, but it is much more difficult for them and usually comes after much heartache and trouble.

MORE PROBLEMS

One basic difference in families around the world is the number of spouses allowed. Every society has some rules (laws) that define and govern marriage and family. Monogamy (an exclusive relationship between two people) is the most common form of marriage and is the only one universally recognized (the accepted form of marriage in all societies). Few places in the world, however, consider monogamy as the only acceptable form of marriage—one spouse at a time (until death alone shall part them).

Different parts of the world practice polygamy, defined as:

- One man to more than one wife (polygyny);
- One woman to more than one man (polyandry).

One of the reasons Africans struggle to provide a secure family structure is that historically many of their families were polygamous—usually one man with many wives and several sets of children. In most societies, this practice would be confined to men of wealth or high status (the best hunter, farmer with the most land), but in Africa, polygamy occurs many times if the wife fails to produce a male heir.

As explained by Kirabo Lukwago in the same *Focus on the Family Magazine* article cited above, the tradition of polygamy leads to many problems.

- The husband keeps a different home for each wife.
- The father does not want to get too close to any one family unit, so he becomes the provider only.
- Children in this type of family structure grow up as though they were from a single-parent family.

Africa is not the only place where polygamy is a problem. Asia and Latin America also deal with the difficulties it brings. Research conducted at the University of Wisconsin found that from 1,231 societies listed, 186 were monogamous, 453 practiced occasional polygyny, 588 practiced frequent polygyny, and 4 practiced polyandry. (<http://www.wyzant.com/resources/lessons/english/etymology/words-mod-polygamy>, accessed February 23, 2015.)

Many first-world nations have outlawed polygamy. In countries where polygamy is legal, laws require a spouse to notify the other spouse before taking a new partner. In Asia, polygamy was practiced until modernization. Very rich men in Asia typically have several wives and concubines. In the twenty-first

century, anthropologists say polygamy is having a “little” revival. In Israel, a former chief rabbi is promoting polygamy as well as pilegesh (concubinage).

For the most part, Africans keep the newlywed couples in the home or compound of the groom’s parents, and this causes still more trouble. Again, the children are the ones who struggle to determine the head of the home. Is it their father (whom they rarely see) or the owner of the place (such as their grandfather) who is near every day?

WHICH IS RIGHT?

With all of these different ideas and variations on the marriage theme, how do we determine the right way? As always, God has a plan. His plan was designed to bring peace and harmony into the lives of every family member—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters.

Where do we find God’s plan? There is only one source of reference for God and His plan for the world—His Word. Please note here that all rules (laws) for family life should have their basis and support in the Bible. We are not trying to enforce any certain cultural norm, but God’s plan will work, no matter what the culture.

THE FIRST FAMILY

God began His plan by speaking the world into existence (Genesis 1). He created everything that is or ever has been, and He was careful to do it in the proper order so that all living things have what they need to grow and reproduce after their own kind (Genesis 1:11-12, 29-30).

Genesis 2 tells how God made the first man, told him to name every living thing, and then put him to sleep to take a helper from his side. This man and woman were the mother and father of all humanity (Genesis 2:23).

However, they were not content to know only good. They decided it would be wonderful if they knew good and evil. Their disobedience brought sin and death into the world, and humanity has been suffering since that time (Genesis 3).

After God forced them to leave their garden home, they learned about toil and sweat the hard way. They also found out about the joys and sorrows of being parents (Genesis 4). With the first children came jealousy, strife, and murder.

THE CONTINUING PATTERN

It would be good if humanity had learned a lesson from this first family, but even today, the same pattern is repeated quite often. God planned something wonderful for both men and women to enjoy—the family. Nevertheless, as the first man and woman did, humans often choose to do evil and the result is pain, suffering, sorrow, and death.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:18-25).

As God created the world we live in, He gave every living thing—even plants, flowers, and trees—the ability to reproduce itself. As God made the animals, He gave them the ability to reproduce also. He then brought these living creatures to Adam, the first man, and told him to give them a name (Genesis 2:19). As Adam was working on this project, he noticed something. Every other living creature (fowls, fish, cattle, and creeping things) had two of a kind—alike yet different—a male and a female. He watched them and knew that they came together to reproduce. However, there was no living thing that matched Adam, and this made him lonely.

GOD'S SPECIFIC PLAN FOR FAMILIES

God had a plan, and it included a mate for Adam. He designed the first family with some important guidelines in mind.

“Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4-6).

- A distinct and special difference exists between males and females.
- A man should leave father and mother when he finds a wife.
- The man should cleave (draw very close, be joined in love and loyalty) to his wife.
- The man and woman are to become one flesh.

When followed in its fullness, this plan works.

- Since the Creator of men and women designed the plan, He also knew how differently they would think.
- He understood the weaknesses and strengths of both the male and female.
- His design was intended to make them both need (desire) each other and complement (complete or supply what is lacking in) one another.
- Only when joined as man and wife did they know each other (in the physical sense).

It was after Adam and Eve had chosen to know good and evil that God placed a curse on them, bringing sorrow, suffering, and death.

- He let Eve know that bringing children into the world was going to be a dangerous and painful experience—sending her into the valley of death (Genesis 3:16).
- In this same verse of Scripture, God mentioned the rule her husband would have over her. Until this time, she had been called a “helpmeet,” and “bone of his bone,” and “flesh of his flesh.”

- Adam was told about the difficulty he would have providing for his wife and the children they would produce together (Genesis 3:17).

CONCLUSION

When we study Genesis 2-3, we see that God communed with Adam and Eve daily. As long as they obeyed God's plan, they were not afraid to speak to Him.

When Eve listened to the serpent, she made a terrible choice—one that is still made daily. She chose to make up her own mind about what was good and evil, right and wrong, and not listen to what God had specifically told her. Anytime a man uses his own judgment to decide something that has already been planned by God, he will reap the same harvest that Adam and Eve did—separation from God and eventual death. Because of Adam and Eve's foolish choice, we will probably never know all the good things God had in store for humanity, unless they are revealed to us in Heaven.

We need to remind ourselves of one more important thing. Everything we do in life is a reflection of the Creator, because He made us in His image.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27).

A godly marriage that follows God's plan will go a long way toward showing a clear reflection of God and His love for the world.

The foundation of all life is the family, and this is where the choice for evil usually begins. Those who forsake God's plan by choosing their own way bring suffering and trouble on themselves and their children.

It does not have to be this way. We are created with the ability to choose. We can decide to follow God's original plan and see what wonderful things He has in store for us.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What proves that Jesus came to earth the same way as everyone else?

2. What are five (5) characteristics found just before the fall of an empire (nation)?

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

3. Most people of the world live in what type of family unit?

4. Which form of marriage is recognized all over the world?

What does this mean?

5. What four (4) problems does polygamy encourage?

A.

B.

C.

D.

6. What was the choice Eve made when she listened to the serpent?

7. What twofold harvest did Adam and Eve reap because of their sin?

A. _____

B. _____

8. What does a good marriage show the world about God? _____

9. Define these terms.

A. Polygyny _____

B. Polyandry _____

C. Pilegesh _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 2

Building Your Family

KEY VERSE

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it:
except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”
(Psalm 127:1).

FOCUS

All building begins with a plan. Buildings that have stood the test of time began with correct materials on a solid rock foundation. If you want your family to be a long-lasting dynasty, you must begin properly and follow God’s plan without any change in materials. Jesus is the rock, and His Word is the plan.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Adam and Eve’s decision to know evil along with the good, men and women have been trying to determine good and bad according to their own thinking. The first trick of the devil (causing Eve to doubt that God meant what He said) is still working, but it does not have to keep on doing so. We have the answer if we will only use it.

THE PATTERN FOR FAMILIES

Everyone began as a member of a family somewhere in the world. The family was designed to fulfill some important roles, and it is still responsible for each one:

- The care, protection, and nurture of infants;
- Teaching children the rules and regulations of their culture/society;
- Helping all members learn how to give and receive affection and love;
- Making sure all members understand that children should be born within the same type of family unit.

According to *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia* (1995), "It is doubtful whether infants could survive—much less develop into mentally, physically, and socially healthy human beings—outside the intimate network of the family."

- Why are millions of babies born every year with no idea of whom the father is?
- Why do millions of young girls give themselves abortions or go to clinics that "help" them get rid of these unwanted children?
- Why are fathers not beside these young mothers, encouraging and supporting them?

The answer is simple—we have forgotten God's pattern for families.

Even sadder is the knowledge that many have never known God's plan for the family. Too many do not know that God cares enough to help them plan for their future. There may not have been an example of a godly family in their life and no training to prepare them for the responsibilities of raising a family. They have been taught to take care of themselves, solve their own problems, and fight for their rights—never considering God's instructions. Therefore, they choose their own path, experiencing sorrow, heartache, and even death. However, it doesn't have to be this way.

God has a plan for each of us, and it is in His Word. How should a person plan for their family?

- Take time to learn what God says about families.
- Spend much time in prayer and discussion with your chosen life partner about your goals and desires for your new family.

- Make prayer and Bible reading a priority in your family life—both privately and with other family members.

“For faith to remain in a land, it must be driven not only by Bible-driven churches but also through the multi-generational ministry of the Christian family.”—Dr. Rob Rienow

Contrary to the many voices in this world shouting that your life is your own so do what you want to with it, God’s Word is the only family planning manual.

In his book *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, Charles R. Swindoll relates a story from J. Oswald Sander’s book, *A Spiritual Clinic*.

Two families from the state of New York were studied carefully. Max Jukes was the head of one family, and Jonathan Edwards was the head of the other. This study revealed that like reproduces like.

Max Jukes was not a believer, and he married a woman of like character who was without principle. This was the outcome among over 1,200 of their known descendants:

- 310 professional vagrants;
- 440 physically wrecked lives because of a wicked lifestyle;
- 130 convicted prisoners (averaging 13 years each, 7 of them for murder);
- Over 100 alcoholics;
- 60 habitual thieves;
- 190 public prostitutes;
- 20 learned a trade, half of them while in state prison. This cost the government approximately \$1,500,000, and they made no contribution whatever to society.

During roughly the same time, Jonathan Edward’s family was studied. Jonathan, a godly man, married a godly woman. Their family produced:

- 300 clergymen, missionaries, and theological professors;
- Over 100 college professors;
- Over 100 attorneys, 30 of them judges;

- 60 physicians;
- Over 60 authors of classic books;
- 14 presidents of universities;
- Numerous industrial giants;
- Three United States congressmen;
- One vice-president of the United States.

The basic difference in these two families was that one tried to live by God's pattern, and the other did not. The results speak for themselves.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We must look for answers in God's Word, our only hope. It is amazing how clear the instructions for a healthy, productive family are inside its pages. We just need to follow them one step at a time.

- Always remember that the family was God's idea.

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18).

- A family begins with one man and one woman.

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:21-23).

- The man has a leadership role in the family.

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (I Corinthians 11:3).

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesian 5:21-24, NIV).

- The woman has a role of submission and desire toward her own husband.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

- A new family is meant to begin apart from the parents, with the husband and wife working closely together and loving one another.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

- The marriage covenant joins a man and a woman in the most binding of all human relationships. They are so closely joined that they are not even considered a separate person anymore. Physical union makes each a part of the other.

“What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (I Corinthians 6:16, 18-19).

- The physical relationship between a husband and wife is approved by God and is to be enjoyed.

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

- The man and woman who begin a family should share common beliefs and faith.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? (II Corinthians 6:14)

- The children that follow the union of a godly man and woman are a blessing from the Lord.

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3).

- For their safety and long life, children are to be taught obedience and respect.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

- The marriage covenant between a man and a woman is binding until death.

“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (I Corinthians 7:39).

- Divorce is not a part of God’s ideal family plan.

“Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Malachi 2:14-16).

The *Living Bible’s* paraphrase of this passage says:

“‘Why has God abandoned us?’ you cry. I’ll tell you why; it is because the LORD has seen your treachery in divorcing your wives who have been faithful to you through the years, the companions you promised to care for and keep. You were united to your wife by the LORD. In God’s wise plan, when you married, the two of you became one person in his sight. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. Therefore, guard your passions! Keep faith with the wife of your youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel says he hates divorce and cruel men. Therefore, control your passions—let there be no divorcing of your wives. You have wearied the LORD with your words.’ Wearied him?’ you ask in fake surprise. ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying that evil is good, that it pleases the LORD! Or by saying that God won’t punish us—he doesn’t care” (Malachi 2:14-18, TLB).

- If a marriage is to be broken up (even though God’s plan is not for this to happen according to Genesis 2:24; Song of Solomon 4:12; Matthew 19:5-6), Jesus gives us the reason for divorce.

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9, NIV).

God’s Word speaks strongly against divorce. Anything God hates is an abomination. If He hated divorce this much in the Old Testament, do you think He suddenly began to like it, or show leniency toward it, in the New Testament?

The Pharisees tried to trick Jesus with a question about divorce. They quoted the law of Moses as an argument that Jesus was disagreeing with their law. This is what He told them:

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:5-9).

Jesus spoke out so strongly against divorce, that the disciples asked more questions when they got Him alone.

“And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them. Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:10-12). (See Matthew 19.)

CONCLUSION

No matter the culture, God’s plan will not fail because it is built on the solid rock of God’s Word.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24-25).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. What are four (4) things that families are responsible to do – worldwide?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
2. What is the best family planning manual available? _____

3. What was the basic difference in the two families whose descendants were studied in this lesson? _____

4. Given the following statements about God’s plan for families, write one (1) Scripture reference to support each.
 - A. God hates divorce. _____

- B. Children are taught obedience for their safety. _____
 - C. Physical union with another person makes each a part of the other.
-

5. What is the solid rock upon which a marriage should be built? _____

6. List three (3) steps a person should follow to plan for their family.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 3

Deciding to Marry

KEY VERSE

“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24).

FOCUS

God’s first being created in His image was alone and needed a partner to complete him. This is the most common reason given for marriage—a strong desire toward a person of the opposite sex—called “love” by those who do not know the true definition of this word. Paul spoke of this desire for marriage when he wrote the Corinthian believers in I Corinthians 7:9, “But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”

This reason has been used as an excuse to marry with little thought to all the other reasons given by God for the joining of a man and woman in the most sacred union of all. “Love” should be the foundation for the beginning of the family, and Paul gives us a clear definition in his letter to those same Corinthians of the type of love that holds couples and families together.

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love

never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance" (I Corinthians 13:4-7, NLT).

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

According to *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*, marriage has been around since the beginning of civilization. It is defined as "a universal institution whereby men and women are joined in a special kind of dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family." Here is the basic purpose and function of marriage as given by God to Adam and Eve.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28).

The need for families is basic to all societies. God designed all Creation with families in mind—even the animals and plants. The need for male and female came from the desire (placed in creation by God) for companionship, support, and help throughout life.

A WORLD WITHOUT MARRIAGE

Dr. James Dobson (in his book, *Solid Answers*) and George Gilder (in his book, *Men and Marriage*) agree that society cannot survive the death of marriage. Without the institution of marriage, many terrible things would happen:

- Many women would stop having children because they would lack the security needed to raise them.
- Out-of-wedlock pregnancies and abortion would flourish among children born into homes where godly marriage is not the foundation.
- Children would grow up in turmoil without the benefit of parental guidance.
- Sexual abuse would abound.
- Drug abuse and alcoholism would abound.

- Legitimate businesses would suffer.
- Peace-loving citizens would find themselves besieged by violence and lawlessness.

If we want civilization to flourish, we need to keep marriage as God designed it.

MORE REASONS FOR MARRIAGE

1. *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia* states: "Successful child rearing requires extensive parental involvement and the cooperation of both parents." That is how God planned it from the beginning, but man has made a terrible mess of God's plan or ignored it altogether. Divorce is at an all-time high, and single-parent homes (children living with a mother and no father, or a father and no mother) are common around the world. This was never God's plan, and His heart must be aching for the innocent children who struggle with half the support and guidance they desperately need. Friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even government agencies may provide help and support, but statistics show that none of these are as effective as a loving family. Nothing can replace God's original design.
2. Most societies approve of the birth of children within marriage. A major principle of many societies is that every child should have a legitimate father. The father should be present to protect, guard, and be legally responsible for his children. Although children born outside of these protective boundaries can become productive citizens, legitimacy and social approval begins in the family.

Given the decline in marriage rates, childbearing outside of marriage is increasing in many regions.

- The highest rates of nonmarital childbearing are found in South America and Europe, paralleling increases in cohabitation.
- Moderate rates are found in North America and Oceania.
- Varied rates are found in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The lowest rates of nonmarital childbearing is found in Asia and the Middle East.

3. Adam needed someone to complement him, so God brought him a woman—the one He created from a part of Adam. Women's liberation has deceived many women into believing they are not designed to help their husbands. The word *help* has been taken to mean something bad or degrading. Adam called God's gift to him "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," for that was exactly how she was made (Genesis 2:18, 22-23). The woman who fails to understand this misses a wonderful chance to experience special closeness with her husband.
4. Companionship has long been a major reason for marrying. God's plan for the man to love his wife in the same manner that He loves the church cannot be fulfilled by companionship alone. Those who marry for companionship—without the closeness of "becoming one flesh"—are missing a vital part of God's intention for marriage. (See Genesis 2:24.)

The Revell Bible Dictionary defines "becoming one flesh" as "the close bonding of individuals who love one another as equals and who can relate on every level of the human personality." This is speaking of sexual intercourse, yes, but includes far more. The Hebrew term means the total person during his life on earth. Together, husband and wife should experience all that life has to offer, both good and bad—"in the bad that darkens our days and the good that lightens our ways"—as a favorite marriage vow reads.

5. According to history, countless women (and occasionally men) have married to gain security and wealth. This is a dangerous path to follow, because riches can so easily be here today and gone tomorrow. Sudden death (or serious sickness) can remove every hope of security, especially if that security has its foundation in material possessions. Any purpose that does not include God's expressed plan is a risk.
6. Like King Solomon, some people marry for political reasons (they think it is the right thing to do). This wisest of men (before Jesus came into the world) was foolish above all with his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. He could not possibly understand, love, and "become one flesh" with that many women. Once Solomon started, he just couldn't seem to stop finding another wife.
7. Many couples have mistakenly joined in marriage because of the pressure of family or society that says you must marry by a certain age. The instructions given in God's Word about marriage never mention an age limit or time to marry. God created every man different. With this in

mind, God did not set a time limit. Every man determines when he is ready. However, when a man bends to the pressure of society, he usually bends to other temptations also. One should never allow anyone to persuade him to marry without knowing it is God's will for his life.

8. Some cultures force marriage on the children as a means to continue the extended family or clan. Polygamy is common in cases where the union does not produce children. In these places, it is a common practice for girls to have children long before they are married just to prove they are able to produce an heir. Culture and tradition become wrong as soon as they go against the Bible way.

“FALLING IN LOVE”

In many nations of the western world, young people talk of “falling in love” before they consider marriage. They give this as the only reason (or the most important one) for joining their lives to another person. They will disregard all counsel of their families and spiritual leaders. They will ignore the biblical reasons for marriage. They will turn their backs on every principle they have learned when they “fall in love.”

This practice has been long encouraged by the media and entertainment industry. Songs, movies, television, books, and advertisements of every description have taught this generation that when people are “in love,” they will follow their hearts and fulfill their dreams at any cost—even to the loss of family ties or their integrity.

Most people have misused and misunderstood this term. The love a couple shares *should* be the same type of love that Christ has for His bride—the church. The love Christ shows for His bride in no way compares to the “in love” talked about here.

“The Greeks had a word for it:
‘Eros’ (physical love) is all take;
‘Philia’ (friendship) is give and take;
‘Agape’ (Christian love) is all give.”—G. B. Caird

According to the *Revell Bible Dictionary*: "The controlling concept when Scripture portrays divine or Christian love is that of commitment." It further states:

The love human beings have yearned for has at last appeared in Christ. In him, we discern God's love, which is sacrificial, redeeming, unmerited, an expression of the character of the lover rather than dependent on qualities in the beloved.

This is a key difference in "falling in love" and the love Christ portrayed for His church. Those who "fall in love" do so because:

- He is so handsome! (She is so beautiful!)
- He always knows exactly what I want. (She always pleases me.)
- He always makes me feel so good. (She knows how to make me feel wonderful.)

These statements reflect the shallow, selfish nature of the reason for being "in love." Everything is for my pleasure and feeling. If for any reason these variables change (he gets older and is not so handsome, or she gets much larger after childbearing), the person who was so "in love" is suddenly out of love.

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary gives us even more insight into the love that Christ patterned for us.

- God not only loves us, He *is* love (I John 4:8).
- God loves every individual in the whole world (John 3:16; Galatians 2:20).
- God loves us in spite of our sinful actions (Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God proves His love by supplying our needs (Acts 14:17).
- God proved His love by giving His Son (Jesus was God manifest in flesh) to die in our place (I John 4:9-10).
- God especially loves those who love Him (John 16:27).
- God corrects those He loves and tries to help them (Hebrews 12:6-10).
- God promises never to leave us (Hebrews 13:5).

This is true love. God's pattern for loving is the one we should follow. Keeping our eyes on the real picture of love and not on the world's view of "falling in love" will make all the difference in our marriages and families.

“Love is the condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own.”—R. A. Heinlein

CONCLUSION

People get married for many reasons. We should remember and practice the ones given in God’s Word. Let’s review them.

- Marriage is God’s plan to provide a helpmeet for the man (Genesis 2:18).
- Marriage is God’s plan for producing children (Genesis 1:28).
- Marriage is meant to be the starting point for families (Genesis 2:24).
- Marriage is designed by God as the honorable way to “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24-25).
- Marriage should be experienced with the same type of love that Christ has for His church (Ephesians 5:25).

Marriage should take place only when two people understand God’s plan and use His whole pattern as their guideline.

Have you ever seen a building that used only one part of the architectural plan? What would happen if only the plan for the foundation was followed accurately? Yes, there would be something solid to stand on, but what about walls in the proper place, wiring correctly installed, and plumbing that was accurately fitted? House plans must be followed completely (all parts included) if they are going to work.

God’s plan is no different. When making a decision to marry, a couple needs to follow God’s complete set of plans. If they understand the reasons God meant for a man and woman to marry and are sure they have reached that point in life, they should proceed with much prayer and caution, letting God lead the way.

How is this possible?

- Seek out God’s pattern of love and follow it.
- Remember God’s reason for marriage.
- Continue in prayer with your spouse, fulfilling your God-given role in the marriage. (We will talk more about this in a later chapter.)

When a couple follows God's whole plan, being careful with every detail, something beautiful grows out of their efforts—a wonderful marriage.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1. What is the most common reason given for marriage? _____

2. Using your own words, write a definition of marriage. _____

3. What is one (1) need, basic to all societies? _____

4. What are the basic requirements of successful child rearing? _____

5. What is one (1) major principle of most societies regarding children?

6. According to the *Revell Bible Dictionary*, what is the controlling concept in Scripture that defines "love"? _____

7. List at least five (5) reasons given in God's Word for marriage. Support with Scripture reference.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

8. What is the difference in "falling in love" and the love Christ portrayed for His church? _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 4

Becoming a Husband

KEY VERSE

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).

FOCUS

Many men do not understand their role in the success of the marriage and family. God has given the family a clear path, and His methods always work well – no matter the culture and background.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Most marriages begin before the man and woman are ready. They are full of expectations and hopes, but have little (or no) understanding of what they are getting into. Many times, reality hits the morning after the wedding, when neither the husband nor the wife has any idea what to do next. Now that they realize that fulfillment of physical desire is a small part of marriage, what are they supposed to do with the rest of their lives? When marriage is built on physical desire, the couple has no foundation for the time when physical attraction fades. It is no wonder that marriages do not last. Statistics show that more and more marriages are failing after only one year, and most divorces occur within the first five years of marriage. Why?

A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING

The world is full of ideas of how men should act as husbands. The media would have us believe that the “big” man is cool. The man who has more than one woman is the example young men want to follow because it goes along with their base nature. However, this road leads to destruction and death—especially for the family (Proverbs 5:15-23).

Our source of understanding the husband’s role comes from the Word of God. The example of the first family created by God in the Garden of Eden is our starting point. Few examples of godly husbands are between Adam and Noah. Adam and Noah were not perfect either. They had their moments of doubt and failure, but God was faithful. He kept showing man the right way. Isaac did a better job than his father Abraham in being faithful to one wife, but his sons did not follow his example. What is a husband supposed to do?

WHO NEEDS WHOM?

It is difficult for a man to admit that he needs help. Many men will run around in circles rather than stop and ask someone for directions. This independence goes against the basic principle of marriage explained in Genesis 2. God made the woman out of the man and brought her to him because he needed a helpmeet. Men should stop denying this fundamental principle of humanity. Something was missing in Adam’s life, and God knew exactly what it was. So He made woman. Adam called her “woman” because “she was taken out of man.”

In his book *Solid Answers*, Dr. James Dobson cited the research of social commentator (someone who studies and reports about his society) George Gilder from his book *Men and Marriage*, when he wrote, “Men and women were designed for each other and often feel incomplete alone. Women do better without men than men without women.

- “Unmarried men are far more likely to be alcoholic, drug users, convicted criminals, or of no good to society.
- “Landlords don’t want to rent to them.
- “Insurance companies don’t like to underwrite them.
- “Loan companies are reluctant to loan them money.

- “The unmarried male drives too fast, is hot-tempered, and tends to act without thinking.
- “He earns less money than the single woman, and is more likely to move from job to job.”

There are many exceptions to this, but the unmarried young man is at risk for many antisocial behaviors. What happens when the young man marries? According to Dr. Dobson and Mr. Gilder—at least in North America—when he commits himself to a wife and children, most of his social liabilities disappear. Research about society in general has documented the following trends:

- He now has a reason to live responsibly, work hard, and save for the future.
- Instead of following his own selfish desires, he waits for what he wants and sacrifices for those who are counting on him.
- He looks to the future more often.
- Many times, he becomes a “pillar of the community.”
- This has been generally referred to as “settling down” after “sowing wild oats.”

Dr. Dobson and Mr. Gilder continue, “A woman harnesses the sexual energy of a man that was a threat to society and turns its focus to protecting and providing for a family. This transformation is vital to the well-being of a culture.”

God designed men to need a woman (wife), and He made women to desire a man (husband). It is as simple as that, and we need to stop trying to change the way we are made. When men understand this, they are ready for the next step in their role as a husband—that of family “head.”

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Look in God’s Word. When God made the first family, He said some basic things. We will keep reminding ourselves of these throughout this text with the hope that we will remember and practice them.

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be

called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:21-24).

These verses cover more than man’s need for a helpmeet. Man is to leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, and they are to become one flesh. Several things are evident here:

- The woman was a part of the man – actually taken from his body.
- The man recognized where she came from and that she was a missing part of him.
- He was so close to this woman that he would leave his father and his mother, and actually stick to or hold fast (cleave) to her.
- The man and his wife would be so close in every way that they would share all of life.

This understanding of the shift in a husband’s loyalty from the parents to his wife is an important part of the role of a husband. He is no more a single being but part of a whole that includes his wife and involves a mutual form of submissions as they work together with Christ. When this is clearly defined, it is easier to see what Paul was talking about when he wrote to the church at Ephesus:

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21).

“So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:28-33).

Paul wrote about the mystery of Christ and the church. This is the type or picture God gave to help us understand our relationship to Him. As marriage and the role of the husband get more and more out of focus, it is difficult for us to see this analogy clearly.

THE HUSBAND AS “HEAD”

Our key verse speaks of the husband as the “head” of the wife. Most people do not know what this means. God’s Word makes it clear, using the comparison between Christ and the church and the husband and wife. *The Full Life Study Bible (KJV)*, with study notes written by Donald C. Stamps, explains it this way:

Since the family is the most basic unit in society, it must have a leader. God has assigned this responsibility to the husband, and given him guidelines of how he must carry this out. It must be done in love, gentleness, and consideration for his wife and family (Ephesians 5:25-30; 6:4). His responsibilities as “head of the wife” should include:

- Leadership and provision for the family’s spiritual and domestic needs (Ephesians 5:23-24; Genesis 3:16-19; I Timothy 5:8);
- Love, protection, security, and interest in her welfare in the same manner that Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25-33);
- Honor, understanding, appreciation, and thoughtfulness (Colossians 3:19; I Peter 3:7);
- Absolute faithfulness and fidelity to the marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:31; Matthew 5:27-28).

Gentlemen, this is quite a job description! It is not optional, but required by God of every husband. Young men who are planning to marry should know these things. If the family is a proper Christian one, they should have been learning about their role as a godly husband since childhood.

AN ATTITUDE OF SERVICE

The foundation of all roles of the married man is the attitude of service.

- This attitude will cause a man to serve God with his whole heart because he knows how much God loves him.
- It will make him serve his wife in love as he tries to lead her by example to follow the Lord.
- It will be the driving force behind every bit of training he gives to his children.

To many people, *service* means *slavery*. However, these two words are defined very differently. *Slavery* is being forced to do something, with no reward for the effort. *Service*, on the other hand, is when someone makes a choice to help another and freely gives of his time and energy. It comes from the understanding of the verse of Scripture that says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

This is the way Christ loves the church. Time and again, we read of His attitude of service:

“But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

The portion of this verse that says God “made Himself of no reputation” literally means He “emptied Himself.” He willingly gave up His rightful place of glory and honor to become like us. He did this knowing that He was going to suffer, be misunderstood, be treated wrongly, hated, and even crucified.

This description of the headship of Christ, our perfect example, makes it clear that men have forgotten their role. When they look to Christ’s example, the attitude of service is evident. A husband cannot take over the headship of a woman and attempt to control and dominate. That attitude is totally against everything the Bible teaches. Headship will serve, or it is not really headship; it is dictatorship.

CONCLUSION

The Bible gives clear direction. Men are designed by God to serve as the head of the family. They have a great responsibility. Problems come when they

do not follow God's instructions. They have not listened to God's Word or even read the instructions, but have tried to decide what was right and wrong using their own judgment. Their poor choices have weakened the marriage and damaged the family.

The weakening of the family is a serious thing. It could cause the death of every nation and people group in the world. We must go back to the original plan. Men must follow Christ as their head, so that they will be the "head" God intended for the family.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What basic need did God place in every man? _____

2. God made women to want (desire) something. What is it? _____

3. Why is the husband's shift in loyalty from parents to wife so important to the marriage? _____

4. The foundation of all roles of the married man is the attitude of _____

5. This attitude will show itself in what three (3) areas?
A. _____
B. _____

C. _____

6. The husband's responsibilities as "head of the wife" should include what four (4) things? Support your answer with Scripture.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

Lesson 5

Becoming a Wife

KEY VERSE

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

FOCUS

Many voices in our world call out to wives for attention.

- One voice tells them they should devote their time and energies to a career.
- Another voice tells them they do not need a husband at all.
- Still others tell them they should only do what they think is best for themselves.

In the midst of these voices, God is speaking. His Word has clear instructions for women who marry. His Word does not change from culture to culture.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Women are special creatures. God designed them to fill a special function, but most have forgotten (or never known) God’s plan. This has caused much pain and suffering in our world.

“A woman was not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him; but out of his side, to be equal to him; under his arm to be protected; and near his heart to be loved.”—Matthew Henry, quoted in *Tales of the Tardy Oxcart* by Charles R. Swindoll

Women are not the only ones who have misunderstood or never known their God-given function. Men have played a major role in women failing to find their place and be the special creatures God meant them to be.

Remember Adam and Eve? Adam was created first and given major responsibility in the world. However, Adam was alone, and he needed a helper.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . . And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:18, 21-23).

The first man and woman were not born, but created by God to fill a special place in each other’s lives. Adam recognized this and knew without an introduction that the woman was going to be an important part of his life. Nevertheless, Adam failed to fulfill his responsibilities toward this first woman, just as many men have done since that day. He told her about God’s warning—do not eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden (Genesis 3:2-3). However, when the serpent talked to the woman, asking her questions, Adam did not stop their conversation. He was there when she took the fruit from the tree. When she gave it to him, he said nothing, just ate with her (Genesis 3:1-6).

God had given the woman to the first man to be a helper, to share in his responsibilities and help fulfill God’s purpose for their family. When she listened to the serpent, and when Adam subsequently listened to her, they both disobeyed God’s plan. Their desire to know “good and evil” (Genesis 3:1, 4-6) overcame their desire to live as God intended.

After their disobedience, Adam named the woman Eve, mother of all living (Genesis 3:20). When God came to commune with them, each blamed another (Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent) for their sin (Genesis 3:9-13). This “passing the blame” to others is still going on. Husbands accuse

wives and wives accuse husbands, and “no one” accepts the blame for anything. If we take a close look at God’s design for the family, we will discover that “everyone” is to blame. We have forgotten God’s plan, failed to follow it, and the family is paying for this mistake.

SO . . . WHAT IS A WOMAN TO DO?

She should return to her beginning. If God created her to be a “helpmeet,” she should learn how to be one. Many women do not understand what this means. They have followed their husbands in trying to put their own interpretation on God’s design. Anytime humans try to decide right and wrong for themselves, they mess up more than their own lives.

Did you ever wonder why God did not make the woman from the dust of the ground as He did the man? Do you know why He removed a rib from the man and used it as the starting point of the woman? The Bible never answers these questions, but it does give clues to the puzzles they present:

- She was to be a helper for the man (Genesis 2:18).
- The man called her “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” because she was taken out of him (Genesis 2:23).
- The woman was created for the man (I Corinthians 11:8-9).
- The woman was supposed to be so close to the man that he would change his loyalties from his parents and “stick to” her (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31).

How was she supposed to help him? God did not tell the woman to work in the garden, hoe the maize, harvest the cassava, or pick tomatoes. He did not tell her she should cook all the meals, clean all the messes, and wash all the clothes. He said she was to be a “helpmeet.” So where do we find what God meant?

In his book *Strike the Original Match*, Chuck Swindoll says the meaning of the Hebrew word used here for *helpmeet* gives the idea of someone who “assists another to reach complete fulfillment.” The Old Testament uses this same word in other places when referring to someone who comes to the rescue of another.

The *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines *help* as:

1. “To join someone and contribute to the performance or completion of a task;

2. "Used as a cry of distress indicating that one urgently needs intervention from outside to rescue one;
3. "To contribute to the relief, remedy or cure of, benefit;
4. "To be useful and effective to (someone) in the attainment of a desired end;
5. "To make easier, likelier or more probable;
6. "To prevent oneself or others from doing a certain thing."

It is good to understand the meaning of words that we use daily. Sometimes a word is made to sound bad, when actually it has a good meaning. A "helpmeet" is someone who performs all the functions of the verb *help*. The psalmist used this same word to describe God in the Book of Psalms:

"Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield"
(Psalm 33:20).

"But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer: O LORD, make no tarrying" (Psalm 70:5).

"O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield"
(Psalm 115:9).

Is it demeaning to call God a "help"? God created everything, and we are nothing. Yet He refers to Himself using the same term that He used to describe the role of the woman. So how can a wife "help" her husband?

- Begin with the understanding (both husband and wife should have it) that he needs her.
- Study him (even before they are married) and strive to understand the things that are important to him.
- Learn to support, encourage, and cheer him on with his chosen life work.
- Show respect to him, especially in public or in front of other family members.
- Learn to praise him for his accomplishments and improvements—even small ones. As she praises him, he will work to do more and better things.
- Make requests—not demands. Demands cause him to feel as if she is trying to take control.
- Remember that love works two ways. She should try to show him love and affection in ways that she knows will please him.
- Always remember that he does not have the same needs she does—after all he is a man.

- If her husband gets defensive, she should check her motives for her comments/criticism. Then look for reasons why he is reacting this way. Maybe something in his history is causing her words to sound different than she intended.
- Remember the basic biological difference in men and women. He responds to sight, and she responds to touch. If he grabs her without some sign of tenderness or loving touch, she should try not to push him away. Here is where open communication is vital. She should help—there is that word again—him understand her needs by avoiding any inference that she is just an object, and make sure he knows she is ready and willing to fulfill his needs. Never give way to coercion and abuse by either spouse.

These few suggestions are in no way conclusive but should be taught to daughters in the home and church. Hopefully, they will give some idea of ways the woman can be a “help” to her husband. The wonderful thing about this “help” is that she is increasing her closeness to him with every one of them, which in turn will help her.

WHAT NEXT?

Genesis 3 makes it plain that the woman was not designed to lead the family in spiritual matters. The serpent easily beguiled her and tempted her with something that looked good. However, Genesis does not record what Eve actually did in the Garden of Eden. Until her conversation with the serpent, we see her with her husband (Genesis 2:25), and we know they communed with God every day (Genesis 3:8). That does not seem to be such a hard life, does it?

We know that God told Adam to take care of the Garden. He also made sure that Adam knew he was in charge of the animals and plants, and they were subject to him (Genesis 1:28-30). Since Eve was called his “helpmeet,” we can assume that she helped Adam take care of these things in their garden. There is no mention of hard work—until disobedience entered their lives (Genesis 3:16-19).

After their disobedience, the lives of both the man and woman changed. Adam was condemned to sweat and toil for everything he grew (Genesis 3:17-19). Eve was sentenced to the pain and near death of childbirth, to desire her husband, and to be under his rule.

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16).

From this verse, we understand that the woman will desire her husband, and he will have authority over her. Many men take this word to mean they are supposed to keep their wives under their feet and rule her like a king does his subjects. However, God gives us a clear picture of the type of “rule” He meant—in the same way He “rules” the church in love and service. (We discussed it in the lesson 4, “Becoming a Husband.”) This understanding is vital if the woman is going to fulfill her God-given role.

WIVES, SUBMIT

The God-given command to submit is probably the hardest for most women to swallow. This, too, comes from a lack of understanding of what it means. According to Dennis Rainey in his book *Ministering to Twenty-first Century Families*, “The Greek word translated *submit* literally means ‘to place or arrange under the authority of another.’ It is a voluntary subordination.” This means she chooses to place herself under the protection and guidance of her husband. He, in turn, listens to her advice and counsel and makes the final decision. Then, if the decision turns out to be a bad one, he is protecting her from shouldering the blame.

Both men and women often misunderstand another part of this God-given plan of submission. Have you ever heard a man say that women are supposed to submit? It helps our understanding to quote the entire verse of Scripture:

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22).

“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (I Peter 3:1).

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18).

Do you notice anything similar about these verses? They each say, “Wives, submit to your *own* husbands.” This makes the picture a bit different. The devil would try to make women believe they are inferior, good only for helping their

husbands, and in subjection to all men. This is not what God's Word says. It tells women not to try to take authority over men, but to be in obedience to their own husband and under submission to him, asking questions in private (I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-12; Genesis 3:16). When we clearly understand Scripture, we can use God's Word to defeat the enemy and find our proper place in God's family plan.

CONCLUSION

It is amazing how different a word can look when it is clearly read and understood. God designed both men and women with their good in mind. He created them in His image and brought them together to be a blessing and help to one another. He planned their future to be one of joy and fulfillment together. Likewise, He intended their family unit to form the foundation of all living things.

Isn't it about time that people started following God's plan? It sure works better than what they have created with their human wisdom. Let us seek the face of God, understand His Word and will, and live our lives according to the blueprint that works – the Bible.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. How did Adam fail in his responsibility to his wife? _____

2. What does "Eve" mean? _____

3. Why did the man call the woman "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"?
Support your answer with Scripture. _____

4. In your own words, what does it mean to be a “helpmeet”? _____

5. List ways that you think a wife (your own, if you have one) can be a good helpmeet. _____

6. How did the lives of Adam and Eve change after their disobedience? _____

7. What is the literal meaning of *submit* when translated from the Greek?

8. To whom is a woman supposed to submit? _____

Support your answer with Scripture reference(s). _____

Lesson 6

Getting Ready to Marry

KEY VERSE

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Genesis 2:22).

FOCUS

Marriage did not start in some remote corner of the world by human government. God ordained marriage and it started at His command in the Garden of Eden. Because of this, as the church we have an obligation to turn the focus of marriage back to God’s original design.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

The five previous lessons in this book explained God’s original design for marriage:

- God made the man first—but with something missing—he was alone.
- God created them male and female—alike but different—and both were to reflect His image.
- The man needed a helpmeet, so God put him to sleep and made a woman.
- The man and woman were both happy about God’s gift of a spouse, and they enjoyed being together.
- This was one man and one woman. They were never meant to have a sexual relationship with anyone outside their marriage.
- God said that this closeness meant that a man would leave his father and mother (get married).
- The man would change his loyalty to his wife, and they would “stick together like glue.”

- The authority would change from the father to the new “head” of the family – the husband.
- The wife would “submit to” (put herself under the protection of) her husband.

God’s original plan for marriage can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. (See Genesis 2:18-25 and Ephesians 5:22-33.) It is so simple, but sadly neglected today. Men and women from every culture have tried to figure out “good and evil” and devised their own plans. The results have been catastrophic.

SOME ALARMING NEWS

Divorce has become common in most nations, and the numbers are climbing daily. According to Dr. James Dobson in a *Focus on the Family Magazine* article (August 2001), titled “Families in Crisis,” the divorce rate is “slightly higher among Christians than among those who claim no faith at all.” Likewise, George Barna of the Barna Research Group reports that in the US—one of the countries with the best known statistics about marriage and divorce—the divorce rate among conservative Christians is significantly higher than for other faith groups, much higher than atheists and agnostics.

This is shocking, since Christians are supposed to be leading others to a saving faith in Jesus. This includes following His guidebook (the Bible) in their daily lives. What can we do as the church to help people get ready for marriage and make it last?

THERE IS HOPE AND HELP

Where do we go for help?

“And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

Our source of help is God. He designed marriage and knows exactly how to make it beautiful and holy. He will answer us when we cry out to Him in our desperate need.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God not only has an answer, He has a better answer than we can imagine or think. He wants us to have the beautiful relationship and loving support in marriage that He intended from the beginning.

GETTING STARTED

Everything we do to prepare for marriage should be centered in God's Word. This does not mean all our preparations will be spiritual. It does mean our decisions and actions will be based on biblical principles. What we do will have its foundation in God's original design for marriage.

As the church, our influence begins with the spiritual, but involves the physical/natural too. We teach people how to live according to the Bible. We teach them how to get ready to die according to the Bible. However, how much time do we spend training them how to prepare for marriage according to the Bible?

Here is how we should begin.

All churches need to give special teaching on marriage.

- It should be given in Sunday school, when children are entering adolescence (teenage years).
- It should be given during adolescence, as the students are maturing.
- It should be given as men and women work or study toward a career or life plan.
- It should be given in the young married class, as couples begin their families and start training their children.
- It should be given in the most senior class to the older men and women who will be giving advice and training young couples.

Do you "get the picture"? Instead of little or no training about marriage, our churches should be full of it, on a continual basis, in every age group.

- Youth groups should have special training about marriage.
- Ladies Ministries meetings should have special training about marriage.
- Men's fellowship meetings should have special training about marriage and instruction on how to train others.

Actually, marriage preparation needs to begin at home as the children watch their parents live together and love each other according to the Bible. If children witness from a young age how God intended marriage to be, they will have a much better chance of following the original plan.

With what areas of marriage should these special teachings deal?

Go back to God's plan, and the subjects are evident:

- Man needed someone, so God designed a special "helpmeet" just for him (Genesis 2:18).
- She was "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh" (Genesis 2:23). She was not created out of the dust, but out of man, and called "woman."
- God made male and female (not two males and not two females)—both in His image, but with obvious physical, emotional, and psychological differences. Men and women are not supposed to look alike, respond the same way to things, or think the same (Genesis 1:27). They are alike—but different.
- The first man and woman were not embarrassed with their physical union (Genesis 2:25).
- They enjoyed each other, and only each other (Matthew 19:6).
- This closeness to his wife was the reason the man was willing to leave his father and mother (Matthew 19:5).
- The loyalty of the man needs to change from his parents to his wife, he should cling to her, and they should be intimate in every way (Matthew 19:5).
- When a new family unit is formed, the husband becomes the "head" and leads the family to follow Christ (Ephesians 5:23-25).
- In a godly family, the wife submits to the leadership of her husband "as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22-24).

This kind of intense, continual, seeking after God's wisdom produces results. The promises of God are true, and He cares—very much—about marriage and the family.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then

shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee" (Proverbs 2:1-11).

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

An important practical suggestion about marriage comes from instruction given to Christians by the apostle Paul.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1).

No matter what nation we live in, the government has laws about marriage. They set the standard of legality for the institution of the family, and we must be careful to obey them. If we do not know what the government requires, we should find out by going to the authorities and asking. Obedience to the laws of the land is essential to the blessings of God. We cannot claim ignorance either, since everyone is aware that marriage is a part of the state and requires proper registration and approval.

"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans 13:2).

Divorce is illegal in the Philippines; any divorce conducted outside the country is not recognized in the Philippines. (<http://facts.randomhistory.com/divorce-facts.html>; accessed February 25, 2015.)

The history of divorce is in large part a history of abandoning Catholic teaching on marriage and divorce in the thirteenth century. The Catholic Church's position was that divorce was forbidden because a validly contracted Christian marriage was dissolved only by death of the husband or wife. (Genevieve Clapp,

Divorce and New Beginnings, second edition, New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 2000.)

God's Word speaks clearly about this. The apostle Peter even spoke of it in his writing to the church in I Peter 2:13-17. God means for us to obey our governmental laws or face the consequences.

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

Customs and traditions are not enough—we must obey the law. It is important to make our vows before God and man. This begins with obedience to God's Word and includes obedience to the law. This needs to be clearly understood by every couple that comes to the church and asks to be married. One of the first questions they should be asked is whether they have obeyed the law and fulfilled the proper ordinances needed for their marriage to be legal.

There are many other practical tips for marriage preparation.

- Even though not required by law in some parts of the world, it is wise for both the man and woman to have a blood test.
- A wrong combination of the Rh factor in parents' blood is one of the known causes of infant mortality. The Rh factor does not usually work against the first child, but it can be deadly to the second or third. If the Rh factor is found in both parents, a number of things can be done to prevent serious health problems in their children. Talk to a health official (licensed doctor or nurse) to learn more.
- The dreaded HIV virus is a serious problem in our world, especially in developing nations. In a story called "Africa's Hope" by Mary Jane Welch, it was revealed that at the end of the year 2000, nearly 70 percent of all HIV-infected adults in the world lived in sub-Saharan Africa. Even sadder is the fact that 80 percent of all HIV-infected children lived in the same area. A blood test prior to marriage can warn all concerned and prevent many problems later.

CONCLUSION

Following God's plan for marriage and the family is our only hope.

- Society does not have the cure for the family.
- Modern medicine can help with many things, but has no answers to stopping such diseases as AIDS. Following God's plan of having only one sexual partner is the best solution.
- The women's liberation movement has contributed to a rise in juvenile delinquency and much dependence on governmental assistance (since the father is not around to give loving discipline and financial support). It has been the cause of many children losing the blessing of a mother's guidance and love.
- Alternative lifestyles—such as men with men and women with women—will wipe out future generations and are not tolerated in societies where continuing the family name is a priority.

If a marriage begins outside of God's original design, the risks will be higher. The best way to strengthen that marriage is to build on the firm foundation of God's Word.

- The church must train children, young people, and adults in God's original design for marriage and the family.
- We must obey the laws of the country in which we live.
- A couple should take as many health precautions as possible before marriage to prevent sickness and death.

If a person forms habits that follow God's design before he or she is married, it will be easy to continue them after they are married. Make it a habit to live the way God said. He wants to help—if we will let Him.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Write short answers to the following questions.

1. Where and when did marriage begin? _____

Who started it? _____

2. Where in the Bible can you find God's original plan for marriage? _____

3. What is the most alarming statistic about divorce among Christians?

4. Explain the following statement: "Everything we do to prepare for marriage should be centered in God's Word." _____

5. Where and when should preparation for marriage begin? _____

6. How do we know God cares about marriage and the family? Support answer with Scripture. _____

7. What important practical suggestion about marriage did the apostle Paul give? Support with Scripture. _____

8. What is the best way to prevent the failure of marriage and the family? Include at least three (3) points.
- A. _____

- B. _____

- C. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 7

Understanding Marriage

KEY VERSE

“Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” (Proverbs 5:18).

FOCUS

The foundation for a lasting marriage is understanding and obedience of God’s plan. This involves four important concepts as the couple works together to build the family in the beautiful way that God intended. These concepts are companionship (time), commitment (decision), covenant (pledge or vow), and communication (expression).

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

God designed and sanctified marriage as the basis of all society. God saw that Adam was lonely, so He made him a partner and brought her to him (Genesis 2:3, 18). God’s Word proclaims that the institution of marriage will not be dissolved until Jesus comes again (Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35).

UNDERSTANDING COMPANIONSHIP

The need for companionship is first felt while we are still involved in the family unit of our parents. Even as children, we long for someone to share our times with and enjoy life's ups and downs. That is because God has placed a need for companionship inside each of us. It is both a natural and universal feeling.

A companion is "a person who goes with or accompanies another, someone who shares another's experiences, whose company one enjoys" (*Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*). According to *Focus on the Family's* Internet article by Derek Scotton on "The Covenant of Marriage," companionship involves:

- Unity of purpose,
- Unity of thoughts,
- Unity of efforts,
- Unity of bodies (in marriage only).

The Bible speaks of both the man and the woman as a companion in marriage.

- Malachi 2:14 speaks of the woman as the companion ("the wife of thy youth").

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

- Proverbs 2:17 describes the husband as the companion ("the guide of her youth").

"To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God" (Proverbs 2:16-17).

This companionship is designed to meet the needs of both. Every part of marriage is based on this.

"As God by creation made two of one, so again by marriage he made one of two."—Thomas Adams in *Gathered Gold*

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMITMENT

One important thing to remember about biblical marriage is the meaning of *commitment*. Marriage was never meant to be primarily a “love match” (sexual intimacy), but a pattern (picture) of Christ and His relationship to His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25-33).

If the Bible is talking only about the physical union of a man and a woman when it speaks of marriage, why is there so much reference to fornication? Would this not rather be called some type of loose marriage? Why mention adultery? “Thou shalt not commit adultery” is a straightforward commandment. If sexual relations alone meant “marriage,” then adultery would be called bigamy in some form.

When God brought the woman to the man, He intended a physical joining (“the two became one flesh”). It is cheapened when it is not confined to marriage. Paul’s teaching in I Corinthians 7:3-5 makes it clear that the physical union of the man and woman is a special and important part of a marriage, but it is not the *most* important part.

God used marriage to symbolize the depth of His commitment to Israel (Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 31:32). Since commitment is “a continuing obligation, promise, or pledge” (as defined in *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*), it must be kept.

“Commitment is not a cage; it is a safety net.”
—William Coleman, *What Makes a Marriage Last*

When marriage is entered into with this understanding about the commitment involved, it is difficult to “put it asunder.” Many ceremonies are available. These should be studied carefully and understood completely. This study should take place long before the day a couple stands in front of “all these witnesses” (family, friends, and church members) to join their lives “until death alone shall part them.” *The Pastor’s Guidebook (A Manual for Worship)* by Marion D. Aldridge, gives the following example of an actual affirmation of marriage, which is one of my favorite ceremonies:

PASTOR: We are gathered together today, in the presence of God, and in the company of your friends, to join together this man, _____ (Groom), and this woman, _____ (Bride), in God’s Holy institution of marriage.

We all should know, and _____ (Groom) and _____ (Bride) do know, I am assured, that marriage is not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently, not only with the joy and hope of Christians but also in awe of God whose will they shall seek to follow.

The chief word, as we look at a biblical perspective of marriage, is not love but commitment: a commitment of life.

In a Christian marriage (and we expect no less), there must first exist a total allegiance to Jesus Christ and His will. Only after this commitment with God is sealed can I, as a Christian minister, be satisfied that these two people can effectively commit themselves to one another.

It is necessary to understand that God, not man, designed marriage. In the quiet of the Garden of Eden, before evil had touched the world, God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone. He made a partner suitable for him, two persons complementing and corresponding to one another, and established the rite of marriage.

We must emphasize the importance of what will take place in the uniting of these two persons. Marriage is the foundation of home life and social order and must remain so until the end of time. It was sanctioned and honored by our Lord Jesus Christ. So it happens that a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and the two shall become one flesh."

After this serious and special introduction, the man of God leads the couple in the vows (covenant) of marriage. This can be done in several ways. The example from *The Pastor's Guidebook (A Manual for Worship)* continues:

PASTOR: "You _____ (Bride) and you _____ (Groom) having come to me signifying your desire to be formally united in marriage, and being assured that no legal, moral, or religious barriers hinder this proper union, I command you to join your right hands and give heed to the question now asked you.

"_____ (Groom) In taking the woman whom you hold by the right hand to be your lawful and wedded wife, I require you to promise to love and cherish her, to honor and sustain her, in sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, in the bad that may

darken your days, in the good that may light your ways, and to be true to her in all things until death alone shall part you. Do you so promise?

“GROOM: ‘I do’.

“PASTOR: _____ (Bride) In taking the man who holds you by the right hand to be your lawful and wedded husband, I require you to promise to love and cherish him, to honor and sustain him, in sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, in the bad that may darken your days, in the good that may light your ways, and to be true to him in all things until death alone shall part you. Do you so promise?

“BRIDE: ‘I do’.” (Marion D. Aldrige, *The Pastor's Guidebook (A Manual for Worship)* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1984).

UNDERSTANDING THE COVENANT

A *covenant* (according to *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*) is “an agreement between two parties; a sealed contract or bargain.” The covenant of marriage (found above) is one of many styles available. They are all meant to become lifelong agreements (vows), taken in front of God (with His blessing), the two families being joined in this marriage, and any other witnesses present. For too many, this sacred covenant has become just words spoken without much thought and little (or no) prayer. We need to remind ourselves that:

- God is the one who designed the pattern for marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).
- God commanded that a marriage continue until the death of one of the people involved (Romans 7:1-3).
- God commanded that the institution of marriage continue until His return (Mark 12:25).

An understanding of and commitment to the marriage covenant gives the relationship strength and the ability to withstand the problems that life brings.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

After studying the sample marriage ceremony, it is difficult to see how Christians could make these vows and then choose divorce. Does their word mean nothing? Did they make their commitment to man only, or was God involved?

The marriage covenant (commitment) is both vertical and horizontal. It is between two humans who are on the same level (horizontal), and it is also directed upward by both of them to God (vertical). What are some of the things that will help a couple considering marriage understand these principles?

- Prayer and Bible reading must be a vital part of preparation for marriage.
- When they feel God leading them toward one another, they need to pray diligently to be sure that this feeling is from God.
- They should ask God to reveal any hidden trouble with the other person involved. Nothing is hidden from God, and He can reveal what needs to be known.
- They should ask God to help them understand the commitment they are about to make.
- They should understand that this is not “trial and error.” There is no “multiple choice” involved. They have one opportunity, and if they fail, their whole life will be affected.
- They should pray together specifically for God’s direction in their lives—even if it means not getting married.
- They should fast. This will put down their selfish desires and fears and exalt God’s original design for marriage.
- They should take their time in more focused prayer and not rush their decision.

In *Reader’s Digest*, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale said, “I have married hundreds of couples and counseled hundreds of others, and I have never yet known a marriage to fail where the couples had—or had acquired—the habit of praying aloud together.”

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION

What is prayer? By the simplest definition, prayer is communication with God. It is the way we talk to Him. It is how we tell Him our troubles. It is the means by which we share our joys and sorrows with our Creator. It is the way we ask Him for help. This is the means by which the church draws near to their Bridegroom.

Communication is much more than talking. It is at least 50 percent listening, and sometimes more. We get much more from our prayer life when we take time to listen to God's voice (through His Word, a sermon based on His Word, or a lesson taught from His Word). This is not always easy to do, since we usually have a long list of things we need to tell Him, but every effort to communicate is worthwhile.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

"Communication is the needle and thread that sews the partners of a marriage together. It is the only means by which two people become one."—Robert J. Morgan,
Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes

Why is it difficult to understand how important communication is in marriage? If marriage is God's picture (for our finite minds) of His relationship with the church, then marriage should be full of communication.

The major cause of marriage failure is not abuse. It is not even adultery. Less than a third of divorces are caused by high-conflict marriages. *The vast majority of marriages fail for lack of communication and commitment.* These statistics (taken from "Divorce and Public Policy Fact Sheet" by Amy Desai, J. D., as cited in *A Generation at Risk* by Paul Amato and Alan Booth) give much hope. As cited in <http://facts.randomhistory.com/divorce-facts.html> (accessed February 25, 2015), the top five reasons for divorce in the US are:

- Communication problems
- Infidelity or betrayal
- Financial problems
- Physical abuse
- Loss of interest

If communication will save more marriages, we must get busy trying to understand each other by talking and listening.

- As with prayer, one person never needs to do all the talking.
- Listen to more than the words. Think about (or, if possible, ask about) what has been happening in the other person's life.

- Tone of voice, body language, facial expression, and every part of the emotional and physical makeup of a person goes into real communication.
- Work at really listening to each other.
- Work at being able to express thoughts and feelings in such a way that the other party will understand.

Sound difficult? It really is not—if the couple is committed to their marriage.

“It is impossible to overemphasize the immense need humans have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood. No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood by at least one person.”—Paul Tournier in *To Understand Each Other*.

CONCLUSION

There is only one relationship more important than marriage—our relationship with Jesus. Many people strive so hard on their work relationships and spend little time on their marriage relationship. This is true especially of those in the ministry. When their marriage cracks at the seams, they are often too busy to repair it. This grieves the heart of God. Understanding (this should come before marriage) and properly utilizing (this should happen “until death do you part”) the four C’s of marriage will go a long way toward building your family the way God intended. Let’s join the campaign to see companionship, commitment, covenant, and communication in action in marriages everywhere.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What are the four (4) concepts involved in the building of a godly family? Give a short definition of each.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

2. When is the need for companionship first felt in a person's life? _____

3. According to the article "The Covenant of Marriage," what four (4) different types of unity are involved in companionship?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

4. The Bible speaks of both the man and the woman as a companion in marriage. Write out the Scripture (with reference) for each.

5. If marriage is not just the physical union of a man and a woman, what is it?

6. What is the difference between a commitment and a covenant? _____

7. List four (4) reasons why the marriage covenant must be kept sacred.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

8. How is the marriage covenant both vertical and horizontal? _____

Lesson 8

Finding the Right Partner

KEY VERSE

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

FOCUS

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly. One of the gravest mistakes made in our world is the quick and careless manner in which people get married. The Bible talks about this:

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark” (Matthew 24:37-38).

In our world, little advice is given to the groom and bride about joining their lives in the most intimate human relationship ever designed. Since God ordained marriage (He approves of it because He started it), He gives examples and guidelines in His Word.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

The previous lessons have defined God's design for marriage. When we compare man's actions to God's Word, we realize our need to repent. We must keep our attention focused on God's plan for marriage, or we will become a part of the sad statistics that rise yearly, in the battle to destroy marriage and the family.

Think about the words spoken at most weddings (taken from the *Book of Common Prayer*):

To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

These words, though spoken often, seldom are meant sincerely. Divorce is so prevalent worldwide that the institution of the family is threatened. How can we prevent this? As the old American saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Before marriage, the couple should make sure their reasons for marrying are the right ones. They should start by making sure the one they have chosen for a life partner is in line with God's pattern and design.

BIBLE EXAMPLES

God's Word gives examples of marriages with problems.

- Jacob got a raw deal—the wrong girl (Genesis 29:18-30). He ended up with two wives—jealous sisters.
- Job's wife was not supportive when things were "worse" instead of "better" (Job 2:7-10).
- Hosea was commanded by God to choose a harlot for his wife, as an example and message to the nation of Israel (Hosea 1:2).

One example in the Old Testament of a good marriage explains how the wife was chosen. Contrary to most cultures today, the marriage was arranged before the bride and groom ever saw each other. The story is found in Genesis 24 when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his promised son, Isaac. It is amazing how clear the hand of God is in the whole process. *Toward a Growing Marriage* by Gary Chapman lists some principles (adapted here) to be gained from this biblical example. No matter the culture and custom, the principles remain the same.

PARTNER HUNTING—THE BIBLE WAY

1. A common foundation of life is needed (Genesis 24:3-4). Couples will not have exact ideas (no two humans ever do), but there should be some basis of mutual agreement about everyday living:

- **Intellectual** (the importance and level of education and experience);
- **Social** (at least some understanding of their part in their community and family);
- **Physical** (the principles of appearance);
- **Spiritual** (a common understanding and love for the things of the Spirit). This is vital to sharing the deepest oneness possible between two humans, as they are one with God (II Corinthians 6:14-15).

2. God must be involved in the choice of a life partner (Genesis 24:6-8). If God was concerned about Isaac, certainly He is concerned about the choices His children make today. He is looking out for their best interests and waiting for them to talk to Him.

What did Abraham's servant do to be sure that God was involved in his choice? He prayed—before he ever saw the girl (Genesis 24:12-14), after he had found her (Genesis 24:26-27), and again after her family said yes to his proposal (Genesis 24:52). Couples make many mistakes in marriage because they never talk to God. They begin the engagement process, and prayer never enters the picture.

- They use custom and culture to determine if they “think” the marriage will work.
- They check their financial condition to see if they can “afford” to marry.
- They look at each other to see if they like the appearance of their partner.

They leave prayer out of the process of deciding if this is God's choice for their marriage partner. Couples would do well to follow the example of Abraham's servant and pray, pray, pray.

3. Life partners should look good to one another. This involves more than the outward appearance, but includes actions and character (Genesis 24:16). An old saying says “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Different

cultures view “beauty” in different ways, but whomever one chooses to live with for the rest of his life should be someone he can at least stand to look at and enjoy being around.

4. Life partners should be morally pure (Genesis 24:16). Not only was Rebekah beautiful, she was a virgin. In modern society, some cultures claim that it is almost impossible to find a young lady who is pure. What about the young men? Are they supposed to play around with every young girl or woman they desire and then come to the marriage claiming to be the spiritual “head”?

Staying pure is an important part of preparation for marriage. It is vital to the mutual respect and love needed between a husband and wife.

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

God forgives sin, but the consequences of that sin (injury from abortion, children born out of wedlock, disease from drug use or alcohol, mistrust because of repeated wrong conduct, and so forth) may be dealt with for the remainder of your life. It takes a long time to build someone’s confidence in you, and only one failure to break it. This is especially true in marriage. Research has proven that those who partake in sexual activity before marriage are more likely to have an affair after marriage. That is why it is so important to teach and train our youth to avoid immorality. They will need the power of God to help them, but it is possible; and a godly example in the home will help a lot.

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication. That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour . . . For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (I Thessalonians 4:3-4, 7).

There are other works of the flesh besides sexual acts. One who partakes of one or more of these “works of the flesh” can find forgiveness and hope, but how much better it is to have never experienced these sins.

Preparation for marriage begins from childhood—as children are taught that their bodies are the temples of the living God. They should learn how to “possess their vessel in sanctification and honour.” Parents should be mindful of the dangers of childhood curiosity and train their children accordingly.

5. Parents should be involved in the marriage decision (Genesis 24:1-9, 28-60). The parents of Isaac and Rebekah were an important part of their marriage. Abraham started the process and gave specific guidelines to his servant for choosing Isaac’s wife. Rebekah’s family also played a major role, and they were consulted about every decision.

Culture and tradition are different today, but couples cannot overlook this principle if they want a peaceful and profitable marriage. The man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. However, this is a much easier process if he has given his parents the opportunity to get to know and approve of his bride. Parents need to know that their children respect their judgment and desire their blessing.

6. The decision to marry involves God’s timing (Genesis 24:19, 21, 49, 56). Right timing is vital. The first thing for the couple to remember is, “Don’t be in a hurry.” Many times, they pray and God answers, and then they jump into marriage too quickly. The first time Abraham’s servant prayed, God answered exactly as the servant had requested (Genesis 24:19). Nevertheless, the servant still waited and watched (verse 21).

Even with his prayer answered positively, the servant wanted to check more important things. Who was she? Is she of the tribe of my master? Are her parents willing to give her to my master’s son? What if they don’t agree?

Often, when God gives one “yes” answer, a couple thinks this means everything is fine. They need openness to God’s leadership here, and most people do not take time to even think about this. The couple should talk to each other. Spend time together in prayer and Bible study. Get to know each other in everyday situations (such as work or family gatherings).

- How does he/she treat elders?
- What attitude does he/she have toward children and those less fortunate?
- Is he/she submitted to those in authority in his/her life?
- Is he/she a person of integrity and honesty?

- Is he/she concerned with the welfare of others, or just his/her own interests?

The answers to these questions will reveal much about the character of the other person. They will help determine whether the two even like one another. If they choose to skip over this area of “getting to know” one another before the wedding, it can lead to disaster in marriage. An old song fits this principle. The first two lines go something like this: “Getting to know you, getting to know all about you; Getting to like you, getting to hope you like me.”

The time before marriage is special for two people who plan to live the rest of their lives together. They should carefully consider and enjoy it.

The other side of the timing issue involves action. Only when the couple is sure their marriage is God’s will should they get married, knowing that God will be a part of their life together, as long as they allow Him to lead them.

7. God’s will is the foundation of a proper marriage. Isaac loved Rebekah after they were married (Genesis 24:67). It would have been a bit difficult to love her before, since he had never seen her. This is not our cultural way, but it does give a better understanding of God’s plan. When God has led a couple in the choosing of each other, He will enable them to love one another. God is love, and His way of loving is the best and most wonderful love of all. This is the biblical basis for marriage. In *Toward a Growing Marriage*, Gary Chapman says it like this:

The Christian should get married because he or she is deeply convinced that this marriage is the work of God, that God in His infinite wisdom has brought the couple together and intends that they live their lives in union with each other and with Him.

If a couple is already married and did not know God’s plan for marriage when they wed, it is never too late to talk to God about their marriage. He will take them right where they are and help them grow into His best; but they have to desire His help and be willing to be changed into His image. God’s work on something as personal and intimate as marriage begins in the mind. He can and will transform the pray-er’s mind until he/she is “made into His image.”

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2)

CONCLUSION

Using the Old Testament story of how a bride was chosen for Isaac as a guide for finding a partner does not mean that you should send your servant to choose the bride as Abraham did. Most people do not have servants, and this is not the way marriage works out culturally (in most parts of the world).

This Old Testament example of how a partner was chosen has some important principles in it, which, if followed, will make it easier to obey the New Testament guidelines.

God loves us all. In His wisdom and care for us, He developed the institution of marriage. He intended for this to be a beautiful and blessed part of life on earth. Let us pray and work to train those preparing to marry to be prayerful and careful as they go about finding the right partner. Nevertheless, those of us who are already married should strive to be the right partner following God's pattern and will.

"Marriage is not so much finding the right person as it is being the right person."—Charles W. Shedd, *Letters to Karen* quoted in *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart* by Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Write short answers to the following questions.

1. What do we mean when we say that marriage is ordained of God? _____

2. Name at least four (4) areas of everyday life that couples should agree (or at least get along) about. Give a short explanation of each.
 - A. _____

 - B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

3. List the seven (7) principles for choosing a life partner that can be found in the story of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24).

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____

G. _____

4. Why is keeping oneself morally pure so important in marriage preparation?

5. What do statistics say about people who partake in sexual activity before marriage? _____

6. When does preparation for marriage start, and why? _____

7. What are the two (2) sides to the issue of God's timing in making marriage plans? _____

8. God's work on something as personal and intimate as marriage begins where? _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 9

Waiting to Say, “I Do”

KEY VERSE

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Psalm 119:9-10).

FOCUS

When the bride and groom arrive at one of the most important days of their life, will they be ready? Obedience to God’s Word is vital to having a successful marriage and family. Along with the wedding preparations, have they been properly prepared for the new responsibility they are facing?

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

For most couples, planning and preparing for the wedding (dresses, decorations, guests) takes up so much of their time and energy in the days immediately preceding the big event that they almost forget what is really happening. They are about to embark on the greatest adventure of their lives. Two people—with different views, tastes, desires, and habits—are about to be joined as one.

For many newly married couples, the morning after the wedding will bring some embarrassment and uncertainties. But those who have sought God's will and obeyed His commandments will be free to look at this joyful adventure for what it is – God's best for their lives.

BE SURE

During the time after they decide to marry each other, and before they walk down the aisle to say, "I do," the couple should:

- Take time to pray, just as they did when they began their time of getting acquainted.
- Communicate with one another. It is good practice.
- Communicate with their parents, who will always be a special part of the couple's life. Parents appreciate feeling needed during this hectic time.
- Remember that they are not forsaking their parents, but they are adding another person to their family (with fewer responsibilities and at a distance).
- Discuss with the pastor every part of the marriage ceremony. This will help avoid any surprises that can cause even more nervousness.
- Get some rest the night before the wedding. If they have been working toward the ceremony far enough in advance, they should be able to do this.
- Remember why they are marrying. It is God's will. (If they cannot say that, they are making a big mistake.)
- Stay focused on God's promises and not their problems.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The mind is an interesting thing. We can get something in our mind, believe it is true, and change our whole lives just because we "thought" it was that way. We must be careful to communicate our thoughts on marriage to God and ask for His guidance.

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (II Corinthians 3:5).

Most young people have expectations about what married life will be like. At a young age children begin dreaming about their future spouses. Unrealistic

expectations can damage a marriage. The thought life must be kept in subjection to God's Word. Marriage can be even better than expected.

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

A TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR-A-DAY JOB

Every newlywed couple feels a certain hope that their marriage will be different. They make the wedding ceremony as nice as possible. Everyone tries to look the best he or she can. Everything is "picture perfect" during the wedding, and then the bride and groom ride off together—alone. Suddenly, they are face to face with the person they will be with daily for the rest of their lives.

This frightens many people. In fact, it frightens many into admitting they do not really know the person they have just agreed to live with until death. They sometimes do not even *want* to know that person. Most divorce occurs in the first three years of marriage, and many times the break comes during the first year (*Compton's Inter-active Encyclopedia*, 1995).

Why is it that every couple feels as though their marriage couldn't possibly end as quickly as so many others? They say things like:

- My marriage will never fail.
- I won't make that mistake.
- I can do better than that.
- My partner will never leave me.
- I won't have to work that hard—I can make it easy.

These statements (and many others) are common among young people, or those who have never married. Marriage involves work by both parties. Nevertheless, it is worth every effort and far more rewarding than they ever dreamed.

Marriage is a twenty-four-hour-a-day job and requires
100 percent commitment from each person involved.

God made us basically the same, yet totally different. If a couple will work together (depending on God's power and love for every day) their marriage will last.

THE FOUR KEYS

Four keys unlock the door to a great marriage. In the days before the wedding, the couple should remind themselves of these often:

Key 1: We must leave before we can cleave. This is so important that if not taken seriously, it can damage every other part of married life. The problem is that most people do not understand what it means. See what Ephesians 6:2 says: "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

Children must respect and honor their parents all of their lives. However, when it comes time to marry, father and mother are no longer their first loyalty.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Does that mean he stops loving, respecting, or honoring his parents? No! It does mean, however, that when he leaves his parents, he cleaves (joins himself) to his wife. If he is still overly connected to his parents, this bonding as husband and wife will be hindered.

This brings up the subject of where the new couple will live. Many times, because of finances, they decide to stay with his or her parents. This is not good for the marriage. Why not?

- The father is still the head of the home, and the new husband leaves all the decision-making to him.
- The mother may try to continue making decisions for her child.
- The parents may make demands on the new wife/husband that are difficult to meet.
- The new husband will not practice making decisions after sharing and communicating with his wife.
- The responsibility that should be shared between the new couple will continue to fall on the parents.

- There is no real place for privacy for the new couple. This is vital as they learn how to please and understand each other

Many times, young couples say they will stay with the parents only for a little while. However, this “little while” can turn into years, because having someone else responsible for the home makes the couple lazy about accepting responsibility.

Weddings are stressful enough, but then there is the marriage. Difficulties can best be worked out in privacy—not under the parents’ roof. If that means waiting to marry until the couple is able to find their own place, it will be worth the wait. The couple should not be afraid to step out on their own—even if conditions are not the greatest. With God’s help, things will get better as they work together in His will.

Key 2: They must work at the cleaving. After a lifetime of looking to their parents for advice, counsel, and help with decisions, the bride and groom must turn to each other now. God’s Word says this is absolutely necessary (Matthew 19:5-8). What difference does it make?

- The couple has started a new life, and the husband is now the “head” of the home.
- The wife is the helpmeet, and together the couple strives to obey God’s commandments.
- Loyalties change as the husband and wife draw closer to one another in every area. This takes time and work.
- The husband needs to discuss things with his wife before he comes to a decision. He should explain his idea or difficulty to her and see what she thinks. She should not make the decisions for him, but he should regard her input and opinion as important. When the husband listens to the wife, he lets her know that she is a part of what is happening in their marriage. They are “partners” in this journey and must walk hand in hand. Partners do not hide things from one another but work closely to see things accomplished. So husband and wife must “stick like glue,” as they allow God to do a work in their marriage.

Key 3: It takes leaving and cleaving to have unity. If one spouse is more loyal to his or her parents than to their marriage partner, the couple will never enjoy the unity God meant for their marriage. Unity in marriage is “becoming one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31-32) and has been thought of mostly on the physical

level. This does not mean becoming like the other person. It does mean that the husband and wife will:

- Accept each other;
- Give to each other;
- Listen to each other;
- Forgive each other;
- Walk together in the same direction.

The *Focus on the Family* article by Derek Scotton titled “The Four Foundations” explains it like this: “Unity means oneness of purpose, and is best expressed through sexual union. It involves a strong, growing friendship and understanding that you are committed to each other and God’s purposes for your marriage.” In other words, although the physical union is not the only part of becoming one, it is the best way to show that oneness to your partner.

Key 4: Unity breeds loving intimacy. It takes a couple truly united in the purpose of growing and becoming God’s best to enjoy sexual intimacy to the fullest. This union is a special part of marriage, but should be the *result* of the couple’s efforts and not the *goal*.

- Intimacy is about sharing one’s deepest feelings and desires with another.
- Communication is extremely important. Husband and wife should talk about what pleases them and share their deepest hearts with each other.
- Intimacy is about joy in serving and sacrificing for each other.

The greatest possible fulfillment physically comes only through this type of intimacy. Charles Swindoll says this of Adam and Eve’s relationship: “The man and his wife had no hidden areas, no hang ups, no embarrassments, no fears. There was total transparency, the complete absence of self-consciousness. This made them totally free, emotionally as well as physically, inwardly and outwardly.”

- God meant for intimacy to be confined to marriage (Hebrews 13:4).
- He designed this part of the marriage relationship to be very good, just like all His other creations (Genesis 1:27-31).
- Intimacy is to be enjoyed (Song of Solomon 4:1-7).
- Intimacy is only good with an unselfish partner (Song of Solomon 2:10-17).

- God planned that intimacy would be uninterrupted, except for times of drawing closer to God, and by mutual agreement of the marriage partners (I Corinthians 7:1-5).

Intimacy is not shameful, but it is private. The deepest thoughts and feelings shared during times of intimacy should never be discussed with anyone outside the marriage union. If there is a problem, it should be discussed with the marriage partner only. This practice of keeping intimacy private will reinforce the cleaving, unity, and intimacy that make a marriage special and beautiful.

CONCLUSION

One of these keys alone will not work. They must come together, one after the other. They should fit like a glove to make marriage the special and beautiful thing God meant for couples to enjoy.

Marriage is work, but it is also pleasure. It will fill the lonely spot God placed in each of us for that special someone who:

- Understands and keeps on trying even when I do not;
- Loves me in spite of all imperfections;
- Stands with me through life's joys and trials;
- Shares the deepest secrets of his heart with me as together we look to God for continued direction;
- Remains loyal to me through the good and bad;
- Cares about what I think, feel, and do.

Does this sound impossible? With God, it can and will happen because He is a God who loves to prove the impossible to be simple.

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. When do most divorces take place? _____

2. What four keys unlock the door to a great marriage? Briefly explain each one.
A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

3. What five things are parts of "becoming one flesh," in addition to the physical union?
A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

4. Loving intimacy is about what three things?
A. _____
B. _____
C. _____

5. What are five things that we need to remember about intimacy? Support your answers with Scripture.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 10

Living “Happily Ever After”

KEY VERSE

“And he said, the things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

FOCUS

Classic children’s stories paint a picture of those who marry living “happily ever after.” Living in the real world, we know this does not happen. Marriage is full of joy and sorrow, gain and loss. Nevertheless, it is also full of the joy and wonder of a new life being placed in your care, and the peace of knowing you are fulfilling God’s purpose and plan for families.

Even though we know fables and myths do not have true-to-life endings, it is possible to live a rich, rewarding life in Jesus when we put Him first, our partner next (in an attitude of service), and our selves last.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Fables are fanciful stories, and myths are tales made up to suit cultural changes and whims. However, the Bible has a true and special story of what a marriage should be. We find this story in the pages of God’s book:

“And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD” (Hosea 2:19-20).

GOD’S LOVE STORY

The love story of God and His bride, Israel, is not always about having fun and enjoying life.

- It talks of a loving and giving husband who gave Himself totally to the good of His wife (Isaiah 54:5-6).
- He protected and cared for her always (Exodus 23:20-33).
- He did everything for her—providing for her every need and want—even giving her things she had never imagined (Exodus 3:8; Hosea 2:8-9).
- He blessed her with gifts of every description and clothed her in the finest (Ezekiel 16:8-13).
- He gave her houses she did not build and vineyards she did not plant (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

She must have loved Him very much and served and sacrificed willingly for Him—right? Wrong!

- After all the blessings He bestowed upon her, she turned her back on Him, cursed His gifts, and left Him for someone else (Isaiah 57:8).
- She did this over and over, and His heart was broken (Ezekiel 16:14-19).
- Every time she got in trouble, she ran to Him for help. He forgave her and took her back (Judges 2:16-17).
- As soon as things were going well again, she would run away with a different lover (Judges 2:18-19).
- This went on for many years. Finally, He put her away (Jeremiah 3:1, 6-8), but all the time He planned to bring her back (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).
- When she was a slave, for sale on the auction block, He bought her back (Hosea 3:1-5; I Corinthians 6:20).

Where can you find this story in God’s Word? The entire Old Testament covers the same theme—God in a covenant relationship with Israel (Exodus 19:5), suffering through her idolatry and wickedness, but always loving her and bringing her back to Himself (Jeremiah 31:3).

To get specific, go to the Book of Hosea and read what God said through His prophet (chapters 4-14). Check out the kind of marriage Hosea had with Gomer (chapters 1-3) and see what God told Hosea it was all about.

According to “Introduction to Hosea,” in *The Full Life Study Bible*, “the infidelity of Hosea’s wife is recorded as an illustration of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.”

- Gomer ran after other men – Israel ran after other gods.
- Gomer committed physical harlotry – Israel committed spiritual harlotry.

See what God did when His chosen one sinned against Him? He forgave and restored her, always looking for the return of His beloved.

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4).

Israel was God’s chosen people. No matter what they did, God loved them and brought them back. Then in the New Testament, He came to live among His people.

- He came as one of us, not in pomp and ceremony, but as a tiny, helpless baby boy (Matthew 1:23). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).
- He came to redeem and save from sin (II Samuel 7:23-24; Isaiah 53:6).
- He left the glory and majesty of Heaven and humbled Himself as a servant (Philippians 2:7-8).
- He felt pain and hunger, saw suffering and death (Isaiah 53:4-5, 7).
- He died willingly in our place because of His great love for us all (I John 3:16).

FOLLOWING GOD’S EXAMPLE

God has always had a plan for His chosen. His plan has always been beautiful and good, but humanity wants to do its own thing, following its own path. This selfishness began in the Garden of Eden and is continuing today. It is the cause of most problems – especially those in the family.

When we look at the picture of a marriage relationship in the Bible, we see over and over how one-sided it can be. It is like this because of selfishness—not because of the plan of God. God wants the best for His chosen ones. When they make wrong choices, follow their own path, and ignore His Word, they find themselves in terrible situations.

The picture of God and His bride is not all pleasant. We like to think of marriage as the picture-perfect story we sometimes tell our children. These stories usually do not show the selfishness that causes most of life's problems. God's Word gives us a clear picture of real life, and real life is often one-sided.

- God did all the giving; His chosen one all the taking.
- God sacrificed again and again, while His chosen one cared only for herself.
- God forgave and restored, while His chosen one continued to live for her selfish pleasure.

THE FINAL PICTURE

This story would be discouraging if we did not see the outcome. God not only shows us how to forgive repeatedly (Matthew 18:21-22), He also shows us the final picture.

- There will come a day when Israel will be restored (Luke 1:68).

“Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:11).

- God's covenant with His chosen one is everlasting.

“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9).

CONCLUSION

God's Word gives us the pattern to follow in a marriage. It tells us the way God intended marriage to be—a joyous and fulfilling union of one man and one woman until death separates them.

(The following story is told of a thirty-six-year-old man named Nicolai Pestretsov. He was a sergeant major in the Russian army, stationed in Angola, a long way from home. His wife had come out to visit him.)

On August 24, South African military units entered Angola in an offensive against the black nationalist guerrillas taking sanctuary there. At the village of N-Giva, they met a group of Russian soldiers. Four were killed, and the rest fled—except for Sergeant Major Pestretsov. He was captured, and the South African military communiqué said this: “Sgt. Major Nicolai Pestretsov refused to leave the body of his slain wife, who was killed in the assault on the village.”

It sounded like the South Africans could not believe it, for the communiqué repeated: “He went to the body of his wife and would not leave it, although she was dead.” This man sits in a South African prison, not as a “Russian” or a “Communist” or “soldier” or “enemy” or any of those. He was just a husband who loved his wife for just a time, more than anything else.

In this story we see the picture of the kind of marriage God desired to have with His chosen people. It is a picture of commitment. Why was God's relationship with Israel not as pretty as the one He intended? When man chose his own path, he chose sin and death. Sorrow, heartache, suffering, and disappointment are real parts of life because of that wrong choice. This is why it is important to choose God's way when we marry. Wrong choices lead to the same heartache, suffering, and disappointment that Israel faced.

- God's picture of His relationship with His chosen one, Israel, is meant for men and women to look at carefully.

It does not mean that one partner will always have to be the one who gives and gives and gives, seldom receiving anything in return. It does mean that both partners have to be committed to one another and willing to “give” instead of “get.”

“Marriage is a daily exercise in unselfishness.”—Rev. Francis Westberg

Here are a few suggestions for ways to make a life of joy and peace on earth and in your marriage more probable:

- Turn to God.
- Listen to His voice.
- Do His will.
- Obey His Word.
- Follow God's pattern in the choice of a mate.
- Work together.
- Teach children and those under your leadership biblical principles regarding marriage.

As a reminder of God's promise to be with us even when we fail, memorize and quote these verses daily.

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. The Old Testament picture shows God in a covenant relationship with whom?

2. Which book of the Old Testament is a clear picture of God's relationship with the nation of Israel? Explain briefly. _____

3. Why is it so important to choose God's way when one marries? _____

4. Write Lamentations 3:22-23 in full and memorize it. _____

5. What are seven (7) suggestions for finding a life of joy and peace on earth—especially in your marriage?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____

G. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 11

Being a Godly Father

KEY VERSE

“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

FOCUS

Many different types of fathers are in our world. Some have not lived up to the noble name of fatherhood. Others are shining examples of how God intended fatherhood to represent Him.

“If children can’t trust your promises, how will they learn to trust the promises of God?”—Greg Johnson and Mike Yorkey

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Most boys of a certain age are capable of fathering a child. This physical ability does not make them capable of being a true father. A father was designed by God to be the living picture of what He is like. Worldwide, men have fallen far short of this godly example. Nevertheless, praise God, He still gives us hope.

THE VERY FIRST FATHER

The first father was not a man, but God, who created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Paul stated, “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6).

God came and talked to Adam and Eve every day and provided for their every need. He gave them an example and pattern of a father, and then He gave men the ability to become fathers.

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:24-26).

WHAT IS A FATHER?

The Revell Bible Dictionary defines *father* as:

- A male parent;
- Any ancestor;
- God;
- The creator or originator of something;
- A polite form of address to a superior.

The role of a father is difficult, but God gave men the perfect example. The good news is that God did not just give them a pattern of perfection, He promised to help them become fathers who would reflect His image. Man’s job is to trust and follow Him—asking daily for guidance and help.

In the Bible, a father had a lot of responsibility. *The Revell Bible Dictionary* provides this list:

- He was the spiritual head of the family (Genesis 12:8; Exodus 12:3).
- He, with the help of his wife, was in charge of the education of their children (Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:7-9). This involved the passing of truth (God’s law) from one generation to another.

- He was in charge of the wise and loving discipline of his children (Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:5-11). This meant being a godly example before them.
- He was the provider for his family's needs (Proverbs 6:6-11; I Timothy 5:8).
- He was the defender of his children's rights in a court of law (Deuteronomy 22:13-19).

These responsibilities are still true, with the possible exception of defending children in court (lawyers do that now). These jobs were not easy. Being a father is serious business. That is why it is so sad when young boys, who are still children themselves, father children. This was never God's intention for the family, but with the ability to choose "both good and evil" men have learned a lot about sorrow and disappointment. Some of the most painful hurts in life come within the family.

FOLLOWING GOD'S EXAMPLE

God's Word clearly shows His plan. Everything we read about His relationship with His children gives us the blueprint we need to build a family properly.

What kind of a father is God?

- God is a father who loves His children so much that He died in their place (Romans 5:8).
- He is a father who gives His children many wonderful things (James 1:17).
- He is a father who loves all of His children the same and never shows favoritism (Romans 2:11).
- He is a father who loves to talk to His children. More than twelve hundred times the Bible records "God said," "thus saith the Lord," "the Lord said," "God saith," "Jesus said," "Jesus saith," or "the word of God."
- God gave His children rules and told them the consequences of breaking those rules (Genesis 2:15-17) The consequences are exactly what He said they would be (Genesis 3:9-24).
- God never gives up on His children. He continues to love them – no matter what they do (Jeremiah 30; Hosea 11:4; Romans 11:28).

- He has a plan to save them from their mistakes and sin (Revelation 21:1-7).
- God is a father who always keeps His promises (II Peter 1:4; Job 36:11).
- He is a father who is always honest with His children (Numbers 23:19).

“At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the LORD, the people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:1-3).

Throughout the Bible, we find the story of God and His children. He never changes the way He deals with them. His faithfulness and love are new every morning. His example gives us a clear guideline for our relationship with Him and with our children.

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: to show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night” (Psalm 92:1-2).

SOME FATHERS IN THE BIBLE

The examples of human fathers found in God’s Word remind us that we all have a long way to go before we are the type of father He showed us:

- Abraham sent his firstborn son (born of a bondwoman and not God’s promised child) away from his camp and life (Genesis 21:8-14).
- Isaac favored one son more than the other and tried to bless his boys against the spoken will of God (Genesis 25:23; 27:1-4).
- Jacob also showed favoritism among his children. This led to jealousy and eventual heartbreak for his family—especially his beloved son Joseph (Genesis 37:3-4, 12-36).
- Moses failed to obey God’s command to show the covenant in his son’s flesh. God almost killed him for that mistake (Exodus 4:18-26).
- Joshua and the entire generation who survived the wilderness wandering failed to share God’s Word and His testimony of greatness with their children (Judges 2:8-15).

- Gideon, though a mighty judge and deliverer of Israel, did not train his sons properly. He practiced polygamy and fathered seventy sons. One of his sons killed all his brothers, except one (Judges 9:4-5).

We should learn from the mistakes of these fathers. Where did they go wrong? In every case, their failures came when they failed to obey the voice (word) of God.

Here are some well-known men of the Old Testament whose example as fathers teach us many lessons:

Samuel was the last of the judges and a great prophet and priest in Israel.

- Samuel was a gift from God for his barren mother (I Samuel 1:10-20).
- Samuel was dedicated for God's service before his birth (I Samuel 1:11, 21-28).
- He began his career as a leader in Israel at a young age (I Samuel 2:11, 18, 26; 3:1-21).
- He lived a long life of service to God and His people (I Samuel 25:1). His death marked the end of the judges of Israel. After Samuel, Israel had a king.
- Samuel's sons, Joel and Abiah, were judges, but not priests. They did not follow the godly example of their father, and this conduct was given by the people of Israel as a reason for choosing a king to rule over them (I Samuel 8:5).

David is one of the best-known men in the Bible. The Bible introduces him to us as a young boy.

- Even as a child, he lived for and pleased God (I Samuel 16).
- As a man of faith, he is a shining example (I Samuel 17).
- As a king, he was Israel's greatest.
- As a man, he had trouble with his many wives (I Samuel 18:20-30; 25:40-44). His weakness for women was his biggest failure (II Samuel 11).
- His sin with Bathsheba was the beginning of a long history of trouble with his children (II Samuel 13-17).
- As a "man after God's own heart," he understood how to seek God's forgiveness for his shortcomings (II Samuel 12).

FATHERS AND MOTHERS

You can't become a father until you choose someone to be the mother of your children. This choice is one of the most important parts of becoming a father, and it needs to be considered prayerfully.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14).

"Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

God's plan for fathers includes a godly wife to bear the children. From the time God said that it was not good for a man to be alone, He spoke of fathers and mothers together. His plan is for them to work together, cleave to each other, and share in the joys of their children.

"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus the man be blessed that feareth the LORD" (Psalm 128:3-4).

"The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother."—Theodore Hesburg in *Family Love*

CONCLUSION

As with every other part of His creation, God has a plan for fathers. God's Word shows us numerous fathers who followed their own path, or cultural traditions, and found heartache and trouble as a result. Their children brought more pain than joy. The mistakes of these fathers can teach us much.

- Abraham teaches us to wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.
- Isaac shows us the danger of going against God's will and plan for our children.

- Jacob portrays the bitter harvest of deceit and favoritism that lost him many years with his beloved son Joseph.
- Moses teaches us the value of fulfilling God's covenant in the lives of our children.
- Joshua makes it clear that we must train the next generation to know and love God.
- The brutal murder of Gideon's sons by their half-brother shows us the terrible consequences of polygamy and lack of righteous leadership in the family.
- Samuel gives a real understanding of the far-reaching effects of failing to discipline our children.
- David is the perfect picture of a father whose greatest failure haunts him most in his own family.

Thanks be to God for His mercy and love toward us all! Even though God's Word is not full of examples of perfect fathers, we have the beautiful picture of The Great Example—our heavenly Father. When fathers follow His example, they will be the fathers God intended.

“And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, NLT).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What did God design fathers to be for their children? _____

2. Who was the first father? _____
3. What were His children's names? _____

4. What four (4) responsibilities of fathers in Bible times are still the responsibilities of fathers? Support your answers with Scripture.

A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____

5. How many times does the Word of God record God talking to His children with a direct statement such as "God said," "thus saith the Lord," "the Lord said," "God saith," "Jesus said," "Jesus saith," or "the word of God"?

6. Why does a man's choice of a wife affect their children so seriously? _____

7. What can we learn from each of these fathers?

Abraham _____

Jacob _____

Joshua _____

Gideon _____

Samuel _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 12

Being a Godly Mother

KEY VERSE

“Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter” (Ezekiel 16:44).

FOCUS

The responsibility of being a mother grows more difficult each day, but God’s Word gives us a clear job description of what a mother is supposed to do. One of the hardest things for a mother to accomplish is revealed in the key verse—that of being a role model. A godly mother needs to train her children to reflect God’s glory—as they reflect the mother.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

The population of our world is growing at an amazing rate. According to the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, DC, over one hundred and forty-three million (143,341,000) babies are born each year—that is over three hundred and ninety thousand a day (392,714) a day or over two hundred seventy (273) per minute. (http://www.prb.org/pdf14/2014-world-population-data-sheet_eng.pdf, accessed February 26, 2015.) That means, whether they are new mothers or veterans giving birth for the fifth time, every year 392,714 women in the world

take on the job of motherhood. How many of these women are aware of God's requirements for mothers?

THE DEFINITION OF A MOTHER

The common understanding of *mother* is one who gives birth. A mother carries a baby inside her womb for approximately nine months and then goes through the painful process of delivery. God is right there through it all.

"By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee" (Psalm 71:6).

Since the birthing of Adam and Eve's children, every human to enter this life has followed this process of birth—even Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Galatians 4:4). Without the hand of God, the miracle of giving birth could never take place.

"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16).

GOD'S PLAN FOR MOTHERS

The first mention of *mother* in the Bible comes when Adam gave his wife a name. He had called her a "woman" because she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:23). But after their disobedience to God's one and only rule in the Garden, Adam called his wife "Eve," because she was the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20).

Eve became a mother through sorrow and pain, not because that was how God wanted it, but because of her disobedience (Genesis 3:16). Childbirth became a time of suffering and often, death. We will never know for sure how

God originally wanted it to happen, because Eve made the choice to know evil instead of the good God had planned (Genesis 3:5-7).

This decision to try to determine on our own what is good and what is bad brings trouble even now. The pain of motherhood began with this choice to know evil, but God still gives us the option of doing things His way. The pain of childbirth may not lessen, but following God's plan will make our whole family more blessed.

There is more to becoming a real mother than giving birth. A young girl with no husband and no understanding about raising a child can give birth. A mother is much more than this. By a study of biblical culture, we learn more about God's plan for mothers.

According to *The Revell Bible Dictionary*:

- Women had more rights among God's chosen people (Israel) than in other societies of that day.
- God expressed His love for Israel by comparing His compassion with that of a mother who will never forget her child (Isaiah 49:15).

In the Bible, the father had the major responsibility for the training of children, but the mother was supposed to help him (Proverbs 30:17; 31:1). Among God's people, and in His plan, a mother was very important.

"No one is poor who had a godly mother."—Abraham Lincoln

A MOTHER'S RESPONSIBILITY

A woman's responsibility to her future children begins with choosing the right man for a husband. It is here she decides what type of person is going to lead her spiritually and in every other area of life until her death.

This is one of the most important decisions a woman will ever make. Since God has ordained that the husband is the "head" of the family, if a woman makes a mistake in choosing a mate, she is bound for trouble.

With all the possibilities—the men who would try to persuade and woo a woman into marriage and even those who claim to "love" her—how should a

woman go about choosing her husband, the one who will be the father of her children? She must base her decision on the guidelines given in the Word of God.

RULE 1

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (II Corinthians 6:14-17).

These verses are clear that Christians must not follow the trends of the world. A woman should take her time and be very sure that the man she chooses loves the Lord and is following in His footsteps.

To know this, she will need to spend time in prayer and fasting. Fasting is one of the best methods given in Scripture for putting down the desires of self and lifting up God’s will as supreme. When a woman earnestly seeks the face of God, He will answer her. God knows things about the person she is planning to marry that no one else knows. After all, God made him.

When a woman fails to seek God’s will and does not take the time to get to know the principles and life practices of the one she plans to marry; she suffers much heartache and disappointment later. Seeking God’s will for her marriage is a vital step for all women who desire to be godly mothers.

RULE 2

“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (I Corinthians 6:15-17).

These verses are plain about the type of person one should choose as a marriage partner. Clearly, Christians must be careful, because God’s temple is

nothing to play with. Again, God has spoken clearly about His plan, but many have decided they do not want God to make their decisions. This is asking for trouble. This makes life especially difficult for the innocent children who had no part in the marriage decision.

Finding yourself married to someone who is not following God in the fullness of the Holy Ghost because of ignorance before marriage is one thing. However, if you knew about this when you chose a life partner, you are still one flesh. Other wives have come to God after marriage, and for whatever reason, the husband did not. These husbands and wives are also still one flesh. You cannot change partners now, but you can begin teaching your children when they are very small that God has a plan for their lives, especially when they choose their mate.

A SUPPORTING ROLE

God has designed mothers to care for their children. Their role is not one of leadership but of helping the father in his God-given place of leading the family (Ephesians 5:22-33). She is to support and uphold his instruction and make the home a unified place of obedience to God and His ways. This will include instruction for the children, especially in obeying God and their fathers.

“My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Proverbs 6:20).

Proverbs 1:7-9 and 4:1-5 are similar passages, teaching that children are supposed to receive instruction first from their father, which is then upheld by their mother.

“So commit yourselves completely to these words of mine. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21, NLT).

TEACHING AND TRAINING OUR CHILDREN

Proverbs 22:6 is an important verse for parents: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

The problem most of us face with this verse comes from the meaning of the word *train*. Here, the Hebrew means “to dedicate.” We must dedicate our children to God and teach them His ways.

- Training is more than words.
- Training is action—putting into practice what has been learned.
- It can also be defined “to cultivate a taste for.” Children are not born loving the Bible or even understanding how valuable it is. Our job is to make sure they learn to enjoy and desire more of God’s Word.
 - ❑ It will not happen overnight.
 - ❑ It will not happen if we only work on it once a week.
 - ❑ It will never happen if we choose to blame others for the lack of training we are giving our children.

We must cultivate in our children the habits of Bible reading and prayer. We must instill in them (at an early age) an understanding that God cares about them, listens when they pray, and always answers, even if it is not what they want to hear.

Did you ever read of a champion athlete (soccer player, boxer, or swimmer) who woke up one morning and was very good at his sport? Sportsmen spend years in training. It is a daily job for them. If they skip a day, they lose some of their ability to perform at their best. How can we expect our children to know and love God if we spend little (if any) time “training” them?

Gladys Brooks in *The Gift of Family* equates this training with discipline and describes it like this:

- “Discipline is demanded of the athlete to win a game.
- Discipline is required for the captain running his ship.
- Discipline is needed for the pianist to practice for the concert . . .
- If parents believe standards are necessary, then discipline certainly is needed to attain them.”

GETTING INTO THE WORD

More than anything else, our children need to know the Lord personally. One of the best ways to “know” Him is by His Word. There are many fun ways

to get our children acquainted with the Scriptures and teach them to love and study God's Word daily.

- Before beginning, write down the goal you have for your children's Scripture memory exercises for each day (or you can start with a weekly goal).
- Make rules and give a deadline as to when each verse or passage needs to be quoted (i.e., each night at the evening meal, once a week at the evening meal).
- Learn the verses as your children do. Following in your footsteps makes their learning easier.
- Depending on the age of your children, use different Scripture memory games. Make up your own. For example, play "hide and seek." Place portions of Scripture in different parts of the house. The players have to go search to find the parts of the verse.
- Children of all ages can learn Bible verses.
- If your children are small, verses can be memorized a few words at the time.
- Use your imagination to make Scripture memory fun and challenging for every age.
- A day missed will make a difference in your child—spiritually and mentally.

Godly mothers have the beautiful opportunity to train up their children in the way they should go.

In *The Myth of Separation*, David Barton says, "I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt."

It is never good to send your children to live with anyone who does not love the Lord and live a life of obedience and holiness before Him. It is the responsibility of parents to train their own children in the ways of the Lord. When it is time to send children out into the world of higher education, job training, or beginning a family, this "living by the Word" will go with them.

TRAINING BY EXAMPLE

Our key verse gives a clear picture of the results of training by example. Mothers must show their children by example that God's Word should be followed every day. Children always pay more attention to what their mothers

do than what they say. If a mother's life is not the proper example, her words will not mean a lot to the children.

In *How to Raise Your Children for Christ*, Andrew Murray defines training like this: "*Train* is a word of deep importance for every parent to understand. Training is not telling, not teaching, not commanding, but something higher than all of these. It is not only telling a child what to do, but showing him how to do it and seeing that it is done."

In the end, if a mother is not following the ways of the Lord and setting a good example for her children, and they do not serve the Lord, she must look to herself for at least a portion of the answer for the poor choices they made. Here is a wonderful saying that is sobering in its truth.

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with fear, he learns to be apprehensive.
If a child lives with jealousy, he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to be appreciative.
If a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love.
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal.
If a child lives with honesty, he learns what truth is.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
If a child lives with security,
he learns to have faith in himself and those about him.
If a child lives with friendliness,
he learns the world is a nice place in which to live.—Sinai Sentry

Mothers must be careful that their children have the proper example and guidance. It is not enough for a mother to be an example, and it is not enough for her to guide only. She must do both in the fear of the Lord, following Him every step of the way.

CONCLUSION

Mothers are special in every part of the world. They are honored—even by male-dominant societies. When mothers are obedient to God's job description, the result is the praise of their husband and children. The Proverbs 31 woman proves this:

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Proverbs 31:28).

- She understands the importance of choosing a godly mate to be the father of her children.
- She is a helper to her husband in training and nurturing their children.
- She is careful to support her husband’s discipline for the family.
- God’s Word becomes a beloved part of the family, and is memorized and shared by everyone. Its principles are enforced in the lives of parents and children alike.
- She shows her children a godly example in word, deed, and attitude.
- She loves God and her family and it shows. That is why peace reigns in the family, and God’s Word is the shield and protection it was meant to be.

Thank God for godly mothers, and help me always to strive to be a better one, following my husband as he follows Christ.

“Mothers, it’s worth it. It’s worth it.
It’s worth every hour of it.
It’s worth every sleepless night of it.
It’s worth every moment of counsel.”
—Charles Swindoll in *Tales of the Tardy Oxcart*

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What is one (1) of the most difficult things for a mother to accomplish (according to the key verse)? _____

2. When and where in the Bible is the word *mother* first mentioned?

-
-
3. Why is motherhood associated with sorrow and pain? Give Scripture to support your answer. _____
-
-
-
4. Where does a mother's responsibility begin? _____
-
-
-
5. What does fasting do to help one in the choice of a life partner? _____
-
-
-
6. What can be done to correct the mistake of choosing a life partner who does not love and serve God? _____
-
-
-
7. What is the common definition of the word *mother*? _____
-
-
-
8. Use Scripture to explain how the role of a mother is a supporting one.
-
-
-

9. What two habits need to be cultivated in our children as we train them to live for God? What should they understand from an early age?

A. _____

B. _____

10. What do children need in their lives more than anything else? _____

11. Write one (1) idea for a game or fun way you could help your children memorize Scripture. (Use a different idea than the ones given in the lesson. You can use a well-known children's game as the basis for your Scripture memory game.) _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 13

Seeing Children as God Does

KEY VERSE

“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Samuel 16:7).

FOCUS

Some parents do not feel their children are important or worth much time and effort. Often parents’ occupations take priority, and many children never reach their God-ordained potential because of it. God’s Word gives clear directions about how He views everyone—including children. He looks at the heart.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Our key verse is from the story of Samuel choosing a new king for Israel. The prophet and priest talked to God, asking for direction, but he still looked at the situation and viewed David the way adults normally look at children—as small and insignificant. God had a plan for this shepherd boy, and God’s plan has always included children.

- He designed children to be a blessing from Him—not an aggravation to get in the way of “important” adult plans (Proverbs 17:6).
- God’s plan takes the most innocent, gentle, and vulnerable of His creatures and molds them into His big children.
- He wants them to follow His Word and do His will, living according to His purpose (Romans 12:1-2).
- He often uses these tiny creatures to get the attention of bigger folks and show them how they need to act if they want to enter His kingdom (Mark 10:13-16).
- He desires for them to be part of a family that loves Him and each other dearly (Ephesians 6:1-4).
- He plans for the family unit to love those around them enough to share the good news of His Word (Genesis 18:17-19).
- He wants everyone to enjoy an abundant life (John 10:10).

GOD SENT A BABY

In his Injoy Life lesson “When You Follow a Star and Find a Stable,” John Maxwell relates the following story (adapted here).

The year was 1809. The whole world was watching and waiting to hear what Napoleon Bonaparte—self-proclaimed emperor of France—would do next. He had already won the great naval battle of Trafalgar (1805) and was marching through Europe, conquering every nation, seemingly with nothing and no one to stop him.

History reveals that 1809 was an important year. Not because of Napoleon, however, but because of the babies who were born that year:

- **William Ewart Gladstone** became the prime minister of Britain four different times (a great politician).
- **Alfred Lord Tennyson** became an English poet whose profound effect on literature continues even to this day (a great literary figure).
- **Oliver Wendell Holmes** became an American writer and medical doctor who helped advance the use of sterilizing techniques that removed bacterial infection from surgery and the birthing process (a great doctor).

- **Charles Darwin**, born February 12, 1809, grew up to be a British scientist and father of modern evolutionary theory. His theory changed the thinking of scientists and modern society in general (a world-renowned scientist).
- **Abraham Lincoln** was born February 12, 1809 (the same day as Charles Darwin), in a log cabin in a small village in the United States of America. He became the sixteenth president, preserved the union of American states, and abolished slavery in the United States (a great leader and lover of equal rights for all humanity).
- **Felix Mendelssohn** was born in Germany, the grandson of a Jewish philosopher. He became a musical genius of the early nineteenth century (a great musician).

The accomplishments of these men touched the whole world and had much more effect on humanity than the march of Napoleon. But it did not look that way in 1809. After all, they were just babies. The whole world looks at babies as special, but unimportant to the affairs of men.

“A baby is God’s opinion that the world should go on.”—Carl Sandburg

LOOK AT GOD’S CHILDREN

God’s Word is full of stories about children.

- **Cain** was the first baby ever born, but he did not follow God’s ways (Genesis 4:1, 5-9). He grew up to become the first murderer—of his own brother.
- **Isaac** was God’s promised baby, born twenty-five years after God spoke to his father, Abraham, with the good news that he would have a son (Genesis 12:1-4; 15:4-5; 18:10-15; 21:1-7).
- **Joseph** was the first baby born to Rachel, Jacob’s favored wife (Genesis 30:22-24). We see God’s hand on his life through many difficult circumstances (Genesis 37, 39-41). He saved his family (and the nation of Israel) from starvation.
- **Moses** inspired many to trust in the God who protects and preserves His own (Exodus 2:1-10). He grew up to lead an entire nation out of slavery without fighting a single battle—overnight.

- **Samuel** was dedicated to the Lord before his birth (I Samuel 1:1-20, 24-28). God gave his mother five more children after him (I Samuel 2:20-21).
- **John the Baptist** was a miracle baby, born to parents who were very old (Luke 1:6-7). The Bible talks about baby John while he was still in his mother's womb.

"For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

All of these stories (and many more) show us the importance of "ordinary" babies born into "ordinary" families. Actually, no baby is "ordinary." Every child is God's miracle and a potential beginning for new and great things.

"Life is a flame that is always burning itself out, but it catches fire again every time a child is born."—George Bernard Shaw on raising children

HOW THE DEVIL SEES CHILDREN

Looking at different times in history, it is interesting to note that the devil knows where to begin the destruction of an enemy – kill the babies.

- Pharaoh ordered the killing of all newborn babies to stop the growth of Israel (Exodus 1:16-17, 22). However, Moses was preserved and grew up in Pharaoh's palace (Exodus 2:1-10).
- Herod ordered the killing of all babies under the age of two years after the wise men came looking for the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:16-18). Joseph obeyed the instructions of the angel and took his family into Egypt to escape this slaughter (Matthew 2:13-15).

Today, children are the primary target of the devil's attack on humanity. Let's look at some statistics (taken from *Mission Frontiers Magazine*, March 2001).

- Thirty-five thousand children under the age of five die of malnutrition every day.
- Forty million children are aborted yearly. (Of the babies conceived 29 percent are never born.)
- Two million children die yearly because of no immunizations.

- Two million children were killed in wars during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

HOW GOD SEES CHILDREN

“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:1-6).

Throughout the synoptic gospels, Jesus gives us a clear understanding of His view of children:

- The greatest in His kingdom are those who are changed from their “adult” attitude to have the character of a little child.
- Anyone who harms (offends) one of His little children (whether an actual child or a believer with childlike character) is in serious trouble.
- Those who receive little children in His name are receiving Him.
- Heaven is going to be full of people whose character is childlike.

The disciples tried to send away the little children who were brought to Jesus. They thought the Master was too busy with “important things” to take time for such small children. Luke’s account calls them “infants” (Luke 18:15-17). Nevertheless, Jesus made a point to bless them and reminded the adults that children are important in His kingdom.

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter

therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16).

Note that the accounts of this blessing of the children (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16) immediately follow Jesus' teaching about marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12). Between a lasting marriage and children who are truly blessed and touched by God is an important connection. His plan for their blessing includes a home with both parents involved in their daily lives and growth.

The early church obviously understood the lessons Jesus had taught about the value of children. When Paul wrote to Timothy, giving him instructions for the church at Ephesus, he spoke of the importance of saints taking care of their families and providing for their needs.

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5:8).

This is especially important for church leaders.

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (I Timothy 3:4-5).

How does God see children?

"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5, NASB).

- Children are priceless treasures, a heritage (inheritance) from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5).
- He does not take lightly anyone who would harm one of these precious gifts (Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48).
- He does not approve of parents who do not properly love and nurture their children— together as a family (Mark 10:2-12; I Timothy 5:8).
- His disapproval includes anyone who does not take time to minister to them spiritually (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17).

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, nations have been conquered by the destruction of children, usually through the downfall of their families, but God has always had a plan. Repeatedly He has used the tender gentleness of a tiny baby to bring a saviour into a hopeless situation.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Jesus began His life the same way as you and I—as a baby. That means He had to grow, learn, and follow the normal process that all children go through to become adults. He did not hurry the process. He did not skip over the periods of life that we all face (infancy, toddling, puberty, adolescence, teenage, and young adult). He went through the whole process and became a victorious, mature man.

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40).

“When a wrong wants righting, or a truth wants preaching,
Or a continent wants opening, God sends a baby into the world to do it.”
—John Maxwell in *When You Follow a Star and Find a Stable*

Even though armies have tried to destroy children, and kings have tried to stamp them out, God’s babies of deliverance have always survived. Babies grow up to be children. Children grow up to be boys and girls, then men and women. Without them, the blessing of hope will not continue. Don’t see the seed of their beginning, but see the tree of their maturity as it gives joy and supplies the needs of the future. When you look at children, see leaders of vision, fathers and mothers of courage and faith, new generations of believers, carrying the torch of truth until Jesus comes again.

We must “train for the future while ministering to the present.”
—John F. Wilson in *An Introduction to Church Music*

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. How did Jesus begin His life on earth? _____

2. Give four (4) points about the way God sees children. Use Scripture to support your answer.
 - A. _____

 - B. _____

 - C. _____

 - D. _____

3. Using Scripture as a reference, what two (2) instructions did Paul give Timothy about children and the home?
 - A. _____

 - B. _____

4. Why is the term “ordinary baby” not a correct one? _____

5. How does the devil see children? _____

6. Give two (2) examples of babies from the Bible who were used for great things in God's plan. Support with Scripture.

A. _____

B. _____

7. Write in full the following Scripture passages:

Matthew 18:5-6 _____

Galatians 4:4 _____

Mark 10:14-16 _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 14

Enjoying Our Heritage and Reward

KEY VERSE

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3).

FOCUS

A heritage is a long-awaited gift, passed down from one’s family. A reward is usually offered for some special service rendered. God equates children with both of these blessings. This was His intent with the creation of the family. If humanity would return to God’s plan and follow His Word, joy would return to families everywhere.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

God made the world with a special design. He meant for every living thing to be under the dominion of man—the creature made in His image (Genesis 1:26-31). From Adam to Noah, man continued to “be fruitful and multiply.” He subdued every living thing on earth, even the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air. However, when he failed to subdue his own desires and plans, God had to destroy man and animals too (Genesis 6:1-7).

God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). This was not optional. It was God's plan for populating the whole earth. In our key verse, God commanded Noah's sons to do the same thing after the flood had destroyed every living thing. This commandment is still an important part of family life; for without it, no nation can grow and be blessed.

POPULATION EXPLOSION

Since Noah's day, men have abused God's command, because they did not follow God's original plan for the family. All around the world, daily, hourly, even every minute, a new life begins. There is much talk about the difficulties of population explosion and the problem of feeding the world's children. The problem is not with God's commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" but with the failure of people everywhere to bring children into the world following God's family pattern.

- What would happen to the increasing population if the only children born were those who entered this world and were nurtured as God intended?
- What if every child was born into a family with legally married parents?
- What if every child was born to parents who loved God, each other, and this new life they were responsible for bringing into the world?
- What if every child was born into a home where both parents were present (except in cases of death) and took an active part in the training of that child?

Most of our troubles come from a failure to properly obey Him. Some take this particular verse (Genesis 1:28) to mean they should have as many children as they want, in whatever condition they desire, and with as many different men (or women) as possible. They also have children, then leave them with someone else to care for and nurture to maturity. Obviously, this does not work, and it is not what God said. Since the beginning, people have tried to interpret God's Word their own way.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Genesis 1:27 tells us that man (and woman) was made in the image and likeness of God. Everything God did in creation was done in decency and order.

God created everything needed for each new creation to flourish, before He made the next one.

In the first four days of creation, God made:

- Day and night;
- The heavens and the skies;
- Dry land and seas;
- Plants, trees, and all types of vegetation complete with the seed inside for more of the same
- The sun, moon, and stars to mark the days and years and times and seasons.

Only after there was light, water, air, and food did God create animal life—fish and fowl and cattle and crawling things. He made sure they had everything they needed to nurture and sustain life before He made man—in His own image.

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Genesis 1:28-31).

God had a plan for families too.

- He began with the father—the leader.
- Notice Adam was a man, not a boy. He was old enough to fulfill the responsibility of naming every animal that God had created (Genesis 2:19-20).
- He brought the woman to the man (actually took her out of the man) to be a helper (Genesis 2:21-22).
- Notice Eve was not a little girl. She was mature and well able to handle the relationship expected of her as Adam’s wife (Genesis 2:23-25).

- The man recognized the closeness of this creature (she looked like him but was different) God had brought to him. Adam was not ashamed to get acquainted with his mate (Genesis 2:23-25).

This was the beginning of the family plan—one man plus one woman. Then God told them to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth.

- The commandment was not for Eve alone.
- It was not for Adam alone.
- God never told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful” and then live in different places.

Even when Eve listened to the serpent, and Adam sinned with her, their family life followed the pattern God had started in the garden. (Read Genesis 3-4.)

THE FIRST CHILDREN

Until they sinned, Adam and Eve had known only the blessings of God’s protection and guidance. However, when they failed to obey His Word, they began the journey of all humanity who choose to do evil—sin and death.

It began with Adam toiling to find food. In the Garden, no mention is made of sweat and toil, but outside of the Garden, Adam found plenty of both (Genesis 3:17-19).

Eve’s curse was related to God’s commandment to “be fruitful and multiply.” It also spoke of her submission to Adam.

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16).

The *New International Version* of the Bible reads like this:

“To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Notice the following from this verse:

- Pain and suffering go along with the joy and fulfillment of motherhood.
- A woman's desire should be toward her own husband—not other men.
- The Bible does not say that men would rule over women, but rather that a woman's own husband would rule over her, because of the desire she would have toward him.

So the first children were born into the world. Eve named her baby boy *Cain*, meaning "I have gotten a man from the LORD" (Genesis 4:1). Then Eve had another baby boy and named him *Abel* (Genesis 4:2). The story of these two boys is not a good one, but it does make a point. Children do follow in the footsteps of their parents.

When it came time to offer sacrifices, Abel brought a firstling of his flock, and Cain brought some of his best fruit and vegetables. When God accepted Abel's offering, Cain became jealous and angry. What did God tell him?

"And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (Genesis 4:6-7).

Look closely at what God said:

- Do what is right and your offering will be accepted.
- If you do not do what is right, it is because the sin that is trying to overtake you has succeeded.

Just like his parents, Cain wanted to do things his way. It did not matter what God said to him. He wanted God to change to fit his idea of a sacrifice. When God would not change, Cain reacted with anger and killed his brother. The Bible does not tell us what he hoped to accomplish by this act, but his jealousy and rage overcame his good sense. Maybe he did not know that God would see what he had done. For sure, Cain never repented.

The story of Cain and Abel is a sad one, but it gives us guidance and hope. (Read Genesis 4.) Even with the decision to do things his own way, God still gave Cain a chance. God continued to talk with him until he went away from God's presence.

“And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16).

Cain, a marked man, left God; God never deserted Cain. No matter how wicked and willful Cain was, God was ready to forgive. He will forgive all who turn back to Him and follow His will and plan.

LET’S TRY AGAIN

In a matter of days, Adam and Eve lost both of their first children. The Bible does not tell us of their grief over Cain and Abel, but it does tell us they continued to obey God’s instruction to “be fruitful and multiply.”

“And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:25-26).

Genesis 5 paints an interesting picture of Adam’s family. It tells of creation, and the first child of Adam listed is Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived another eight hundred years and begat sons and daughters, but the only children whose descendants are listed are Seth’s. From Seth’s descendants came such men as Enoch and his great-grandson Noah (Genesis 5:21–24, 28-29).

KEEPING GOD CLOSE

According to *The Broken Hearth* by William J. Bennett, the following statistics tell us that many are forgetting God’s instructions to “be fruitful and multiply.” They are choosing their own path for developing families, and their choices are bringing trouble of all sorts to our world. Here are some of the statistics since the year 1960:

- Fewer people are getting married.
- Those who marry are doing so when they are older.
- Couples are having fewer children.
- They are spending less time with the children they do have.
- Couples are divorcing much more frequently.
- Those who do not marry are having sexual relations at an earlier age.

- Sexual disease is much more common. AIDS is the number one cause of death in many developing nations of the world—especially in the continent of Africa.
- More than ever before people are living together with no plans or intentions to marry.
- A record number of children are being born out of wedlock. Many of these children are born to girls who are still children themselves.
- More children than ever before live with only one parent.

When we look at these facts, we can see how far man has strayed from God's original plan for bringing children into the world. God's commandment still stands. His plan for families has never changed. He wants to bless us with children who are a joy in the home and hope for the future.

"Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers" (Proverbs 17:6).

God delights in children long before they are born. The psalmist David expressed it well when he wrote, "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it" (Psalm 139:13-14, NLT).

CONCLUSION

What can we do to change the direction families have taken?

- We can pray and ask God for forgiveness if we are not following His plan.
- We can read His Word to remind ourselves of His plan for families. Start with Genesis chapters 1-5, then read Ephesians 5:22-33.
- We can obey God's command to be fruitful and multiply, following God's pattern of one man becoming one flesh with one woman until death parts them.
- We can be sure that children are a result of that union—not the reason for it.
- We can be careful to take responsibility for the provision, nurture, and training of our children—both physically and spiritually.
- We can continue to trust God to be with us and guide us as our children grow according to His will, not theirs or ours.

- We can remember God’s explanation of what children are supposed to mean to us—a special heritage from our ancestors and a reward for our present and future.

“We deeply want a revival of family religion. The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the Puritans, but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advanced when His own disciples do not teach His gospel to their own children?”—Charles Spurgeon, “The Kind of Revival We Need,” cited in *enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201401/201401_070_fam_worship.cfm*, accessed February 26, 2015.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. In what two (2) specific places in Scripture did God command people to “be fruitful and multiply”? For whom was each commandment?

A. _____

B. _____

2. What things did God provide in Creation before He made man? _____

3. What three (3) possibilities give us insight into God’s pattern for families—a plan that would greatly decrease the world’s population?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. God's family plan began with whom? _____

5. Which of Adam and Eve's children is listed in the genealogy of Adam?

6. After rejecting his sacrifice, God told Cain two (2) things that could have helped him offer a proper sacrifice. What were they?
A. _____

B. _____

7. What hope do we gain from the story of Cain? _____

8. Write in full the verse (with reference) that makes it clear that God delights in us long before we are born. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 15

Keeping Trouble Out by Discipline

KEY VERSE

“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Proverbs 25:28).

FOCUS

Walls are valuable in any culture. They keep trouble out and protect those on the inside. A wall forms the most common boundary known to people and shows the area of their (or even a city or nation’s) property—their place of influence. This is true in both the natural and spiritual.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

To understand the purpose of spiritual boundaries, God’s Word uses the common example of a wall. The Bible contains stories and illustrations of actual walls that were in need of repair. The Book of Nehemiah tells the story of the rebuilding of the wall around the city of Jerusalem.

WHY ARE WALLS IMPORTANT?

Think of a wall as the border between two countries. What would happen if that border were taken down or if there were no distinction of land and influence? This would cause much confusion and trouble, and in many parts of the world, the destruction of borders has been the major cause of war.

In Jerusalem, the Temple had been rebuilt, but most of the people did not live in the city. The wall was broken down, and there was no boundary around the city. According to *The Student Bible – New International Version*, this caused many problems:

- Gangs of thieves had easy access to the city.
- Those seeking security had settled outside the city in villages where there was some semblance of protection. However, they were living with foreigners who did not know or follow God's laws.
- Living in these villages brought closeness that led to marriages with people who were not Jews.
- This intermarriage led to the loss of the Jews' language, culture, and religion.

The rebuilding of the wall was important because it gave the Jews a chance to make Jerusalem a Jewish city again. It offered the people safety and control over who came and went.

Nehemiah felt this need, even when he was far away, serving the king of Persia as a cupbearer. His heart understood that the wall around Jerusalem was necessary to the rebuilding of his homeland. The things he encountered in this process make wonderful lessons for leaders, even leaders of families.

WHY DO FAMILIES NEED WALLS?

What do walls have to do with family life? Our key verse gives the answer. The walls around our compound (family) are the boundaries (rules) we erect for the protection and control of our home—especially with children. Control of our self-will and desires requires discipline, and it must begin early in life.

“The idea [of having boundaries] is not to insulate children but to equip them—not with our fragile cocoon but with the whole armor of God.”—
David Veerman in *Parenting Passages*

What would happen if you waited until your child was twelve years old before you trained him not to play in the street? Even with a physical wall around the compound, this one lesson could mean the difference in life or death for a child. You must teach it as early as possible and enforce it daily as the child grows. In a world that tells us we should allow our children to make their own life choices, even when they have no idea of the dangers, walls are vital to their protection. It is up to parents to rebuild the walls before the enemy moves in and destroys the next generation.

BUILDING STRONG WALLS

What do we use to build these walls? Discipline. *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* defines *discipline* as "the training of the mind and character; a mode of life in accordance with rules; self-control; control, order, obedience to rules."

The Revell Bible Dictionary defines *discipline* as "correction or punishment which makes a positive contribution to one's growth in righteousness. While punishment is a part of discipline, we must remember that discipline is a very positive term. To discipline is to instruct, train, and guide development."

Moses said, "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you" (Deuteronomy 8:5, NIV).

The New Testament speaks strongly about discipline. For example, Hebrews 12:6 (NIV) states, "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

God never meant divine discipline as an expression of anger or revenge.

- Divine discipline proves that God loves His children. He will never abandon them or correct them because He is angry with them.
- Divine discipline helps God's children become holy.
- Divine discipline may be painful, but it seeks to produce right living and peace with God.
- To get the proper good out of divine discipline, one must endure it, remembering God's grace and love toward all His children.

When we follow God's pattern and example, we will not fail.

“He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity” (Job 36:10).

How do we build strong walls around our compound (family)? We begin by teaching our children the difference between right and wrong. Where do we find the difference between right and wrong in a world full of corruption? We measure all righteousness by God’s Word. We ask ourselves if something is right according to what God says, and when we find that answer, we live by it.

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

This is the first step to building the walls.

TRAINING FOR LIFE

Outside of the parent-child relationship, discipline is most commonly referred to when talking about the training of an athlete. His work requires consistent training over an extended period of time with many hardships and even physical pain.

Those who would become Olympic athletes begin at a very early age, especially for some sports (i.e., ice skating, gymnastics). The reason is that younger children have muscles that are more flexible and more easily adaptable to the rigors of the physical training required for these sports.

The same is true of children in the family. Training a child to live a life for God must begin while his ideas and life goals are flexible. When God’s Word becomes the guide for the child, he will usually continue to follow God throughout his life.

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

“When a plant is young and bending, it is easy to straighten it out.”
—African Proverb

Many times, we fall into the trap of believing that when a child is older, he will understand more. However, God has made the human mind so that by the

time a child is five years old, his thought patterns are set for life. After this age, it is much harder to mold and shape him according to God's plan.

It becomes like breaking up the cement to write a new name in it, an almost impossible task. How long does it take cement to harden? Not long at all. So it is with children. The boundaries of their lives need to be established early and kept consistently throughout their time in the home. By the time they are old enough to leave the home to start their own family, they will be prepared to set boundaries for their children – our precious grandchildren.

WHAT MAKES THE WALL?

What are some materials we need to use in the building of walls of protection? Not enough time or space is here to list them all, so we will choose some that are basic and needful around the world.

- **Respect for elders (Hebrews 13:17) and each other (Romans 12:10).**

Respect is basic to all cultures, even though it varies by application. Every child needs to know how to reverence his elders, especially those who are trying to lead him. This respect and reverence should include the laws of the land and the government authorities (Romans 13:1). The respect needed to live peaceably with family members of different ages is vital and must begin early in life. Respect leads children to obey their elders and protects them from many hurts.

- **Love and obedience to God and His Word (John 14:15).**

God has always equated love for Him with obedience to His Word. He wants to give us many wonderful things, but He cannot go against His Word. When we fail to obey it, we are asking for trouble (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

- **Keeping God's temple pure (I Thessalonians 4:3-4; Colossians 3:5-6; Ephesians 5:2-3).**

This material is probably one of the most important, and also the most neglected, because it makes parents uncomfortable to talk about it. The world would have children believe they can read, watch, think, and do whatever they choose. They are told that sexual immorality is a "choice"

they can make and is no one's business. It is true that everything we do in life is a choice. But with proper understanding of the consequences of wrong choices, our children can be spared much pain and trouble.

"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:18-20).

- **Seeking God's will (Romans 12:1-2).**

This is an area where many people feel inadequate. Knowing the will of God is a simple process of knowing God's Word and living by the principles in it. This comes with prayer and Bible study throughout life. If families make this a priority and a habit when their children are small, they will grow up accustomed to seeking guidance from God's Word for every decision, even daily choices. The problem of finding God's will comes when this life habit is not followed, and suddenly an answer is needed fast. The will of God involves our whole life. It is the parents' responsibility to teach their children how to seek and find God's will. Living in the will of God means staying within the walls found in God's Word for daily life.

MORE LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah knew his city needed walls (Nehemiah 1). The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down for almost one hundred years, so why had no one tried to rebuild them earlier? There are two possible reasons:

1. Strong opposition from the people who lived there. They were the exiles who had been moved there as prisoners of the Persian Empire.
2. Lack of a leader with vision and determination. Nehemiah had both in abundance.

We have already learned of the failure of many families around the world to fulfill their God-given role in society. Why has so little been done to correct this sad situation? Possibly for the same reasons no one rebuilt Jerusalem's wall:

1. Strong opposition from the locals, the god of this world, and his cohorts

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:2-3).

What are some of the things the “locals” are telling us about families?

- Follow cultural trends even when it means direct disobedience to God’s Word. For example, the practice of proving the ability to bear children before a girl is considered eligible for marriage is against God’s law.
- It is not necessary for the father to be around as long as he sends plenty of money to his family.
- Divorce is no big deal.

These are just a few of the lies spread by the “locals.” They do not mind using actual attack, but also employ the same methods Sanballat did – lies and propaganda. God’s Word plainly tells us:

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:9-11).

2. Lack of a leader (father or head of the home) with vision and determination

Possibly, the family leader has not been the kind of spiritual head that would see the need for walls (boundaries) for his family. Maybe he has not talked to God and followed God’s laws about everyday family life. It could even be that he has had a desire, but the opposition has overcome his efforts, so he has given up.

Whatever the reason for the walls being down, it is time to rise up and build. Just like Nehemiah, the family leader needs to pray, and then he should act.

GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

Another important ingredient in Nehemiah's success was that he got everyone possible involved. Skilled craftsmen worked with ordinary laborers. Priests and rulers worked beside regular families, who were motivated to build the section of the wall just outside their own home (Nehemiah 3:28).

"Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me: as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

Because of the diligence of Nehemiah and his helpers, the wall was completely rebuilt in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15). It began with one man who saw the need and was willing to leave a life of luxury and comparative ease to get the job done. Nehemiah not only had the vision for the work, he was able to share that vision in such a way that he got others involved. Not only were they involved—they never stopped the work, but were always on their guard. They were totally committed to rebuilding the Jerusalem wall:

"During this time, none of us—not I, nor my relatives, nor my servants, nor the guards who were with me—ever took off our clothes. We carried our weapons with us at all times, even when we went for water" (Nehemiah 4:23, NLT).

CONCLUSION

The task of rebuilding the walls (boundaries) around our families may seem gigantic. However, with God's help, guidance, and the diligent work of every family member, we can do it. We should not be discouraged if we begin alone; Nehemiah did. We must remember that our job is really a calling from God to protect and guard our families.

What was the first thing Nehemiah did when he heard of the broken walls of his beloved Jerusalem? He wept, then fasted and prayed for direction and help.

“And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4).

Maybe you are just becoming aware of the terrible condition of families when measured according to God’s Word. If so, the first response is mourning for the failure to follow God’s ways. But don’t stop there. Like Nehemiah, fast and pray for God’s help, then get to work!

Nehemiah looked to God for direction and then acted quickly and consistently. So must we. And, like Nehemiah, we must not quit until the work is finished. Is it possible that, like Nehemiah, the task may be completed long before we thought possible? YES—for with God all things are possible. Nehemiah has one more word of encouragement for us all:

“Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the LORD, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!’” (Nehemiah 4:14, NLT).

Remember the Lord!

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What do walls refer to in family life? _____

2. Which book of the Old Testament gives us the account of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem? _____

3. List four (4) reasons why the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall was so important to Israel?
- A. _____
- _____
- B. _____
- _____
- C. _____
- _____
- D. _____
- _____
4. In what four (4) ways does divine discipline give us the proper example to follow for disciplining our children?
- A. _____
- _____
- B. _____
- _____
- C. _____
- _____
- D. _____
- _____
5. What is the first step in building the walls of protection around our children?
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. Write the African proverb used in this lesson that speaks about discipline at an early age. _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. List four (4) things needed as materials in our walls of discipline. Use Scripture to support your answer.
- A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

8. What two (2) things need to be done (as Nehemiah did) before we begin rebuilding the walls of discipline around our families? Support your answer with Scripture.

A. _____

B. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 16

Building an Ark . . . Again!

KEY VERSE

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

FOCUS

Our world is full of trouble and heartache. Families are struggling to survive. Nevertheless, there is hope. God has a plan for families, and He is looking for someone to rise up and follow that plan, just as Noah did.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 6 tells the familiar story of how wicked the people God created became. Violence and fighting, evil and selfishness filled the land. These things that happened thousands of years ago are like seeing a picture of our world today. People cared nothing for God, but only sought their own pleasures (Genesis 6:1-7).

This lesson introduces us to one man who refused to follow the crowd. In the whole earth, God found only one person who communicated with Him and obeyed His laws.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8).

WHY BUILD AN ARK?

When God first spoke to Noah about building an ark, it had never rained. The plants and trees were watered with a mist that came up from the earth (Genesis 2:5-6).

God told Noah exactly how to build this boat, and He told him why He wanted it built (Genesis 6:13-22). He obeyed without question.

Without rain and living where people were not familiar with lots of water, building a huge boat seemed a foolish idea. Nevertheless, the way God’s prize creation (men and women) was acting enraged Him. He was sorry He had made them. He determined to destroy humanity, except for the family of the one righteous man who found grace in His sight (Genesis 6:1-9). God told him to build a boat that would save his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives (Genesis 6:18). God gave the instructions, and we do not find that Noah asked one question.

“I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you” (Genesis 6:17-18, NIV).

Although the world was terribly wicked, God had a plan for the safety and protection of the only righteous man alive. God specifically wanted that man’s children to be saved.

- God made provision for life to continue when He told Noah to bring all the animals by pairs (two of each) into the ark.
- God made sure enough clean animals were on the ark (seven of each kind) for Noah to offer sacrifices (Leviticus 11 lists the animals that were considered clean.)
- The ark had enough room for these creatures to live together until God’s destruction was complete.

- The ark was 450 feet (150 meters) long, 75 feet (25 meters) wide, and 45 feet (three stories – 15-meters) high. That was a big boat. As always, God provided a way of escape for all. (Read Genesis 6-7.)

FAITH BEGINS WITH OBEDIENCE

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith has nothing to do with what we can see and touch. Faith comes from our belief that the unseen is true, real, and possible.

- Noah’s faith caused him to obey God’s command to build an ark, without any visible signs.
- There was no previous event in history to boost Noah’s faith.
- He started working on this great big boat that could carry approximately 35,000 different kinds of vertebrates (animals with backbones).

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

Noah did not wait to see the rain before he started to work on the ark that was to save their lives. He obeyed God. It is good that he did, since Noah had no idea when the rain would start.

NOAH’S CHILDREN

Noah’s first son, Shem, was born when Noah was 500 years old (Genesis 5:32); Japheth was next, and then Ham. They helped with the construction of the ark. They were a part of it and the ridicule that went along with the work. They heard their father preach to the people and endured the taunts of the wicked unbelievers. By the time of the flood, Shem, Japheth, and Ham were married men. They were saved because of the continuing obedience of their father, Noah.

We never read that Noah’s children rebelled against the work of building the ark. Obviously, they believed God too. They were:

- Present during years of construction;
- Present when God told them to go inside;
- Present when God shut the door of the ark;
- Present when the rains came down and the great deeps broke up;
- Present every day to help feed and care for the animals in the big floating zoo;
- Present when the waters stopped and the big boat floated day after day;
- Present when the boat finally rested on land and the dove returned with an olive branch in her beak;
- Present to help herd the animals off the boat;
- Present when their father made a sacrifice to God;
- Present and used by God to inhabit the earth after the great flood receded (Genesis 7-8).

LESSONS FROM THE ARK

What does the story of Noah and the ark have to do with us? It begins with faith. There are many different types of families (both physical and spiritual) represented in the church. Some have grown children and grandchildren. Others have both young and grown children. Some do not have any children. But we all have something in common with Noah.

- God has called us to be responsible for the saving of our families.
- God has given clear directions about the construction of the ark of salvation through His Word – the Bible.
- We cannot wait for circumstances or situations to be perfect before we begin constructing an ark for the saving of our families. Immediate obedience is necessary to get the job done.
- God’s instructions may seem impossible, but if He has told us to do something, He will help us get the job done.

How easy do you think it was for Noah to “bring into the ark” two of every kind of living thing of all flesh (Genesis 6:19-20)? How would you like to be told to gather food for all of these animals and store it in a big boat you were building on dry land (Genesis 6:21)? “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22, NIV). And you thought God was asking you to do something that was difficult!

Some of the lessons from Noah’s example are hard to follow:

- Noah preached for many years, and no one believed him, except those of his household.
- Noah continued to build the ark in spite of rejection by friends, neighbors, and family all around him. How do we know they rejected his preaching? No one got in the ark with Noah, except his immediate family (his wife and three sons and their wives).
- Noah built the ark because God had told him of the coming destruction, although there was no sign of it.
- Noah never questioned God's instructions and never tried to change the plans he had been given.

NOAH'S EXTREME FAITH

Some of the most interesting facts about this story have to do with the construction of the boat.

- Only two supplies were listed in the materials needed for the construction of the ark: gopher wood (probably cypress) and pitch (something like tar) that was to be applied within and without (Genesis 6:14). No options or other choices were allowed.
- The size was huge, and the task was too. It took many years to complete.
- Noah had to follow specific directions, because there had to be enough room to house two of every kind of animal, and every creeping thing (Genesis 6:19-20), and seven of every clean beast (Genesis 7: 2-3).
- There had to be storage space for food for the animals (Genesis 6:21). Someone had to know what the animals liked to eat (chickens do not eat grass, but horses do) and feed them daily.

What a job! Noah did what God told him to do, never asked a question, never complained, and did not fail to do one thing that God said (Genesis 6:22, 7:5). What faith!

Noah's faith was expressed again when he entered the ark and God shut the door, because he had no way of opening that door himself. He could not get out, and he could not let anyone else in. We have no record of anyone else even wanting to enter the boat during the time that Noah, his family, and the animals were entering.

GET IN THE BOAT . . . OR ELSE!

What do you think happened when it started to rain? The people had never seen or felt water from the sky. They were not familiar with the waters of the great deep either (Genesis 7:10-11), but both of these were unleashed. When they realized what was happening, do you imagine they tried to enter the ark? If they did, it was too late.

For all the days that it rained and all the days after the waters stopped, the boat floated along exactly as God pleased.

Noah and his family were completely at the mercy, direction, and timing of God. They were helpless in their ark of safety. Safe? Yes, but they had no idea where they were going, when they would arrive, or how they would survive once they landed. What a trip!

If there were doubts and complaints on this trip, the Bible does not record them. If Noah and his family were afraid, we do not read about it. They totally trusted in God to take care of them, guide them, and bring them through the terrible storm that raged around them, and even the calm floating on water with no land in sight.

We find lessons of extreme faith in Noah's story:

- Obeying God's plan for our lives and ministry means depending entirely on God's timing. Reaching our goal may take much more or much less time than we imagined.
- Obeying God's plan means trusting God for direction and guidance every step of the way.
- God will not forget us but will bring us safely through—to exactly where He wants us to be.

CONCLUSION

What does this have to do with the training of our children? The responsibility to train our children "in the way that they should go" is not an option. As men of God and/or parents, we do not have a choice. God has commanded us to do this, and a failure on our part will require an answer on the Day of Judgment. God has always required this training for children. He

designed this method to be sure that His laws and righteousness never pass away. If we fail to obey this commandment, not only our children will be lost, so will we.

If Noah had not built the ark, would he have been saved? The stated purpose was for the saving of his house, but it saved him too. As a man of God and the man of your home, what are you doing about the salvation of your children—those in your family and those you nurture as spiritual leader?

- Are you following the specific directions given by God in His Word (Acts 2:38-39) to make sure your children are inside the ark of safety (salvation)?
- Are you training your children from infancy (Matthew 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)?
- Are you consistently training your children in the ways of the Lord to assure that they follow in His statutes? If you are not consistent—no matter how long it takes—you will not complete the building of the ark. It took years, but he never gave up (Deuteronomy 6:7-9, 20-25).

If you answered, no to any of these questions, get out your tools (God's Word and prayer) and start building an ark.

"By faith Noah built a ship in the middle of dry land. He was warned about something he couldn't see, and acted on what he was told. The result? His family was saved. His act of faith drew a sharp line between the evil of the unbelieving world and the rightness of the believing world. As a result, Noah became intimate with God" (Hebrews 11:7, *The Message*).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What reason does Hebrews 11:7 give for building the ark? _____

2. What four (4) things from Noah's life and ministry are difficult examples to follow?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

3. What four (4) things do we have in common with Noah and the instructions God gave him?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

4. What two (2) supplies or materials were to be used for the building of the ark?

- A. _____
- B. _____

5. Why was it necessary for Noah to bring seven (7) of every type of clean beast into the ark? _____

6. How was Noah's faith tested again as he entered the ark that he had built according to God's instructions? _____

7. What four (4) lessons can we learn from Noah's extreme faith in God's plan?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

8. What three (3) questions should we ask ourselves about the salvation of our children?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Personal Study Notes

Lesson 17

Believing Means Obeying

KEY VERSE

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? . . . And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1, 4-5).

FOCUS

While Eve knew the general idea of God’s one restriction in the Garden of Eden, she could not quote His Word correctly. When the serpent began to ask questions, Eve’s uncertainty about what God had said led to the original sin. What *did* God say?

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

What did Eve tell the serpent God had said when she was questioned?

“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the

midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Genesis 3:2-3).

Eve not only misquoted God, she added to His rule—God never told them not to touch the fruit. Her failure to listen and follow God's directions correctly caused all humanity to know sin and death.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

It is important to know God's Word. It is vital to our eternal destiny. Adam told Eve what God had said. The devil also knew, twisted God's words, and made them sound completely different to Eve. Satan is up to that same trick today.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH FAMILIES?

Not knowing exactly what God's Word says is the root cause of the failure of families. *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* defines *submission* as "an agreement in which parties undertake to abide by a decision or obey an authority." The meaning of this word that causes so much confusion has its roots in a choice made by someone to place himself (or herself) under the protection and guidance of another.

This is what God's Word says:

"And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16).

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:21-22).

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18).

Do you see the difference in what God said and what many people believe about submission? God told the woman to "submit" to her husband—not every man alive.

Men have taken these same verses and used them as a hammer over the heads of their wives, never reading God's commandment to them:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . . so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29).

Many men try to force their wives (and any other woman around) to "submit" and never notice what verse 21 of this same chapter says: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

According to the *Revell Bible Dictionary*, this submission is an eagerness to put others first, to yield out of love. As Les and Leslie Parrott in their article "Who's in Charge Here?" explain in the *Marriage Devotional Bible (NIV)*, the headship of men in marriage is not about being the boss or ruler. It is talking about being

- The first to honour;
- The first to nurture; and
- The first to meet your partner's needs.

The basic principle involved is to empty ourselves of all self-centered desires. When we understand that submission in marriage is a two-way street, we can better remember that we are also supposed to be submitted to God together (Hebrews 12:9; James 4:7).

Understanding mutual submission will eliminate many of the difficulties that cause marriages to fail. Godly men who are striving to follow the example of Christ and His bride (the church) will not try to force their wives "to submit." They will not need to. Any woman fortunate enough to be married to a man who loves her in the way God said, is fulfilled in her obedience to the commandment to "submit."

Submission comes easier when the proper "leaving" and "cleaving" have taken place in a marriage. In many cultures, the husband's mother and father will make decisions for the new family unit—especially if the newly married couple lives in their house. It is easier to submit if there is no outside interference—from either the husband's or the wife's family.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Cleave means “stick like glue.” The closeness of cleaving produces something really precious—children. These children—so much a part of both parents—make it vital for husband and wife to fulfill their proper roles in marriage, sharing decisions and obeying God’s Word.

What about the children who are added to this godly family? God’s Word gives them instructions too, with the added blessing of a promise.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Parents who follow the godly plan described in God’s Word will find it much easier to train children who honor them. Both parents will be involved in this work as they:

- With loving discipline and instruction train their small children to obey and honor them (Proverbs 13:24).
- Show their older children by example how to respect and follow their counsel and honor them with assistance whenever possible or needed (Matthew 15:1-6).
- Remind their children often of the blessings on earth and the joy in eternity for being obedient to God’s commandments (Ephesians 6:3).

These simple instructions to the three parts of a family—father, mother, and children—should be understood long before marriage, taught consistently to the whole family, and practiced throughout life.

WHAT ABOUT FINANCES?

One of the most common problems with every marriage is the issue of money. Every couple has to answer such questions as:

- Who earns the money?
- Who spends the money?
- For what do they spend the money?

No matter what the culture, these questions must be answered. The Bible has some clear directions about this issue also.

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me, But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:8-10).

Many passages in God’s Word are about giving to His house, His people, and His work; but this one shows the serious consequences of disobedience. Families who desire prosperity and the blessings of the Lord must learn to tithe. Tithing is for the express purpose of providing for God’s house. Offerings are in addition to this, and usually provide for those in need.

Notice that these verses name the actual amount required as one-tenth of your increase, whether you are rich or poor (Leviticus 27:30). Every man and woman, boy and girl should understand that everything they have (or work to receive) is a gift from God (Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1). Their obedience to His plan for their finances will reap the reward of great blessings.

“Rather than, ‘How much of our money should we give to God’, we learned to ask, ‘How much of God’s money should we spend on ourselves?’—Les and Leslie Parrot, “Conversion of the Purse,” *Marriage Devotional Bible*, NIV

BROKEN FAMILIES

In his book *Real Family Values*, Robert Lewis related the account of the Great Flood of 1993 that devastated the entire midwestern United States of America. The waters of the great Mississippi River and all its tributaries and lakes rose to record heights. When it was all over:

- 50 people were dead.
- 17,000 square miles of farmland were under water.
- 70,000 people were homeless.
- (US) \$8 billion worth of property loss was estimated.
- The Army Corps of Engineers called it a *five-hundred-year flood*.

("Troubled Waters," *Newsweek*, 26 July 1993, pp. 21-24.)

The world we live in has been devastated with the loss of godly families. Every government and society feels the effect of this loss. But how did we arrive at the place where every nation is affected—socially, economically, culturally, and physically, with health problems compounding themselves in diseases that are a direct result of family failures?

The original sin has been at work. When God's Word said, "Flee fornication" (I Corinthians 6:18), the devil whispered, "Hath God said?" Thousands are suffering disease and death for their failure to heed this commandment.

When God's Word said, "He hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16), the devil whispered, "Hath God said?" What exactly does God say?

GOD SPEAKS OUT ON DIVORCE

"Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit, they are his, And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith" (Malachi 2:13-16, NIV).

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32).

Some religious leaders came to Jesus asking questions about divorce, and He said:

“Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:4-9).

The Book of Mark reports this event as follows:

“And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:2-12).

Luke 16:18 records the account of Jesus again teaching the Pharisees: “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”

CHURCH LEADERS SPEAK ABOUT DIVORCE

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome with this advice:

“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man” (Romans 7:1-3).

The new church at Corinth had questions about marriage. Their culture was steeped in idol worship that promoted all sorts of prostitution (of both men and women), and Paul spoke to them clearly:

“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband; but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (I Corinthians 7:10-16).

After Paul explained to the Corinthians why he preferred his single state (he believed the Lord was coming back soon, and the unmarried person could serve the Lord without having to please a partner—I Corinthians 7:25-38), he spoke more about marriage:

“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment; and I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 7:39-40).

The above verses of Scripture give us a clear picture of God's feelings on divorce. The question many people ask is the same one Eve listened to, "Hath God said?"

Remember the definition of *cleaving*? When you pull two pieces of wood or paper apart that have been glued together, you damage both parts. In a marriage, that means not only the husband and wife, it especially refers to the children. According to Americans for Divorce Reform, Inc., of Arlington, Virginia, USA, this is what happens when families are broken apart:

- The impact on children of divorce is not short-lived but life-long.
- Problems persist into early adulthood and affect the marriage and mating choices of children of divorce.
- Problems arise from conflict during and after divorce more than from conflict during the marriage.
- Divorce increases two or three-fold the incidence of all kinds of bad effects on children of divorce such as:
 - Psychological problems;
 - Juvenile delinquency;
 - Suicide;
 - Less years of education;
 - Teen pregnancy and motherhood.

CONCLUSION

Families have been falling apart for too long. It is time to listen to the voice of God, obey His Word, and put our families, nations, and the world back together the way God designed them from the beginning. His plan is always best, and He wants only good things for His children.

"All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm 25:10-14).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. What is the underlying principle of submission that makes the meaning different from what most people think? _____

2. Give one (1) Scripture reference for each family member (husband, wife, and children) that makes it clear what God requires from them to produce godly families. _____

3. What single financial principle will make a major difference in family values? Support with Scripture. _____

4. What one (1) question can we ask about finance that will “convert our purse?” _____

5. List five (5) things that happen two or three times more often to children of divorce.
 - A. _____

 - B. _____

 - C. _____

 - D. _____

 - E. _____

6. Write one (1) Scripture with reference that Jesus gave about His feelings on divorce. _____

7. Write one (1) Scripture with reference that Paul taught about divorce, quoting from Jesus' teaching. _____

8. What is the special reward that often comes as a result of "cleaving" in a marriage? _____

9. What three (3) things can parents do to help their children obey the commandment of God for their family life as found in Ephesians 6:1-3?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Lesson 18

Bolting the Door

KEY VERSE

“He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8).

FOCUS

Unfortunately for many couples, at the first sign of trouble, the first serious disagreement, or the first really hurtful exchange of words, they are “out of here.” Divorce is a door that is wide open when trouble shows up.

God’s people need to rise and fight the enemies of family life. The downfall of families is never God’s will. In the Old Testament He told Israel that He hated divorce (Malachi 2:16, NIV). Jesus stated that “from the beginning it [divorce] was not so” (Matthew 19:8). The Creator meant for families to be the backbone of society and the church. His desire was for a father and mother, who love Him and each other to raise children to love and serve Him too. Together this family unit was supposed to serve each other and those outside their home unselfishly.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

INTRODUCTION

In *What My Parents Did Right* (compiled and edited by Gloria Gaither), Jill Briscoe, British author and speaker, tells of a well-known saying in her parents' home: "When the doors on a marriage are shut and bolted and a fire breaks out, all your time and energy goes to putting out the flames." Her parents did not view divorce as an option—they had bolted that door—so when there was a problem in the home, they spent all their efforts correcting the problem and preserving the marriage. When a couple enters marriage with this type of commitment, there is a much greater chance that their family will survive.

This will obviously take work on *both sides* of the marriage partnership. As we have seen in previous lessons, God's Word agrees with this plan and gives us many weapons and methods to use to "bolt the door" against divorce and stay inside the marriage, working to do away with any destructive force.

PRESERVING MARRIAGE

God's family plan will work. Since marriage is the beginning of the family unit, its failure must be considered the root cause of the destruction of families everywhere. How can we "save the marriage"?

- **The first step is a determination to obey God's Word.** We cannot look at marriage as anything other than God's special design for the beginning of the family—a commitment and vow for the rest of our lives.

"And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matthew 19:4-5).

- **We need to understand that God's will and purpose for marriage is for our benefit and pleasure.** He never intended us to suffer and struggle alone but to share the joys and sorrows of life with our spouse.

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him. . . . And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called

Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:18, 22-25).

- **Always keep in mind that God made us in His image and likeness.** A daily reminder that marriage is supposed to be a model of Christ will help keep the focus on the priority of making the marriage work. Our goal is to be a reflection of His relationship with His church.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27).

- **One of marriage's greatest blessings is a result of keeping yourself pure in body.** Many children are not taught by example to keep themselves for their future spouse. We have to begin training our small children to assure that they follow this practice all the days of their life.

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (I Thessalonians 4:3-4).

- **It is vital to the building of a strong marriage to know your duties and obligations.** Enter marriage with an understanding of the role you should play. God has given us specific jobs as men and women, and if the marriage is going to work, we must live out these roles.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18).

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29).

When these commands are obeyed, both the husband and wife are blessed, and the marriage can succeed.

Many principles in God's Word will help a marriage succeed, but these last two points cover them all.

- **Always walk with the Master.**

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Invite Jesus into your marriage. Many of the things we say and do would change if we practiced His presence. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding. He wants to perform a lot more miracles by saving marriages everywhere.

- **Pray together.** One of the best ways to walk with the Master in your marriage is by praying with your spouse. This may take time and patience to get started, but it will work. Many passages of Scripture support this statement.

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20).

As Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, one of New York City's most famous pastors, said, "I have married hundreds of couples and counseled hundreds of others, and I have never yet known a marriage to fail where the couples had—or had acquired—the habit of praying aloud together."

- **Never give up—keep working on the marriage.**

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24).

"Marriages are made in heaven, but we are responsible for the maintenance work."—*Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes*, compiled by Robert J. Morgan

“Working” at marriage involves every day – all day long. It means that neither spouse takes the other for granted. Conscious effort must be made to express the love and commitment that brought them together in the beginning.

In “Advice That Could Save Your Marriage” (*Reader’s Digest*), Dr. Nathaniel Branden suggests several ways to show affection to a marriage companion:

- Tell each other “I love you” often.
- Be physically affectionate (hold hands, hug each other, or sit close together when talking).
- Express your love sexually.
- Mention the things you admire and appreciate about your spouse.
- Share thoughts and feelings, talk about what is on your mind and heart, and confide in each other.
- Express love by giving gifts or doing little acts of kindness for each other.
- Find time to be alone together with your spouse.

These suggestions take effort, but they will strengthen your relationship and bring joy into your marriage.

WHAT ABOUT CONFLICT?

Every marriage has disagreements. The secret is to use biblical principles to resolve them so that both parties will feel they have been understood. This will take work, but again, it will strengthen your marriage.

These Scripture references (taken from the article “How Do We Fight Fairly?” in *Preserving Christian Homes*) will help you when you have a conflict with your spouse:

1. Be patient.

“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11, NIV).

2. Stay calm.

“If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest” (Ecclesiastes 10:4, NIV).

3. Listen carefully.

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Proverbs 18:13).

4. Do not answer too quickly.

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19, NIV).

5. Speak gently.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1, NIV).

6. Be very careful when you do speak.

"He who guards his lips guards his soul, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3, NIV).

7. Be careful not to cause the problem to get any worse.

"He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Proverbs 17:9, NIV).

8. Do not seek revenge.

"Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did'" (Proverbs 24:29, NIV).

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

9. Do not say everything that comes to mind.

"Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down" (Proverbs 26:20, NIV).

10. Trust the Lord to solve your conflicts.

“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you” (Proverbs 20:22, NIV).

11. Make sure everything is settled peacefully before you rest at night.

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

As with every other problem faced in marriage, God’s Word gives us the answer for solving our conflicts. If we cling to this advice, God will work His miracle in our marriage.

PRESERVING THE FAMILY

When two people make a decision to work together, following Christ’s example and Word, they have laid the proper foundation for a family. Through good and bad, God is the head of everything in the home, and He gives grace and strength.

One basic commandment of Jesus will help preserve the family more than anything else we can do. In human relationships, this is one of the most difficult commandments ever given. Peter came asking Jesus how many times he was supposed to forgive a brother (or sister) who had wronged him. Jesus’ answer is one we need to remember and obey prayerfully.

“Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22).

Jesus explained what He meant with a parable about an unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35). The master had forgiven the servant’s great debt, but the servant refused to forgive the man who owed him a very small amount. His punishment was severe and a lesson to us all. Matthew 6:14-15 explains why: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

The bitterness and anger that develop in a marriage, especially over conflict, is a direct result of forgetting this important principle. No matter what men do to us, God commands us to forgive. Even though it is a difficult rule to follow, it is a must for family life.

- Forgiveness begins with Mom and Dad and must be worked on diligently and consistently. Mom and Dad teach forgiveness by example when they forgive each other, their children, other family members, their neighbors, and anyone who hurts them.
- Children need to be taught to forgive from earliest childhood. Many times this begins with learning how to forgive brothers or sisters.
- Sometimes parents need to ask their children for forgiveness. This is one of the best ways children can learn how to forgive.
- They learn the same lesson of forgiveness at school while getting along with other children.

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 4:29-32) gives some sound advice—especially for families:

“Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (NLT).

Oh, the difference forgiveness makes in any home!

“I can forgive, but I cannot forget” is only another way of saying, “I will not forgive.” Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note—torn in two and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one.
—Henry Ward Beecher

CONCLUSION

When we bolt the door against the idea of divorce, and work hard together with God and His plan, our families can be a witness to others. The prophecy of Isaiah concerning the salvation of Israel can be applied to families who follow God and work together to build their homes for Him.

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:1-4).

Some of the characteristics strong families develop when they obey God’s Word (taken from *Fantastic Families* by Dr. Nick and Nancy Stinnett) are:

- Happiness;
- Parents and children who get along well as they practice the love of Jesus;
- A relaxed and open atmosphere in the home with relationships that are free of conflict;
- A family unit that actively reaches outside their home to affect others for eternity.

This is possible when the family works together to love God, each other, and those around them. This is God’s perfect will for families.

When was the last time you asked God for help with your family? There is no greater time than the present to ask—believing God’s promises are true and they are for you—and me too.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Give short answers to the following questions.

1. List eight (8) things that can be done to “save the marriage.” Give a Scripture reference to support each.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____

G. _____

H. _____

2. What is the secret to resolving disagreements in a marriage?

3. List seven (7) ways to show affection to a spouse.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____

G. _____

-
4. List eleven (11) points to resolving a conflict. Support each with Scripture.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____

G. _____

H. _____

I. _____

J. _____

K. _____

5. What is one (1) basic commandment of Jesus that will help preserve the family more than anything else? Support your answer with Scripture.

6. How many times are we supposed to forgive? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

Family Life Resources

The inspiration and challenge of writing this book was greatly helped by the reading of many other books. Here is a list of very interesting and valuable resources for more study about family life from a Christian perspective.

- Anderson, Neil T. and Charles Mylander. *The Christ-Centered Marriage*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, A Division of Gospel Light Publishers, 1997.
- Carmichael, William and Nancie. *601 Quotes about Marriage & Family*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998.
- Chapman, Gary. *Toward a Growing Marriage*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985.
- Focus on the Family Magazine & Focus Family Internet Articles*. (January 2001–May 2002).
- Laney, J. Carl. *The Divorce Myth*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1987.
- Lewis, Robert. *Real Family Values*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000.
- Marriage Devotional Bible (For All Seasons of Marriage), New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.
- Morgan, Robert J. *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000.
- Rainey, Dennis. *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001.
- Rainey, Dennis and Barbara. *Moments Together for Couples (Devotions for Drawing Near to God & One Another)*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, A Division of Gospel Light Publishers, 1995.
- Walker, James. *Husbands Who Won't Lead & Wives Who Won't Follow*. Wheaton, IL: Bethany House Publishers, 2000.

Missionary Spotlight:

Samuel and Patricia Balca

By Samuel Balca



Samuel and Patricia Balca - 2010

“So, you’re going to Europe married, are you?” Patricia asked with a quizzical look on her pretty face. “Well, yes! Don’t you wanna go?” Samuel replied matter-of-factly, as if it was a forgone conclusion. And that, in fact, was his proposal for marriage as far as he was concerned.

It was December 1970, and we were driving in my pale blue, ‘68 Mustang fastback, returning to Windsor, Ontario, from Harrow, where we had just met with the outgoing missionary to Eastern Europe, Fred Tinus. In that meeting I made the final arrangements with the missionary to join him on the mission field in Vienna, Austria, in a few months, and from there help him evangelize the countries behind the Iron Curtain. That’s when he asked me if I was coming to Europe single or married. Without thinking, I said I was coming as married, in my mind referring to Patricia, but with whom I had never even broached the subject of marriage. Hence, her surprise and exploratory question in the car.

How did it come to this strange scenario of marriage and departure for the mission field, seemingly in such a haphazard manner? I was twenty-four at the time, the youngest son of a preacher and church planter from Yugoslavia (for more information read my father’s autobiography, *My Life with God* by Jan Balca). We had been in Canada for fourteen years by then, and I was busy studying to be a chartered accountant. I had moved to Windsor with my job to help in establishing a new church in that city.

The Lord, however, had been dealing with me for some time to return to Eastern Europe and get involved in ministering to those persecuted nations. They were my people, and I sympathized with them. However, I liked living in Canada, and I tried to excuse myself from the increasing pressure from above to get going.

Instead of preparing for the ministry, I buried myself in the business world and study for an accounting degree. Having grown up in the church, I should have known better than to try to outwit God. Quite suddenly my studies did not go so well. Even though I was a top student in high school, now I could no longer handle the correspondence course I was pursuing. My mind was constantly dwelling on my people in Eastern Europe suffering under the heavy yoke of communism, and no one was there from our church organization to help them.

My excuse that I was not a licensed minister did not impress God very much. In short order God had Fred Tinus, a good friend of our family, appointed as a missionary to the very countries I was being drawn to, and He impressed me very clearly that I was to go and join him on the field, get a job to support myself, and begin the journey of a life of a missionary.

My wife, Patricia, was born in Picton, Ontario, and she and one of her sisters were the only family members who were converted in a UPCI church. Patricia attended the Apostolic Missionary Institute in Picton. When she graduated, she and her sister were invited to Windsor to establish a Sunday school program in the new church. This is how the Lord so neatly arranged for Patricia and me to meet.

Yes, she was rather shocked when I “proposed” in the car, but in her heart she knew everything was simply falling into place according to the will of God. When she was converted, the Lord already prepared her for this moment, in that He had impressed her very clearly at the time that someday she would be involved in church work in foreign countries.

We were married on July 31, 1971, and four days later we were flying to Vienna, Austria, to join the Tinus family and begin the adventure of a lifetime. We arrived on Saturday, and on Monday we both had jobs at the Coca-Cola bottling plant.

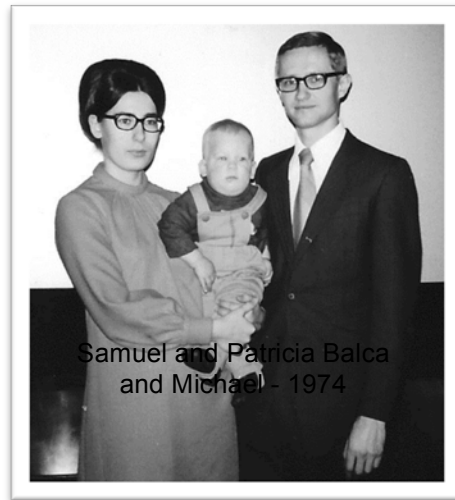
In order to facilitate our work behind the Iron Curtain, Brother Tinus began holding services in Vienna in a rented hall. Officially, this was the reason we were in Vienna. Unofficially, we were heavily involved in ministering in countries behind the Iron Curtain with preaching and teaching, humanitarian aid, Bibles, and anything else that helped suffering, persecuted saints of God, and brought the good news to unbelievers who otherwise would never hear.

I was able to get right to work along with Brother Tinus, because I still had a good grasp of my mother tongue, Slovak, and was able to communicate in most of the other Slavic languages spoken in Eastern Europe. I also perfected my German, to the point where I could preach in it. God gave my wife the gift to learn languages easily and naturally, without even taking any courses. She became quite fluent in Slovak and German, and could find her way in the other Slavic languages, according to need.

In 1973 our first child was born, and missionary Tinus died. His unexpected passing was a shock to everyone. He was only forty-three years old, and was always such an energetic man, working diligently and passionately almost day and night. It was a great loss to me especially, because I desperately needed him to continue teaching me all about the ministry and missionary work.

The summer Brother Tinus passed away, we had our European conference in Vienna in the church hall that he had rented. Brother T. F. Tenney, who was the general director of Foreign Missions, attended this conference and met with us to discuss the future of the work in Vienna and Eastern Europe. We were allowed to quit our jobs at Coca-Cola, and were given some support from Brother Tinus's PIM account so we could devote all of our time to church work. I was also granted a general ministerial license.

We continued fulfilling the late Brother Tinus's vision both in Vienna and Eastern Europe. By 1976, Brother Tinus's PIM account came to an end, and we could no longer get a job in Austria, so we had no choice but to return to Canada. Another missionary was already under appointment to Austria, so at least that part was covered. Eastern Europe again had no UPCI representative, and our burden was as active as ever, so we applied for a missionary appointment. We met the missionary board in the summer of 1976, but were turned down, with the recommendation that we gain more ministerial experience by assisting a pastor or starting a church. We asked the brethren if we could gain such experience in Europe, and they agreed. We returned to Europe on our own in the fall of 1976. This time we based in Germany, worked with German missionaries, and made as many trips to Eastern Europe as we could finance.



Samuel and Patricia Balca
and Michael - 1974

In 1979 we returned to Canada for a few months. We applied for a missionary appointment again, and this time we were approved. Brother Harry Scism, who was then the general director of Foreign Missions, was especially burdened to send missionaries to Eastern Europe, and he gave us a strong recommendation. With the backing of the whole fellowship, we were able to devote all of our time, energy, and finances to Eastern Europe, and many people were saved, helped, and encouraged in many of the Eastern European nations. The fact we were able to be involved in church work in such adverse circumstances for so many years is all thanks to the grace of God. He delivered us from many dangerous situations, and mercifully we were not even aware of most of them.

Of course, God uses non-miraculous things just as easily as the miraculous. For example, I blended very well with the people and the culture in those nations, and as such, I was not easily picked out in a crowd by the myriad of spies who were everywhere, always on the lookout for foreigners, whom they could accuse of spying for the West. Bible smuggling was not our main goal because Bible smugglers were caught eventually, and my goal was to keep coming back, not to be caught. However, when there was an acute need and we felt the special covering of God, we did bring Bibles in without hiding them, and they made it safely every time.

One time I had forty Bibles in the trunk, waiting to cross the border from Yugoslavia to Romania. We had passed the passport/visa control, and now we were waiting for the customs official to check out the car. My heart sank when I saw it was a lady, because they seem to be much more curious about what you have in the car than the men. The trunk of the car was open, and the Bibles in two boxes were in plain view. When the customs officer was about halfway to the car, her colleague from the booth called out to her to come back. Apparently, some kind of emergency situation had suddenly come up. She paused for a moment undecided, but then waved us on and hurried back to the booth. Angels were doing their job.



The Samuel Balca Family - 1980

An example of how God can blind the eyes to certain things happened on the Bulgarian border. Brother David Bernard was with me to teach a doctrinal seminar to ministers. We were carrying a typewritten Bulgarian translation of his book, *The Oneness of God*, to be photocopied and distributed through-out the country. I put the manuscript on the back window of the car among some English language news magazines.

When the customs official searched the car, at one point he was on his knees on the back seat of the car shuffling through the magazines and the manuscript on the windowsill. Several times his hand went over the manuscript. He even looked at it and did not see it for what it was, even though it stood out from the other magazines because it was in Bulgarian and it was typewritten.

In 1989 the greatest event of our lifetime occurred: the downfall of the communist regime and the dismantling of the iron curtain and the Berlin Wall. I really did not expect this miracle, because I had seen firsthand the power that system had over the hundreds of millions of helpless people. I thought only God would bring an end to that system at the end of the age and the return of the Lord. However, God's ways are beyond our understanding; and He faithfully fulfills His purposes in the earth and nothing can stop Him. And who can tell how much our involvement with the gospel in Eastern Europe played a decisive role in bringing down that evil system.

When communism fell, those nations went through many painful changes. Criminals became rampant, and often former government officials or national security people were the worst of all. We also experienced firsthand the lawlessness of the period. Organized crime had an efficient network in place in these nations to steal western-made vehicles.

One of their favorite tricks was to follow you closely, and at an opportune time, drive into the back of your car as you were slowing down to stop. This way no damage was done, but you did get out of the car to see what had happened and why. Of course, you left your motor running and the driver's door opened. While you were examining the back of your car along with the driver who hit you, his colleague in crime easily got into your driver's seat and drove off with

your vehicle and all its contents, including your car papers, passport, credit cards, and so on.

I knew all this, and even foiled their attempts a couple of times, but all of this happened when I was far from home. When they succeeded in stealing my vehicle, it happened just a few kilometers from home, and that is why my guard was down. I did not expect an attack close to home. So foolishly I got out of my car, left the motor running, the door opened, and all my documents under the seat. As soon as I arrived at the back of my car, the driver was already there, a giant of a man, who without a word flung me into the nearby ditch as if I was a rag doll. While I was recovering, his colleague slipped behind the wheel of my car and drove off. The ensuing police investigation was just a formality, and I got the strong impression the police probably got a kickback from these criminals if they would just turn a blind eye.

Now that the borders were open to the rest of the world, it seemed the worst things the western nations had to offer were the first things to come in, such as drugs and pornography. I was really praying and hoping the UPCI would send in many missionaries to these former communist nations because they were open and hungry and curious about religion, just waiting for someone to come and tell them about it. I began to feel that my type of ministry of sneaking around borders and dealing with underground churches was finished, and it was time to let the younger generation take over with more conventional missionary methods. I was thinking of moving to another mission field. The UPCI did appoint some missionaries to those nations, but not nearly enough to meet the need. So at the insistence of our regional director, we remained where we were for a few more years.

Finally, in 2003 we requested a change of field, and were approved to move to France to help John and Anne Nowacki. (Anne is my sister.) We settled near the headquarters church in Melun, which also housed the national office and the Bible school. Several times we served as furlough replacements for the Nowackis, taught in the Bible school, and served on the national board as well as the Bible school board. This ministry was very much different from Eastern Europe, and we gathered much vital experience that helped to round out our ministerial ability.

At the end of 2013 we returned from Europe to Canada for the last time. With a sincere prayer of thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, and many thanks to our great fellowship of the UPCI for their confidence in our ministry and faithful support, we retired from active duty.

