

# Grace for Family Life

Joseph Arthungal

"Next to thy God, thy parents."

William Penn

A book written by a father for sons and daughters, bridegrooms and brides, husbands and wives, and parents and grandparents everywhere.



**Also by Joseph Arthungal**

***Grace for Raising Children***

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## **The Author's Preparation to Write This Book**

I write as the son of devout Christian parents (now with the Lord), as the husband of a devout Christian mother, and as a father. Having tasted the grace of God in the household of my parents as well as in my own, I write out of a thankful heart.

My spiritual and cultural heritage blends the East (India) and the West (U.S.A). I came to the United States in 1968. Both in India and in the U.S., it pleased God to make me a witness for His Son Jesus Christ and serve in His Church. Learning God's Word and obeying it have been my chief joy in life. God gave this to me as an inheritance. I share that inheritance with my readers.

The message contained in this book owes much to the example of one person: my dear wife and sister in the Lord, Achiamma (Lilly) Arthungal. For over thirty-seven years I have seen her fulfilling by God's grace the words of Abigail: "*Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord*" (1 Sam. 25:41). Lilly's life as a wife, a mother, and a servant of God's people has lit a lamp in many hearts, and that light has illuminated the words in this book.

## **Acknowledgments**

Jeff and Jeanne Burks, my beloved co-workers in Christ in the Church in Fairborn, Ohio, and my daughter Rebecca Arthungal contributed significantly to the development of this book.

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# Preface

## Chief Objectives of This Book

1. Give young, single adults words of instruction to prepare them for the future. Many can be spared much sorrow if they are instructed early in life. I have written words intended to draw the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.
2. Show both young and older couples alike the blessedness of exclusive love in marriage.
3. Emphasize that marriage and sex are of God, and therefore pure. Children are God's gifts to be received with joy and thankfulness.
4. Highlight the duty of parents to train the children in godliness. The parents' spiritual care extends to grown children whose reverence for their parents is not altered by age.
5. Establish that the marriage covenant includes God in addition to the couple, and therefore lies beyond man's authority to modify.

A battle is on against marriage as a covenant under God's law, and for redefining it as a modifiable contract under man's law. There is, and will always be, a need to set forth in the clearest possible words the teaching of Christ on marriage and family.

## Two Important Reference Points

Conflicting viewpoints abound concerning almost all matters of holy living. Marriage is no exception. When such is the case one is often tempted to think in terms of relative right and relative wrong, saying "it depends" or "it is just your view", implying that there are no absolutes about the case in point. Many feel that such thinking indicates broadmindedness and education. We all agree that there are absolutes in

the physical universe God created. How can there be none in the moral universe inside our hearts? If God is sovereign in our hearts, there indeed are moral absolutes for us to live by.

Where do we go to discover the absolutes? We go to God and His Word. We may use the following two reference points:

**I. The Words of the Scripture:** Very rare, if any, would be a moral issue for which the Bible fails to give clear guidance. Such guidance is given either as precepts or as principles. Precept is based on principle.

**II. The Silence of the Scripture:** The Bible speaks of “inventors of new forms of evil”(Rom.1:30, The Amplified Bible). All sins are not mentioned in the Bible, but all precepts and principles necessary for godly living are laid down. Living in the end times, we should expect an increase of new forms of evil invented by men. A precept or principle not given to us in God’s Word, and whose purity is doubtful, calls for careful examination in the light of the Scriptures related to the matter. It could well be that it is a new form of evil invented by men. In such matters, what the Scripture has not permitted by its words may in fact be condemned by its silence.

We acknowledge that there are differences of opinion among Christians. This, far from daunting us, should only challenge us to love God and love the truth with firm resolve. We may safely trust the Holy Spirit to lead us into all the truth we need to do the will of God.

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# I. Beginning at the Beginning

## The First Marriage in Eden

Jesus taught that we must learn from the example of Adam and Eve if we are to learn aright about marriage (Matt. 19:3-9). For Adam and Eve, their whole world was just the two of them and God. There was no one else to desire or to be desired by. No one else to think about but themselves and God. No one else to fellowship with but each other and God. No one else to talk with but each other and God. It was an exclusive company of just three! This is how it was in the beginning.

Adam had no woman to please but Eve. Eve had no man to please but Adam. Perfect loyalty. Perfect commitment. Perfect fellowship. The two were together in their prayers, work, dining, rest, and sleep. God was very much a part of their thoughts and affections. Their home was the Garden of Eden — meaning, garden of delights. What were their delights? To live to please God, and to live to please each other. Such were the delights of the first marriage. Adam’s love was exclusively for Eve, and for God. Eve’s love was exclusively for Adam, and for God. It was a world of just three.

Initially, Adam was alone. Then God said, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet (fit) for him*” (Gen. 2:18). From this single verse we have much to learn. God said that it was not *good* for man to be alone. What would be *good* for Adam? A woman! Centuries later Solomon wrote, “*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord*” (Prov. 18:22). Again, “*She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life*” (Prov. 31:12). Just as we believe the Scriptures concerning the salvation of our soul, we have to believe these verses so that they become true for us.

When a husband believes and confesses, “God has given me a good thing in my wife,” God is pleased, and the Scripture shall have its fulfillment. And, when the wife believes and confesses, “I am a good gift the Lord has given to my husband,” God is pleased, and the Scripture shall have its fulfillment. A wife is a good gift, a favor from the Lord. Let us emphasize: Have we believed the Scripture? Have we confessed the

Scripture? It is what we believe that is our portion, not what we merely agree with.

Let every husband confess: “Lord, my wife is Your good gift to me, Your favor toward me. I thank You for her. Lord, I bless my wife in Your name so that she will be a blessing to me. Grant, Lord, that only kind thoughts will arise in my heart towards her, and only gracious words proceed from my mouth to her or about her. Lord, teach me to praise her as it says in Your Word (Prov. 31:28). Lord, help me to love my wife as You loved Your Church and gave Yourself for her. Amen.”

When you believe and confess this truth, Satan loses his power. God is glorified.

Let every wife confess: “Lord, my husband is Your good gift to me, Your favor toward me. I thank You for him. Lord, I bless my husband in Your name so that he will be a blessing to me. Grant, Lord, that only kind thoughts will arise in my heart towards him, and only gracious words proceed from my mouth to him or about him. Lord, I thank You for creating me as a good gift and as a helper for my husband. Lord, teach me to be a help to him. Teach me, Lord, to do him good all the days of my life. Lord, teach me to submit to him as unto You as it says in Your Word. Amen.”

Again, when you believe and confess this truth, Satan loses his power. God is glorified.

What is set forth above is the heart of the matter in family life: believing the truth God has spoken, confessing the same in prayer, and giving God the glory.

### **God’s Design and God’s Grace**

The greatest thing God made was not the planet Earth, not the heavens, not even the angels. When the angels sinned, God did not send His Son to die for them, but for man He did. That shows God’s love for us. God has created nothing higher than man, man being inclusive of woman. Adam was the crown of creation, and Eve was to be his crown (Prov. 12:4). Again, will we believe these truths? Sin has brought such degradation upon man that these precious truths are almost forgotten. All

things have become earthy and ordinary. But not so with us who are in Christ, and in whom Christ dwells. We are changed into His image, and we should look back to how it was in the beginning.

## **Exclusive Love in Marriage**

Love between a husband and his wife is necessarily exclusive except for God. It is this exclusive love that takes the couple back to the blessedness of the first marriage in Eden. Spousal love excludes even parents, but the parents are no less dear because of marriage. It is in this exclusive love — we may call it *covenant* love — that two people give themselves to each other: a love that creates a oneness whose mystery is of God’s own design. It creates a union that never dissolves, and ends only with death. Here, in such a union, belongs sex, nowhere else. Here, and here alone, is sex pure. Here, and here only, we may experience the delights of marriage and family as it was intended in the beginning.

How earnest a husband should be, a wife should be, to preserve this exclusiveness of affections! While in the presence of other women, a husband must have the door of his emotions securely locked (“*I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?*” Job 31:1) so that he may preserve his exclusive love for his spouse. It is as if he is a father or a brother to other women.

A wife, in the presence of other men, would, as it were, rather see than be seen (Gen. 18:9-10: Sarah was out of sight, but within hearing; see also 1 Tim. 2:9). It is as if she is veiled to other men. It is a demeanor that adorns her face as an invisible veil, and is her power and her glory. She relates to other men as if she were a mother or a sister to them. For such a couple the exclusive delights of Eden are promised in this earthly life.

Praise be to God who grants that we may experience and enjoy such goodness in marriage and family. This is possible when our love is pure. Our love is pure because it is exclusive, but yet inclusive of God who is Love, and through whom alone we can love as we ought to love. For this reason we are taught that Christian marriage is a picture of the marriage between Christ and the Church.

## **Sex: God’s Idea and God’s Gift**

Some of God’s people, based on false teachings, think that sex is not holy. When the pure is called impure, Satan gains power. When sex is considered impure, marriage is degraded, and its bliss marred. This causes distress in married life.

Sex is holy in marriage (Heb. 13:4) because it is the idea of the Holy One. Marriage and sex are God-ordained institutions for mankind. Let us call holy what God has called holy. Let us bless what God has blessed. Sex in marriage and the joy of sex are God’s own ideas, and therefore absolutely pure. It is blessed to experience sexual union in covenant love as God’s precious gift. It is also blessed to receive the fruit of that union — children. Knowing that the joys as well as the sufferings in marriage are God’s provisions, the husband and wife should seek God’s wisdom to dwell together fulfilling God’s purposes (1 Peter 3:7).

### **Experiencing God’s Goodness in Marriage**

“How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also in the spirit.” Tertullian, A.D. 145 - 220

We read in the second chapter of the first book of the Bible that when God decided to make Eve, he said: *“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him ”* (Gen.2:18, The New American Standard). Here God used the word “*good*” concerning a wife meaning that Adam’s life would not be good without her. The same word “*good*” is used in two other places in the Bible in reference to wives. King Solomon said, *“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord”* (Prov. 18:22). Again Solomon said, *“She does him good and not evil all the days of her life”* (Prov. 31:12).

This is God's word about a wife. She is the good gift from God's hand for her husband. She is the favor from the Lord for her husband. She, by God's grace, will do "good" to him all the days of her life (Prov. 31:12). Much is written about such a wife in Prov. 31. Wives, please read that chapter prayerfully, and reflect.

The word "good" God used in Genesis concerned the life of Adam and Eve together. Therefore the husband is a good gift from God to his wife as well. It is shared goodness. It is a fellowship in God's goodness. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). The wife, for her part, is to be subject to her husband as the Church is subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24). The husband is to treasure his wife as a crown (Prov. 12:4). The husband is to give honor to his wife (1 Pet. 3:7). What words can describe the bliss in such a relationship? The highest bliss is that they have sweet fellowship, and God is pleased with their fellowship. Their prayers are not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). A home where there is such fellowship between the husband and the wife is a fountain of comfort for the family and for all who come in.

Since God intended the wife to be a help for him (Gen. 2:18), the husband can succeed only if he willingly seeks her help. He needs to listen to her, honoring her for the part God has assigned to her. See how blessed such a couple can be. They are fulfilling God's will. They are blessed. They are a blessing. Their home is like Eden, which means, 'delight'. To such a life God is inviting every couple reading these words. It is a good life. It is the goodness of the Lord.

When God created man, He made him in His own image. Because Adam was a being in God's image, God and Adam had friendship and fellowship with each other. That shows God's love for man. This is the great thing about love: friendship and fellowship. God made Eve, and gave her to Adam to be his wife. The fellowship between Adam and Eve was to be so intimate, so complete, that God said that they would be one flesh. God desired that Adam and Eve should be happy.

## II. Newlyweds and Young Couples

### Keeping the Good Wine Until Last

The Garden of Eden — garden of delights — was the home of the first couple. Such was God’s design for them. The very first miracle Jesus did was to turn water into “*good wine*” for use when the wine ran out during a wedding feast (John 2:10). Wine — the good wine — indicates delight. As in Eden, and as in the wedding in Cana, God wants to give us pure delight, pure joy. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God in Eden, and that was the secret of their delight. Jesus Christ was present at the wedding in Cana, and that was the secret of the good wine.

Was not Eden the most ideal place for perfect love and fellowship? But how sadly things went wrong. What great sorrows followed. The happiest days of our life are open to subtle dangers if we stray away from God, if we go against His purpose for us. We cannot be too careful. In the midst of innocent joys, it is possible for us to lose our sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit.

The danger can be warded off if we keep thanking God for His goodness, and maintain our joy in prayer (Is. 56:7) and in God’s Word (Psa. 119:103). There is joy and fellowship in the husband and wife kneeling down and praying together, and listening to each other pray. There is joy and fellowship in the husband and wife reading God’s Word aloud to each other. There is joy and fellowship in the husband and wife sharing their hearts and communicating their joys and sorrows. There is fellowship in the Spirit, and the two spirits experience blessed union. May this be our portion in daily life.

The opening pages of the Bible describe the marriage between Adam and Eve. The closing pages of the Bible describe the marriage between Jesus Christ and the Church. Marriage is most precious in God’s sight. May it be so in our hearts. God created Adam and Eve in His own image (Gen. 1:27), and joined them saying: “...*they shall be one flesh*” (Gen. 2:24).

Reflect for a moment on the glory of the union between two beings (Matt: 19:6). That such a union is unbreakable should be obvious. This is

stamped upon our hearts, and the stamp is clearer still when we are born again by faith in the Son of God. Paul describes the marriage union as a “*mystery*,” thus signifying the spiritual nature of the oneness.

The fellowship and oneness in marriage is so precious that we should expect severe attacks from the enemy who tempted and defeated our first parents situated in the most ideal environment. We shall have “*trouble in the flesh*” (1 Cor. 7:28). Beyond the innocent delights of wedlock, lasting bliss is founded on sacrifice: The husband lives for the wife, not for himself; for him, the wife comes first (Eph. 5:25). The wife lives for the husband, not for herself; for her, the husband comes first. Their union rests upon a covenant to be kept at the cost of life. A union that rests on this foundation rests secure by God’s grace.

Difficult situations will arise in your marriage. This is normal. It may seem that the wine has run out. It may seem that you have only water left. Please come to Jesus. He will turn your water into wine as He did in Cana. He will bring you back to Eden, the garden of delights. Come to the Lord in true repentance, and in true humility. It is His will that you have the good wine all through your married life. Ask God for the joy of the Holy Spirit. As you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are also filled with God’s love (Rom. 5:5).

**Submitting as Unto the Lord:** “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord*” (Eph. 5:22). Note, “*as unto the Lord*”. Only a wife who knows the Lord in the Spirit, and is one with Him in the Spirit, can understand this and obey this. Seek therefore to know the Lord in the Spirit, and learn to submit to the Lord in all things. How else can you submit to your husband as unto the Lord? It is the way of sacrifice, and therefore of purest joy. There is unlimited blessing for a wife who follows this way. She will reap abundant rewards in the spirit first, and in the natural as it pleases the Lord.

**Loving as Christ Loved:** The commandment to the husbands is: “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Eph. 5:25). Note, “*even as Christ also loved the Church*.” Only a husband who knows the Lord in the Spirit, and is one with Him in the Spirit, can understand this and obey this. Seek therefore

to know the Lord in the Spirit and obey Him in all things. How else can you love your wife as Christ loved the Church? It is the way of sacrifice, and therefore of purest joy. A husband who follows this way will have God's blessings upon him and his family.

Christ is the heavenly bridegroom of the Church. The Church is Christ's Body, a people who love Him with bridal love in bridal purity. The Holy Spirit brings this bridal love in our heart. The Holy Spirit keeps us in bridal purity. Please seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit through earnest prayer. Our bridegroom is coming. Three times in the last chapter of the Bible Jesus Christ said: "*I am coming quickly*"; the last of these three reads: "*Surely I am coming quickly.*" The response of the bride is: "*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*" God has put that faith and joy in my heart. May God put that faith and joy in the heart of everyone who reads this.

## **The First Year of Marriage**

See God's special care for the newlyweds: "*When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken*" (Deut. 24:5, New American Standard). It is a husband's duty before God to devote quality time for fellowship with his new wife, and give her happiness. This will cement their love and settle their affection for each other. Special devotion to each other during the first year will help establish in their hearts a commitment to remain faithful in the midst of cares and trials in years to come.

If you have failed in this area, repent. Take time now to cherish your spouse and give her happiness. Take time to acknowledge your failures. Perhaps now you can go the second mile.

## Serving One Another; Praying with One Another

“Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord” (1 Sam. 25:41). This was the response of the wise and beautiful Abigail when asked to become David’s wife. How pure and blessed are her words! Such a wife is indeed a “crown” for her husband (Prov. 12:4). May every Christian wife be so adorned, and so adorn her husband. True happiness in the home — and in the Church and community — is the fruit of serving one another.

Abigail offered to be the servant of the servants of David. How blessed it would be for a husband to serve such a wife. The Lord Jesus Christ was the servant of all, and we are His servants. The husband is first a servant, and therefore the leader in the home. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the example by washing the disciples’ feet. If we remember Him we will have wisdom to serve one another in true humility. Our Lord said, “*And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all*” (Mark 10:44).

Have we, as husbands, been taught to “give honor” to our wives? That is precisely what is written: “*...Husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered*” (1 Peter 3:7). Peter here instructs the husband: (1) Dwell with the wife with understanding; this refers to cohabitation, and here the husband needs to be wise and selfless. (2) Give honor to the wife; this refers to the husband’s respect for the wife, and his trust and confidence in her. (3) The husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life; the two are partners not only in the natural, but also in the spiritual. (4) Unless the husband and wife have a proper appreciation of these things, their prayers one with another, and one for another, will be hindered. See how careful the apostle was to emphasize prayer in this context.

## **The First Blessing for the First Couple: Be Fruitful and Multiply**

God ordained that Adam and Eve should be fruitful and multiply. This was the very first blessing God pronounced upon man (Gen. 1:28). A godly wife is as a *“fruitful vine,”* and her children are like *“olive plants,”* we read in Psa. 128:3.

The Scripture reveals God’s very close attention to conception as it takes place in the mother’s womb:

“For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ” (Ps. 139 13-17, New American Standard Bible).

These scriptures plainly show God’s wonderful work in conception. It is most blessed for us to greatly praise God when He grants conception.

### **Counsel for Couples**

After your marriage, when you come together, may thankfulness to God fill your hearts. As you experience joy and fulfillment, anticipate the greater fulfillment: a godly offspring (*“But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring...”* Mal.2:15). That child may be an Isaac or a Samuel or a Mary. We are to receive with thankfulness the children God gives us.

People say that the Bible gives no specific instruction about family planning, nor does it condemn contraceptive measures. Is not preventing conception a moral issue? Absolutely. Then the silence of the Scripture (see Introduction: Two Important Reference Points) is condemnation of a

new form of evil, especially in light of Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 9:1 as well as the other passages describing the blessings of having children. This is evidently the case in this matter because the first blessing to the first couple was to be fruitful and multiply.

**Abstaining for Prayer and Fasting:** Hear Paul’s very specific advice regarding how the spouses may live together: “*Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control*” (1 Cor. 7:5-6). However, later in the same chapter we read the Apostle’s words to the husbands who live in the last days to live as though they had no wives, because time is short (1 Cor. 7:29). Living in these last days we need wisdom from God to live as we ought. Peter counsels husbands to live with their wives with “*understanding, giving honor to the wife*” (1 Peter 3:7).

Paul counsels the couples to abstain with mutual consent “*for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer...*” (1 Cor. 7:5). From this we may infer that abstinence for a period of fasting and prayer was practiced by the believers in Paul’s time. [Note: Some translations omit “fasting”.] How profitable it would be for couples to take time for prayer and fasting, abstaining from lawful pleasures. It is certain that married life will be only the more blissful for such abstaining. Except for such seasons of unhindered prayer, the couples are not to defraud one another the use of their bodies (1 Cor.7:6).

Both in the Old Testament and the New, God’s people fasted and prayed. It allows us unhindered communion with God.

### **Abstaining After Childbirth**

Please read Leviticus chapter 12. On this passage the Matthew Henry Commentary says, “There was some time of strict separation immediately after the birth. During these days she was separated from her husband and friends...” In ancient cultures it was recognized that, depending on the health...of the mother, several weeks (or even a few months) of rest and nutrition were necessary for her to return to normal life. This will also promote health and happiness in family life.

## **Refraining From Coming Together for a Time**

This should be done according to the Lord's leading. Sometimes refraining from coming together for a time may be necessitated by the limitations of the health of either spouse.

## **Encouragement For Expectant Mothers**

### **The Baby's Life in the Womb**

The first nine months of a person's life, though not included in his or her age, is spent in the mother's womb, and therefore are days of maximum intimacy with the mother. During this time the parents, especially the mother, can do much to bless the offspring and shape its future.

It has been said that if the mother's thoughts during pregnancy are centered on God and the Word of God, such thoughts will leave their impressions on the child's personality. The baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy (in that small space!) as the mother rejoiced at the voice of Mary's salutation (Luke 1:44). The same baby was to be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in the mother's womb (Luke 1:15). If the baby in the womb shares the mother's joy, we may infer that a mother's experiences in the Spirit will impart grace to the baby. Some suggested Scriptures for meditation: 1 Sam.1; book of Ruth; Psa.139; Psa. 23; Prov. 31; Isa. chapters 40-49; Jer. 1:4-5; Luke 1:15; John chapters 13-17; 1 Cor.13: 4-8; Gal. 1:15;1 Tim.2;15; 1 John 4:7-21.

It was the hearing of Mary's voice that caused the baby in Elizabeth's womb to rejoice; or, we may say that Mary's voice caused Elizabeth to rejoice, and Elizabeth's joy aroused the inhabitant in her body. Every husband may give joy and peace to his pregnant wife by his voice, and that joy and peace will reach the baby inside her. When we greet or speak to or deal with a pregnant woman we would do well to be tender and kind, remembering the impact it can have on the infant.

### **The Honor of Motherhood**

God has placed great honor upon motherhood and mothers. The highest honor was conferred upon motherhood and mothers when the Son of God took his abode in a virgin's womb to negate the damage done to mankind at its infancy, in the Garden of Eden. Peter instructs the

husband to give honor to the wife (1 Peter 3:7), esteeming her highly (Prov. 12:4) and praising her (Prov. 31:28). The Scripture has conferred a common blessing and honor on all women — both mothers and others — in that the first woman was named Eve (life or life-producer; *“because she was the mother of all living”*) prior to her having children (Gen. 3:20).

### **Note to The Father**

Your prayers for your wife and special attention to her comfort during the days of pregnancy will help her remain restful for her sake and the baby’s sake. May your tender words and caring deeds sustain your spouse as she undergoes many stressful changes. May there be a closeness and a unity that make these days blossom in anticipation of the fruit of the womb that comes as the Lord’s reward (Psa. 127:3).

### **Naming the Newborn**

The naming of the newborn had prophetic significance (Gen. 5:29; 4:25). The meaning of the name signified both the character and the potential of the child. What does this teach us? While the child is in the womb, the mother and father may pray for the child, and receive faith from the Lord concerning the child’s future. Thus they can bless the child with the appropriate name when he or she is born.

### **Breast Feeding**

In Bible times the mothers nursed until the child was two to three years old. Nursing has significant health benefits for both the mother and the child.

## **Serving God as Wife and Mother**

While the husband is the leader of the family, the wife is its builder (Prov. 14:1), and she needs wisdom from God to build (Prov. 24:3). She needs her husband’s support. Much honor comes to a husband (Prov. 31:23) who honors and appreciates his wife (Prov. 31:28). A husband should endeavor to make his home a place of rest for his wife (Ruth 1:9; 3:1), and highly honor her calling as wife and mother. This will allow her to fulfill her ministry to him and to the children, as well as to the guests, visitors, and the needy who come to her. Such a woman is doing what St.

Francis of Assisi taught: “Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words.”

The honor and obligations of being a wife and mother may be learned from Prov. 31:10-31, 1 Peter 3:1-6, Eph. 5:22-24 and Titus 2:3-5. Please read these passages slowly. What can we learn from the virtuous woman of Prov. 31? She is doing good to her husband. She is industrious, working willingly with her hands. She is an early riser. She gives to the poor. She takes good care of the needs of her family members. She is a joyful person. She speaks words of wisdom and kindness. She watches over her household. She is not idle. Wives, please pray for grace to fulfil such a calling.

The young wife in Titus chapter two is devoting herself to the family. A mother’s full-time care for her children is needed today more than ever before; so great are the evil influences on the children in our modern permissive culture. The obligations of being a wife and mother often conflict with the pursuit of a career. If you are pursuing a career out of financial need or conviction of God’s leading in your life, ask the Lord for great wisdom not to fail in your duties as mother and wife. I know a mother whose grown children are deeply thankful to her for giving up her career to devote herself to raising them.

There are situations where it becomes necessary and desirable for a wife to work to supplement her husband’s efforts in earning a living for the family. (Prov. 31:13-19). However, sometimes it is possible and wise to manage with less, and live a life of contentment using principles of good stewardship. If the wife has to work, it is desirable that she do so from home, if it is possible. The husband and wife should seek God to know His “*good, and acceptable, and perfect, will*”(Rom. 12:2).

It is a blessing that in our day educational and employment opportunities are open to both men and women. I know instances in poor families in India where daughters, having received an education, work hard to lift their families from poverty, thus opening a door of hope for many. I believe that such women should be commended. However, when a wife sacrifices the family’s needs for her career, the results are lamentable. We see this all around us today.

Is it pleasing to God for a woman who has the enormous duties of a wife and mother to pursue a career that demands many hours of work outside the home? Often such women leave their children with baby sitters or in day care centers. Some of these children suffer emotionally and spiritually. Are you failing your children? Have you, as a Christian wife, sought the Lord in this matter? Have you, as a Christian husband, sought the Lord for your wife in this matter? If we do not seek the Lord, we will be driven by the norms of the world. Is there need for repentance?

Sarah served God as wife and mother. So did Mary, the mother of Jesus. Are not such mothers full-time servants of God? I believe so. They are serving God in serving their families, the Church, and others. They are serving God in raising the future servants of God as John Wesley's mother did.

# III. Purity Before and After Marriage

## Pre-Marital Sexual Purity

The Bible mentions the following relationships between a man and a woman: 1. brother and sister, including non-relatives; 2. betrothed (espoused, engaged); 3. husband and wife. Sexual intimacy or sexual union is pure only in the last relationship; in the other two, it would be sinful. Please note that the boyfriend/girlfriend relationship is not mentioned in the Bible.

The betrothed should treat each other as brother and sister as it concerns sexual intimacy, so that God's will is done whether or not their engagement leads to marriage. If you permit sexual intimacy, and then for some reason marriage does not take place, how can the two persons part, and live with a good conscience the rest of their lives? Delaying sexual intimacy until marriage is a small price to pay for living with a pure conscience.

What can we say to those who have gone wrong? When we come to the Lord in repentance and humility, He forgives us without condemnation. He does not ask, "why did you sin?" but only says, "*go, and sin no more*" (John 8:11).

*"Flee fornication,"* (1 Cor. 6:18). *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7). All other sins are committed outside the body, but when you sin in this area, you sin against your own body.

The battle can be intense. If your hatred for sin is equally intense you will receive grace to resist sin "*unto blood*" (Heb. 12:4). You must *flee* all that causes temptation. Do certain TV programs or internet sites cause you temptation? Do some books or magazines cause lustful thoughts? Do certain types of music arouse lust in you? Then *flee* these things. Young Joseph *fled* from the woman who tempted him. Paul wrote to young Timothy to *flee* from youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22; please open your Bible and read verses 20-22). It is certain that if you will not *flee*, you will not overcome lust, but will be overcome by it.

Please ask the Lord: is it pleasing to You that I watch these TV programs or internet sites ? Is it pleasing to You that I read these books and magazines? And, listen to Christ's words in Matt 5:29: "*...if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*" You should flee from lust as from a serpent that pursues you.

### **Faith for Victory**

Please read attentively Paul's words in 1 Cor. 9:25-27: "*And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*" I know an older Christian who testifies that these verses kept him from much harm in his youth.

Men, learn from Job and make a covenant with your eyes. What was Job's covenant? His covenant was not to "look [lustfully] upon a girl" (Job 31:1, The Amplified Bible). Women, may your heart and mind be veiled, and preserved like a garden enclosed, like a spring shut up, and like a fountain sealed, as the bride in Song of Solomon 4:12. The bride of Christ weaves her own wedding garment, which will be found without spot or wrinkle. May you be found among such. Be on your guard against thoughts that would arouse lust. When the door is firmly shut against lust, sin that crouches at the door is mastered (Gen. 4:7, The Amplified Bible).

Those who overcome "*shall be clothed in white raiment*" (Rev. 3:5). They are promised a white stone with a new name written on it which no man knows except he who receives it (Rev. 2:17).

### **Thoughts, Intimacies, Physical Contacts**

Jesus said that even without sexual union, adultery occurs in the heart when one looks at a woman to lust for her (Matt. 5:28). "*Watch over your heart with all diligence,*" we read (Prov. 4:23, New American

Standard). By grace we can be kept from lusting if we abide in godly fear, and are kept by the power of God. A young man and a young woman, though betrothed, would do well to think of themselves as brother and sister, and relate to each other as such in godly fear.

The test lies mostly in ‘time alone’ and physical contact. Ask yourselves: what example is being set for the young people in the Church? Would it be proper for other young adults — not betrothed — to have the physical contact and ‘time alone’ you allow for yourselves?

There is always a possibility that marriage may not take place, in which case you want to part in peace and with a good conscience. Those who keep themselves pure gain tremendous respect from each other, and their eventual union will have the fragrance of innocence and enduring romance.

We wish all young boys and girls could receive this instruction before it is too late for them. The culture around us like a deluge is drowning young people, and there is such an absence of clear, timely, guidance. We need to hear these things clearly taught. Sexual purity both before and after marriage is a matter of utmost importance, having consequences in this life and the life to come.

## **Sexual Purity for the Very Young**

Intimate body contact between girls and boys (beyond about seven years of age) while playing or working together should be shepherded with care. How much more does this apply to older children and teenagers! This should apply to members of the same family and relatives as well. We should train our children to respect the bodies of children of the opposite sex, and keep a healthy distance in the fear of God. It is naive to assume that children are sexually insensitive, especially in our television-saturated culture.

Another word of caution for parents: Children sleeping in the same bed — especially boys — could give occasion for harmful sexual experiences. It is good to have them sleep in separate beds. It is also best for boys not to share the same room with girls. These cautions apply to members of the same family also.

## Sexual Purity for the Married

“...*Let the marriage bed be undefiled*” (Heb. 13:4, New American Standard). The husband and wife are to love each other with exclusive love, with no mental image or involvement of any other person defiling their pure love for each other. Then their union is pure, because their thoughts are pure. The desire and prayer in their heart is that God, according to His will, will give them a godly offspring.

Here we repeat a passage from an earlier section: How earnest a husband should be, a wife should be, to preserve this exclusiveness of affections. While in the presence of other women, a husband must have the door of his emotions securely locked (“*I made a covenant with mine eyes,*” Job 31:1) so that he may preserve his exclusive love for his mate. It is as if he is a father or a brother to other women. A wife, in the presence of other men, would, as it were, rather see than be seen (Gen. 18:9-10: Sarah was out of sight, but within hearing; see also 1 Tim. 2:9). It is a demeanor that adorns her face as an invisible veil, and is her power and her glory. She relates to other men as if she were a mother or a sister to them. For such a couple the exclusive delights of Eden are promised in this earthly life.

Difficulties in sex life are to be expected due to circumstances, poor health, and ignorance. But if each spouse is committed to live for the other, and not for oneself, God will give us understanding to work with the difficulties. Much wisdom may be received from faithful older couples, as well as from wholesome, educational reading. In some situations it may be necessary to consult medical professionals to treat physical or mental conditions that may impair emotional and sexual intimacy.

# IV. Covenant, not Modifiable Contract

## Covenant of God: God, Husband, Wife

A wife is a “*wife by covenant*” (Mal. 2:14, New American Standard), and the covenant is the “*covenant of her God.*” (Prov. 2:17). The law of man may treat marriage as an ordinary “contract” that is modifiable by the mutual consent of the parties involved. The law of God, however, treats marriage as a “*covenant*” involving three parties: husband, wife, and God. When God is a party to an agreement, the agreement is a covenant (covenant of God, Prov. 2:17), not a contract modifiable by man. God never breaks the covenant, and for this reason, neither can the other two parties.

In Old Testament times the sacrifice of animals and the shedding of blood was typically part of the making of a covenant (Psa. 50:5; Heb. 9:16,17). This implies a commitment to keep the covenant at the cost of life. The parties live for one another, and would die for one another so that the covenant may be kept. See Genesis 15:9-21 where God made a covenant with Abraham, and Exodus 24:1-8 where God made a covenant with Israel, and He became Israel’s husband (Jer. 31:32). Abraham’s children (Israel) later became unfaithful, but God remained faithful to the covenant (Deut. 4:29-31; Psa. 89:34).

Where do we see the sacrifice and the shedding of blood in connection with the marriage covenant? It is Christ’s life-giving love and His precious blood that won Him His bride, the Church. This truth is reflected in every Christian marriage. The husband and wife have solemnly promised to each other and to God: “I will live not for myself, but for my God, and for my spouse. I will lay down my life for my God and for my spouse.” By such a promise the husband and wife are fulfilling Heb. 9:16-17: “*For where a testament (covenant) is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (one who made the covenant)...*” This is the nature of the covenant of marriage, a covenant of God.

In such a covenant union the spouses are allowed to “*know*” each other (Gen. 4:1, first mention of sexual union in the Scripture). In such

“knowing” the spouses experience the blessings of God in covenant love. The covenant love and union between husband and wife reflect the covenant love and union between Christ and His Body, the Church (Eph. 5:22-28). The union between Christ and the Church — The Head and the Body — cannot be dissolved, no more can the covenant union between a husband and his wife be dissolved. Jesus Christ said: “...*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*” (Matt. 19:6, New American Standard).

## **Divorce and Remarriage: The Scriptures**

**Did Jesus Christ absolutely prohibit divorce?** Read Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9. These words of Christ permit divorce on the ground of fornication. It should be noted however that where there is repentance, there is room for forgiveness and this is best.

**Did Jesus Christ absolutely prohibit remarriage of the innocent spouse unjustly divorced?** Read Luke 16:18 and Matt. 5:32. In these verses we have the case of a woman unjustly divorced, and is therefore innocent. However, the remarriage of such an innocent woman would result in an adulterous union.

Let us apply the same principle to a faithful man who divorces his wife on the grounds of fornication, and is himself innocent; the remarriage of such an innocent man would result in an adulterous union. [Note: Some think that this applies only to the woman, not to the man. They base their thinking on the fact that a man was allowed to have more than one spouse in the Old Testament, but not the woman. The argument fails in the case of Adam and Eve, which is what Jesus used (Matt. 19: 3-6) to affirm Gen. 1:27 and 2:24; see also Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, Titus 1:6.]

**Christ’s Words:** “*But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery*” (Matt. 5:32). Let us ask: If a woman not guilty of sexual immorality was divorced, and she remarried, how could she be committing adultery? Was she not innocent and unjustly divorced? How would it be wrong for

her to remarry? Unless Christ had spoken, we wouldn't have known. True, there is extreme pain when the innocent suffer. But when we suffer, we commit ourselves to God (1 Pet. 4:19).

Again we read: *“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery”* (Mark 10:11-12). This verse speaks both of the husband and the wife.

Separation or Divorce Permitted, Not Remarriage: *“A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife”* (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Matt. 5:32 would allow divorce — not remarriage — on the grounds of sexual immorality.

Does 1 Cor. 7:15 permit remarriage? Here the apostle counsels that if an unbelieving partner leaves, the believing spouse is free and should remain in God's peace. Is the believing spouse free to remarry? Nothing is said about remarriage. Paul's silence on remarriage here is significant. It shows that Christ's teaching on remarriage was well known. Contrast this with Rom. 7:3 where Paul permits remarriage for the woman whose husband is dead.

### **“God's Foolishness is Wiser Than Human Wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:25, NRSV)**

“The Biblical view of Christian marriage, then, is that it is the union between one man and one woman, through whose union each finds himself in a new realization of being, created by God, which can be broken only by the death of one or the other partner. It is the unique function of the Church, both in its teaching and its practice, to bear witness to this. It will be folly to the world, whose standards are controlled by convenience, custom, desire, and other motives. But it is not a new thing that *‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men.’*” (*The Biblical Doctrine of Marriage*, Donald G. Miller, pg. 12, 1976 Ed.)

In marriage God joins the spouses in a lifelong union of covenant love; the two become one flesh. This “oneness” endures until the death of one spouse. This oneness is harmed — not undone — by unfaithfulness on the part of one spouse or both. The oneness endures even through

unfaithfulness, even through divorce, even through remarriage, until death. This truth brings godly fear in our hearts, and the spouses remain faithful in covenant love to each other and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Divorce and Remarriage: The Early Church**

Following is a quote from early Christian writings (Tertullian, A.D.145-220) on Luke 16:18:

“Christ prohibits divorce saying, *‘Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, also committeth adultery.’* In order to forbid divorce, He makes it unlawful to marry a woman that has been put away... *‘put away,’* that is, for the reason wherefore a woman ought not to be dismissed, that another wife may be obtained. For he who marries a woman who is unlawfully put away is as much of an adulterer as the man who marries one who is undivorced.”  
(*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III, pg. 405, 1989 Ed.)

Following is another quote from Tertullian:

“Moses, however, permitted repudiation in Deuteronomy: “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house” (Deut.24:1). You see, therefore, that there is a difference between the law and the gospel – between Moses and Christ. To be sure there is! ...while prohibiting divorce, He has given us a solution of this special question respecting it: “Moses,” says He, “because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt.19:8) – for this reason, indeed, because He who had “made them male and female” had likewise said, “they

twain shall be one flesh; what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Now, by this answer of His (to the Pharisees), He both sanctioned the provision of Moses, who was His own (servant), and restored to its primitive purpose the institution of the Creator, whose Christ He was.” (*“Ante-Nicene Fathers”, Volume III, pg. 404, 1989 Ed.*)

Here is another testimony from early Church history:

“In the second century the medical writer Galen was impressed by Christian continence and especially the fact that many were celibate. Justin in 150 presented his fellow-believers as heroes of restraint, rejecting remarriage after divorce...” (*The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* edited by John McManners, *The Early Christian Community*, Henry Chadwick, pg. 39, 1992 Ed.)

### **Counsel Concerning Marriage and Divorce**

In His authentic and final teaching about marriage in Matt. 5:32, Matt. 19:4-9, Mark 10:2-12, and Luke 16:18, *the Lord Jesus Christ joined the prohibition of divorce to the prohibition of remarriage*; let us not separate what Christ has joined. Men and women will fear to divorce if the Church will fear to accept remarriage. This, and only this, shall reverse the destructive divorce culture that is engulfing the Christian churches in our day. Let us stand against the tide and intercede for God’s people.

How may we comfort the innocent who suffer unjustly? The Lord Jesus Christ suffered unjustly; we share in His suffering and in His glory. *“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”* (1 Peter 4:19).

God is a party to the covenant of marriage, and He never breaks the covenant (*“My covenant will I not break,”* Psa. 89:34; Deut. 4:29-31); and for this reason, the covenant of the first marriage endures unbroken

on God's part, and therefore unbreakable by divorce and remarriage on man's part. "*They are no more twain*" (Matt. 19:6), and the "*scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). If Jesus said that they are no longer two, neither divorce nor remarriage can make them two. Did God dissolve the covenant of the first marriage when the divorce took place under man's law? No. Did God dissolve the covenant of the first marriage when the remarriage took place under man's authority? No. Would God dissolve the covenant of the first marriage for any reason — other than death — after the divorce or the remarriage? No.

The following counsel is based on the premise that the first spouse to whom God joined you to is your spouse "*by covenant*" (Mal. 2:14, New American Standard), and the covenant is the covenant of God (Prov. 2:17).

### **Counsel for Covenant Couples**

Do not think of divorce except if your spouse is guilty of adultery, and unrepentant. And, if you divorce at all, with or without any guilt in either spouse, be warned that you do not have the option to remarry (1 Cor. 7:10,11); if you remarry, the union would be adulterous (Luke 16:18; Matt. 5:32).

### **Counsel for the Divorced**

Never think of remarriage as an option as long as your spouse is alive; if you remarry, the union would be adulterous. Your options are: (1) Do not marry again as long as your spouse lives, remarried or not; or, (2) Be reconciled to your spouse if there is repentance and the spouse is free.

### **Counsel Concerning Remarriage**

If you are remarried, while (a) your covenant spouse is alive, or (b) having no living covenant spouse, you are married to a divorcee who has a living spouse, please seek guidance from God's Word, the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual guides (see Heb. 13:17) God has given you in the Church. [If you would like to receive the author's counsel, please refer to his paper: "What God Has Joined and What God Has Not Joined: Remarriage of the Unjustly Divorced." This paper may be obtained from the address listed on the title page of this book.]

## V. Love at its Best: God Has Joined Love and Suffering

“You can advance farther in grace in one hour during this time of affliction than in many days during a time of consolation.” Jean Eudes.

“*God demonstrates His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom. 5:8). The Bible says that God loves us as He loves His Son. The Holy Spirit imparts this knowledge to our hearts. It is this love that we see on the cross where Jesus died for our sins. He died for us when we were ungodly, not when we were good people. Such love freely forgives. Your sins are forgiven as soon as you repent and put your faith in Jesus Christ.

A husband is to love His wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. With all her faults, your wife is beautiful in your eyes because she is the gift from your heavenly Father, for that one reason. Love is not blind, but has eyes to see as Christ does. I know of some husbands who from time to time put their hands on their wives and bless them. Those wives are blessed indeed. Apostle Peter in his wisdom exhorts the husbands to dwell with their wives “*according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife...*”(1 Pet. 3:7). Please note the words “*giving honor.*” The wife on her part should submit to her husband, as if she is doing it unto the Lord, for the Lord’s sake. That is a wife’s glory.

**What is God’s purpose for trials in marriage?** Without trials, marriage cannot attain to its greatest glory. We learn patience. We see our need for Christ. We learn to take up our cross and follow Jesus. The wife is not the cross, nor is the husband. Trials are openings to grace and glory because we have opportunity to yield our will to God’s will as Jesus did when He prayed, “*not my will, but Thine, be done*” (Luke 22:42). We are transformed into the image of God’s Son. This indeed is the highest glory: to suffer patiently for the one whom you love, even to the point of laying down your life, for Christ’s sake. That is how Christ loved us, and suffered for us. God has joined love and suffering; we cannot separate

them. This makes suffering meaningful, and love Christ-like. Such love is the best wine Christ makes for us if we come to Him when we hurt.

The nature of love requires that it be tested, because testing involves suffering for the sake of the loved one. Such suffering causes love to increase. The Apostle Paul wrote sixteen things about love in 1 Cor. 13, and the first thing he said was, “*love suffers long.*” He repeated the same thought in different words: love “*bears all things*” and love “*endures all things.*” Jesus Christ loved the Church, suffered for her, and died for her. A husband and his wife love each other, and for that very reason they may expect trials. Love may have to suffer long so that it increases as God desires. Trials permitted by God are good because they open the door for a certain kind of suffering, a suffering according to God’s will, a suffering that causes the love for the loved one to increase. Do you have trials in your marriage? If you are enduring in God’s grace and praying for your spouse, God will cause your love for your spouse to increase and be purified. This is God’s will, God’s goodness in marriage.

**A special point:** When you have difficulties with your spouse, affirm your oneness before God, *before* issues are resolved. Then you are in God’s will, and God gives you His power to overcome all things by grace. Again, this is God’s goodness. If we can remember this, we may give thanks as we see trials coming, and we may taste the goodness of God according to Rom. 8:28.

If your union is built on such understanding of love, dear couple, your union is secure. A union built on other considerations will easily tear apart under trials. May trials bind you to God, and to each other. So give thanks to God for trials that he permits in your lives. God be praised for his goodness.

Let every husband bless his wife, and thank God for the great goodness and favor from God she is for him. Let every wife bless her husband, and thank God for the great goodness and favor from God he is for her. This confession and attitude will break the power of Satan who is against your marriage. As you bless each other in your heart, and in prayer, God will make you a blessing to each other, and to many others. The nature of love is that the husband lives for his wife, not for himself; and the wife

lives for her husband, not for herself. Together they live for God, and for others, especially for the Church of God.

## **What Sustains Love in Marriage Under Trials: Confessing God's Word in Prayer**

In the opening pages of the Bible we read of the first marriage, that of the first man and the first woman. In the closing pages of the Bible we read of the marriage of God's Son and His Church. When God created the heavens and the earth, He waited until the very last to create the man and the woman. God made the woman from the man's rib, and then, we read, He "*brought her unto the man*" (Gen. 2:22). God made the woman, and then brought her to Adam. Just try to imagine that solemn moment, and place your memory of your own wedding alongside that. What was spoken at that solemn moment when God joined our first parents? As soon as Adam saw his bride he said: "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*" (Gen. 2:23). These are the first recorded words of the first man, and they show his love for his wife. We continue to read: "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (Gen. 2:24). These few words — "*they shall be one flesh*" — have remained the most central teaching on marriage both in the Old Testament and the New.

Nearly 4000 years after Adam and Eve, when the Lord Jesus Christ taught about marriage, He quoted the earliest oracles of God preserved for us in Genesis 2:24. Jesus' words are recorded in Matthew 19:3-6. After quoting the verses from Genesis, Jesus repeated twice the most central part of the ancient passage: "*they two shall be one flesh.*" In repeating it twice, He first said: "... they are no more two, but one flesh." In the second repetition, He said, "*What God has joined together (that is joined together as one flesh) let not man put asunder.*" Our Lord said nothing new, but affirmed three times, that the husband and wife are one flesh joined together by God's hand.

The power of this confession is experienced when we face difficulties, especially when trials seem too hard, and love seems to fail. The stabilizing power of the roots of a tree is most felt when the tree bends

under storms. The confession of oneness is like the root system of the tree; it sustains you in trials. This confession binds you to God and to your spouse when trials seem too hard; and we experience the power of the cord of three strands. In such moments we may pray: ‘Lord, these trials are hard for us, and our love seems to fail. But Lord we confess your Word that your hands made us one flesh, and we trust you to keep us one.’ God’s power is at work in us and through us when we believe and confess His Word in sincere commitment.

The glory of this confession is that it reflects the oneness and love between Christ and the Church. Joined to Christ, the believer desires what His Lord desires, and it pains him to think or act otherwise. In like manner, the husband desires what his wife desires, and it pains him to think or act otherwise; and the wife responds with the same love. If conflicts arise, we have need to humble ourselves, pray together, and listen to each other. If we do this, conflicts in fact serve as a means of drawing our hearts closer.

To this ancient confession — that the husband and wife are one flesh — and to its exceedingly great blessings God invites every couple today. There is pure joy that arises from such confession of oneness, and that joy increases to God’s glory; the more so as we learn to endure the trials that God permits in our lives. Such joy is known by spouses who dwell in humility always desiring to please each other as they both desire to please God. God Himself creates a little paradise for them in their home, for He dwells with them. It is a garden of delights, as Eden was meant to be. The Serpent who harmed our first parents has no power against us if we dwell in humility.

**God said, “*it was very good*”:** God waited until he finished all creation including Adam to make Eve, and join the two as one. Marriage, therefore, was the very last thing God created. All that God created was in some way to serve the glory of the union between two beings created in His image. Such is the glory of the covenant union formed by God’s own hand. It was after God created Eve and instituted marriage that He said, “*it was very good,*” (Gen. 1:31). Until then at different stages of creation God “*saw that it was good.*” The marriage of Adam and Eve

crowned all creation, and made it “*very good*”. Let every couple rejoice and praise God for the glory that God has caused to rest upon them.

Marriage was God’s own idea as the crown of creation in Eden. And, dear reader, God shall crown eternity with another marriage. The marriage of Jesus Christ and the Church shall be the crowning glory of eternity. In the closing pages of the Bible we read of the marriage of the Lamb, namely Jesus Christ. It shall be spoken at that wedding: “*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.*” (Rev. 19:7). Is there a desire in our hearts to see the Lord? Then we long to please Him. That is the preparation of the Bride. Blessed are those who love the Lord, and are waiting for Him. Amen.

## VII. If You Are Single

### If You are Young, Single, and Seeking a Spouse

I write these words as a father, and as an older Christian writing for the younger. Please read these words with all diligence, and look to God for the pure wisdom that comes from Him only. *“Even a child (young person) is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right”* (Prov. 20:11). Your actions as a teenager and as a young person point to the direction your life is heading. The thoughts you think leave their mark on your being; so read God’s Word slowly and often to be filled with pure thoughts. The words you speak leave their mark on your being; so meditate on God’s Word constantly to speak words of grace. The deeds you do leave their mark on your being; so keep God’s Word in your heart for power to do good and shun all sin. Such thoughts, words and deeds will guide the direction of your life. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit and be led by Him.

When the Holy Spirit leads you, He leads you into the battle, and through the battle. (Matt. 4:1) What is the battle? The battle is for your thought-life, a battle against evil thoughts. *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life”* (Prov. 4:23). When your thoughts are pure, your words and deeds will be pure. Your thoughts form your thought-life, and your thought-life shapes your character and personality. Your prayers form your prayer-life, and your prayer-life will cleanse your thoughts. Therefore, learn to pray often by simply turning your heart to God and worshipping Him, especially when you are alone.

God found an Enoch who walked with Him in the dawn of history (Gen. 5:24). He found a Noah, *“a just man and perfect,”* when *“all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth”* (Gen. 6:9-12). Certainly we are living in similar times. Has God called you to be an Enoch in your generation? Or a Noah? A flood of lawless lifestyles is covering the earth, but you may find your refuge in the ark that is Jesus Christ, and firmly believe that the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth.

When the Lord Jesus Christ taught about marriage, he started with Adam and Eve. Let us also start where He did. Marriage was God’s idea, and

God's design, for mankind. Sex was God's idea, and God's design, for mankind. God, therefore, is the lawgiver concerning marriage and sex. Please acknowledge this in your heart, and confess accordingly to God. If you begin here, you shall be blessed from beginning to end. Not that you will not be tested; just the contrary. The purest joy follows the hardest testing in the ways of our God; and to such a life we are called. See Heb.12:2: "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." We also read in James 1:2-4: "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*"

God made one — only one — woman for Adam. God made one — only one — man for Eve. May this simple but great truth be planted in your heart; and may you thus come into harmony with God, and His eternal purpose for you. Keep your heart and mind and body unspoiled for the Lord's sake, and for blessed fellowship with your future spouse.

**What is the secret of faithfulness in single life?** Read 1. Cor. 7:34-35. Paul counsels virgins (or unmarried persons) to attend upon the Lord. An unmarried person is to be concerned about the things of the Lord that he or she may be holy both in body and spirit. Newer and newer forms of openly lawless lifestyles are covering the earth; a flood of literature, music, and entertainment designed to corrupt young minds is pouring in. What shall we do? Remember Joseph, read Genesis chapter 39. Joseph fled from the woman who tempted him. Just imagine the ruin had he not fled! "*Flee also youthful lusts,*" wrote the aged Paul to young Timothy in the last letter he wrote while waiting to be martyred. You who are reading this may be a Joseph or a Timothy. Let not this exhortation slip. Remember Daniel, read Daniel 1:8. Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the royal food. Would you be a Daniel in the present age? Learn to have precious moments of prayer alone with the Lord. These few moments count for eternity, so don't rush them. Ask the Lord for correction, as Jeremiah did in Jer. 10:24. Ask the Lord to search you,

as the Psalmist did in Psa. 139:23,24. Desiring correction is a mark of a true son. Small things make big differences in our fellowship with God. Small sins tolerated knowingly break our fellowship with God. Conversely, faithfulness in small things pleases the Lord immensely (Luke 16:10).

**How may teenage boys and girls receive help from their parents?** Sit down and talk to your mother frequently, and listen very closely to what she has to say; don't rush. Your mother's word is law — teaching — for you. See Prov. 1:8 and 6:20. Ask your mother to pray for you. Promise her that you will follow her advice. Also, take time to talk to your father from time to time; don't rush. Let him know you esteem his counsel; God will bless you with long life, and it will go well with you. One special note for girls: Ask your mother to teach you the message of 1 Peter 3:4. This verse speaks of a special treasure for you, "*the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*"

**How may young men and women receive help from parents?** You are never too old to need your parents' counsel. Seek out the guidance of your parents as long as they live. Take time to talk to them and listen to them unhurriedly. God will speak to you through your parents. Ask them to pray for you. Read a mother's advice to her son in Prov. 31:2-5. This is a mother's teaching on purity.

**What if your parents are not Christians?** There is much to be learned from them, especially in practical matters. Ask the Spirit to help you receive from them what is right, and reverence them even when you cannot follow their advice exactly.

**Are there words of caution for teenagers?** Friendship between girls and boys should be guarded in the fear of God, and free of emotional overtones. Physical contact or intimate conversation between boys and girls, though seemingly playful and innocent, could easily lead to emotional problems. Secret, private, intimate sharing of thoughts and ideas between a boy and a girl, or between a man and a woman, is seldom free from defilement. Internet chat has destroyed not a few. Please read Prov. 4:14-15. If you would not eat of the forbidden tree, don't go by it; avoid it, pass not by it. This truth was impressed upon me

in my youth by an esteemed spiritual guide of mine (M. Aruldas, Trivandrum, India; now with the Lord). I am very thankful to him.

Read Prov. 4:23. What you watch on television or videos is fastened onto your memory and your being, as food is assimilated in your body. Be warned, and flee from programs that feed the flesh. Let Jesus cleanse the temple — your heart — and live there as Lord.

**How may I make a beginning today on the way of purity?** Remember Jesus Christ. He offered His body to do the will of God. Tempted in all points like us in a flesh (nature) like ours, He humbled Himself, denied Himself, and learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). We suffer in the flesh when we say “no” to our own will, and “yes” to God’s will; and through such suffering we learn obedience. In this walk of suffering the Lord Jesus Christ comes to our aid, and we have fellowship with Him. (Heb. 2:18.) We follow the footsteps of our Lord. He gives us grace, and leads us by His Spirit. In simple faith, turn your heart to God often as you go through your daily routine. You will be borne along by the Spirit of God through trials, and led to the work that God has prepared for you daily.

**How may you be led by God in finding a spouse?** Please see next section.

## **Concerning Courtship Among the Disciples of Jesus Christ**

See Prov. 19:14: “...*a prudent wife is from the Lord.*” In Prov. 18:22 we read that a wife is the “*favour of the Lord.*”

### **Waiting on God**

God brings about the appropriate circumstances for you to meet your future spouse. Look to the Lord and commit your thoughts to Him. God may use others to help you and guide you. Rebecca was at work when God led Abraham’s servant to her. Rachel was at work when Jacob first met her. Ruth was at work when Boaz first saw her. What is the message here? Young disciples of Jesus Christ, devote yourselves to the work God has given you. Keep on doing good. In due time you shall reap as we read in Gal. 6:9. Good will come your way. While you are at work for

God, He is at work for you. God is faithful. The life of service will prepare you for your life-partner. There may be waiting, and your patience may be tried, but the gift of God will be the sweeter for the waiting.

Adam was asleep when God formed his wife for him! May your thoughts come to rest in God. Remember Prov. 19:14 quoted above.

Isaac was meditating in the field when his bride was brought to him from the far country. Rebecca, as soon as she saw Isaac coming toward her to meet her, dismounted from the camel, took her veil and covered herself. Please reflect on the lessons from this first meeting between Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac is a picture of piety, and Rebecca, of modesty.

**Meeting Life's Partner:** A young man and his partner may meet by God's leading with or without help from others. God may use the parents or others to guide a young man and a young woman towards meeting each other. Once they meet, and sense God's leading, they need prayerful guidance every step of the way (courtship and betrothal) from parents and family and spiritual guardians.

### **Parental Role (initial stage)**

Abraham took the initiative in seeking a wife for his son. Abraham's servant, when he met Rebecca, told her nothing about marriage. He waited until he came into her house. And her brother and father, after hearing about Isaac, said, "*The thing proceedeth from the Lord*" (Gen. 24:50). Read Ruth chapter 3 and see how the virtuous Ruth was guided by her mother-in-law Naomi in marriage. Ask for counsel from parents, and from older brethren who have wisdom. Read Genesis chapter 24, especially verses 63-65.

It is for a man to seek a wife; the woman's role is to wait on God, and to place herself under the care of her family or spiritual guardians. It is for the man to seek the permission of the woman's family (the parents) for courtship.

### **Courtship**

It is a *virgin* that a disciple of Jesus Christ courts: virginity is an inestimable treasure, not for women only, but for men as well: purity of

the heart first (Matt. 5:28; Job 31:1), and then of the body. If you have been defiled, come to God with heartfelt repentance. Come to the One who died for you, and be restored to purity.

In Bible times it was the glory of the woman to be veiled. The veil arrests the gaze of the opposite sex, and declares the glory of the person it hides. In courting a woman, a man should highly respect her veil, though she is not wearing one literally; it is a demeanor that adorns her face as an invisible veil, and is her power and her glory. When courted by a man, a woman preserves herself and presents herself as if covered with the veil, as Rebecca was in Genesis 24:65. The invisible veil limits the closeness, and preserves the honor. This signifies the scope of interaction permissible in courtship.

Do not our Lord's words in Matt. 5:28 about looking to lust apply here also? This restraint, far from being a hindrance, assures you the vantage point from which to get to know the other person without being handicapped by emotions. Here you need the help of the Holy Spirit to guide you.

It is a *sister* in the Lord that a disciple of Jesus Christ courts: Courtship therefore excludes intimacies of hearts and bodies that belong exclusively in marriage. Courtship can be pure in God's sight only if kept strictly as a brother/sister relationship. Never discount the possibility of any relationship failing prior to marriage; you must be able to part with pure hearts and memories. Avoid spending time alone with the opposite sex, giving room for temptations. A wise grandfather among us (Wilson Maxim, now with the Lord) used to advise young people, saying, "I don't trust human nature." It is good that we be warned.

Friendship between a young woman and a young man should be guarded in the fear of God, and kept free from intimacies that are only appropriate in marriage. Secret, private, intimate sharing of thoughts and ideas between a man and a woman is seldom free from defilement. Internet chat has destroyed not a few. Please read Prov. 4: 14-15. If you would not eat of the forbidden tree, don't go by it; avoid it, pass not by it.

George Mueller, when he began courting a Christian woman, first asked her if she would pray with him, and both prayed together. This is a

blessed lesson. The fear of God is our protection and our power against all sin whether of thought or action. It will save us from much sorrow.

If the above principles guide you, you will gain the respect of the other person from the start; and your relationship will be pure and noble all the way through.

### **Parental Role (during courtship)**

Parental initiative and guidance are providential. Be very thankful for it and willingly submit to it so that you may reap blessings. Pray that God would give your parents wisdom to guide you. Parental role may sometimes seem to limit your freedom, but the benefits are immense. If your parents are unable to help, seek the help of others in the extended family or in the Church who are able to fulfill such a role.

If you have met or come to know someone you would like to consider for marriage, consult your parents without delay, before you enter into serious communication with the person. Coming to the parents “after-the-fact” would hurt now and afterwards. Parents would do well to listen to the children with consideration, and help them seek God.

**Notes For Readers in the East:** 1. The parental role as it is practiced in the East is a special blessing, provided it maintains the freedom of the bride and the bridegroom to make the final decision having sought the will of God. Sons and daughters would do well to benefit from the caring guidance of the parents and other members of the family, as well as from the advice of the overseers in the Church. 2. The dowry system as it is practiced in the East is often a painful humiliation for the bride and her family. If you are seeking the bride whom God has prepared for you, then sincerely renounce the desire for money and wealth as part of the marriage. The *bride* is the wealth (Prov. 31:10).

**Notes For Readers in the West:** Christian parents, even in the Western culture, may assist their children by introducing them to a prospective young man or woman. Initially, the parents on both sides may interact closely. If they believe the young man or woman could well be the one for their son or daughter, they may encourage the young people to spend some time together in conversation and prayer in appropriate settings.

Such opportunities help them to make an informed decision, based on an awareness of the factors that affect harmonious family life. The final decision about engagement is then made after both have peace from the Lord. Such a process assures purity whether or not it leads to marriage.

### **Word of Caution : Seek Counsel From Your Spiritual Guides**

Before entering into a commitment with a prospective spouse, both the man and the woman who fear God will ask for the advice of those who have a care for them in the Lord. There are examples everywhere in the Western culture of people who regret their choice of spouse, even people who were Christians before they married. It could be that you are mistaken in your choice of person, in your timing, or in the way you are going about your courtship. Humility is extremely crucial at this vulnerable time in your life.

Know that marriage is not a contract modifiable by man but a covenant of your God (Prov. 2:17) to be kept at the cost of life. Please read Jesus' words in Matt. 5:32 and Luke 16:18. Here we have the case of a woman unjustly divorced, and is therefore innocent. The remarriage of such an innocent woman would result in an adulterous union. By these few simple words Jesus has answered for us most of the excuses for divorce and remarriage. Be instructed and warned about divorce as well as marrying a divorcee.

**One special point, especially for men:** Put off marriage until you have prepared yourselves for the responsibilities of married life. Seek guidance from your parents, and from the elders in the church who “*watch for your souls*” (Heb. 13:17). Take time to equip yourselves to serve God and to serve your fellow man. With God's Word in your heart, and your hands skilled in work, you will be useful to both God and man.

### **Opting to Stay Single for the Kingdom of God**

The family includes, and is adorned by, members who put off or renounce marriage “*for the kingdom of heaven's sake*” (Matt. 19:12). Such are blessed exceptions as called of God and according to His gift (1 Cor. 7:7). The unmarried state affords more freedom to “*attend upon the Lord without distraction*” (1 Cor. 7:34-35).

Paul counseled in preference of unmarried state in view of “*the present distress*” (1 Cor. 7:26). He was careful and faithful to say that it was his opinion only, and not a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:25,26). The “*distress*” situation may apply to individuals and Churches (as for the Church in Corinth) at any time in history. We should look to the Lord for His leading. Apart from this there are those who are called to serve God in single state like John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and Paul. Peter as well as most leaders of the first century Church were married (1 Cor. 9:5). Again, we should look to the Lord for His leading, because “*every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*” (1 Cor. 7:7).

Both the call to be celibate and the decision to be celibate are exceptions, and are sustained by grace and the spirit of sacrifice. Church history shows that while God used Paul and others like him exceptionally, the vast majority of those who were mightily used of God were married men and women. This is especially true of the earliest period of Christianity, and since the Reformation. See the words of our Lord in Matt. 11:18-19 “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”

You may pray: ‘Lord, am I called to be celibate for life?’ God will show you your calling, and give you grace accordingly. Paul counsels how to keep oneself pure when single by being occupied with the things that belong to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:34-35). When you are single, devote yourself to prayer and faithful service with singleness of heart. God has promised to make you joyful in the house of prayer (Isa. 56:7). Whether or not you remain single life-long, you need God’s grace to keep yourself pure as long as you are single. “*Shun youthful lusts and flee from them...*” (2 Tim. 2:22, The Amplified Bible).

# VII. Encouragement for Parents of Young Children

## The First Ten Years of Your Child

Psychiatrists say that a person's value system is locked in when he is around ten years of age. How precious, how critical, are those first ten years! The training that parents should give to a child in the early years is far too important to let it slip. It is the very foundation of the child's whole future. Let us therefore earnestly heed the scripture that says: "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*" (Prov. 22:6). Here we are given a great task — "*train up a **child***" — and a glorious promise — "*he will not depart from it.*" This gives us faith to apply ourselves to the task with a sure vision of our children's destiny.

Impressions from a godly mother begin to impart grace to an infant. Samuel was born in answer to prayer. His mother had "*prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore*" for a son whom she would "*give unto the Lord all the days of his life.*" Samuel's parents raised him for the Lord such that even as a child Samuel was able to minister before the Lord. "*Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a **child**, girded with a linen ephod*" (1 Samuel 2:18).

Timothy had a godly mother, and a godly grandmother. The Scripture says that the sincere faith that was in Timothy dwelt first in his grandmother and in his mother (2 Tim 1:5). Here we see three generations of faith, the third producing a man who served God with tears (2 Tim 1:4), of whom Paul writes: "*from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation*" (2 Tim 3:15, New American Standard). Timothy knew the sacred writings **from childhood**. He grew up to be a man of God's Word and a co-worker of Paul.

Above all, let us learn from the example of Jesus as a child and as a teenager. It is written of Him: "*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him*" (Luke

2:40). Let us teach our children to pray and grow strong in the spirit as the child Jesus did. Let us give our children God's Word so that they will be filled with wisdom as the child Jesus was. Then God's grace will rest upon our children as it did upon the child Jesus.

By the time He was twelve years of age, Jesus had gained such knowledge of the scriptures that He was able to sit with teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers (Luke 2:46-47). At this very young age of twelve, Jesus knew, "*that it was necessary (as a duty) for Me to be in My Father's house and [occupied] about My Father's business*" (Luke 2:49, The Amplified Bible). Even with such knowledge, Jesus remained "*(habitually) obedient*" to Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51). Let us keep before our children the example of Jesus as a child and as a young boy. Let us show them the glory of learning God's Word, and of habitually obeying their parents.

Many parents allow their children to spend time exposed to worldly television programs and videos, bad literature, and music. Before they are teenagers, the children have drunk deeply from the spirit of the world. Now they are teenagers. They continue to drink from the spirit of the world through friends. The parents begin to worry. Sin has taken root and soon will bear fruit. It hurts, and the parents grieve. Even at this late stage we must believe God and cry out to Him. It may be difficult with older children, but let us work earnestly with the younger ones. Let us remember the example of Samuel and Timothy. There is hope in God. Mothers, work with your sons and daughters, and draw their hearts to God's Word from childhood days. Don't wait until they are teenagers. It is much easier to bend a tender plant than a grown tree. "*Train up a child,*" we are told (Prov. 22:6).

What is the responsibility of the fathers? Eli was judge and high priest in Israel, but "*his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*" (1 Samuel 3:13). But of Abraham, God said "*...I know him, that he will command (teach and command, the Amplified Bible) his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord*" (Gen. 18:19). It is a father's ministry to teach and command his children in the

ways of the Lord. How shall a father teach and command? The Scripture says: *“Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger — do not exasperate them to resentment — but rear them (tenderly) in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4, The Amplified Bible). Fathers often are likely to get angry and provoke the children to anger. Let us heed Paul’s counsel.

Again we read: *“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up”* (Deut. 6:7). God’s word thus becomes the center of life in the home. The father and the mother keep God’s Word in their hearts, and it overflows in loving words to children in ordinary conversations. The pressures of daily life often make this difficult. We therefore need to be diligent, because we are told to *“teach them diligently to your children.”* We may do this at the dinner table. We may do this when we travel or work together. We have opportunity to do this especially during family devotions.

Of the virtuous wife it is written: *“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness”* (Prov. 31:26). What a glorious ministry for a mother! When we love our children, we will discover new ways of communicating with them in daily life. It is fellowship. It is pure joy to see your child receiving God’s Word trustingly from your lips.

## **Leading Children to a Personal Relationship With Christ**

Let us emphasize an important point: Begin when the child is a child. The Lord Jesus Christ is calling the children to come to Him (Matt. 19:14). How early may we begin? *“But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts”* (Psa. 22:9). We may learn from this verse that as the mother nurses the child, she may also give him or her the pure milk of God’s Word in songs and stories and memory verses. As you pray for and with the child, the Lord will give you wisdom to minister the Word and the Spirit to the child. The mother’s role is prominent in the beginning, and the father joins in due time.

A mother or father who is walking in the Spirit will be able to impart the Spirit, and not the letter of the Word only to the child's heart. *"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,"* said Jesus (John 6:63). We are planting and watering the seed. God will give the growth. We must abide in faith for the future of the child even when the results don't seem encouraging. Such faith on our part pleases God. *"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children"* (Isaiah 54:13).

The children receive gladly and trustingly from Mom and Dad. The word of God will become a fountain of life in due time, and will keep them from drinking of the spirit of the world in their teenage years. God's Word will be fulfilled that says, *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word"* (Psa. 119:9).

### **Training Children for Family Togetherness in Church Meetings**

**Infants and Young Children:** It is our desire to bring our little children to Christ (Matt.19: 13,14,15) and train them to be part of the Family of God. Training the children to sit respectfully in the meetings and participate according to their age and development involves frequent and consistent reminders. Babies need to be taken out at times to care for them, and toddlers need breaks from long periods of sitting. Consider taking your toddler out for a short walk or other quiet activity and then bringing him back into the meeting again. As your baby grows, the time spent in the meetings can gradually be increased until the child is only removed for short periods for correction and instruction, or for other reasons.

Possible helps for sitting still are drawing in a notebook or playing with a small quiet toy of some kind. If your child is sitting next to another child, he may be tempted to talk or play in a distracting manner, so you need wisdom concerning where they sit. Training a child that is not used to sitting through meetings quietly may take more time and involve more interruptions, but can be done with some patience. Daily family devotions at home can go a long way in training the children to sit in the meetings.

It is common in the churches to have special programs for children separate from the main service to enable parents to be undistracted. Some children may need special care under certain circumstances. However, many parents have found by experience that children who are kept with them in the meetings as much as possible (starting as infants) develop an ability to enjoy and benefit from these times. Regular exposure to singing, prayer, preaching, and testimonies greatly aids the child's learning experience and spiritual enrichment. Paul wrote to Timothy that *"from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 3:15).

**Older Children:** See the example of Samuel as a boy in 1 Sam. 2:18,26 and Jesus as a 12-year old in Luke 2: 46-49. Older children are like olive plants (Ps. 128: 3), and are to be encouraged to be filled with the Spirit, and share in the life and ministry of the church following the example of older disciples. It is blessed when the parents are role models for the children. Older children can help train the infants and younger children in the meetings of the church. It is a special blessing to hear the older children pray and testify in the meetings.

Joshua said: *"...But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15). Whether it is in a church meeting or any other activity, the goal is that the family be encouraged to work together for the blessing of everyone. The scriptural foundation for raising godly children is through interaction and fellowship with the parents. This principle of family togetherness is important also when considering church meetings. If parents train their children to sit quietly in the meetings, then all can worship together with great mutual enrichment.

## **Raising Children for the Lord**

By Susannah Wesley

[Note: The author of the following passage was the mother of 19 children of whom eight died in infancy. She spent an hour with every child once a week, instructing him or her in God's Word. She was the mother of John Wesley who brought revival to England in the 18th century, and of Charles Wesley the hymn writer. The following is a condensed paraphrase of a letter written by her in 1732.]

“First of all, it must be remembered that no mother can bring up her children for the Lord who does not renounce the world completely in her own life to start with. Secondly, she must be willing to devote her entire life to the work of saving the souls of her children, and must be convinced that such a life is a life well spent.

When children are about one year old, they must be taught to fear the rod and cry only softly. [Note by Joseph Arthungal: “fear the rod” must be understood as being gentle but firm correction appropriate to this tender age; not inflicting of severe pain that may cause emotional damage, but warnings and punishments appropriate for the child's age to teach to “fear the rod.” May the mother seek God's wisdom.] Thus they can escape an abundance of correction that they would otherwise have to learn later on. That awful noise of children screaming in the house must never be heard in a house. Even in their talking and their playing, children must not be permitted to be loud. Thus there can be peace in the house. At the meal table, children must not be allowed to choose whatever food they like. They must be taught to eat whatever is set before them. They must also be taught that they can get nothing that they cry for. They must ask quietly for whatever they want and must be taught to speak respectfully to their parents.

In order to form the minds of children aright, the first thing that must be done is the conquering of their will and thus bringing them to an obedient attitude of mind. If the will is not subdued at an early age, they

will become stubborn and obstinate and it will be very difficult to correct them later on. A child must not only be corrected, he must be conquered. Only thus can it be preserved until the time comes when it chooses Christ of its own. When the will of a child has been totally subdued, and it is brought to the place where it fears and respects its parents, then a great many problems are solved.

Some childish follies should be ignored and some others reprov'd only mildly. But no deliberate disobedience should ever be overlooked. It must be punished — the degree and type of punishment being dependent on the circumstances of the case. Cowardice and the fear of punishment often lead children to tell lies in order to escape punishment. To prevent this, it must be made clear to them that if anyone confesses his fault and is sorry for what he has done, he will not be punished. No child in any case should be rebuked or punished twice for the same fault; and if he changes his ways, he should never ever be reminded of his past failures. Every significant act of obedience that is the result of a child having denied himself in some way should be commended and praised. Where a child makes a mistake, when it intended to do what was right, it should not be punished, but only lovingly taught the right way to do it in the future.

Children must be taught to respect God, to be still during times of prayer, and to pray by themselves every day. They must also be taught to respect the property of others and never to take even a small pin or coin that does not belong to them.

We must never forget that true spirituality is nothing other than denying one's own will and doing the will of God. Since the one great hindrance to our eternal happiness is our self-will, any small indulgence of it cannot be ignored, and every small denial of it will be eternally profitable. Heaven and hell depend on this. And so the mother who works to subdue self-will in her child works together with God to save a soul for eternity. On the other hand, she who indulges her child's self-will actually does the Devil's work for him and helps toward the eternal damnation of her child's soul."

## **VIII. Encouragement for Sons, Daughters and Parents**

In the last two verses of the Old Testament we read that God will send Elijah the prophet to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers. We are therefore warned that the heart of the children and the heart of the fathers will be turned away from each other in the last days, and a prophetic ministry will be needed to turn their hearts towards each other. When Joel prophesied about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was to happen in the last days, he said, “*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*” (Joel 2:28). It is our prayer that our sons and daughters be filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesy in these last days. This has been happening, and we pray that there be an increase.

### **The Father–Son Bond**

If you would see a very fundamental aspect of the bond between a father and a son, please read Genesis 22:7-8, and note the conversation between Abraham and Isaac. Isaac addresses his father as “*my father*,” and not merely as “father”; Abraham addresses his son as “*my son*,” not merely as “son”. This ancient example shows us the emotional bond between the father and the son. From this bond arises the desire to honor the father. Whether you address your father as *my* father or merely as father; whether you address your son or daughter as *my* son or *my* daughter, or, merely son or daughter; please seek to have the emotional bond that is implied by the “*my*”. May this be true for both father and mother, as well as for sons and daughters.

### **Honoring Father and Mother**

If the first blessing to the first parents was to have many children (Gen. 1:22), the first commandment with promise to the children was to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12); and the promise was long life on earth with related benefits. Paul repeats this in Eph. 6:2-3. It is so very important, therefore, for children to learn to honor their parents from early age.

*“Every one of you shall **revere** his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God”* (Lev. 19:3). Note how solemn this commandment is! The commandment to revere the parents and the commandment to keep the Sabbaths are joined in one sentence, made most solemn by the addition of *“I am the Lord your God.”* How blessed it is to believe and obey!

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to honor and revere your parents. Your attitude, your love, your obedience, your words, your tone, your consideration, your willingness to listen, your actions; all these add up. Gifts and kind words on special occasions have their place, but honor and reverence in daily life are far more important. Sons and daughters, never raise your voice at your mother or father. You may forget to repent, and you would remain blind to the harm it does to your parents and to you. If you believe your parents are wrong, plead with them and pray for them. God will richly reward you.

Respect for the elderly (not parents only) is pleasing to God. *“You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord”* (Lev. 19:32). Note, here also, how solemn the commandment is. There are elderly people in your extended family, in the Church, and in the community. When you honor them and show them respect, you have a blessing from God. In some Eastern countries, the younger people rise when an elderly person walks in. In every culture there are traditions that show respect to the aged. It is good for young boys and girls to be with, and listen to, elderly people who love them. We should train the children to enjoy the friendship of older people, and receive wisdom from them.

## **Parents’ Care for Grown Children**

The twelve sons of Jacob were fathers themselves when blessed by their dying father. If they were to receive the blessing at that stage, surely they had to be honoring and revering their father at that time. Jacob himself was in his late seventies when he obeyed his mother, and obtained his father’s blessing. Sons and daughters, esteem and inherit your parents’ blessing. Even as a queen, Esther obeyed her uncle Mordecai who reared

her (Esther 2:20). Sons and daughters, esteem and submit to the spiritual care of your parents.

Job's seven sons and three daughters were grown and living in their own houses. Yet Job cared for their spiritual welfare. From Job 1:5 we may learn: (1) At the conclusion of the days of feasting, "*Job sent and sanctified them.*" This implies that the caring father invited the sons and daughters to come to the altar at his home, and participate in the prayers and offerings for them. Job was sensitive to the possibility of sin entering his children's hearts while they were feasting. A caring father has the duty and authority to call even his grown children to repentance. From the place of feasting, let us hasten to the place of sacrifice. (2) Job rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of his sons and daughters. Burnt offerings for ten children, one offering for each! This teaches us how earnestly we should pray (as if offering a burnt offering; remember Christ's offering of Himself for our sake) for each of our children, even grown ones. (3) Job did this continually; this was his custom. Please read Job 1:4-5.

As a father, I have been moved by the example of Job who "*was the greatest of all the men of the east*" of his day. Fathers, please reflect on Job 1:4-5.

## IX. Sunshine at the Eventide

Old age increasingly makes us less “relevant” to the fast-paced, fast-changing younger generation. Most people are too busy to give us time. Off they go to work, to school, to appointments. Success brings more work, more stress, less leisure. We long for our grown children to sit down and talk to us, but they are driven by more demanding commitments and opportunities. The younger generation cannot relate to our situation as we wish. We shouldn’t fault them. Now our time is too precious to be spent on finding fault.

As our time winds up in the eventide of our life, our moments are precious. This is the time of our life to bless others. We can bless if we are blessed ourselves. We can bless if we have a blessing to give. What good can we do? What words can we speak to bless? What fruits of our life will speak of us after we are gone?

As we wake up in the morning, thousands have departed this life while we were asleep. What shall we do with this day, this present moment, we are permitted to live? The present moment is ours by God’s grace, and it is precious. Should we not offer it up to the Giver in thankful joy? “O Lord I offer this precious moment to You,” let us pray. The present moment belongs to us by God’s grace, and we belong to God. In offering the present moment to God we are offering ourselves to Him. As we make a truly conscious offering of our present moment to God, we experience pure joy, and we are drawn closer to God. We worship. Our time is our life. As we make a truly conscious offering of our time to God, we sense God’s leading in the daily affairs of life.

Daniel lived in a land far from his own, but in his old age God showed him visions of things to come. Daniel was a man of prayer. John who wrote the last book of the Bible was in exile in his old age and God opened the heavens and unveiled the future to him. John was a man of prayer. Old age did not hinder Daniel and John from fulfilling their ministry of prayer. Anna the prophetess was a widow of about eighty-four; she “*served God with fastings and prayers night and day*” (Luke 2:37). It was granted to her to see the infant Christ in the temple. On

seeing the infant, she knew it was Christ, and “*gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*” (Luke 2:38). It is God’s will that we devote ourselves to a life of prayer as we set our hearts to finish the work the Lord has assigned to us on earth.

Would you like to invest your time for eternity? Ask the Lord Jesus to give you a longing to pray. The Lord will give the longing, the Lord will give grace, and you will see a change coming over your affections. The Spirit of God will give you a love for the presence of God and for prayer. As we begin to experience this, we also experience the joy of being in God’s will and being led by the Spirit.

When we apply our hearts to prayer we will receive an ever-increasing measure of the Holy Spirit. We do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit knows (Rom. 8:26). As we long to pray the Holy Spirit helps us to pray as we ought. This indeed is so blessed. As Job prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes; and more than that, “*the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning...*” (Job 42:12). Job’s friends had faulted him when he was suffering, but he prayed for them. When we pray as Job did, the Lord gives us a double portion of the blessing. Let us pray for others and not condemn them. We are blessed, and called to bless.

Please reflect on the following from *Fenelon’s* (AD 1651-1715) *Spiritual Letters*:

“Our whole life belongs to God, as well as our whole heart; neither is too much to give Him. He has bestowed them upon us only that we may love and serve Him; let us keep back nothing from Him. We cannot always be doing a great work, but we can always be doing something that belongs to our condition. To be silent, to suffer, to pray when we cannot act, is acceptable to God. A disappointment, a contradiction, a harsh word, an annoyance, a wrong received and endured as in His presence, is worth more than a long prayer; and we do not lose time if we bear its loss with gentleness and patience,

provided the loss was inevitable, and was not caused by our own fault.

Thus spend your days, redeeming the time; give up vain amusements, useless correspondences, those weak outpourings of the heart that are only modifications of self-love, and conversations that dissipate the mind and lead to no good. Thus you will find time to serve God; and there is none well employed that is not devoted to Him.” (*Fenelon’s Spiritual Letters*, Christian Books Publishing House, pg. 236)

For such there shall be sunshine at the eventide.

## X. The Extended Family

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and it divided and became four rivers. Love in the family is like a life-spring that should overflow and water the extended family. If there is God's love in our heart for the family, we cannot exclude any member of the extended family from our love, nor any other human being. We are obligated in Christ to love every human being for whom He died. The Holy Spirit fills our heart, and the living water flows forth to others.

You may learn much wisdom from your grandparents and other older relatives. You have an opportunity to be an example to many youngsters. Your immediate family links you to the extended family, and the extended family links you to mankind at large. Is this not God's design? The extended family opens to you a wider field to cultivate love amidst trials. If you experience difficulties with a person, please remember: Jesus Christ loved that person enough to die for him or her. The awareness of this truth will bring wisdom in your heart concerning the situation, and you will receive grace to love as Jesus loved you.

Mankind is one family — one flesh — in Adam. The Bible does not speak of “races” because mankind, having a common father, is of one flesh and one blood (Acts 17:26).

What divides mankind is not color but sin that uses color as an excuse. What divides mankind is not language but sin that uses language as an excuse. Jesus Christ is the Savior from sin, and therefore from divisions as well. He is the progenitor of the new family called the Church.

The Church is one new family in Christ. Differences do not divide in the Body of Christ because we are all baptized into one body by one Spirit. Whether Jews or Greeks, whether black or white, we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Where the Spirit unites, let not the flesh divide. In Christ, we belong to one another for eternity.

Jesus Christ died for every man. The wall that divided the Jew and the Gentile was broken down by Jesus Christ. Sin had divided mankind, but the cross (the sufferings of Christ) reconciled us to one another (Eph.

2:14-16; Col. 3:10-11). This reconciliation begins in the heart, and we receive grace to love one another as we read in Col. 3:13-14.

Offenses are common, as we know from experience. We are to forgive as God forgave us in Christ. Has there been an offense from us? We humble ourselves and seek reconciliation without delay. Such a life of genuine love will meet trials that will test one's love, one's forgiveness, and one's patience. Here we need to be full of the Spirit of Christ who loved us and died for us.

If the Spirit of God is drawing you to such a life of love, please yield, and don't hold back. Let us give ourselves in love for others as Christ gave Himself in love for us. We may suffer loss, but we are in possession of a wealth that cannot be lost. And that wealth is love. Amen.

## Historical Notes

1. God instituted monogamous marriage at creation (Gen. 2:18-25). Polygamy was the fruit of the deterioration of mankind. It has no sanction under the New Covenant.
2. With the deterioration of mankind, physical beauty rather than godliness became the main criterion in choosing a wife (Gen. 6:2).
3. "Marriage among the Jews was usually preceded by a formal act of betrothal, such a contract being regarded as absolutely binding. On the marriage day, the bride was escorted to her husband's home by a procession consisting of her own companions, and the 'friends of the bridegroom', or 'children of the bride-chamber'. When she reached the house, some such words as 'Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel' were spoken, the pair were crowned with garlands, and a marriage deed signed. After the prescribed washing of hands and benediction, the marriage supper was held. For a year after marriage a man was released from all military service. The Christian law of marriage is given in Mt. 19:4-9; Mark 10:2-12; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7; its mystical meaning, as symbolizing the union between Christ and the Church, is explained in Eph. 5:22-32." Concise Bible Dictionary in the Holy Bible, Cambridge University Press.
4. In Jewish culture it was not proper for a couple to express their affection in public (Song of Solomon 8:1-3).
5. In ancient times long and flowing hair was the glory of a godly woman (Song of Solomon 4:1; 6:5 ; 1 Cor. 11:15). A meek and quiet spirit was her inner beauty (1 Peter 3:4).
6. In the Old Testament, betrothal was considered equally as binding as marriage. Rape of a betrothed girl demanded the death of the man involved (Deut. 22:23-27).

7. Job's daughters shared their father's inheritance with the sons (Job 42:15). Daughters did not share the inheritance in Israel, except later under the law only if there were no sons (Num. 27:8). "In Mesopotamian law the dowry was given to the bride by her father and remained her possession even if it was administered by her husband; it passed to her sons after her death or returned to her family if she died without sons." Dictionary of the Bible, John L. McKenzie, S.J.
8. A large family was a blessing from God (Psa. 127:3-5; 128:2-4). Childlessness was a matter of sorrow (Gen. 30:1; 1 Sam. 1:6,11; Luke 1:25).
9. It was the duty of the parents to teach the children wisdom.
10. Respect and obedience for the parents was commanded (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Striking or insulting the parents was punishable by death (Ex. 21:15,17; Lev. 20:9).