



HOW TO BE
THE SPOUSE
AND PARENT
GOD
WANTS YOU
TO BE

ZANE C. HODGES

**How to Be the Spouse and Parent
God Wants You to Be**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Part I: Marriage - Male and Female Created He Them	5
1. The Woman Who Wrecked the World	6
2. The Man Who Went Along to Get Along	14
3. The Married Couple Who Played Hide-and-Seek	20
4. I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed	25
5. No More Fairy Tale	32
6. A Helper Comparable to Him	40
7. How Committed Are You?	47
8. Friendship	53
Part II: Parenting	61
9. Do It Right, Dad	62
10. Can You Do It Alone?	69
11. Samson's Dad	78
12. Me or Him?	86
13. What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?	93
14. You Can't Dodge God's Arrow	101
15. A Wise Son and a Foolish Son	109
16. What Do the Neighbors See?	118
17. But the Money Was Gone	126
18. Children Lost Yet Found	133

Foreword

Zane Hodges was a professor of New Testament Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary from 1960-1986. However, he had a much longer ministry at Victor Street Bible Chapel, where, over a period of nearly 50 years, he often taught on the subjects of marriage and parenting, as well as providing marital and parental counseling.

Now, Zane was a lifelong bachelor when he went home to be with the Lord in 2008. So a fair question and observation would be: “How much insight on marriage or parenting could possibly come from a man who never married and was never a biological father? Such a person has no personal experiences to share.” However, if the question is: “What does the Bible teach about marriage and parenting?” then the answer does not depend on personal experience, but on the teachings of Scripture. We invite you to evaluate Zane’s insights on marriage and parenting, based on the Word of God.

Originally released in 2021 under the title “How to Be the Spouse God Wants You to Be,” this new edition expands the previous book with three new chapters on marriage and an entirely new portion on parenting in ten chapters. Hence, the expanded title “How to Be the Spouse and Parent God Wants You to Be.” Although a few anecdotes are repeated in a few chapters, we decided that these anecdotes provide value in communicating the truths of how to be a better spouse or parent.

While compiling this book, drawn from messages that Zane presented at Victor Street, we were struck by his ability to observe and connect experiences to the Word of God. Whenever insights are drawn directly from the Bible, we remember the words of the Lord in Isaiah 55:11—

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing
for which I sent it.

For those who are married, for those who are considering marriage, and for those who are parents or hope to be parents, we hope you will be as blessed as we were by the Scriptural insights of a man who was a lifelong student of God’s Word.

Letitia and Michael Lii
February 23, 2026
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Part I

Marriage

Male and Female Created He Them

Chapter 1

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

There is an old saying: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” My addressing the subject of marriage might tempt some to think of a variation on that: Bachelors rush in where married men fear to tread.¹ However, I don’t think the two statements are really parallel because, first of all, married men are not angels. Just ask a woman who’s married to one, and I assure you that she will tell you she’s not married to an angel. I have the opinion that married men, deep down in their hearts, do not think bachelors are necessarily fools! So I make no apology for attempting this, as long as I can keep my focus on the Word of God.

In fact, the case can be made that God, perhaps, thinks it’s a little better for us to get marital counsel from an unmarried person than from a married person. The New Testament epistles, which basically teach us what we need to know for the Christian life, were written by five men: James, John, Jude, Peter, and Paul. Of the five writers, James, John, and Jude say nothing about marriage — nothing. Peter, who wrote two epistles, gives six verses to marriage, and I’ve always been a little amused by the fact that he gives one verse to husbands and five verses to wives. But the Apostle Paul beats them all the way around by giving the vast majority of the Bible’s marital instruction. In addition to the famous passage in Ephesians 5, which is so frequently read at weddings, 1 Corinthians 7 is a very long chapter dealing with various aspects of marriage, and there are other references to marriage in the Pauline Epistles. Now, I realize that some people have thought Paul might have been a widower. We know he was not married at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians, and I’m unaware of any really good evidence even suggesting he was ever married. If he had been married and became a widower, he does a very good job of hiding it from us. So as far as we know, we are getting the majority of the Bible’s marital counsel from a man who is not — and probably was not ever — married. We’re going to be looking at Paul’s advice and at the other biblical advice as well.

Now those who know me know that I have engaged in marital counsel for many years. I’ve lost track of the number of husbands, wives, and husbands and wives together that I’ve talked to. Those who have had any exposure to me as a marital counselor are probably aware that I usually come down a little harder on the man than on the woman. One of the reasons for that is that God makes the man the head of the home, and therefore he has the more serious responsibility. But this chapter is going to address the ladies. I will be getting around to the men in subsequent chapters, but I’m going to start by concentrating on the ladies and am titling this chapter “The Woman Who Wrecked the World.” (Now you can understand why no married man is likely to use a title like that.) I don’t even need to tell you what the woman’s name was, do I? You know what her name was. We’re going to read about her in Genesis.

But first, I want to look at 1 Timothy 2:11-14. The Apostle Paul writing:

¹ Zane Hodges gave the messages in Chapters 1-6 at the Lord’s Supper meetings at Victor Street Bible Chapel in 1998. Zane was a lifelong bachelor and was 65-66 years old when he gave these messages.

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Now a lot of people, both men and women, have had trouble with some of the statements Paul has made about women. I know that some people have even suggested he wrote these things because he didn't like women, he hated women, and he wanted to put them in their place. We obviously know that was not true of the Apostle Paul, who wrote not only as a servant of God, but under the inspiration of Scripture. Other people take another and more indirect approach to it and say, "Well, Paul was influenced by the culture of his time, and in the Jewish culture, as well as in the Gentile culture of his day, the woman had a very secondary position. It simply reflects the opinions and attitudes of his culture. We need to update his opinions and to bring them into the twentieth century." Now I think you can see — if you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and the product, ultimately, of the Holy Spirit — that doesn't wash as an explanation for Paul's statements. Reread 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence — *because that's what our culture teaches us.*" Do you notice the italicized portion in your Bible? Of course not. It's not there!

Notice that Paul appeals first of all to the priority of man in Creation: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (v 13). Secondly, he appeals to the woman's role in the fall of man, and he says, "And Adam was not deceived [not a good note for Adam, I might add, because Adam sinned with his eyes wide open], but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (v 14). So what is Paul saying here? He's saying that because of the priority of man in Creation and because of the role that the woman played in the Fall: "I do not permit a woman to teach, or to have authority over the man, but to be in silence" (v 12). This is talking about the main church meeting (Lord's Supper meeting)² as far as the biblical pattern is concerned. If women have ever wondered why they don't speak at the main meeting in churches seeking to follow the biblical pattern, this verse is one of the reasons why.

Now obviously this passage directs us back to the central passage I want to discuss, Genesis, chapters 2 and 3. I'll begin with Genesis 2:7-9:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now notice here, there are some very basic and simple facts. God creates the man, He plants a garden for the man to live in, and He fills this garden with every kind of tree

² 1 Corinthians 11:17-33. Victor Street Bible Chapel weekly observes the Lord's Supper by reading Scripture, breaking of bread, Bible discussion among the men during a meal, and drinking of the fruit of the vine.

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

that was good for food and that was beautiful. And notice that it says here, “The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (v 9), was there as well.

Now, skipping down to verses 15-17:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend [the word *tend* here means something like *to cultivate*] and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Now this is a very important set-up passage for the thrust of this chapter. The man has been created. He has been placed in this garden with all these lovely trees as well as all these excellent fruits, but he is not placed there just to live out his years. He is given a job, and his job is expressed in verse 15: He is to tend the garden and keep it. He’s to cultivate the garden and keep it. Now he has a positive responsibility and a negative responsibility. The positive responsibility is: “Keep the garden tended.” The negative responsibility is: “Don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This is a very simple program, couldn’t we admit? But that was what his job was: to take care of the garden and to avoid eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now this brings us to the creation of the woman and man’s subsequent fall, found in Genesis 2:18-3:7:

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would name them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken
out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent,

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

“We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

All right, we’ve got the scene: Man has been created and placed in this lovely garden, and his responsibility is to take care of the garden and to avoid eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God surveys the scene and He says, “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make someone who will love him.” Genesis 2:18 doesn’t say that, does it? “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make somebody for him to talk to.” No, it doesn’t say that. “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make somebody who will comfort him and keep him company.” No, it doesn’t say that. What God says is: “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper comparable to him” (2:18).

Now, please do not think that the word *helper* implies that the woman has some kind of inferior status. It may interest you to know that the word *helper* used here is also used in a number of the Psalms to refer to the help of God, or to God as a Helper. Psalm 33:20 says, “Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help [or, He is our Helper] and our shield.” It seems to me that even though we must, on the basis of the Bible, say that God created the woman to be man’s helper, we must also say that, because God Himself is a Helper, this is a very high and noble role He has given to the woman. Which of us does not want the help of God? All of us want God to help us when we need help. That’s one of the roles that God has in each and every life, male and female. If you’re a man, God is your Helper. If you’re a woman, God is your Helper. That’s a high model, and that’s what the woman was created to do for the man — to be his helper.

Now we’re not talking about somebody to fix the meals. Did you notice that there were no meals to fix in the Garden of Eden? They just ate the fruit. We’re not talking here about somebody to take the dirty clothes to the laundromat. There were no dirty clothes in the Garden of Eden (in fact, originally, no clothes at all), so that was not the woman’s role. We’re not talking about somebody to clean up the house or sweep out all the dirt. There is no house in the Garden of Eden.

Then, what are we talking about? Well, God has just said to the man, “Take care of the garden, cultivate the garden.” And then He says, “It is not good for man to be alone in the tasks that I have given him. I’ll make somebody to help him with his tasks.” May I suggest that the highest goal of a wife is to help her husband be the man God wants him to be and to do the things that God wants him to do? If that is not the role a wife is fulfilling in the life of her husband, she has yet to learn what it means to be a wife. It would be interesting to ask each wife in a group of Christian married people why she married the man she married. I suspect we would get a variety of answers. One answer might be, “I married this guy because I was really in love with him and wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.” (She may have had second thoughts since then, but that may have been the original reason.) Another might say, “The reason I married this man

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

is that I wanted to establish a home, have children, and raise a family.” But I wonder how many, at the time they got married, would have said, “The reason I’m marrying this man is so that I can help him to be the man that God wants him to be.” Do you know what I bet? There might not be a single wife in the group who thought of it like that when they got married. Well, if you’ve never thought of it like that, start thinking of it like that. “It is not good for a man to be alone. I will make him a helper. I have given him a job to do, and I want somebody to help him do it.”

But that brings us to the temptation, doesn’t it? That brings us to the story of the Fall. You’ll notice that in Genesis 3 we are told that the serpent through whom, obviously, the devil was working “was more cunning than any beast of the field, which the LORD God had made” (v 1). The serpent was very clever, says this text, very clever. So does the text say, “The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made, and the serpent said to the *man*. . .”? No! The serpent was smart, so he talked to the woman.

When you hear some people discuss marriage, you can very easily get the impression that the vast majority of problems in marriages come from husbands: “If my husband were only this or that or this other thing, then our marriage would really be great. The devil works in our marriage through my husband, and he fouls things up.” Well, I’ve got a news flash for you! The devil is capable of working in marriages through the woman, and when the woman forgets the role for which God made her, believe me, the devil will take advantage of that in a big way.

So Satan approaches the woman, and he says to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (v 1). Notice how Satan phrases that for the woman. Let’s translate that into modern language: “Has God really said, ‘You can’t have it all?’ ‘You can’t have it all’ — is that what God has said to you?” How many women are susceptible to that? You know, it’s really surprising how often a woman will get to the state where she’s surrounded by all sorts of privileges that other women would kill to get, and she says, “We don’t have this. My husband doesn’t do that. My life is missing that particular thing.” One of the things that the devil can do with considerable success with women is to focus them on what they do not have. Notice what the woman’s answer here is:

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’” (vv 2,3)

Wait a minute. I thought the earlier verse said that the tree of life was in the midst of the garden. What happened to the tree of life here? She ignores it. What’s in the middle of the garden for the woman at this moment? You know what’s in the middle of her garden. It’s what she can’t have. That’s what’s in the middle of her garden. “We can eat of the trees,” she said, “but that tree that’s right in the heart of the garden that we pass by all the time, you know, and I’ve looked at it [I’m elaborating here], that thing that’s in the midst of the garden — I can’t have it. I can’t have it.” And she says, “The reason I can’t have it is because God says that when I eat it, I’ll die.”

The devil says, “Oh no, you won’t die. Don’t be silly. You’re not going to die if you eat of that tree. Because God knows that in the day that you eat, your eyes will be opened, you’ll be like God knowing good and evil. Oh, you’re missing something,” says the devil.

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

“You are really, really, really missing something. The tree that God has forbidden you to have is the one that, first of all, will open your eyes and will make you like God, knowing good and evil.”

Notice that the woman, first of all, is focused on what she doesn't have, and secondly on how good it would be to have what she doesn't have. But if God didn't give it to her, it wasn't good for her, right? The devil can, first of all, focus a wife on one particular thing that she doesn't have that seems very nice, and then persuade her that she is missing so much by not having it. When a woman is persuaded of that by the devil, she no longer thinks in terms of her role in the marriage as a helper.

Now notice what happens next. The woman looks at the tree. You know what she sees? Not a tree that will kill her. Not a tree that will break her relationship with God. Not even a tree that could possibly break her relationship with her husband. What if he doesn't eat of it and she does? She doesn't see the tree that way anymore. You know what she sees in that tree? She sees delicious fruit, beautiful fruit, and a tree that is “desirable to make one wise” (v 6). “Oh, I just have got to have that.” She took of it and ate.

What was she doing? Was she helping her husband? No. She was acting selfishly. She wasn't thinking of anything at that moment except what she wanted. As I have mentioned, I have counseled husbands and wives together and separately more times than I can enumerate. And after hearing both sides, do you know what I usually say to myself? “This problem could be easily solved if both of them would be less selfish.” Almost always, especially in Christian marriages, when something goes wrong, at least one person is selfish. That is the avenue through which the devil entered the first marriage in human history. He got the woman focused on what she didn't have, and she began to think about it selfishly.

The next phrase is short, but devastating: “...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (vv 6,7). This is the helper, folks! This is the being that God created to help the man, to help him meet his responsibilities, and to help him be what God wanted him to be in the garden. What does she do? She helps him break his relationship with God.

They lose their home in the garden because they are driven out of the garden. Both of them are made subject to death. When a wife forgets her role as the helper of her husband and when she begins to act selfishly, what is she doing? She is threatening her home, her marriage, her children, and her happiness.

Is there any woman reading this who thinks she can be happy without fulfilling God's purpose for her? Is there any woman reading this who would say, “Well, Zane, maybe God did make women to be helpers, but I don't really like that role, and my husband doesn't really deserve that from me. If you knew what kind of husband I was married to and how much help he needed, you wouldn't be so complacent. So I'm not going to do it God's way. I'm not going to be the kind of wife that God designed me to be.” Do you think you're going to be happy? Think again. That's a fantasy. Neither the man nor the woman can be truly happy or fulfilled unless they are happy in accordance with the way God has created them to be. If all Christian married couples understood that, we would have a lot fewer difficulties in Christian marriages.

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

All professors and ex-professors give tests.³ This test is for the wives who are reading this. (Men can rate their wives, but don't you dare tell them how you rated them. I don't want you to get in trouble, and I don't want to get in trouble, either!) Which of the following three statements best characterizes your role as a helper of your husband?

A: My husband would be a better Christian man if he was married to somebody besides me.

B: My husband's Christian life and service is his own business. That's his thing. I'm doing my thing.

C: I am fully committed, by the grace of God, to helping my husband be the best man he can possibly be for God.

Which of those three statements mostly describes your role in your relationship with your husband? If you chose A, give yourself a flunking grade, and a minus 100, because you are also saying, "Not only do I not help my husband, but I'm a hindrance to him." If you chose B, give yourself a flunking grade, but this time you can take a zero, because you're saying, "I neither help nor hinder him." I hope you chose C — or if you couldn't honestly choose it right now, that you have determined to choose it from now on. I hope you will choose to be deeply committed to helping your husband become the man that God wants him to become and to do the things that God wants him to do. Before seeking counseling for your marriage, first be sure you have that as your objective.

Now, when I go into homes — I guess I'd better admit this — I'm always watching to see the dynamics between a husband and a wife. They may not know it, but I'm always doing that. Of course, I'm not expecting to see a big old fight with screaming and yelling because when the pastor comes calling, that's not what happens. Everybody's on their good behavior. So I'm not looking for something so obvious as that. I'm looking for little subtle things. I can't give you all my trade secrets, but let me tell you a few things.

I'm looking to see if, during the course of my visit, the husband and wife talk to each other a little bit, as well as to me. And I'm interested in the tone of the exchange between them. If the husband and wife are not speaking at home, they may get past that by speaking only to me or mainly to me except as to say, "Pass the meat," or, "Cut the bread," or something like that.

Another thing I'm looking for is whether, in the conversation, either of the spouses has a tendency to put the other one down, even with little gentle put-downs, such as, "Well my husband couldn't cut his way through a steak if his life depended on it." I remember years ago one of my heroes in baseball, Johnny Bench,⁴ married a very attractive airline stewardess, and I read about it in the Cincinnati papers. They had both of them on camera and interviewed them. Some of the viewers who wrote to the newspaper said it was horrible because throughout the interview, the wife kept putting Johnny Bench down. Here is Cincinnati's hero, and she's there saying all sorts of negative things about him. The people who wrote to the newspaper said, "We don't expect this marriage to last very long." Sure enough, it didn't. They divorced.

³ Zane was a New Testament professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1959-1986.

⁴ Baseball Hall of Fame catcher who played for the Cincinnati Reds, 1967-1983. The Cincinnati Reds were Zane's favorite baseball team.

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

I'm looking for little indications of whether the husband and wife respect each other. Here's another thing I'm looking for: I am looking to see if the wife is truly, truly interested in what her husband is doing for God. The writer of Proverbs, and with this I conclude, said, "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her. . . She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:10-11a; 12). Man, what a description for a wife! How fortunate a man is to find a virtuous wife. How fortunate a man is to find a woman that he can trust from day one to the end of life. How fortunate a man is to find a woman who will do "him good and not evil all the days of her life." That's a high standard, ladies, a high standard. And with the help of God, you can reach it.

Chapter 2

The Man Who Went Along to Get Along

We find the story of “The Man Who Went Along to Get Along” in Genesis 3:6-13:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

As explained in chapter 1, the biblical title for the first six chapters of this book is “Male and Female Created He Them.” I would like to note the fact that the Bible is not saying He created them unisex. One of the problems in our culture and society today is that people are allowing the breakdown of the created distinctions between men and women. That’s a fatal step to take and produces all kinds of difficulties. This is one of the reasons I’ve gone back to the beginning of the account of the creation of man and woman.

However, I could have chosen the more practical title: “How to Get Along with Your Spouse.” Once when I was teaching on this topic in a meeting, someone in the audience said, “I didn’t know Zane had a spouse.” So please notice that I did not just state as a possible title, “How to Get Along with **My** Spouse,” but “How to Get Along with **Your** Spouse”! I want to suggest that spouses do not get along well until they both accept the role God has given them in Creation, and that the secret of a happy marriage lies first and fundamentally in the willingness of the man to take the man’s role and the woman to take the woman’s role.

In the previous chapter, “The Woman Who Wrecked the World,” I focused on Eve and the way in which the devil succeeded in getting her to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The main point of chapter 1 was that the woman was created to be man’s helper, not in terms of doing the dishes, carrying out the garbage, or preparing the meals, but in helping the man to fulfill his responsibilities to God. Now there’s an old saying, “You can take the teacher out of the school, but you can’t take the school out of the teacher.” I ended chapter 1 with a quiz, and I’m tempted, at this point, to give a follow-up quiz to each married woman reading this. The quiz would ask her to list one, two, or three ways in which she is trying to improve her performance as

someone who helps her husband to perform the will of God and to be a better servant of God.

This chapter addresses the men. One of the sad features of modern culture is that we have produced a lot of wife abusers. There are men who occasionally strike their wives, and there are men who frequently abuse their wives. When I find out that a man has struck his wife, my opinion of him sinks below zero. It seems to me that he's a coward — he's less than a man. It is inexcusable for any husband to strike his wife, no matter what the provocation. Men who do this periodically and regularly, sometimes beating their wives within an inch of their lives, are sick, in my opinion. A man like that is very sick and needs therapy. He needs the Lord, of course. But he also needs treatment because that kind of behavior is a sign of a very serious psychological and spiritual problem, as well as a serious addiction to violence. We must admit that one of the sad signs of the decay of our society is the increasing number of men who abuse their wives physically.

However, I want to suggest that the problem of most men is not that they are abusive husbands. The problem is that they are passive husbands. I suggest that for every man who is an abuser, there are probably five, six, seven or more men who are passive husbands. Now please understand that when I talk about a passive husband I'm not talking about the typical stereotype — the henpecked husband whose wife obviously wears the trousers in the family; she tells him what to do, and he does it. This is the "Yes, dear," husband type. He says to his friends, "I always take a positive attitude toward my wife, always." And they say, "How come?" "Well," he says, "whenever she tells me to do something I say, 'Yes, dear. Yes, dear. Yes, dear.'"

There are some husbands like that, but that's not the type of husband this chapter will address. A man can be a passive husband in the sense I will be discussing, yet still be very stubborn and have a mind of his own. For example, he is comfortably seated in front of the television set watching the Dallas Cowboys football team or the Texas Rangers baseball team when the wife comes up and says, "Could you take me over to the mall so I can do some shopping?" He responds, "There's no way I'm going to go to the mall with you until the game is over." That's a very assertive response, but the man may still be a passive husband.

The kind of passivity I'm talking about is the husband who is passive regarding the spiritual welfare of his wife. I would like to suggest that many husbands display this kind of passivity because they are the sons of Adam. They behave as Genesis 3:6-12 tells us Adam behaved. Notice that after the serpent deceived the woman into taking a different look at the tree, we read that "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (v 6). And then it says, "She also gave to her husband with her, and Adam said, 'No, no, sweetheart.'" (Now I don't really know whether Adam called Eve *sweetheart*. I just kind of like the term. All writers have to have a little license, so I'm going to pretend that Adam called Eve *sweetheart*.)

Adam said to Eve, "No, no, sweetheart. Do you realize that you are offering me a piece of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God has commanded us never to eat of? Sweetheart, I can tell that you've already eaten because you have a half-eaten piece of fruit in your hand. I'm disturbed by this. This is a terrible, terrible mistake. The most important thing for us to do right now is to get it straightened out with God. When God begins to walk in the garden in the cool of the day, as He does

The Man Who Went Along to Get Along

every day, well, we're going to have to go into the garden, and you're going to have to tell God what you did. I'll be right there with you. I'll be right beside you, and we'll tell God that something awful has happened. We'll admit to this fault, and we'll see what God will do about it."

Of course, I'm making this up! Obviously, Adam didn't say anything like that, did he? Have you ever stopped to consider how different the history of mankind might have been if he had? But he didn't. Notice what the Scripture says; "...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her and he ate" (v 6). Just like that. Whew! As far as this record is concerned, no argument, no resistance. She gives the fruit to him, and he eats it.

Later on in the day, the Lord is walking in the cool of the garden, and Adam and Eve, who have now felt shame over their nakedness, have put on some fig leaf aprons and have hidden in the garden. God says, "Where are you, Adam?" (v 9)

Adam said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v 10).

God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (v 11)

Then comes the classic statement. Not only did sin start in the garden of Eden, but passing the buck started in the garden of Eden, too. Adam says, "The woman gave it to me." The buck is passed to Eve, but also to God: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (v 12). Well, what do you know? "God, You're to blame. You gave me this woman. Now look what she's done to me."

Now don't think that men have never thought, felt, or spoken that way since the garden of Eden. "Lord, why in the world did You give me a wife like this? Why did You bring this woman into my life? Look how she's ripping my whole life apart." Of course, he's conveniently forgetting that when he married her, he thought she was the best thing this side of fried chicken. But when it goes wrong, "Ooh. Why did You do this to me?"

Now, Adam is passing the buck. I want you to see that clearly. Wouldn't you expect him to go on and say, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the fruit, and I said, 'No, no, no. I can't do this.' She said to me, 'Please do it.' She pleaded with me, begged me, and nagged me and nagged me and nagged me. She wouldn't speak to me for five hours. And finally, Lord, I couldn't take it anymore, and I ate."

You don't find that here, do you? But you better believe if he could have said it, he would have. He's already passing the blame to Eve. He's already passing the blame to God. But notice: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (v 12). As simple and as easy as that. Adam can't say, "I resisted this. I pushed her away from me. I fought with her over this." No. "She gave me of the tree, and I ate."

You know, Adam is the world's number one pushover — number one — first, because he was the first man, and second because, as the New Testament says in 1 Timothy 2:14a, "And Adam was not deceived." He wasn't fooled by any of this. The woman was deceived by the serpent, but the man was not deceived. He knew what he was doing. Without the smallest amount of resistance, as far as the Scriptural record is concerned, he just went ahead and did it. Why?

Now, I want to make a suggestion, and in doing so I may run afoul of the male fraternity. It is my opinion that one of the greatest fears married men have is the fear of losing intimacy with their wives. Let me repeat that. I think one of the greatest fears married men have is the fear of losing intimacy with their wives — personal intimacy

The Man Who Went Along to Get Along

and physical intimacy. Now, I don't find anything particularly wrong with the word *sex*, but I'm not going to use it here. Given the harsh overtones that the word *sex* sometimes has in the culture, I think it may be better to use the term *physical intimacy*. That is, after all, what God created in the marital relationship from the very beginning.

Now, I want you to think very carefully about the position Adam was in at the moment his wife came up with this piece of fruit. You have got to put yourself in his place. Remember that Adam knew what it meant to be alone. For a while he was the only created human being, and remember that God said, "It is not good that man should be alone."¹ God began to bring the animals He had created to man. Adam named all the animals, but not one of these animals was a suitable companion for him. God then made Adam go to sleep, and while Adam was asleep, God took out one of his ribs, and He created the first woman. When Adam woke up, there she was. I am sure she was marvelously beautiful — perfect from head to toe.

They began a life of complete and total harmony. The only perfect marriage that has ever taken place on the face of the earth took place between Adam and Eve before the Fall. Think about it for a minute. They never fought. Neither partner was ever selfish. Eve would say, "What do you want to eat tonight, Adam?" Adam would reply, "Peaches. But what would you like to eat, Eve?" Eve may have answered, "Apples." So Adam said, "Let's do it your way." They never disagreed. Beyond all that, they had physical intimacy such as no two human beings have ever known in the history of the world. The intimacy and perfection of their relationship with each other day by day found its consummation and fulfillment in the physical intimacy that they were able to have with each other.

Now, remember that Eve had never known what it was to be alone. She was created when there was already a man there. But the man knew what it was like to be alone. When Eve came to Adam and said to him, "Here, eat this," for the very first time he was confronted with the possibility of creating a breach between himself and his wife, of having the first disagreement of their whole marital experience, and of giving her the first criticism that he had ever given her. Can you imagine this? He knew what it had been like to be alone, and he knew what it was like to be with this wonderful, wonderful, wonderful woman. When she said to him, "Eat of it," he said, "Okay. Okay." He was not willing to risk the intimacy, the oneness, the union that he had with his wife in order to be obedient to God or, for that matter, to look out for Eve's interests.

So, what should he have done? He should certainly have said something like I suggested previously: "No, Eve, we can't. We'll have to go to God and talk about this. I don't know what this means for our relationship, but we have to get it straightened out with God." How do I know he should have done that? Because of the model for married love that is given to us in the New Testament, and because the Modeler of married love is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Ephesians 5:25-27a:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her; that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

What is the model for man's love for his wife? It is the love of Christ for the Church.

¹ Genesis 2:18

The Man Who Went Along to Get Along

It is the love that drives the Lord Jesus Christ to sacrifice everything for the Church.

And notice something in the above passage: The Lord Jesus Christ is not saying, “Oh well, I’ve saved her, I’ve justified her, and she’s pretty good. I can live with that.” No. He continues to work with her “...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (v 27). The smallest imperfection in the Church is a burden to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. That, husbands, is the model for your love to your wife. Isn’t it clear that when Adam took the fruit from Eve, he wasn’t thinking of what was good for Eve? He was protecting himself. He was protecting the relationship that he thought he had to have.

Have you ever heard something like this? A man’s friend says to him, “You know, I hate to tell you this. I don’t like to talk about your wife, but she is a terrible gossip. She’s gossiping all the time.” The man says, “Yes, I know that. I’ve tried to bring it up once or twice, but every time I do, it ticks her off so bad, she burns the supper meat that night and won’t talk to me for three days. When it gets really bad, I sleep on the couch for a week. So, I won’t bring it up anymore. I don’t talk to her about that. It’s bad for the marriage.” Is that the model of love?

Now guys, be very careful here. I don’t want you sitting your wife down and saying, “Here are the spots and wrinkles in your Christian life that I think we need to deal with right away,” because I don’t want you later contacting me to say, “Zane, I took your advice, and she kicked me out of the house.” Let me give you a piece of advice that Jesus gave about helping other people. Do you remember that Jesus said in Matthew 7: 3-5, “Why are you thinking about the little speck of wood in your brother’s eye, and you’re not paying attention to the log that is in your own eye? First,” says Jesus, “cast the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast the speck out of your brother’s eye.” If you do what I suggested that you not do, more likely than your wife kicking you out of the house is that, when you have listed all the little specks in her spiritual life, she will list all the logs in your life. Chances are excellent that that could happen.

So what does that mean? It means, first of all: Husbands, get your act together. Your model of behavior toward your wife is nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Your attitude, your tone of voice, your decisions — everything — have to be modeled on the character of the Savior. When you are behaving in a Christlike manner toward your wife, then God will be able to give you the skill, the wisdom, the love, and the grace to deal with the problems that she has in her spiritual life — but probably not before that.

I’m very fond of the story about the grandmother who was being honored on her 60th wedding anniversary. During the course of the celebration, a younger woman who was having trouble in her marriage approached the grandmother and said, “Tell me, what is the secret of your happy and enduring marriage?” The grandmother said, “Well, on the day I was married, I made up my mind that I would write down a list of ten faults of my husband which, for the sake of my marriage, I would overlook.” So the younger woman said, “Well, tell me what were the ten faults of your husband that you wrote down?” The grandmother replied, “Well, to tell you the truth, I never got around to writing them down. But,” she said, “every time my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I always said to myself, ‘Lucky for him, that’s one of the ten.’”

Now I hope that you guys are lucky enough to be married to a woman who does that. You probably need to be married to a woman that does that! (And I hope, by the way, wives, that you will do that.) Now let me tell you something. If I were married and I thought that my wife could sit down at the writing table and, in the blink of her eye,

The Man Who Went Along to Get Along

write down ten huge faults that I have, I should probably quit. Maybe I'm smart not to have married. But let me just tell you that if I thought my wife could do that, I would be horribly ashamed and embarrassed. I would feel that somehow or other I was not loving my wife as Christ loves the Church. Get rid of the logs so that you can see clearly to help your wife.

I'll close the chapter with a story my mother told me. I believe she told me this story the last time I visited her. When my brother, David, and I were growing up, my dad had a grungy, ugly, dilapidated old cap that he liked to wear when he was working in the garden. Everybody in the family hated it, except my father. So, as my mother told the story, one day my dad was out gardening and he had this cap on. She was at the sink, and from there she could look through the window and see him gardening. David came up to her and said, "Mother, I wish that Dad wouldn't wear that ugly old hat when he goes out into the garden. I hate that cap." My mother told me that she answered, "Yes, David, I know. But your father is so superior to other men that I think we can put up with a few things like that, don't you?" She reminded me of this story after my father had gone, after she had lived with him for 66 years. Did a husband ever get a better compliment than that? I wonder. I kind of doubt it. I will tell you that one of the greatest privileges I have ever had was being raised by a dad who was probably one of the most Christlike men I have ever known. I am lucky if I'm half as much like Christ as he was. Now, that was a man who could help his wife.

My advice to you men is to start behaving like the Lord Jesus Christ in your relationship to your woman, wife, and sweetheart. Then, as God gives you wisdom and grace to do it, help her with her weaknesses, her needs, and her deficiencies.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her; that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.²

That is not easy. Nobody said it would be. But it is possible through the grace and power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

² Ephesians 5:25-27a

Chapter 3

The Married Couple Who Played Hide-and-Seek

We find the story of “The Married Couple Who Played Hide-and-Seek” in Genesis 3:8-13.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Imagine that you’re sitting out on your front porch with your spouse on a Dallas evening enjoying the cool evening breeze, and suddenly from inside your house comes the sound of a wild crash and shattering glass, followed by a deafening silence. So you get up and go into your living room, and there you find that your favorite flower vase has fallen to the floor, cracked, with flowers and pieces of glass scattered all around it. You pause for a moment, and you know that your young son or young daughter is in the house somewhere, but there’s not a sound to be heard from anywhere. You engage in a search and eventually open the door to the den. There is your son or daughter, as the case might be, pretending to be deeply absorbed in the TV program they are watching and acting as if nothing out of the ordinary has occurred. So you say to them, “What happened to my favorite flower vase?”

Your son or your daughter says, “It fell off the table, and it broke.”

You say, “Well, how did it break? Were you playing in the living room like I always told you not to do?”

Then your son or your daughter says, “The cat ran into the living room, and I went after it. I bumped into the table, and the flower vase fell off and broke.” Now, if your son or daughter gave you an answer like this, the reason is that your son is a son of Adam, or your daughter is a daughter of Eve. Here is the answer you probably will not get: “Mom, Dad, I understood what you told me I shouldn’t do. I was running around in the living room, and I bumped into the table. I knocked the flower vase off and broke it.” If you did not get an answer like that, well that is because from the very earliest years, the children of Adam and Eve are experts at avoiding that long ugly word spelled R-E-S-P-O-N-S-I-B-I-L-I-T-Y. From the earliest years they know how to avoid responsibility.

What happens when we grow up? Do we give up that childish practice? No, we don’t. We’re better at it than ever because now we’ve had all these years of experience and practice. Even as the grown-up children of Adam and Eve, we avoid responsibility

whenever we can. That leads me to say this: One of the greatest problems that can occur in marriage is marriage partners who avoid responsibility. Or to put it another way, marriage partners who play hide-and-seek.

Maybe you noticed in our opening Bible passage that on the very day that the first married couple made the first mistake in human history — it could arguably be called the worst mistake in human history — on that very day, before it was over, they were playing hide-and-seek. They were hiding, and God was seeking. Did you notice that the Bible tells us here that “they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves” (v 8). Where? “Among the trees of the garden” (v 8). Dumb, don’t you agree? Dumb, dumb, dumb! I mean, the Person they were hiding from was the Creator of them and the garden. He was the all-wise, the all-seeing, the all-knowing God. Somehow Adam and Eve figured they could hide from Him behind some trees.

The psalmist knew better, didn’t he? Remember his words in Psalm 139:7b-12:

Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold,
You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,”
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

If I took a spaceship and went all the way to Venus and hid behind the vapors that are supposed to be on the planet Venus, even there God would see me. There is no hiding from the Lord God Almighty, and yet the children of Adam try to do it over and over and over again.

There they were, the first man and his wife, hiding from God behind some trees. You know how it used to go when you played hide-and-seek as a kid? The seeker gets frustrated and says, “Billy, where are you? Cy, where are you?” Well, it’s almost as if the all-knowing God is entering into the little game that Adam and Eve are trying to play with Him, and He says to Adam, “Where are you? Where are you, Adam?”

Adam replies, “Here I am, Lord, right behind this pear tree. Lord, I’m hiding here because I disobeyed You and ate from the fruit of the tree that You told us not to eat from.” That’s not in our Bibles, is it? Not there at all. Adam says, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself” (v 10).

Stop and think about that for a moment. That is an answer that doesn’t explain anything — nothing. Had he heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden before? Obviously he had, because he recognized it, but he’d never hidden before. Furthermore, he had always been naked and he had never been afraid of that before. So, Adam’s answer to the Lord is a smokescreen, a verbal smokescreen. It’s a reason that doesn’t

give the reason. Don't you see what Adam has done? He's moved from hiding behind the tree to hiding behind empty words.

Let me say to all who are born-again Christians that although we are saved by the grace of God, we maintain our relationship with God, our harmony with God, and our fellowship with God, only by accepting our responsibility. Remember the words of the Apostle John in 1 John 1:6: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." But 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What does God want of His children? Right up front, He wants the willingness to accept responsibility for the things that we have done wrong. That is something we often fail to do.

Now I can almost hear somebody saying, "Well Zane, I think I already know that. I know we're supposed to accept our responsibility before God, but I thought this book was about marriage. What does that have to do with marriage?" Stay tuned!

Let's go back to the verbal smokescreen that Adam is attempting to employ. God says to him, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (v 11) Bingo! Bullseye! Dead right! So Adam says, "You got me, Lord. I admit it. That's exactly what I did. I disobeyed You, and I ate of the tree." Again, that is not what Adam said. What did he say? "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate it" (v 12). Do you see what Adam is doing? He first started by hiding behind a tree, then he continued by hiding behind his own verbal smokescreen, and now he is hiding behind his spouse.

Now ladies, don't relax here. Ladies are every bit as good at this behavior as men are. Avoiding responsibility by hiding behind your spouse is an equal opportunity, full-time occupation, and there are literally thousands and thousands of husbands and wives who have busily engaged in it all over the country — hiding from God behind your spouse. My thought is that when God gets a little too close to us, when His Word begins to make us a little uncomfortable in our hearts and our consciences, one of the easiest places to hide is not in the shrubs and bushes outside our home, or even in one of the darkest closets in our house. One of the easiest places to hide is behind our spouse.

Can you imagine a marital counseling session that goes like this: Here's a husband and wife who are having real trouble, and they're sitting in the office of the marriage counselor, and the husband says, "Before we start, Mr. Counselor, I want to list my faults as a husband." He lists his faults and never says one word of criticism about his wife. Then the wife says, "Before we start, Mr. Counselor, I would like to tell you my faults as a wife." She lists all her faults as a wife and never criticizes her husband at all. The counselor says, "Session over. Go home and work on your faults." Are there any of you who think there is such a marriage counseling session that occurs like that? If you do, you are not living on the same planet that I'm living on.

Let me tell you what many marriage counseling sessions are like. They are like a slash and burn operation — slash and burn. The husband says, "My wife does this, and she says this, and she has this attitude." The wife says, "My husband does this, and he says this, and he has this attitude." The counselor is there saying, "What a mess. What a horrendous mess. Where do I start?" Well, maybe you want to say to me, "Zane, you don't understand. I never blame my wife for my faults. I always blame her for hers." Or the wife says, "I never blame my husband for my faults. I always blame him for his." Really? Really?

Let me give you a complete-the-sentence test. The sentence starts, “If it were not for my spouse I would” There are lots of options for completing the following sentences.

If it were not for my spouse, I would be more dedicated to God.

If it were not for my spouse, I would come to church more often than I do.

If it were not for my spouse, I would read my Bible more often and I would pray harder.

If It were not for my spouse, I would be more involved with the church and I would be serving the Lord more than I am.

The options are almost endless.

Now folks, you don't have to say those words to God. If you say them in your heart, if you think them in your heart, you are hiding behind your spouse. First and foremost, each and every one of us must come to God and fully accept the responsibility for our failures and our sins. Then, as needed, we need to accept them in the presence of our spouse.

Isn't it too bad that Eve did not have the equal opportunity to blame her husband on this occasion? When God asks her, “What is this that you have done?” what can she possibly say about her husband? Adam has never displeased her from the day she was created. Even on this very day, he has pleased her by eating of the fruit that she herself has eaten of. It would not have been in any way credible for her to pass any blame on to her husband. So she falls back on the excuse of last resort, the last desperate effort to avoid responsibility. She says, “The devil made me do it.” “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (v 13).

May I suggest to you that one of the reasons we find it so easy to blame a husband or wife and hide behind them is because, more often than not, we can make a good case out of it. We can make it sound very plausible. “You know, my husband does this, so how can you blame me for it?” Or, “You know, my wife, she's like this, and how can you blame me for it?” But this story shows us that even when we cannot hide behind our spouses, if we are determined to hide, we will find something to hide behind. “If you only understood the kind of home I grew up in...” “If you only understood the kind of environment that I work in...” “If you only understood the problems that I have...” And failing all else, “The devil made me do it.” As long as we are determined to hide from God, our spouses are a convenient hiding place when we can make it sound plausible.

Did it ever occur to you that after this incident was over there should have been some apologies exchanged between Adam and Eve? Adam should and could have said to his wife, “Eve, I'm so ashamed that God confronted me with my sin and I tried to blame you. I should never have done that. I'm sorry. It was wrong for me to try to blame you.” Eve could and should have said, “Adam, I was stupid enough to believe the lie of the devil, and I ate of that fruit, and then I made it even worse by coming to you and trying to drag you down with me. I'm sorry. I apologize for that.” Did Adam and Eve ever have a conversation like that? I don't know. But the only relevant question is: Do you ever have a conversation like that with your spouse — your husband or your wife?

Now you may wonder how Zane knows about this, but let me tell you how apologies often go inside a marriage: “Honey, I realize that it wasn’t all your fault. I made some mistakes, too.” Notice those magical three-letter words *all* and *too*. The interpretation of that is: “Some of it really is your fault, you know. I’m certainly not the only one who made mistakes.” There is that wonderful fabric softener called *mistake* — not *sin*, mind you, not *evil*, *wicked*, or *wrong*. “I made a mistake.”

Now folks, that’s not the way we go to God and talk to God, is it? I hope not. I hope you do not go to God and say, “Lord, I made a mistake.” You’re supposed to say, “Lord, I have sinned.” Then God does not say to you, “I’m going to give fifty percent of the responsibility for your sin to you, and fifty percent to your wife,” or vice versa. God does not split the difference between us like we often try to split the difference, right? I am one hundred percent responsible for my sin, and you are one hundred percent responsible for yours. The husband is one hundred percent responsible for what he does wrong, no matter what his wife has said or done. The wife is one hundred percent responsible for what she has done, no matter what her husband has said or done.

So here is how an apology ought to work: “Honey, what I said was wrong. What I did was wrong. The attitude I had was wrong. I am sorry, and I apologize for that.” Are you making apologies like that to the partner you have married? If you never have an occasion to make that kind of apology to your partner, allow me to suspect that you are not just hiding from your partner. You are probably hiding from God, and you are refusing to acknowledge before God the complete responsibility for what you have done wrong. To put it another way, if you are trying to avoid responsibility by hiding behind your spouse, you are still engaged in the childhood game of hide-and-seek.

Chapter 4

I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

— Hebrews 13:4

A very good case could be made that the subject of this chapter, physical intimacy in marriage, is one from which a bachelor ought to run away as fast as his two feet will carry him. But an almost equally good case can be made that if I don't discuss this, you may never get a full scriptural treatment of it. So, with perhaps more courage than wisdom, I shall proceed!

While the commonly used word for this subject is *sex*, I prefer to use the term *physical intimacy*. God's Word includes several passages that deal with physical intimacy in marriage. I will begin with three passages from this book's Scriptural core, chapters two and three of Genesis:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

— Genesis 2:21-25

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”

— Genesis 3:6-11

I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.
Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

— Genesis 3:20-21

Suppose you had never heard the story of the temptation and fall of man before, and you get to the place in the story where the devil succeeds in getting the woman to eat the fruit, and she takes the fruit and gives it to her husband. If, not knowing the rest of the story, you were then asked, "What was the first effect of sin on the man and the woman?" you might say, "Well, they fell over dead," because, after all, they had been threatened that eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would lead to death. Or you might say, "They got very, very sick, because what they ate was a piece of fruit that was probably poisoned." Or you might say, "Well, they probably went out of their heads a little bit and started running around the garden wildly, and they were kind of temporarily insane." There are a lot of other things that you might guess.

But, unless you already knew the story, I am betting that you would not guess the correct answer. What was the first effect that sin had on Adam and Eve, as recorded in the Scriptures? Here it is: They became ashamed of their own bodies. May I repeat that? They became ashamed of their own bodies. Notice that right after the man eats, we read, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings" (3:7). They are embarrassed by the fact that they are naked.

A little bit later on, when they hear the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hide themselves. Then, when God says to Adam, "Where are you?" Adam says, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (3:10). God's answer is very revealing: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" "If you are suddenly conscious of your nakedness," says God, "it's probably — it is certainly — because you have committed sin."

The first effect of sin on the man and the woman was embarrassment about their own bodies, and that wasn't the way it was before sin, was it? When God made a deep sleep fall on Adam, took out a rib and created the woman, and then brought her to Adam to be his helpmate, Adam was glad to see her, and he called her name *Woman*. Then we are told that, ". . . they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (2:25).

So my first point is a very simple one: Shame about our bodies is the effect of sin, not the effect of Creation. It is a very natural extension of that to say that shame about the physical intimacy between husband and wife (which generally takes place with the body unclothed) is a natural outgrowth, the natural result, of the initial effect of sin on the man and the woman. I want to suggest that the children of Adam and Eve have never been able to completely escape their embarrassment about their bodies and about the physical intimacy that takes place in marriage.

Now you may want to say, "Looking at our society and culture today, I don't think that's right. It appears to me that people have lost their shame. So now we get dirty jokes on all these talk shows and sitcoms. Now we have pornographic materials sold at any number of stores. Now we get nudity on the television and movie screens." Our initial impression is that the society has lost its embarrassment.

I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed

But let us not jump to conclusions. Sometimes the way human beings hide their basic shame is to get out front and pretend that they are not ashamed. If you take a second look at our culture, you will notice that there are still laws about public nudity that the police enforce. There are still laws about pornographic material and about how old you have to be before it is legal to sell you that material. There are rating systems for movies that warn us about the possibility of nudity and other types of explicit content. So, I don't think the culture has outgrown its embarrassment.

One of the most embarrassing experiences of President Bill Clinton's¹ life was almost certainly the public revelation of his affair with White House staffer Monica Lewinsky. In a speech to the nation, he admitted to having an inappropriate relationship with Miss Lewinsky. (He did not use the term *sexual relationship*.) A lot of Americans didn't want to hear about it. They wouldn't talk about it or think about it. Many Americans probably thought, "I wouldn't like my privacy invaded the way the media and the legal investigative committee are invading the president's privacy." This response shows, I think, that our culture still retains a very powerful undercurrent of embarrassment about physical intimacy and about the unclothed human body.

But I'm not particularly concerned with our culture. I'm concerned with Christian couples because this embarrassment that is part of our inheritance from Adam and Eve can invade the bedroom and impair the physical intimacy that should exist between husband and wife.

Many years ago I was talking with a young friend who was getting ready to be married. I was scheduled to perform the ceremony, and I did so. We were talking about the physical intimacy that takes place in marriage. We were not talking about immorality, the improper use of physical intimacy. I will never forget what he said to me. He said, "I know it's a sin, but . . ." I don't remember the rest of what he said because I was struck by the fact that he was talking about the physical intimacy within a marriage. He said, "I know" — not "I think" — "I know that this is sin." I sat there and thought to myself, "This young man does not understand the Bible, and his opinion about physical intimacy in marriage is the exact opposite of the Bible." You may ask, "How do you know that?" Answer: The Bible tells me so.

This chapter opened with Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed [obviously a reference to physical intimacy] undefiled." By contrast, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge." That is unclean. That is legitimately embarrassing. That is something God will deal with. But marriage is honorable, and physical intimacy is not defiled.

When I used to teach kids, one of my favorite questions to ask was, "Who is stricter, God or the devil?" I loved to ask that question because they always got it wrong. Always! They never answered it correctly. They always told me that God was stricter because their image of the devil was that the devil is the person who taps you on the shoulder and says, "Go out and do anything you want to. Break all the commandments. Do what you want to." So, the answer I always got was that God is stricter than the devil.

I said, "No, the devil can actually be stricter than God," and then I referred them to 1 Timothy 4:1-3:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith,

¹ William Jefferson Clinton, 42nd President of the United States, 1993-2001

I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed

giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

What do the demons teach? Well, if the devil can't get to you by persuading you to break all the rules and kick all the traces, he's got another method. He tells you, "Physical satisfaction is wrong." Have you ever heard the expression, "It was so wonderful, it was sinful"? That testifies to the innate feeling which human beings have that if it's really, really wonderful, if it's really, really enjoyable — especially as concerns the body — well then something must be wrong with it. God could not intend us to be so happy. But that is not what the Bible teaches at all.

Before man fell into sin, there was absolutely no sense of guilt or shame as the man and woman lived together totally unclothed. I can imagine that physical intimacy between them was the most beautiful thing one could possibly imagine: two people in total harmony, two people in total love with God and with each other, enjoying this wonderful gift that God had given them.

That leads me to my second point: In a Christian marriage, if either party in the marriage approaches physical intimacy with a sense of guilt, that can seriously impair the marriage. Talk to any marriage counselor and I'm quite sure they will tell you what I'm about to tell you because I've heard it from people who have studied the problems that exist in marriage. One of the major problems in many marriages is that the husband and wife are poorly adjusted at the level of their physical intimacy with each other. When there is something wrong in this, which is the most intimate experience a man and a woman can have together, there will be something wrong with the marriage. And because of this poor adjustment, marriages have been known to dissolve and end in divorce.

One of the first things that all Christian couples — man and woman alike — should get hold of is that, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed is undefiled."² It is clean in the sight of God. Consider 1 Corinthians 7:1-5:

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another [the Greek word for *deprive* here is a word that can also be translated *rob* or *deform*, so another translation could be, "do not rob 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.

If we really understand that the physical intimacy between a husband and his wife is a gift from God — it is holy in God's sight — it's only logical to conclude that we are to

² Hebrews 13:4

give it liberally to our partner in marriage unless it be “. . . with consent [by agreement] that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (v 5). Then, after the time is over, He says, “...come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you.”

So guys, the husband doesn't have this authority in his marriage. He cannot go to his wife and say, “Look, I'm the head of the family. We're not going to be intimate for 30 days so I can fast and pray.” He can't do that. That is not his area of authority. He will have to get agreement from his wife. And his wife will also have to get agreement from him. If you do it without the agreement of the other party, you are robbing your spouse.

Now, what really happens in marriages? Well, even us bachelors know some of this. The husband thinks, *Ever since I got home from work, my wife has been nagging the life out of me, complaining about this and complaining about that, and now she wants to be intimate. No way.* But aloud he says, “I'm sorry, honey. I had a tough day at work and I'm too tired.” The husband just robbed his wife, folks. The wife thinks, *Ever since he got home he's hardly said a word to me. First, he buried himself in the newspaper and then he spent hours watching the sports on television, and now he wants to be intimate. No way.* “I'm sorry, honey. Not tonight. I have a headache.” What has the wife done? She has just robbed her husband.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I know there are times when sensitive husbands and wives will realize, *Yeah, my spouse is tired out. He or she really does have a headache.* Or, *The kids are sick, and we have to be jumping up every five minutes to take care of them.* Now, let me make this emphatic: If you say *no* without having a really, really good reason for saying *no*, you have not only sinned against your spouse, you've sinned against God. I didn't make this up, folks. This is what the Bible teaches.

So, surprise! When you have physical intimacy with your husband or wife, you are not sinning. It is when you don't that you may be sinning. Now, that leads me to one last observation. Quite obviously, the covering of fig leaves which the man and woman rapidly sewed together for themselves was not quite successful. So, when God came into the garden, they were embarrassed, and they went behind the trees and shrubs and tried to hide out.

At the end of our story, what do we find? We find that, “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin and clothed them” (3:21). He was not going to leave them embarrassed. It's possible, of course, that God could have made tunics of skin just appear out of thin air, but neither I nor anyone else thinks He did that. In all probability God had to kill one or more animals in order to get tunics of skin. So even though the man and woman didn't die when they ate the fruit, somebody else died. Because of the sinfulness of man, innocent creatures died that day, and God took their skins to clothe the man and the woman.

Now it has often been pointed out, and I think correctly so, that here we have the first example of animals being killed because of the sin of man. This theme runs all the way through the Old Testament in the sacrificial system. We know that all the animal sacrifices looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”³

I want to conclude this chapter by making a very simple suggestion: If you suffer from a sense of shame or guilt or anything like that in the process of physical intimacy, you

³ John 1:29b

need to remember the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, when you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God washed you of all your sins. He dressed you. He dressed you in the robe of His own righteousness. He covered up everything that you need to be ashamed of. You are free to enter into physical intimacy with your partner because the sacrifice of Christ has covered everything.

Now let's face the facts, shall we? A lot of people, when they get married today, are not having physical intimacy for the first time. They have had it before in situations that God did not approve of, in situations that were wrong. When that has happened, it is very easy to bring into marriage the feeling, "I'm dirty. I'm already dirty." And if the person already thought that physical intimacy is always dirty, they'll feel even dirtier when they are engaged in physical intimacy with their spouse.

So, what is the solution to our embarrassment? May I suggest that it is faith? Just as we are saved by faith in Christ, so we should enter the physical intimacy of marriage with faith: faith, first of all, that our sins are all forgiven by the blood of the Savior; secondly, faith that God's Word is true when He says, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled";⁴ and thirdly, faith that in acting as we do with our spouse, we are obeying the Lord, we are doing what is pleasing in His sight.

How many parents, how many husbands and wives, enter into physical intimacy that way? I don't know the answer, but if you do not have this kind of guilt-free experience before God, then the chances are good that you're not believing something God has told you in the Scriptures.

You know, if I were a parent and had kids reaching adolescence, I would want to have a talk with them. If I had a boy, I'd do the talking myself, but if it was a girl, I'd let my wife do the talking. I think the talk should go something like this: "Son, in the years from now on, you're going to find that you have physical feelings and desires that are new to you and strange. They sometimes seem hard to control. The first thing I want to tell you is that there's nothing wrong with these feelings. There's nothing wrong with these desires. That's the way God has made us. He has created us to have these desires.

"Now, God wants us to use these desires and satisfy these desires in an appropriate way, and God's way of satisfying these desires is within the framework of marriage. If you try to fulfill these desires outside of marriage, you will find that the results are very bad. You will find that you feel guilty about it. You will find that when you finally do get married, your experience of this with your spouse may be diminished. It may be tarnished. It may be damaged. So the very best thing you can do is to reserve yourself for the life partner God will give you. And then, within that life partnership, be happy to give this satisfaction to your partner and to enjoy the process of giving."

Now, if you're a parent and that is not your philosophy, how can you talk to your kids like that? You can't. If there's any problem in this area, let's deal with it before God. Make sure that if and when you do talk to your kids, you're not being a hypocrite. Make sure that what you tell them about the proper experience of physical intimacy is the experience you actually accept and believe in and enjoy with your partner.

Bottom line: The next time you are physically intimate with your partner in marriage, say to yourself, "I'm so thankful for this wonderful privilege of giving pleasure to my partner." Don't enter it selfishly. Think in terms of it being a gift that you give to your partner: "I'm so glad that God has privileged me to give this to my partner in marriage."

⁴ Hebrews 13:4

I'm Ashamed, You're Ashamed

Then remember what the Bible said, what Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁵ If marriage partners would stop being so selfish, would stop feeling so guilty, and would instead treat this intimacy as a privilege that God has put into their hands to give happiness to their partner, it would not only reshape the experience of physical intimacy, it would immeasurably improve their marriage.

⁵ Acts 20:35

Chapter 5

No More Fairy Tale

Two are better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls,
For he has no one to help him up.
Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

To the woman He said:

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:

“Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat of it, all the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:16-19

Of all the movies I saw when I was a little boy, none of them impressed me more than Walt Disney’s famous animated film *Snow White*. Snow White lived out in a forest in a house that was owned by seven dwarfs. At an early stage of my childhood, I had rubber figures of all seven of the dwarfs and even a rubber figure of Snow White (which was less durable and didn’t last as long as the others). To this day I can give you the names of the seven dwarfs in correct order: Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Sneezy, Bashful and Dopey. Every day they walked out and marched to work. Doc was always in the front, and Dopey brought up the rear. And, of course, they sang that delightful song, “Heigh-

ho, heigh-ho, it's off to work we go." So, they went to work. Then every evening they came marching back in the same order with Doc in front and Dopey behind. This time, of course, they sang, "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's home from work we go."

Now all the time they were out working during the day, Snow White was back at the house alone, and she daydreamed about her future. Who could ever forget that beautiful song, "I'm Wishing"? She made a wish beside a wishing well, and of course what she was wishing for was a gallant, handsome prince who would come into her life and sweep her off her feet and carry her away so that she and he could live happily ever after. She also sang the song "Someday My Prince Will Come." Now if you know the story, you know what happened. She ate a poisoned apple and went into a death-like coma from which the seven dwarfs could not rouse her. But one day her prince came, and there she was. When he kissed her, she came back to life again and woke up from her coma. He took her on his horse, and they rode away to live happily ever after.

I would like to suggest that the story of Snow White is a good example of what we could call the fairytale version of marriage. Now when I was a little boy, it was still possible to dream about a fairytale marriage. In those days people did not divorce as frequently as they do today. The latest figures, I understand, are that in a given year, about 50% of marriages will end in divorce. But when I was a little boy, people stayed together, and divorce was kind of a stigma. In fact, it would not have been surprising in my day to have somebody in the neighborhood say, "You see so-and-so over there? He or she is divorced!" So as a little boy — especially if you lived in a home where the marriage was happy — you could imagine that someday a beautiful princess would come into your life. She would be madly sweet and agreeable. We would get married and live happily ever after.

Now things have changed. Back in my day, Ronald Reagan¹ could have never been elected president because he had divorced and remarried. Back in my day, Bob Dole² could not have run for president because he also, as I understand, left his first wife and married Liddy.³ Of course, things have not gotten any better since then, and now we have immorality in the White House.⁴ If the polls are to be believed, a lot of people don't think that makes any big difference.

If it is really true that 50% of marriages collapse, that means approximately 50% of the kids who grow up in America come from broken homes. It is very, very hard to have positive ideas about marriage if you come out of a home where the marriage has been unhappy. I would say the reality is probably that not too many people actually dream about fairytale marriages.

After I got a little bit older, I realized that *fairytale* would not necessarily describe even the marriages of people who stayed together. A lot of times people stay together who are in very unhappy marriages with very little love and very little fellowship. They are staying together because society expects it or because of the children or something like that. I want to suggest — and at least this is good — that most of us have left behind the idealism and fantasy that sometimes comes to us when we are young, and that as we look forward to marriage, we realize there are no more fairy tales.

Did you know that there has only been one real fairytale marriage in the whole history

¹ Ronald Wilson Reagan was the 40th president of the United States, 1981-1989.

² Robert Joseph Dole was the Republican presidential nominee in 1996.

³ Elizabeth Mary Alexander Hanford Dole

⁴ Reference to President Bill Clinton's affair with White House staffer Monica Lewinsky.

No More Fairy Tale

of the world? That fairytale marriage occurred in the garden of Eden and went on as long as the man and the woman obeyed God and did not fall into sin. Stop and think about it for a moment, if you will. The only two people in the garden were Adam and Eve, and they saw each other all the time. Now I have heard rumors — since I don't know this firsthand — that sometimes, when a man retires and he is around the house all the time, the woman wishes he were back at work. Having the guy around the house is a bit much because it maybe interferes with what the wife is used to doing by herself for a large part of the day.

But think of it, Adam and Eve were the only two people in the garden. They could thoroughly enjoy each other's company. They never had an argument. Neither one of them was ever selfish. They never got mad and fought. Eve never threw pears at Adam, and Adam never threw oranges at Eve. It was perfect. It was wonderful — until sin came.

Then Satan deceived the woman into eating the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She immediately went to her husband, and he willingly ate along with her. Then when God came into the garden, they both hid from Him. When they couldn't hide any more, the man, you will remember, quickly passed the buck to his wife. Then the wife quickly passed it on to the serpent, and that left God to address all three parties.

First, He had words of condemnation for the serpent. God then had words directed to Eve and words directed to Adam. As we look at what God said to Eve and Adam, we can understand that God is really saying, "There is no more fairy tale. The fairy tale is over."

I would just like to pause here to say that the fairy tale is over when it comes to marriage. Now you are probably thinking, "Zane, tell me something I didn't know. You know, this is not exactly a hot news flash. If I ever thought that marriage was a fairy tale, I discovered within the first week of marriage that there was no fairy tale. This is a real person I was living with, and the romance, you know, simmered out of sight. Then we settled down to reality." This realization is good because it is very important for us to realize what marriage actually is and what it can be in a world that is now filled with sin, suffering, and death.

Did you notice what God said to Eve? God said, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children" (v 16). Now, I think almost everybody would agree that one of the high points of any marriage is the birth of children. If there is any time when the parents are happiest, it is when a child is born. Yet, as this makes clear, even the process of giving birth to that child who is a delight to the parents — "in pain you shall bring forth children."

There is more than that. God said, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception." I don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden of Eden before they sinned. I doubt very much that it was a very short time. I can't imagine them just living there a few days, for example, and then coming into sin. They may have lived there for many months. They may even have lived there for years. But one thing we notice is that, apparently, as long as they were in the garden, Eve never got pregnant; she never produced an offspring.

But remember that in that state of affairs, they were conditioned and programmed to live forever. There was no hurry about giving birth to children, and the reproductive system was probably much, much slower because it was part of the physical makeup of people who potentially could live forever. But now, sin and death had entered the world, and the lifespan had dramatically shortened. God said, "I will greatly multiply your

conception.” I think this implies that the process of conception and birth is speeded up for the woman so that during her few best childbearing years, she may bear a number of children.

But notice that when He said, “I will greatly multiply your conception,” He also said, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow.” Now one of the things we all love about mothers is their maternal instincts. Every one of us, I suspect without exception, loved our mother. One of the reasons we loved our mother was because she loved us so manifestly and so tenderly. She was nurturing. She was caring. She was sympathetic. She felt everything that we felt. That is wonderful, but it is also a source of suffering. Yes, the birth of a child is a wonderful and joyful event, but then the life of a child may be something quite different. What happens if the child gets sick? What happens if the child contracts an incurable disease? What happens if the child has an accident that leaves him debilitated? What happens if the child himself grows up and has an unhappy life? Who is it that has the most sorrow over that? I think it is, without question, the mother. “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception.”

I think I learned this best in my own experience when my brother David passed away and I went home to be with my parents. Both of my parents were grieved at the passing of David. Nobody expected the youngest member of the family to be the first to go. My father obviously was deeply grieved, but I very soon learned that my mother grieved in a very definite and specific way. I think it is fair to say it hurt her more to lose David than it hurt my dad, as much as it hurt my dad. I’ll never forget something my mother told me on that occasion.

Remember the story where Mary takes the infant Jesus into the temple to be circumcised and the elderly man, Simeon, takes the child Jesus into his arms? One of the things Simeon says to Mary is, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many... Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”⁵ Of course, Simeon had referenced the fact that Mary would have to watch her own Son die, and it would be like a sword driven through her heart.

I remember my mother saying to me, “You know, I now understand what Mary felt when Jesus died. It is like a sword going through you.” I knew what she was saying, but I knew there was a depth of experience there, a depth of sorrow there, that I could not enter into — no man probably can enter into — because the woman carries this child to birth, nurtures it and cares for it, and the death of a child is like a sword passing through the heart of a woman. The reality of it is that even though there is a wonderful and marvelous joy related to the bearing of children, even though there are many joys associated with the rearing of children and the future lives of children, there is nevertheless the solemn and serious reminder that as pregnancies are multiplied for the woman, so also the sorrows are multiplied.

Then, did you notice what God said to Adam? He said, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.”⁶ Remember that before the Fall, Adam was a gardener. That was his occupation. He worked in a perfect world where I assume the fruit trees grew quite naturally. There was no problem in having to fertilize anything and probably no problem with having to prune the weeds. If I may say so, Adam had the softest job in human history. He probably could go somewhere and say,

⁵ Luke 2:34-35a

⁶ Genesis 3:17

No More Fairy Tale

“I don’t feel like pruning anything in the garden at this point. Besides, it doesn’t need pruning. I don’t feel like checking out the trees. I checked them out yesterday, and there is nothing to check out.” He had it great. He had it perfect.

But now the fairy tale is over. “You, as the husband, will have to work. And the ground from which you will have to grow your food will no longer cooperate with you. In toil you shall produce fruit from the ground. Not only that,” said God, “the ground is going to produce thorns and thistles. As you work with the ground, the thorns and thistles are going to cut you and gash you. You will bleed in the work that you do. In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread all the days of your life until you return to the dust from which you were taken.”⁷

Now maybe I am giving away a Men’s Club secret here, but hopefully the men will forgive me. When men get together to talk and share their complaints with each other, you know what their chief complaint normally is? Relax, ladies. It is not you. Of course, there are things at home that they do complain about. But get a typical group of men together, and you know what they are going to complain about? Their jobs. “My, the hours on my job are absolutely inhuman. I have to get up at 2:00 am, and I get out at 5:00 pm. The boss that I work for is dreadful. I mean, he is so demanding, and he never appreciates anything. My paycheck is so pitiful compared to the work that I do. You ought to see the people that I work with. And there is a person that sits next to me, and I cannot stand that person. I don’t know why they don’t fire him.” And on and on it goes. Why? Because as far as work is concerned, we are not in Eden anymore. We are in a fallen world, in a world that is marred by death and sin.

To illustrate, let me tell you a little about my dad’s career. My dad never finished high school because he came from a large family and had to work to help the family support itself. He started out at a relatively low level. When I first became conscious of such things as work, he was working for the War Department, which is today called the Defense Department.⁸ He had entered it probably at the clerical level or something like that, but my father worked himself up the chain. Eventually he was invited to move from the Baltimore area to the Chambersburg area to become the head of personnel at the Letterkenny Army Ordnance Depot. He was the chief of personnel. He was later promoted to what amounted to being the executive assistant to the commanding officer of the depot. To put it another way, my father was the top civilian of that depot and the best paid civilian. He was a success in his career. (By the way, I found out through many sources that he was greatly admired for his integrity. He was an honest man. If somebody didn’t like him and my dad knew that he didn’t like him, my dad would bend over backwards to be fair with that guy. We used to kid my father and say, “You know, Dad, if we had to work for you, it would be better to be your enemy than to be your friend.”)

But while my dad was a very successful person in his career, you know what I never heard him say? I don’t ever remember hearing him say, “I love my work. I like what I am doing.” Never once can I recall hearing him say that. What I can recall is all the times that he brought a whole stack of papers home from work. See, he dealt with people during the day but had no time to do paperwork, so he had to do it at night and sometimes very late into the night.

⁷ Paraphrase of Genesis 3:17-19

⁸ In 2025, the title *Department of Defense* was changed back to *Department of War*.

No More Fairy Tale

And talk about working with people! If you are the head of personnel, believe me, all these big problems in personnel come in your direction. On top of that, all the people who work under you are not always angels, and you have to worry about how they are performing their jobs. Being an executive assistant to the commanding officer, he had the misfortune of running up against the Army's system of putting a colonel in command of the depot for a couple of years, and then putting another colonel in command for a couple of years, and then another. Once or twice, he got a nice colonel. Other times he got really mean Army men, hard to work with. My dad usually wound up winning the respect of the commanding officer.

I remember one colonel in particular that Dad would come home telling us about, "Colonel Coffee," who was described as *coffee* because of his bitterness. Dad had a hard time working with Colonel Coffee at first, but later Colonel Coffee came to respect my dad's integrity and work ethic and they became friends. But even though my dad enjoyed success, he never once said, "I like my work." He retired at 55, which is one of the perks of government service. He retired at 55 — at the earliest possible moment, I might add — with a very nice pension.

My dad's experience is an experience that is typical of so many men. Yes, they have to work. Yes, they have to sustain their families. But it is hard work, maybe not manually hard work, but sometimes emotionally hard work. Then there are all the "thorns and thistles" that jam your energy at work, that make it so very, very difficult.

"Well," you say, "all you have told us so far is how hard it is for the woman and how hard it is for the man — the woman whose focus is on her children and the man whose focus is on his work. It is hard, and there is no fairytale existence anymore. Why does God make it like that? Is God just mad at everybody because of what Adam and Eve did, and so He says, 'All right, I want everybody to have a hard time. I am just going to see to it that women have a hard time and men have a hard time'"? Well, I don't think that's the reason for it at all, which brings me back to Snow White.

Has it ever occurred to you that Walt Disney never made *Snow White 2*? You know why? It would not have made a good movie. I mean, can you imagine what *Snow White 2* would have been like? Here are Snow White and the charming prince. They live in this wonderful palace. They can wake up anytime they want to. The servants take care of everything. They go downstairs, and the servants have breakfast on the table. Of course, if they have a child, he is a perfect child who grows up and behaves and obeys his parents. They have nothing better to do at night than stroll their lovely gardens under the light of the moon and enjoy their marriage together. It would make a terrible movie. Dullsville, USA! Boring!

You know that the nature of human beings is such that if we did not have any troubles, if everything were smooth, we would soon get bored. That would only be the best of it because, you see, when people don't have problems and troubles they also deteriorate as people and become lazy. They become self-indulgent. They become selfish. We are kind of all those things anyway by nature, but having everything go our way all the time would make us even worse.

I think it is obvious that now, as sinners who live in a fallen world of sin, it would not be good for us to not have problems. It would not really be good for us to have marriages that were absolutely perfect from day one to the end of the line. In fact, remember what James says in the first chapter of James. He says, "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.”⁹

One of the major reasons God gives us a life and a marriage experience that is not absolutely free from suffering and hardship, from woes and sorrows, is because if we will respond to these things in a biblical way, if we respond to them in faith toward God, it can make us a better person. It can make you a better husband if you are a man. It can make you a better wife if you are a woman.

“Well,” you say, “that is true of everybody, so what advantage does the married person have? I mean, Zane, you are single and you have troubles, too. So, you know, you just double your trouble if you get married.” (I’m talking as another bachelor might talk.) No, that is not the case. Actually, it is much better to be married.

One of the things that we learn from the passage from Ecclesiastes that opened this chapter is that two are better than one. Two are better than one. You see, in this wicked world of toil and suffering and sorrow, two are always better than one. One reason the writer of Ecclesiastes gives for that is “because they have a good reward for their labor” (v 9). You know, if I work hard, produce something, and bring it home, who is there to appreciate it but me? If I get a raise in salary, who enjoys the benefits of my salary? Me. It is much happier to be able to share the fruits and rewards of labor with somebody else, your partner in life.

Then the writer of Ecclesiastes says, “For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls” (v 10). Now things happen, don’t they? Sometimes we get really big falls in our lives. Well, if we have a partner who can pick us up, encourage us, get us back on the way, that is a wonderful, wonderful blessing to have. The writer then says, “Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?” (v 11). You can turn up the heat in the home, but you never get rid of, shall we call it, the coldness of being alone. It is a wonderful blessing and privilege to have somebody there who is your life mate, who makes your life warmer, who makes your life more pleasant because they are there. “If two lie down together, they will keep warm.”

And finally the writer of Ecclesiastes says, “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him” (v 12). Both husband and wife sometimes find not only problems confronting them, but people confronting them. When your husband finds this absolutely impossible boss that he has to face every day of his life and he comes home, how wonderful it is to have a sympathetic ear from his wife. She supports him. She encourages him. She says, “Keep at it. He’s wrong. You are doing the best you can.” Same thing with the wife. She runs into problems with other people, and the husband can do the same thing for her.

What I am saying here is that because we do live in a fallen world, a world of sin and sorrow and suffering and death, marriage is a wonderful, wonderful privilege. I want you to understand that. I do not have it myself; I think that has been God’s will for me. But I certainly recommend and commend marriage because the advantages are tremendous, provided that in the marriage are partners who fill the role of partner. That both partners stand together and share the fruits of their labor together. That one partner is there to pick the other partner up when the partner falls. That both partners are there to keep their hearts warm with intimacy and closeness. That both partners are there to combat outside opposition and the troubles that arise.

⁹ James 1:2-4

No More Fairy Tale

You know that over the years I've talked to a lot of couples who are having marital problems, and when I listen to them, as somebody says in the movie *Casablanca*, "I'm shocked. Shocked!" You know why? Because usually each partner is telling me all the things that are not done for them by the other partner. "He/she does not, did not, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." How much better it would be if each partner were focused, not on what the other partner is doing for them, but on what they are contributing to the partnership. You know, if each partner would only take a truly unselfish view of marriage, I am convinced that 50 to 75 percent of all problems that exist in marriage would resolve themselves, just because the partners learn to be supportive and unselfish.

I am going to close with a story about my mother and dad. In the closing years of my dad's life, he was very, very infirm. He was, I think, legally blind. He virtually could not do a single thing by himself. He had to get up at night and go to the bathroom numerous times, as old people often do, and my mother had to get up with him every time and go to the bathroom with him. My father would say, "You have a real crock for a husband." But my mother didn't look at it that way. She didn't look at it that way at all.

In fact, one of the most moving things she ever said to me took place on my last visit with her (after my dad had gone home to be with the Lord): "I know that Z.C. [Zane's father] is happy now. These large problems that I have, for his sake, I wouldn't want him to be back here." Then she added, "If it was only up to me, I would have him back just the way he was." Because she had centered her life on supporting him in the declining years of his health, she was amazing.

Another thing that she said to me was, "Zane, I did my best to take care of Z.C, but I don't think I did a very good job." And I said to my mother, "I think you did a wonderful job. I am proud of you. I think those years were the finest years of your career as a wife." I don't remember exactly what she said to me, but she said something like, "Thank you."

My mother lived to support my father. If it were the other way around, my dad would have done exactly the same thing. He would have been there for her and supported her. That is the way marriage really ought to be. Remember what Jack Kennedy¹⁰ said in his inaugural address. He said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." So, I would ask every married person reading this to ask yourself, not what your spouse can do for you, but what you can do for your spouse.

¹⁰ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President of the United States, 1961-1963.

Chapter 6

A Helper Comparable to Him

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.

— Ecclesiastes 4:9

The account of the first marriage on Earth as recorded in Genesis, chapters two and three, has served as the scriptural core for each chapter of this book. The final chapter is no exception. We begin with Genesis 2:15, 18-24:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it...

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

And Adam said,
“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Quite a few years ago when I was still teaching on the seminary faculty, I used to go out frequently to lunch with several fellow teachers, and we always had a good time solving all the problems of the seminary and the world over lunch. But one semester came when the schedule-makers did not accommodate us very well on the basis of our class schedules, and we were going to have to eat lunch at different times. So, one of my faculty friends said to me, “Even though I won’t be eating with you, I would be glad to come out with you when I can, because I know how awful it is to eat alone.” Now the thought that was going through my mind at the time was, “That’s very nice, but I love to eat alone!” I love to eat with people, too, of course, but if I eat alone, which I frequently do, I also have a good time because I often take a magazine or a book or something else that I want to read, and I enjoy myself reading. So while I appreciated my friend’s concern for me, it didn’t exactly fit my particular situation.

A Helper Comparable to Him

I remember another faculty friend saying to me, “I just couldn’t stand to come home to an empty house and four walls.” And the thought that was going through my mind was, “I love to come home to an empty house and four walls.” I make my living teaching people, and I talk to people all day long, so it’s great to come home and not have to talk to anybody, not have to hear how their day went or tell them how my day went. I can settle down, take a nap, turn on the TV, or read the newspapers or magazines and have a great time all by myself in a house that has nobody in it but myself.

Now maybe by this time you’re thinking, “Well, Zane must be the exception to the statement God made about Adam when He said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’” Well, I’m not so sure I’m an exception to that, because the question I want to raise is: When God said that, did He mean it’s not good for a man to go home to an empty house or not have somebody to eat lunch with, or did He mean more than that? Did you notice that when He said, “It is not good for man to be alone,”¹ He did not then go on to say, “I will make him a companion”? He didn’t say that. Now undoubtedly, He did make man a companion. But what He actually said was, “I will make him a helper comparable to him.”²

Have you ever stopped to think about those words, “*a helper comparable to him*”? After reading that God said that, the next thing we read is that God has made the animals, and He brings them to Adam, and Adam gives names to all the animals. When he’s finished naming all the animals, we are told in verse 20, “But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.” I think it is obvious that each of these animals was brought to Adam not only for the task of naming them, but for Adam to consider whether any of these creatures could be what he needed to keep from being alone. Now you may say, “How can that be? Since man cannot talk to the animals and the animals can’t talk to man, they couldn’t possibly have been good companions for him.”

Are you sure of that? Have you ever stopped to think that in Genesis, chapter 3, when the serpent, who “was more cunning than any of the beast of the field,” came into the garden and said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’”³ the woman didn’t say, “Eek! You’re talking! Where did you get the ability to talk? How can you be communicating with me? What’s going on here?” She doesn’t say that, does she? She carries on a conversation with the serpent as if, “This is not the first time I’ve talked to an animal.”

Do you know the story of Balaam’s donkey, found in Numbers, chapter 22? Balaam is riding his donkey. God is angry at Balaam because he is going to meet with Balak, who wants Balaam to curse the children of Israel. On three separate occasions as Balaam travels along, the Angel of the LORD stands in the road with a drawn sword.⁴ The first two times, only the donkey sees the angel, and when the donkey turns aside to avoid the angel, Balaam whacks the animal in frustration. The third time the angel appears, the donkey just lies down with Balaam on top of it, and this time Balaam beats the donkey with his staff. Then, to our amazement, the donkey says, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”⁵ Balaam is very angry — he may have been surprised, but he’s mainly angry — and he says, “Because you have abused

¹ Genesis 2:18a

² Genesis 2:18b

³ Genesis 3:1

⁴ Numbers 22:22-30

⁵ Numbers 22:28

me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!” So the donkey says to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?” And Balaam says, “No.”⁶ Then the Lord opens Balaam’s eyes and he sees the Angel of the Lord. My point is that the donkey talks to him.

I suspect very strongly that many, if not most, of the animals — perhaps all of them — could talk at the time God brought them to Adam to get named, and that they lost the capacity to talk as a result of the Fall. It is an interesting possibility that in the kingdom of God we may be able to talk to the animals. We will see. But in any case, I do not think it is very likely that God brought all these animals to Adam and that none of them could communicate with him. Even if they could communicate with him, it seems that none of them provided Adam with what he needed.

I am going to discuss the phrase, “a helper comparable to him.”⁷ Let’s start with the word *helper*. As I have already said, God did not say, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a companion.” Neither did God say, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a lover.” And God did not say, “It is not good for man to be alone. I’ll make him a dishwasher, or somebody who will keep house.” There were no dishes to wash in the Garden of Eden and no house to keep. I think it is significant that what God wants man to have is a helper.

Now I suggested in the first chapter of this book that the obvious application of the woman being a helper is that the man had a job to do. He had a job to do in the garden. God created the man, set him in the garden of Eden, and gave him the responsibility of tending the garden and taking care of it. In Eve, Adam has a helper to help him with the job God has given him. I made the point in chapter 1 of this book that one of the major roles of the woman in a marriage is to help the man carry out his responsibilities for God, to be his helper in the work that God has called the man to do. He may not be called to preach, but there are various things that each and every man can and should do for the Lord.

Each of us has a gift, and the woman is to be her husband’s helper in that respect. That is a very important role, indeed. Why is it important? Well, stop and put yourself in Adam’s place for a minute. He’s there in the garden without Eve. Now, I don’t know what it was necessary to do in a garden where there was nothing going wrong because there was no sin yet, but there was something that Adam had to do to tend the plants and cultivate the garden. When it’s all over, he looks around and he says, “Good job, but so what? I’m doing it. I suppose God appreciates it. It’s beautiful, but if I’m doing it just for me, how can I really enter into the value and pleasure of doing it?” I don’t know whether he felt that way or not, but that brings us back to Ecclesiastes 4:9, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.”

Now Eve comes into the garden. She does her thing and Adam does his thing and then, at the close of the day, Adam and Eve stand there and say,

“Hmm. That’s pretty.

Don’t you appreciate that?”

“Yes, I appreciate that and my,

⁶ Numbers 22:29-30

⁷ Genesis 2:18b

you did a good job on the gladiolas.”

“And, Adam, you did a good job on the peach tree.”

They multiply their satisfaction — their reward for their labor — by the fact that they are able to enjoy it and appreciate it together.

You know, my dad did not enjoy his job as the chief of personnel at the Letterkenny Ordnance Depot where he worked for many years. But almost as soon as he retired, he started a vegetable garden. My dad loved to get out in his garden, cultivate it, and grow corn, string beans, tomatoes and whatever else he decided to grow. He fought an ongoing war with the chipmunks, who were determined to take advantage of what he produced. During Dad’s retirement years my mother and father would go outside during the daytime. My mother was not particularly interested in the vegetable garden, but she was interested in flowers. While my father cultivated the vegetable garden, my mother took care of the flowers, and they had a good-looking yard. Then they enjoyed the fruits of their labor together because when they brought in my dad’s corn or tomatoes, they ate it together. If my mother brought in a bouquet, they could both enjoy it together. They had a good reward for their labor.

Now if you ask me, cultivating a vegetable garden is Dullsville, USA. I can’t think of anything more boring than growing a vegetable garden. But whenever I went home to visit my parents, I knew I was in for the grand tour. My dad was going to take me out in the garden, and he was going to show me, plant by plant, what he was growing. I once took my friend Luis up to visit, and I believe my dad took him out once or twice to see the vegetable garden. Then of course, when they fed me at night, my mother would say, “This corn comes from your father’s garden,” or, “These green beans were grown by your dad.” They were good, but I often thought to myself, “I will never, ever retire to a house and start a vegetable garden.” However, that was their thing, and they loved it. They enjoyed it together, and they had a good reward for their labor because they shared the pleasure of working together in the yard.

I am wondering whether the husbands and wives who are reading this book have ever thought of the whole process of marriage as a sharing of labor. First of all, couples normally have kids and, as we all know, there are certain things that mothers do better for kids than dads do, and certain things that dads do better for kids than mothers do.

We know how important it is for mothers and dads to do the right thing for their kids so that the kids grow up to be the right kind of people. All through the years that you’re raising your children, both parents have to think of the ways in which they can serve God. If you do not serve God in front of your children, your children are not going to learn from you how to serve God. They may learn it from somebody else down the line, but they should learn it from you in your home. They should see Mom and Dad love God, and Mom and Dad enjoy the Bible.

I have often said that one of the things I learned from my father was to pray about everything. He taught me a lot of lessons. I cannot even begin to list all the lessons that my dad taught me, but that is probably the most important thing. I learned that you pray about everything. My dad prayed about everything, and there is no estimating how valuable that is to children. So, you have to be serving the Lord all along the way. If Mom and Dad are successful in raising their kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord, don’t you think that is a wonderful joy to share between husband and wife?

Now, in my church there are a number of parents who have seen that their older

A Helper Comparable to Him

children are not walking with the Lord. So, each month we have a parents' prayer meeting. If you have already raised or nearly raised your kids, and they are not really walking with the Lord, it is going to take a different kind of work to get them back, and that work is prayer. I am always glad when I see both husband and wife together at the parents' prayer meeting, praying for their children.

After the children are gone, husband and wife ought to consider what other things they have to do together that are very important. When your children are gone, you still need to be serving the Lord. So, I'm saying to the parents reading this, "What are you doing together? If your children are out of the nest, what are you doing together? What are your objectives together? Are you working together for God? Are you doing something for God? Are you serving in the church in the roles that He wants you to serve?" That's the question, isn't it? It's not good for a man to have to do it by himself. He needs a helper to help him do his best for God.

The second phrase in Genesis 2:18 is *comparable to him*. He needs a helper comparable to him. Now I want you to notice that it doesn't say he needs a helper identical to him. Don't you agree that it would be bad if your mate was absolutely identical to you? I once lived on the 16th floor of a high-rise apartment. I shall never forget a pair of elderly men who lived together there. They were twins and looked almost identical to each other. I couldn't tell them apart. It was my understanding that neither of them had ever been married, and I must say they were not too extremely friendly. If you talked to them, you might get a very slight acknowledgement that you had just greeted them, but that is about all. Maybe they were happy, but they were kind of like clones of each other. They were too much alike.

I think that men and women can thank the Lord that they are not identical. They are just comparable to each other. Now, the animals that God brought to the man were radically different from him. Even though the serpent could talk, who would want to have a serpent as their bosom buddy? Who would want a donkey as their bosom buddy? Even if Balaam did talk briefly to his, we do not want to spend a lot of time talking to a donkey. But the woman was like the man, and yet at the same time there were physical, emotional, and psychological differences. We can see the wisdom of God in this: God knew man needed a helper who, though not identical to him, was comparable to him and who complemented, therefore, his own weaknesses and deficiencies with her strengths and skills.

I would like to suggest that the next time you are by yourself for a few minutes, instead of thinking about all the things in your partner that annoy the daylights out of you — which is pretty easy to think about and consume your time with — think of all the strong points your partner has that you do not have. I would be greatly surprised if you could not pinpoint some very real strengths your partner possesses that you do not possess. Then thank God for giving you a partner with those strengths and make up your mind to take advantage of being married to this partner and learn from their strengths.

Now I do hope husbands and wives talk to each other about disciplinary problems with their children. I hope they have their act together so that they present a united front. There is nothing worse than one parent saying one thing to the kid and the other parent saying something different. That is chaotic and very damaging for the children. You need to get your act together.

However, if the husband and wife are sitting together and the kid has done something

wrong, the dad perhaps feels, “They need to learn a lesson from this, and we need to exercise a discipline that will really communicate this lesson.” The mother, being the sympathetic person that mothers usually are, may say, “Yes, that’s true. But I think I understand why our child did what they did, and I think we ought to take that into consideration.” What happens next? Well, in some families what happens is that the man says, “We’re gonna do it my way. We’re gonna discipline my way.” And the wife says to herself, *OK, but as soon as I get a chance with the kid, I’m gonna communicate my own message to them.* Now what they should do is to merge their points of view into an acceptable discipline that takes into consideration, perhaps, the weaknesses in the child that the mother feels, and takes into consideration the father’s view that the child should learn a lesson.

Do you see what I’m saying? Husbands and wives can learn from each other. You cannot do it by being on a two-track program — the husband is off this way, and the wife is off this way, and you are kind of like two ships passing in the ocean at home. You need to get your act together. You need to cooperate with each other and to incorporate the strengths of each into the way that you handle and discipline your children.

I close with a famous nursery rhyme: “Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean, and so between the two of them, they wiped the platter clean.” Jack Sprat couldn’t eat any of the fat part of the meat, and his wife couldn’t eat any of the lean part. I imagine Jack Sprat as a thin, skinny old man and his wife as a stout woman because she ate only the fat and he ate only the lean. But this was a cooperative venture, so when they had a piece of meat on the table in front of them, Jack Sprat ate his part, and the wife ate her part, and the platter was clean, and no food was wasted. Isn’t that great?

Well, I do not know what is on your platter as a couple, but let me suggest that to clean up whatever is on your plate — I’m speaking figuratively here — you need to work together. The husband needs to do the part he does well, and the wife needs to do the part she does well, and between the two of you, you can wipe that platter clean.

It is true that there are some advantages to being single. However, because I am single, I have to turn to different people to provide some of the benefits that married people get very naturally from one another. I’ve often thought that a preacher is very fortunate if he has a sympathetic wife who will go home with him and, at an appropriate time, say to him, “You know, such and such an illustration was really confusing, and I didn’t follow it. I just wonder if everybody followed it.” Or, “You seemed to get lost in point three, and I got lost with you.” You have no idea how valuable that kind of input can be, and I regret that I do not have somebody who does that with me on a regular basis. That’s just one illustration of many things I could mention where the single man labors under many disadvantages simply because he does not have a helper comparable to him — an in-house helper who loves him, wants the best for him, and is willing to give him her honest and open counsel.

So, ladies, if your man is serving the Lord in the church, give him the benefit of your advice. But remember that you are not trying to cut him down to size. You are trying to build him up to size. That is the important thing. Then you are a real helper to that husband.

Now it is true that in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul recognizes some very concrete advantages to single life. But it is still, in my opinion, not good for man to be alone because there is something missing from the single life that the individual with a happy and a successful marriage has. “Each one has his own gift from God,” says the Scripture,

A Helper Comparable to Him

“one in this manner and another in that.”⁸ God knows what is best for each of us, and for most of us, marriage is best.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:7

Chapter 7

How Committed Are You?

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

— 1 Corinthians 6:18-7:6

In June 1995, a very shocking thing happened in New Milford, Connecticut. New Milford, Connecticut, is a neat, well-groomed suburban community with a population of 23,000 people. In early June 1995, during a five-day period, eight different girls were brought to the New Milford Hospital after what hospital authorities described as suicidal gestures. All of these girls were between the ages of 12 and 17. They had tried various methods. They had tried a heavy dose of alcohol. They had tried over-the-counter medicines. They had tried cutting or scratching their wrist. Now, none of the incidents were fatal. Most of the cases did not even require hospitalization, although two of them, according to hospital authorities, might have been fatal. The reasons for the suicide attempts seemed as ordinary as everyday life in New Milford. One teenage girl said, "I was just sick of it all. Everything. Life."

Now these eight cases stunned New Milford, but they had an even deeper impact because in the preceding few months before June 1995, there had been six other teenage suicide attempts. Dr. Simon Sobo, who is head of psychiatry at the New Milford Hospital, said, "There have been more suicide attempts this spring [1995] than I have seen in the 13 years I have been here." He also said, "We're talking about a crisis that has really gotten out of hand."

One of the striking things was, according to Dr. Sobo, that the teenage girls that he treated did not have serious problems at home or at school. Many of them were popular girls. All of them seemed to be getting enough love in their homes. And yet, beneath this comforting surface, there was obviously pain and despair.

One 17-year-old girl said this: "You'd be surprised how many kids try suicide. You

How Committed Are You?

don't want to put pain on other people; you put it on yourself." She admitted that she used to cut herself just to relieve the pain.

In one of the New Milford classrooms, in one of their schools, there stands a globe of the world. On this globe of the world, some student has scratched the following words, "Hell is now."

One 15-year-old girl in New Milford said, "We are not Generation X. We're Generation Depressed." Now, Dr. Sobo pointed out that what is happening in New Milford is not unique to New Milford. That you could find the same culture of despair in almost any town that you wish to go to.

It is widely recognized by the media today that one of the major problems in America is teenage suicide. According to Dr. Sobo, teenage suicide can become a contagion. If that is true, New Milford has the bug, and it has it very bad.

Now, I want to confess to all of you up front that your preacher does not claim to be an expert on teenage suicide. But I am pretty well persuaded that one of the sources of teenage suicide is the fact that we live in a culture and in a society where sex has been divorced from love and from lifelong commitment.

Will you permit me to say that again? We live in a society where sex has been divorced from love and lifelong commitment. Some of our teenagers find out very quickly that sex outside of love and commitment is empty and unfulfilling. Some of them are led to wonder what life really holds for them. Because this issue is a very important issue in our day and time, I want to confront everybody reading this with a question that is very important for you and one that is very important for your children. That question is the title of this chapter: "How committed are you?"

Now, I'm going to confess right up front that I'm going to climb out on a very long limb. I hope it doesn't collapse from my extra weight because, you see, I want to take a survey by asking each of you three very direct and personal questions. These are questions that I want to have you answer in the quiet of your own heart. But even though I am not going to be asking for responses that are public, some of you are not going to like what I am going to say. Okay, let's get that out up front. Some of you are not going to like it.

I'm sorry, but I'm not going to apologize to anybody for it. The sermon that I'm preaching is probably a sermon I should have preached before. It's too late to go back and do it, but at least better late than never. So, I want you to understand right up front, that I realize that what I'm going to say is sensitive, direct, and personal. So, are you ready? Are you ready for question number one?

Question number one is this: Is it ever right to have sex outside of marriage?

If you said, *yes*, or if you said, *sometimes*, give yourself a big, tall, red, letter *F*. You flunked that question. You see, in the passage of Scripture that we have read, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians at the city of Corinth, and in the very first verse that we read, he says, "Flee sexual immorality." The Greek word that is translated by the phrase "sexual immorality" is a word that referred to almost any kind of sexual activity that took place outside of marriage. Paul says, "Flee that", and then he points out that every sin which a man commits is outside of his body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Do you realize that when a person steals something, that's an action that occurs outside their body? Even if a person murders someone else, that's an action that occurs outside of that physical body. Even when we speak dirty and sinful words, those words

How Committed Are You?

come out of our mouth, and they hurt other people more than they hurt us. But when we take that beautiful desire that God has put inside of each and every one of us – that desire and that drive that leads to the production of life – when we take that beautiful desire and use it contrary to the will of God, when we distort it and pervert it and misuse it, we're not only sinning against our sexual partner, we are sinning against these bodies of ours. We are sinning against our very nature as physical people. We are sinning against what we are as bearers of life itself. If there's one thing that God is obviously trying to get over to America in the 1990s, it is that this is true – that we sin against our own bodies.

Have you ever stopped to think that there's no disease going around among people because they're thieves, and there's no disease going around among people because they're murderers or because they curse and swear? But are there diseases going around among people who misuse their sexual drive and commit sin in the presence of God? You better believe it – and more than one disease, all the way from herpes to the deadly plague called AIDS. Make no mistake about it, folks. When we have sex outside of marriage, we sin against God, we sin against our partner, and we sin against our own body.

On June 29, 1995, Lana Turner, the famous movie actress, died at the age of 75 in Century City, California. She died of throat cancer. Some of us belong to a generation that grew up when Lana Turner was at the height of her glamorous career. There is a story, that may or may not be true, that Lana Turner was discovered when she was a teenage girl sitting at a soda fountain in Schwab's drugstore sipping a soda. Whether that's true or not, she rapidly rose to the top and became one of Hollywood's glamour queens. Because she was an exceptionally beautiful woman, she became one of the most glamorous of Hollywood's glamour queens.

But there was another side to Lana Turner's life. Did you realize that Lana Turner was married seven times? As she moved from man to man, a terrible tragedy entered her life. In 1958, a daughter of hers by the name of Cheryl shot and killed Lana Turner's mobster boyfriend, a man by the name of Johnny Stompanato. So you see, Lana Turner climbed the stairs to Hollywood stardom, but she also descended the staircase into Hollywood immorality.

I want to warn you that everyone who follows in the lifestyle footsteps of people like Lana Turner, everyone like that is inviting tragedy into their lives. The tragedy may be in terms of broken homes and dysfunctional children. The tragedy may be in terms of sexual disease leading to death. Or the tragedy may be in terms of emptiness and boredom and suicide. "Flee", says the Apostle Paul. "Run, run, run! Get as far away as you can get from sexual immorality."

Are you ready for the second question? The first question was, "Is it ever right to have sex outside of marriage?"

The second question is tougher. "If you're feeling fine, is it ever right to refuse sex to your partner in marriage? If you're not sick, is it ever right to refuse sex to your partner in marriage?"

If you answered that question, *yes*, give yourself a great big bold, red, letter *F*. You see, in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul starts out by saying, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." He obviously means, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

Those of us who are single must follow that prescription. But Paul is a realist. Paul

How Committed Are You?

realizes that most people cannot live a single life, and so he goes on in verse 2 to say, “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.” To paraphrase Paul, “I recognize that there is a danger of sexual immorality of trying to live a single life, so therefore, I advise generally that men and women be married.”

It is right here, my friends, that we come to one of the most overlooked, one of the most widely, widely neglected commands in the Word of God. Paul goes on to say, but “let the husband render to his wife the affection due her” (1 Corinthians 7:3a).

He’s not just simply talking about a kiss on the cheek, as the verse makes clear: “...and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:3b). And then Paul says, in the next verse (1 Corinthians 7:4), because a “wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”

Are you all awake? I’m going to tell you something. This is a bachelor speaking here. I’m going to tell you something you may not have known when you got married. When you got married, you gave up the right to refuse sex to your partner in marriage. You gave up authority over your own body. Now, if you don’t like that, your quarrel is not with me. Your quarrel is with God. A man does not have authority over his own body in this matter, but the wife. The wife does not have authority over her own body in this matter, but the husband.

But Paul goes on to say, to paraphrase, “I’m going to make ‘a concession’ (1 Corinthians 7:6).” He says, “Do not deprive one another.” The word in Greek is very strong. Don’t rob each other unless it is “with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.” But after that, “come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this,” says Paul, “as a concession, not as a commandment” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

To paraphrase Paul, “You are permitted. I don’t command it, but I allow you to do it. You are permitted, when you can agree on it, to abstain from the sexual relationship in your marriage for a brief period of time so that you may give yourself to prayer and to fasting. And after that period is over, come together again, so that Satan does not use this situation to tempt you to sin.”

Now, please don’t misunderstand what I’m saying. I’m not trying to turn the husband or the wife either into little tyrants on this matter, so that the husband or the wife says, “I demand that you do it tonight.”

Every wise, loving husband and wife has a great sensitivity toward the situation, the feelings, the emotions of their partner. And especially the men, if they’re obeying the Bible. Are you men reading?

The Bible commands men to live with their wives according to knowledge, “giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, [lest] your prayers...be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). This is not an invitation to the man to ride roughshod over his wife, because if you do, your prayers are going to probably bounce off the ceiling and land flat on the floor.

Let me put it to you, instead, in another way. Suppose I were to come to your house as your pastor, and I were to get both of you aside together, and I was to say to you, “When was the last time you had sex?” Now I’m not going to come to your house and do that, so please don’t worry about it. Okay? “When was the last time you had sex with each other?”

If you said to me, ‘It’s been six weeks,’ or, “six months,” or “a year,” don’t kid yourself.

How Committed Are You?

There are some marriages that haven't had it for much longer than that. You know what I'd say to you? "Have you been sick over the past six weeks? Something wrong with you physically?"

If you said to me, "No, nothing wrong," I would then say to you, "There's something wrong with your marriage." You are not rendering to each other what God commands husband and wife to render to one another.

James and Mary Grady of Illinois were very much opposed to divorce. They wanted to make a protest against the rising number of divorces in American society. You know what they did? They married each other again and again and again and again. I'm not kidding you. Between 1964 and 1969, they married each other publicly 27 times. They married each other in 25 different states. On one occasion, they married each other three times on the same day. On another occasion, they married each other two times in a single hour and they married each other twice on television.

Now folks, that's kind of far out. Don't you agree? I'm not advising that. Not advising that at all. But if you study the Bible very closely, you will find that the sexual relationship is at the very heart of the marital relationship. There is a sense in which, whenever husband and wife engage in this marital experience, they are renewing their love to each other. They are renewing their lifelong commitment to each other. This is a way of reaffirming on a regular basis your love, your commitment, and your devotion. That's the way sex ought to be.

I want to tell you something. I grew up in my parents' house. My parents were a lot slicker than I was. Never once did I figure out when or how often they had the sexual relationship. But you know something? I knew it was all right. They were doing fine. They lived together for 66 years. and at the end of their marriage, they loved each other as much if not more than at the beginning.

Of course your children don't need to see this. But they will see its fruits, whether for good or for bad. If you and your wife are not sexually adjusted, the fruits of that are probably going to appear in terms of friction, tension, and anger.

So, let me put it as frankly as I know how. Flee sex outside of marriage, but inside of marriage, do it as your privilege and your duty.

How are you doing? You ready for the third one? Here's the third one: "Is it ever right to say that sex is always sinful?"

If you said *yes* to that, give yourself a great big, tall, red letter *F*.

Did you notice that between Paul's command to flee sexual immorality and his command to husbands and wives to be involved with each other — that between these two points of instruction there lie some very important words which are found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Paul says:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Why do you flee sexual immorality? The reason is that the Holy Spirit lives in your body, and your body belongs to God, at the tremendous cost of the blood of His Son.

Now listen up, everybody. Why do husbands and wives engage in sexual activity within the marriage? The reason is exactly the same: because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and your body belongs to God, and God tells you to do this, and He

How Committed Are You?

would never tell you to do anything that was sinful.

Many years ago, when we were still meeting down on Hickory and Orleans Streets,¹ I was talking to a young man who lived in the neighborhood. I remember, I think, that the context of our conversation was a request that he was making for me to marry him and his girlfriend. During the course of the conversation, he made a sweeping remark. He wasn't just talking about immorality. He said to me, "I know that sex is always sinful."

Isn't that ridiculous? Not only ridiculous, folks, it's an insult to the Creator. It is the Creator who gave us our bodies. It is the Creator who gave us our sex drives. It is the Creator who wants us to use that within marriage as an expression of love and commitment and as a means of bringing forth children. It is absurd to say that sex is always sinful.

So what's the bottom line? Very simple. Flee sexual immorality, but embrace sex and thank God for it within your marriage.

There was a grandmother one time who was being honored on the occasion of her golden wedding anniversary. During the course of the festivities, she decided to tell the assembled guests the secret of her happy and successful marriage. She said, "On my wedding day, I made up my mind to make a list of 10 of my husband's faults, which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook."

As the guests were leaving, a young woman who was having trouble in her marriage came up to the grandmother and she said, "Tell me some of the faults that you had on your list."

This is what the grandmother replied: "To tell you the truth, my dear, I never really got around to writing it out. But every time my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would always say to myself, "Lucky for him. That's one of the 10."

I say lucky for him that he had a wife who was so committed to him that she could overlook his faults for 60 years.

Folks, you ought to try commitment, for out of true commitment can come true love, and out of true love can come true happiness. Even if you are the only party in your marriage who loves the way God tells us to love, your marriage is a smashing success because you have glorified God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. So, the bottom line remains unchanged. The final question remains the same. How committed are you?

Father, thank You for Your Word, which is a light unto our feet and lamp unto our pathway. In this delicate and important subject that has been discussed, help us to walk in Your paths for Your glory. I pray it in Christ's name.

¹ A prior location where the congregation of Victor Street Bible Chapel used to meet.

Chapter 8

Friendship

Now, consider for this chapter, the following texts from the Bible: Proverbs 27:10 and 1 Kings 5.

Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend...

- Proverbs 27:10

Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always loved David. Then Solomon sent to Hiram, saying:

You know how my father David could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the wars which were fought against him on every side, until the LORD put his foes under the soles of his feet.

But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence.

And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to my father David, saying, "Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name."

Now therefore, command that they cut down cedars for me from Lebanon; and my servants will be with your servants, and I will pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say. For you know there is none among us who has skill to cut timber like the Sidonians.

So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said,

Blessed be the LORD this day, for He has given David a wise son over this great people!

Then Hiram sent to Solomon, saying:

I have considered the message which you sent me, and I will do all you desire concerning the cedar and cypress logs.

My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; I will float them in rafts by sea to the place you indicate to me, and will have them broken apart there; then you can take them away. And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household.

Friendship

Then Hiram gave Solomon cedar and cypress logs according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand kors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty kors of pressed oil. Thus Solomon gave to Hiram year by year.

So the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty together.

Then King Solomon raised up a labor force out of all Israel; and the labor force was thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts: they were one month in Lebanon and two months at home; Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Solomon had seventy thousand who carried burdens, and eighty thousand who quarried stone in the mountains, besides three thousand three hundred from the chiefs of Solomon's deputies, who supervised the people who labored in the work. And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple. So Solomon's builders, Hiram's builders, and the Gebalites quarried them; and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple.

- 1 Kings 5

I'm pretty sure that you've never heard me mention Hiram Hodges, but Hiram Hodges was a brother of my father and therefore he was my uncle. Now even in those days the name *Hiram* was a little bit unusual, and he usually went by the name *Ted*, but his name was Hiram. I don't know whether my uncle really appreciated it or not, but he was really the recipient of one of the most honored names in the Bible. In fact, *Hiram* is not only an honored name, but a highly neglected name in the Bible because Hiram is one of the nicest men to meet us on the pages of Scripture.

One of the areas in which Hiram excelled particularly was the area of friendship. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 10, if you were measuring him for his ability to be a friend, I think you would give him a 10, or if you were rating him by four stars, he would get all four stars. He was an outstanding individual friend.

Now, we are told in 1 Kings 5, that Hiram was originally a friend of David. When David dies and Solomon ascends the throne of Israel, Hiram sends messengers to King Solomon. We're not told what these messengers said to Solomon, but the chances are good that they congratulated Solomon on becoming king. Probably Hiram offered to be supportive and to be helpful in any way that he could to the new king. In other words, Hiram is offering not only to have been the friend of David, but also to become the friend of David's son.

So here, King Solomon meets a case in point regarding Proverbs 27:10. You remember that it says, "Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend." Well, Hiram was a man who qualified as Solomon's father's friend and was now seeking to qualify as Solomon's friend.

Very wisely, Solomon opens himself up to this friendship. He sends a message back to King Hiram that, to paraphrase, goes like this. He says to King Hiram, "You remember how my father David was not able to build a temple to the Lord like he wanted to because he had so many wars, and God was putting his enemies under his feet." But Solomon now says, "I don't have any wars. I am surrounded by peace on every

Friendship

side. I don't have any enemies, and I'm proposing to build a house for God. In fact," Solomon tells Hiram, "that's what God told my father, David — that one of his sons would build a house for God, and I want to be that son." Solomon is telling Hiram, in effect, "I want to build the house for God, and I'm going to need help. I need to have your men join with my men in cutting down timber."

Now please understand that Hiram had a kingdom that was north of Israel and on the coast of what we now know as the country of Lebanon. That's a mountainous region there. There were tall and good trees that grew in the Lebanese mountains. Apparently, Hiram had not only power over Tyre, but also power over the nearby city of Sidon.

Solomon says, "You know that there are no people that can cut down timber the way the Sidonians can, so if you will let your men go with my men, I'll pay the wages for your men. I would like your cooperation in this project."

Notice what Solomon is doing. Hiram has extended to him the hand of friendship, and Solomon is reaching out to grab the hand and to take advantage of this friendship. He is sharing his plans with this friend of his father. He is inviting this friend of his father to cooperate with him in what is unquestionably the greatest project that Solomon undertook at any point in his reign.

Let me just pause here to remind you of something that I'm sure you all know — that one of the greatest gifts that God gives us in life is the gift of friendship. In fact, studies have been made that suggest that married couples ought to cultivate friendships outside the marriage. I'll have more to say about the marriage side of it in a moment, but it has been suggested that it's good for the husband to have a good friend or two of the male sex, and it's good for the woman to have a good friend or two of the female sex. And so, friendship is one of the valuable and important aspects of life.

I've been around long enough to know that the number of real good friends that you are able to accumulate over a period of years is relatively small. But when you do find a real good, solid, reliable, and enduring friend, then you've found something that is really, really significant in life.

What I see here in 1 Kings 5, first of all, is a wise king opening himself up to the friendship of another king. Now, there are a lot of things that Solomon could have said here. He could have said, "Hey, Hiram was my father's friend, and he's a little bit old for me, and I prefer to have my own friends." Or he might have said, "Hiram is a Gentile, and I simply cannot share my project in building a temple for the Lord my God with a Gentile. I'm going to leave him out of this." Not so.

Solomon opens himself up completely to this man who has been his father's friend. "Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend," says Solomon later on in Proverbs 27:10.

You might think for a moment about whether you have, in fact, a solid friendship outside of your marriage. Is there someone that you can talk to freely? Is there someone you can share your plans with? Is there someone you can share your problems with? Is there somebody that you can depend on and that you would like to have participate, where they can, in the projects that you're undertaking? Maybe if you don't have one, it would be good to ask God to bring one into your life, because these people can be very important people indeed. Hiram certainly became an important figure in David's life.

Now Hiram's response to this is equally interesting. Hiram does not say, "I am very delighted to be the friend of David's son," although he was delighted to be that. Neither does he say, "I'm delighted to be the friend of a powerful king like Solomon obviously is

Friendship

at this point.” Notice what he says in 1 Kings 5:7:

So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said,

Blessed be the LORD this day, for He has given David a wise son over this great people!

Does that impress you? That impresses me. This is a Gentile king, who lives up in the city of Tyre, north of Israel. When Hiram hears about the plans that Solomon has, he says, to paraphrase, “Praise the Lord. Blessed be the Lord who has given to my friend David a wise son to sit on his throne.”

That was one of the things that made Hiram obviously a very good friend. He shared with David and now shares with Solomon a reverence and respect for the Lord, the God of Israel.

Do I need to tell you that your friendships are not going to go very far with people who do not share your faith in the Lord, do not share your commitment to the Lord? Frankly, they’re not going to understand a lot of your motives. They’re not going to understand some of the things that you’re really pursuing in life. Real friends from God are Christian friends who have a reverence and respect for the Lord.

Now, Hiram is only too glad to consent to the requests that Solomon has given to him. Now I want you to notice something about this response. Did you notice it as we were reading through it?

Hiram says, to paraphrase, “First of all, I’m going to do all that you desire with regard to the cypress and cedar logs. I’m going to do what you ask.” But notice what Hiram says (he doesn’t literally say this, but his words indicate it). Hiram is going to do more than Solomon has asked him for, because he goes on to say, “I’m going to have my servants load them on rafts. They’re going to float them down to whatever place on the coastline of Israel that you want these logs to be taken. My servants will break them up for you, and then they will carry them wherever you want to go.”

Notice that Hiram is a man who goes beyond what he has been asked to do. “Not only will I do what you asked, but I will do more than you have asked.” Again, isn’t that one of the marks of friendship? Do you want a friend who barely makes the contribution that you’re looking for? Do you prefer a friend who is willing to go the extra mile and make an extra sacrifice and take the extra step? Turning it around, is that the kind of friend you are? Do you in your friendships go beyond what your friend might have expected you to do? Do you offer them more help than they are really requesting?

But then you’ll notice that Hiram has this to say at the end of 1 Kings 5:9: “And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household.”

Some of us might say, “He’s not much of a friend. He’s going to make Solomon pay for this.” I don’t agree with that. The reason I don’t agree with it is because it is part of friendship not only to give, but to receive. Find me a relationship in which all the giving is coming from one side, and I will show you a relationship that doesn’t work. That isn’t a real friendship.

A real friend not only is willing to help and willing to help beyond the call of duty, but a real friend is willing to receive. A real friend is willing to give to their friend the opportunity to contribute to them.

Friendship

There was a study made one time, which really asked the question, “Who do you tend to like better, a person who does something for you or a person would let you do something for them?” You know what the results were? The results showed that people tend to like better the person who allows them to do something for them. All friendships have to be reciprocal.

You will notice that Hiram doesn’t say, “I’m going to ask for this much and this much and this much.” He said, “Your contribution to this can be food for my household.”

Now when the message gets back to Solomon, Hiram comes through on his deal, and notice what Solomon does in 1 Kings 5:11: “And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand kors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty kors of pressed oil.”

You may be interested to know that it has been suggested that one kor of wheat was about six and a half bushels. So now you multiply six and a half bushels by 20,000, and you get about 130,000 bushels of wheat. As a liquid measure, a kor was about 60 gallons. So if Solomon gave 20 kors in a liquid measure, that would be about 1,200 gallons of pressed oil. Now that was a yearly contribution.

Do you notice this? Solomon is giving lavishly. Now he’s not asking Hiram to give him cedar every year, because his objective is to build the house of God. But apparently, Solomon goes beyond the point that Hiram had requested. Solomon gives Hiram all this wheat and all of this pressed oil, year after year. So, what do these friends do? They run a competition of giving. They have both the grace of giving and also the grace of receiving.

You know, I’ve met people and known of people who just simply can’t let anybody do for them. They have to be the doer. But in friendship, you have to give and you have to receive. Good friends like to give, not in a restrictive way, but lavishly, generously, and unstintingly. God declares this a wise process. Notice in verse 12:

So the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty together.

This is very wise. This is an expression of Solomon’s wisdom — that he forms this relationship and involves Hiram in the building of the temple.

The closing verses of 1 Kings 5 tell us how the cooperative venture worked out. What Solomon does is to designate 30,000 men as workers in the mountains of Lebanon. He sends 10,000 a month. They work for a month in Lebanon away from their homes. They come home, and they’re home for two months. He sends another 10,000 for a month, and then the third month another 10,000, and rotates on that basis. Now Solomon also has lots of other servants, burden bearers, and supervisors.

Solomon needs not only timber, but also hewn stone. He needs to cut out the stones that will be part of the structure of the temple. He has said nothing at all to Hiram about the stones, but notice what we read in the last verse of the chapter:

So Solomon’s builders, Hiram’s builders, and the Gebalites quarried them.

Now, I pause here to say that the Gebalites were from a city called *Gebal*, which was north of Hiram’s city. The probability is that Hiram got the Gebalites involved with this. But what I’m really interested in showing here is that Hiram did not just simply stop with his involvement in the timber process. He involves himself also in the preparation

Friendship

of the stones that would go into the temple. His builders and the Gebalites cooperate with Solomon's builders.

By the time we've reached the end of the chapter, what do we have? We have a cooperative venture. We have a partnership, kind of like Luis and I have in Redención Viva.¹ They are working together as friends on the greatest building project that Solomon would ever undertake. And, for that matter, we might say the greatest building project in the history of the world. This is the first time that a building has been built under the command of God for the worship of the one true and living God.

Let's step back from this for just a minute to evaluate what we've seen. Clearly, 1 Kings 5 deals with the preparations that are made for the building of the temple. But these preparations are founded upon a friendship and upon a cooperative venture between a Jewish king and a Gentile king. I think that's significant because, you see, the temple that was being built was intended by God not only to be for Jews, but also to be for Gentiles.

Remember what Jesus said when he was kicking all the money changers and the sellers of animals out? He said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). God did not intend for just the Jews to worship in the temple. He intended for Gentiles to come from all over the world to pray to Him and to worship Him in this house. So this wonderful house that was to be a symbol of the unity of mankind in its worship of the true and living God, is founded at its very beginning on friendship.

Does that tell us anything about the importance of friendship? I think it does. I think it tells us how very significant and how very important friendship is.

Now I've been talking about friends that you might have outside of the home. But I would like to also suggest that friendship can and should exist within the home and between spouses.

Years ago, when I was a student at Wheaton College,² the president of the college was Dr. V. Raymond Edman. You know that he never referred to his wife as *my wife* or "*the wife said this*" or something like that. He always — I never heard him refer to her any other way — he always referred to her as *friend-wife*. *Friend-wife*. That made a great impression on me because (and I assume it made a great impression on many of the students there) in his marriage he considered his wife his friend.

I have heard, over the years, many people say, "My best friend is my husband. My best friend is my wife." That's the way it ought to be.

In fact, one of the things that is wrong with a lot of marriages is that the husband and wife are married, but they're not friends. They're not friends. You know what often happens when the children grow up and leave the roost? Statistics show that many marriages crack up. You know why? The children were the glue. The husband and wife find they have nothing in common. Another way of saying this is, they find they're not friends. They were living under the same roof. They were guiding the home. They were raising the children. But the common ground between them just simply wasn't there.

So, I'm going to ask you married folks reading this to assess your friendship with your spouse, whether you are the husband or whether you are the wife. In this passage we have seen standards by which we can assess our friendship.

¹ Redención Viva was a publishing company founded by Zane Hodges and Luis Rodriguez in 1980. Their initial publication was *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works*.

² Zane graduated from Wheaton College with a Bachelor of Arts in Greek in 1954.

Friendship

Are you first of all open to friendship with your spouse in the way that Solomon was open to the friendship of Hiram? Are you open to that friendship? Are you willing to share your thoughts and plans and activities with your spouse, as Solomon shared this tremendous project of his with his friend, King Hiram? Are you willing to contribute to this friendship? Are you willing to involve yourself in the projects of your spouse? Or do you let your spouse go their way and you go that way?

Do you have cooperative ventures with your spouse? Another way of saying this is, "What are you building with your spouse?" Are you building a life that is centered around the Lord? Are you contributing to your spouse's ministry for the Lord? Are you contributing wherever you can to the everyday work life that your spouse has? Are you interested in that?

Do you want the spouse to come home and tell you how the day went? Are you friends? I mean friends. Don't you see that the temple of God was built on friendship? Everything that we build in life that's worthwhile will also be built on friendship.

Our relationship to Jesus Christ is first of all that of Savior. But if that's as far as we carry it, we don't build much of a life until we discover what it is to be a friend of Jesus Christ. Remember, He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down one's life for his wife and kids." Are you awake? He didn't say that.

Instead, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The paradigm of love for Jesus Christ was the love of friendship.

So, every love that we have that is worthwhile ought to be a love of friendship. Whatever else it is, it ought to be of friendship.

Jesus said, you remember:

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

-John 15:14-15

Jesus Himself invites us into friendship. We ought to have, first and foremost, friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ. But we ought to have other friends.

There's a verse in Proverbs, I think another of Solomon's proverbs that says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Proverbs 18:24). We will never make a friend, and you will certainly never make a friend out of your spouse, unless you show yourself open and friendly to that relationship.

Someone has said that "A friend is one who multiplies joy and divides grief." That's good, isn't it? Joy is better if shared with the friend. Grief is cut in half if we have a friend who's sharing that grief with us.

Another statement about friendship was, "A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down." I like that. A friend is like a watch that beats true for all time and never runs down.

I am going to close with my favorite story about friendship. It is such a good story. It is one of those stories that I like to tell frequently.

There were two young men in World War I who were friends. They had been friends since their youth. They had lived close together. They had gone to the same schools together. They had competed in the same athletic programs together.

Friendship

They joined the Army to serve in World War I together. As the situation would have it, they wound up on the battlefield together. One day, after a particularly fierce battle in an area known as No Man's Land, one of the friends came back, but the other friend was missing.

So the friend that had returned went to his commanding officer, and he requested permission to go back out into No Man's Land to look for his friend. The commanding officer denied him permission. He said, "Nobody could possibly be alive out there after all of those hours of withering fire."

But this young man persisted and continued to ask for permission to go out and look for his friend. So finally, the commanding officer relented and sent him out.

Sometime later, the commanding officer saw him come back with the limp and lifeless body of his friend laid across his shoulders. The commanding officer said to him, "Didn't I tell you there was no use to go?"

The young man replied, with a light in his eyes, "Oh, but it was! You see, I got there just in time to hear him whisper, 'I knew you'd come.'"

Now, it seems to me that that's the best possible definition of a friend. It is somebody that you know will come in the moment of adversity. Somebody who's there for you. That's the way it ought to be in our friendships. And that's the kind of friend that we ought to be to other people.

Part II
Parenting

Chapter 9

Do It Right, Dad

From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.)

Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water."

And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

- Judges 1:11-15

Samuel Walker lives in Missouri City, Texas. Very late in 1995, on a Monday morning, December 11th, he was at work and it was there that he received a call from an alarm company informing him that the security alarm in his house had been tripped.

Now, Sam Walker lives in a two-story house in a quiet cul-de-sac in Missouri City, which is actually a suburb of the city of Houston. At that time, his house was decorated with Christmas lights. The police were also alerted, and they went to the house, but they left after finding no doors or windows open.

About 30 minutes later, Sam Walker arrived at the house and he was alarmed to find that the front door was unlocked. He called his wife on his cellular phone and he kept her on the line as he proceeded to their bedroom and appropriated the .38 caliber pistol that he owned. He had just recently bought that pistol at the urging of friends and because of the frequent break-ins that had occurred in that neighborhood.

Then, keeping his wife on the cellular phone, he began a room-by-room search of the house. It brought him eventually to the room of his 16-year-old granddaughter's stepdaughter, named Sheree. He entered her room. He approached the closet. When he opened the closet door, he saw a person and he saw movement, and instinctively he raised his gun and fired.

Then he realized his horrible mistake and, with his wife still on the cellular phone, he exclaimed something like, "My God, I've shot Sheree!" Now, he never expected Sheree to be home on a school day, but it just simply happened that on that particular day, she was playing hooky. The bullet struck her in her chest and when she was taken to the hospital, she was pronounced dead on arrival.

By a very weird coincidence, the shooting of Sheree occurred just exactly a week after a similar shooting in Saginaw, Texas. Saginaw is a suburb of Fort Worth. In that city, a man by the name of James Hegwood had shot his daughter Sharon, 15 years of age, because he had mistaken her for a prowler. The day after the death of Sheree, Sharon Hegwood was still in critical condition in a hospital in Fort Worth.

Do It Right, Dad

Two fathers, two handguns, a daughter seriously wounded, and a stepdaughter shot dead. Now I wish that I could tell you that if you are a father of a daughter, that the only way that you could accidentally injure your daughter is to have an accident with a handgun or some other physical implement. But if I told you that, it wouldn't be true, would it?

Because you see, all over America today, there are literally thousands of fathers, and some of them are Christian fathers, and they don't even own a handgun. And yet, they have seriously hurt and they have seriously wounded the daughters and stepdaughters that they have.

One of the facts that is coming to the attention of America in the 1990s is the very solemn realization that fathers have a very significant and utterly indispensable role to play in the rearing of children. Because that is true, that brings us to one of the hot button topics of the 1990s, which is the subject of "Family Values."

I want to talk to you for a few minutes about that subject. I want to leave behind a very simple and straightforward exhortation. The exhortation is this, "Do it right, Dad." That exhortation just simply happens to be the title of my message to you: "Do It Right, Dad."

Now, I'm going to share with you one of my very minor pet peeves. It seems to me that there are a number of business establishments which I go to that I wait a little bit longer in line than I used to wait some years ago. The reason for that is fairly simple. It often happens that people who are ahead of me in the line, after they have made all their purchases, decide that they're going to ask the clerk behind the counter for a ticket for the Texas lottery. Of course, that takes a few minutes more. If I put together all of the minutes that I have stood in line behind somebody who was buying a lottery ticket, I think it would add up to quite a few minutes.

Maybe I ought to confess this: Maybe the reason it bothers me is that I know I just simply could not possibly play the Texas Lotto. Because you see after six decades of life, to the very best of my recollection, I have never, never, never won a game or a contest that was decided by luck. If the game or the contest involves luck, then put me down right up front as a loser. The lottery is definitely not for me.

You know, upon first reading the passage that is before us, I think I might be a little puzzled and you might be a little puzzled. I mean, we might be tempted to ask, "What's going on here? Is this a lottery? Is this a raffle? Is this an auction? Why?"

Listen to what this man Caleb says. Caleb says, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as a wife" (Judges 1:12). Now, there's a winning ticket for you, don't you agree? The winner of this particular challenge will get a wife.

Now please remember that at this point in the book of Judges, we have been reading about a very successful military campaign carried out by the tribe of Judah in association with the tribe of Simeon. Under the good hand of God, they have proceeded from one victory to another, defeating the Canaanites and taking possession of the land that God had brought the children of Israel into, which He had promised to them if they would only take it with His assistance.

Now these victorious armies have come to a city named Debir, which used to be called Kirjath Sepher. Before any attack is made, here Caleb stands up. He says (to paraphrase), "Whoever leads this attack, if the attack is successful and the city of Kirjath Sepher is captured, I want that guy to be my son-in-law. That's the man to whom I will

give my daughter Achsah as a wife.”

Now I suspect that if any fathers are reading this, especially those who are fathers of daughters, that you might possibly be thinking, “Boy, do I wish that it worked that way. I would really love to choose the guy that my daughter is — or guys my daughters are — going to marry.”

You know, it doesn’t happen that way these days, does it? It used to be the privilege of the parents to do it, but not anymore. How often it happens now that your daughter or son brings home a guy or a girl, and she or he says to the parents, “This is the one I want to marry.”

The parents can barely manage a smile. They say to themselves, *Why in the world would she want to marry a guy or he marry a girl like that? I could have done a lot better job picking her or picking him myself.*

Well, suppose you did have that opportunity, folks. Suppose you did. Suppose you could choose the guy who would marry your daughter. What kind of guy would you choose?

You know, in this regard lots of Christians have what I call tunnel vision. All they can think of is that they would like somebody to marry their daughter who can earn a decent living, take care of their daughter and the family that they have, and treat her nice and come home to her at night. If that’s what he’s able to do, these Christian parents are satisfied. That’s enough for them.

But listen folks, that isn’t enough. That isn’t enough at all. Do you realize what kind of a son-in-law Caleb wanted for his daughter? Remember that Caleb was one of the original 12 spies. When the children of Israel had come to the very borders of the land of Canaan, Moses had sent 12 spies into the land to size the land up and to see how strong the inhabitants of the land were. You remember the story.¹

Ten of those spies came back and said (to paraphrase), “It’s a great land. It’s flowing with milk and honey, but the cities are heavily fortified, and some of the soldiers are giants. And there’s no way in the world that we can go into that land and capture it. We have to give it up.”

But two of the twelve spies — one of them was Joshua and the other was this man, Caleb — said (to paraphrase), “No, no, no. God can go in there with us. God can lead us to victory over our enemies. God can keep His promise, and He can fulfill His word and give us the land of Canaan.”

Don’t you see, folks, that Caleb was a man of courage and faith? That was exactly the kind of man he wanted to marry his daughter to. He wanted his daughter to marry a man who had the courage to believe that God would be with him, that he could fight God’s battles, and that he could take possession of the territory that God had promised. He wanted a man of God, a soldier of the Lord to marry his daughter.

Guess what? He got one. The guy that led the attack was a fellow named Othniel. You will be interested to know that his name in Hebrew means “lion of God.” What a good name! He not only captured Kirjath Sepher, he became the first of the judges, as we shall see later in this book. He delivered the nation of Israel, as a leader, from the dominion of a foreign king. Caleb got the kind of man he wanted for his daughter. He got a man with courage and faith who could fight for God.

Tell me, Christian fathers, when you really stop and think about it, is that what you

¹ Exodus 13 and 14.

want for your daughter? Now I think I could hear somebody saying to me, “Sure, that’s what I want. Of course, that’s what I want. But what can I do about it? We’ve just said that the culture doesn’t give the dad the right to choose the husband anymore. I have to accept whoever she brings home. There’s nothing I can do about it. Nothing.”

Are you sure of that? Whatever happened to prayer? Whatever happened to the power of God?

You know, I was told something years ago that I have never forgotten. I forgot who told it to me. I have even forgotten where it was that he told me this. He was a father. He said, “You know, as soon as my children were born, I began to pray for them.”

He told me that he had prayed that they might be saved, that they might come to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive from Him the free gift of eternal life. But he told me that he also had prayed from the very time of their birth for their marriage partners, and he prayed that God would lead them to good Christian partners in marriage.

I admit that my memory is a little fuzzy here, but my recollection seems to tell me that some or all of his children were grown and that God had answered his prayers.

You know what I don’t understand? Oh, I admit that I’m a bachelor, so what do I know? What do I know about rearing children? But here’s what I don’t understand. I don’t understand how a parent can realize that God has given to them a precious little baby boy or girl, a real wonderful gift from God, and I don’t understand how that parent cannot really want to get down on their knees every single day of their life and pray not only that their child will be saved, but that they will have a good, Christian, dedicated partner in marriage. I don’t understand the reason why some parents do not do this. If any of you know a good reason why they do not, would you please explain it to me, because I don’t get it. I don’t get it.

It would seem to me that prayer for our children is as important as putting food on the table. It’s as important as putting clothes on their back. It is something we should do every single day that we have them in our home and every single day after they leave our home.

There was an Arab sheik one time who was the father of a daughter. He was also a kind of a religious fanatic. He became convinced that the god that he worshiped (I don’t know whether it was Allah or some other god) had commanded him to bury his daughter alive as a sacrifice to his god, so he informed his daughter that that’s what his god had wanted him to do.

As the submissive spirit was in those days in that culture, the daughter agreed to become a sacrifice. So the father went out and he dug the pit of the grave with his own hand. Then he picked his daughter up, preparing to put her in the grave and cover her with mud and dirt and bury her alive.

But as he picked her up, his daughter noticed a wet piece of mud on the Arab’s long beard. Now apparently, Arabs are very proud of their long beards. As a final act of affection for her dad, she took that piece of mud out of his beard. Her action so touched her father that he changed his mind, fanatic though he was. He took his daughter home. Whether his god liked it or not, he did not offer her as a sacrifice.

Has it ever occurred to you that as your children are growing toward maturity, they are in danger of being buried alive? They are in danger of being buried under the mud, the dirt, the filth, the sin, the wickedness, the temptation, and the corruption of this world. They are in danger of being buried under that. If you don’t pray for them

regularly, daily, that's what may actually happen. There's no other way to get the job done, folks, than to pray. So dads, do it right. Moms, do it right. Dad and mom, please do it right.

I really don't know whether you want to call this a lottery, an auction, or a raffle, but whatever you call it, it was a real good deal for Achsah. I want to point out something to you. I can't tell you at all whether Achsah was pretty. I can't tell you whether she was beautiful or homely. If they had had a Miss Judah of 1035 BC contest back there, I don't know whether she could have entered it. If she had entered it, I don't know whether she could have won. But I am telling you this — that not only did Achsah get a good husband, but Othniel got a good wife.

You see, it was the custom in those days, when a father married off his daughter, to give what was sometimes — even in our culture — called a *dowry*. That was a gift. He gave a gift to the son-in-law and to the son-in-law's family. Apparently, on the day that Achsah was to be married to Othniel, the gift had not yet been decided upon. So when Achsah came to Othniel with her father, she urged Othniel to ask for a special kind of gift.

Did you notice what she said? She says, “Now, look, my dad has been very successful in battle, and he's collected a lot of loot. I mean, he's collected a lot of spoil from the Canaanites, and he's got silver and gold coins, and he's got jewels and diamonds, and he's got stuff you wouldn't believe he has. Just ask him for a big old treasure chest of gold and silver and jewels, and we will be on Easy Street financially for many years to come.”

What's that, you say? You don't find that in your Bible? Well, what do you know! It's not there, is it? The Bible says to us that when Achsah came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field.

Apparently, Caleb gave that field to Othniel. But then Achsah gets off her donkey, maybe to say goodbye to her dad. I like to imagine, as she looked up into her dad's eyes, that her dad saw an expression on her face that he recognized as something that he had seen years and years and years, many, many times before. So he says to Achsah (to paraphrase), “What do you wish, honey? I know that you want something. I can tell it in your eyes. Tell me what you want.”

So Achsah said, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South” — but now she adds — “give me also springs of water. Give me water to go with the field that you have given to me and to my husband.” The Bible says that Caleb gave her the upper and the lower springs.

Now listen to me, folks. For making this request, not only urging her husband to ask for the field, but asking her dad for the water, Achsah gets a four-star rating from me. A four-star rating as a potentially excellent wife.

Do you remember that wonderful passage at the end of the book of Proverbs that is talking about the ideal wife? The writer of Proverbs 31:10 says, “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.” Then the writer begins to describe all of the work that this woman does for her husband and for her household. Among the other things that she does, she collects wool and flax. She works willingly with her hands. She considers a field and buys it. Her lamp does not go out at night, and her hands handle the distaff.² Her hand handles the spindle. After describing all of the things that she

² a staff holding wool or flax for spinning.

does, the writer of Proverbs 31:30 says this:

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the gates.

I think that when Achsah was asking, through Othniel, for this field and then for the waters, that her mind was already in high gear. Now, this land was in the south, and that's a section of Israel called the *Negev*. I was fortunate to get to see a little bit of it quite a number of years ago. It is not good territory for raising crops. The ideal thing to do on the Negev is to raise sheep and goats. Of course, to raise sheep and goats, you are going to have to have water. They need water if they are going to survive.

Achsah's mind is already moving ahead — what she and Othniel can do with this field. They can raise sheep and goats. They can have goats' milk to drink. They can have mutton to eat. They can have wool so that she can make the clothing.

Let me tell you something: Achsah is not thinking of a life where she spends all afternoon in the tent watching her favorite soap operas on television. Achsah is thinking of her partnership with Othniel — of what they can accomplish together if they have a field with water.

Now folks, I'm going to say something that's not too popular in our day and age. It's not politically correct. If there are any feminists out there, you're probably going to wish you had a rotten tomato handy that you can toss up here on the platform.

But let me tell you what the Bible says. The Bible says that the man was created first. It says that the woman was taken out of the side of the man, and she was created to be his companion, his helpmate. Let me tell you, Christian wives: If you're married to a Christian husband, you cannot fulfill the purpose for which God has created you unless you are the kind of companion, helpmate, and partner that your husband needs. May I put it to you this way? Wherever your husband's field is, that's your field, too. You are partners in whatever God has called your husband to do. If you want to serve God as a wife, you will be his helpmate.

Tell me Christian parents, does what I have written represent your family values? If you have a daughter, would you like her to be married to a man like Othniel? If you have a son, would you like your son to be a man like Othniel? Would you like your son to marry a daughter, a woman like Achsah?

Don't you see that Caleb, in bringing these two people together, created a marriage and a home in which his own personal values were reproduced. He was a man of courage and faith, and that is what he wanted for his son-in-law.

But Caleb was also a doer. When the other spies said, "We can't do it," Caleb said, "Yes, we can." He gave in marriage a woman who was a doer and who anticipated what she could do as a partner of Othniel.

Are those your family values? If they are not, you know what you need to do? You need to spend some serious thought and prayer deciding where your family, where your home, and where your children are headed.

There was a stray dog that came to the home of a minister who had three sons. They took it in, and the sons became very fond of this dog. Then one day there appeared an advertisement in the newspaper. An owner had lost his dog, and the dog could be

Do It Right, Dad

identified because it had three white hairs in its tail. In the presence of his three sons, the minister removed the three white hairs from the tail of the dog.

After a while, somehow or other, the owner found out that his dog had found a new home, and he came to the house of the minister to claim it. The dog showed every sign of recognizing his old master. But then the minister spoke up and the minister said, “I thought that your advertisement said that your dog had three white hairs in its tail. Obviously, this dog doesn’t have those three white hairs in its tail,” and because of that, the actual owner of the dog was forced to leave. He could not make the positive identification that he needed to make.

But many years later, folks, many years later, the minister said this, “We kept the dog, and I lost my three sons for Christ.” From that point on, his children didn’t believe in what he preached because he didn’t practice what he preached. When your kids see you lie for them, when they see you defend them when they’re really guilty, when they see you unfair in your treatment of other people, they are going to learn more from that than from all of the sermons that they hear in their lifetime.

Caleb reproduced his own character in his daughter and in the home into which she went as a wife. He must have done something right.

Listen to me. Do it right, Dad. Do it right, Mom. Dad and mom, please do it right.

Father, thank You for this great man of God, Caleb, for his brave son-in-law and his hardworking daughter. Help us to learn from their story, the lessons You want for us. I ask this in Christ’s name.

Chapter 10

Can You Do It Alone?

Now, consider for this chapter the following texts from the Bible: Judges 4 and Judges 5:24-27.

When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, ‘Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?’”

And Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!”

So she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh.

And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

Then Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. And the LORD

Can You Do It Alone?

routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket.

Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.'"

Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

- Judges 4

Most blessed among women is Jael,
The wife of Heber the Kenite;
Blessed is she among women in tents.
He asked for water, she gave milk;
She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.
She stretched her hand to the tent peg,
Her right hand to the workmen's hammer;
She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head,
She split and struck through his temple.
At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still;
At her feet he sank, he fell;
Where he sank, there he fell dead.

- Judges 5:24-27

Woodbridge, Illinois, is about 20 miles southwest of Chicago. On Saturday, April 19, 1997, a woman was arrested in a parking lot of a drugstore near Woodbridge. At the time that she was arrested, she was incoherent and she was throwing things.

When the police arrested her, they took her to the Elgin Mental Health Center, and she was committed to the institution in order to receive psychiatric treatment. But there

Can You Do It Alone?

was one thing about this woman that the police did not know. She was a mother. Now the car that had been left in the parking lot contained a toddler's seat, but the police were unable to follow up on that because they didn't have an address.

But by a strange coincidence, in the week that followed, on two consecutive days, the police went to the apartment where the woman lived. The door was locked on both occasions, and the police didn't enter because they didn't have permission to do so.

But just hours after their last visit there on Thursday, a man telephoned the manager of the apartment complex and expressed concern over the whereabouts of his grandson. This brought the police back to the apartment. This time they entered through a patio door, and guess what they found? They found a 23-month-old little boy who had been home alone for five consecutive days. He was in good health, and they turned him over to his grandparents.

Now, Illinois Mental Health Department spokesman Jo Warfield said that it is customary, whenever a person is committed to an institution, to do a screening, and that as a part of the screening, they always inquire about children and they always try to find out if arrangements have been made for taking care of them. But when they screened this woman, they found out nothing because she was incoherent.

So, how did the little boy manage to survive so well by himself for five consecutive days? Well, he did it by whooping down bread, beef, and ice cream. Now, the headline to the story in *The Dallas Morning News*, I think, said it all. The headline read like this: "Stranded Toddler Survives Alone."

You know, years ago, I was talking to a young man who had just recently gotten saved. He had just recently believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for the free gift of everlasting life. He knew he was saved. He knew he was on his way to heaven.

We were discussing the Christian life, and I will never forget what he said to me. He said, "Zane, I can't do it alone." Now he wasn't talking about trying to do it without God's help. As a matter of fact, in the context of our conversation, what he really meant was, "I can't do it unless I'm married. I can't do it alone."

That remark, that comes to my mind from years ago, leads me directly to the question that I would like to ask each and every one of you. The question is: "Can you do it alone?"

You have probably already noticed that the question is also the title of this chapter: "Can You Do It Alone?"

I was overseas in the land of Israel with a tour group that had been touring the Old City of Jerusalem. Now, the Old City of Jerusalem is right next to the newer part of the city, but it's surrounded by walls that date from Crusader times. When you enter the gate of one of these walls, it's kind of like stepping out of a time machine. You feel like you have stepped out of the 20th century, and you've stepped into the Bible days. We had a fascinating tour through the streets of the Old City.

That afternoon, they gave the tour group several free hours. I decided to take an independent tour of the Old City of Jerusalem, so I went back into this walled city. It was not very long before I found myself wandering in a maze of narrow streets in the center of the Old City. I had lost all contact with the direction in which I was going or with any of the tourists who were there. The only people that I saw there were several mean-looking men dressed in the turbans and the long flowing robes just like you see in the movies.

The thought crossed my mind: *They may think that I am a rich American tourist with hundreds of dollars in my wallet. I am probably a prime target for mugging.*

Can You Do It Alone?

Now, I spent some very anxious minutes trying to weave my way through the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem. Imagine my pleasure when I saw at the end of one street a gate, and outside the gate, the tourists were passing. I made a beeline for the gate. I joined the tourists. I want you to know that was the last independent tour that I took during the entire trip.

But my little experience in the Old City of Jerusalem kind of prepares me in a small way to empathize with the man that we read about just a few moments ago in the book of Judges. You see, although I only had to worry about several mean-looking men, the man that we read about had to worry about 900 chariots of iron.

You see, once again, things were bad in the nation of Israel because the children of Israel had turned away from the Lord their God. They had done evil in the sight of the Lord. As a punishment for their departure from Him, God allowed them to fall under the oppressive dominion of a ruler named Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned at a city called Hazor.

Now please remember that the Israelites in the period of the judges were a long way away from the nuclear age. They were certainly a long way away from the age of aerial combat such as we have been through in the recent century. As a matter of fact, they were back in what we might call the Bronze Age. They had not even entered the Iron Age. They did not possess the technology that was needed to create iron weapons, much less to create iron chariots. It is thought that the technology of making iron implements came to Palestine possibly through the Philistines. It might be that Jabin got his technology from there, or maybe he got it from somewhere else, but it is obvious that he had put it to excellent use. He had made 900 chariots.

Now you have to probably visualize here a small vehicle with two wheels, usually drawn by a couple of horses. One man stood in the vehicle, and he was the driver, and usually there was another man who was an archer. Maybe there were two men there besides the driver.

If you happen to belong to an army that only had bronze weapons, or maybe only had wooden implements to fight with, and you found yourself facing an army with 900 chariots, and they were galloping toward you with their horses galloping as fast as they could and the archers filling the air with arrows, I can guarantee you, that would be a very fearful sight. It is not at all surprising, is it, that Jabin, king of Hazor, armed in this way with the chariots, was able to suppress the children of Israel for 20 years? For 20 long, unhappy years, the children of Israel served this man.

But Israel had a secret weapon of its own. It had a secret weapon which Jabin knew nothing about. The secret weapon was a woman. A woman who possessed the gift of prophecy. A woman whose name was Deborah and who judged Israel in those days.

Now, you may be interested to know that Deborah is the only female judge in the entire book of Judges. It is obvious, is it not, that Deborah was not the kind of person that loved pomp and circumstance, because when she was holding court, she simply sat out under a palm tree, which came to be known as *the palm tree of Deborah*. The children of Israel brought their cases, their lawsuits, and their quarrels to Deborah. No doubt using her gift of prophecy, Deborah decided on behalf of the person who was in the right, and she condemned the person who was in the wrong.

One day, Deborah summoned into her presence a man by the name of Barak, the son of Abinoam, a man who lived in a village called Kedesh in the territory occupied by the tribe of Naphtali. Deborah said to Barak, as he stood before her:

Can You Do It Alone?

Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, “Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand”?

- Judges 4:6-7

Barak said, “My, what a splendid opportunity. I am getting the privilege of leading a relatively small number of soldiers from the land of Israel against the entire chariot army of Sisera, and I’m guaranteed to have victory. God, thank you. Thank you for conveying a message like that to me.” What’s that you say? You don’t find those words of Barak in your Bible?

No wonder, because that is not what Barak said. In fact, he didn’t say anything like that. I’m going to give you the Hodges’ free translation of what Barak said to Deborah when she delivered this message. You know what Barak said, Hodges’ translation? Barak said, “I can’t do it alone. I can’t do it alone. Deborah, if you will go with me, then I will go. If you will not go with me, then I will not go.”

As far as I know, this is the first time in the history of the world that a potential commanding general said, “I am not going out into battle unless a woman goes with me.” Hey, how about that?

Now, I may get into trouble with the other men reading this, because I may be revealing secrets that the male fraternity would prefer not to have out in the open. But I’m going to take my chances, anyway. I am convinced — because I know a lot of men — I am convinced that there are a lot of men who say deep down in their heart, “I could never live the Christian life or be victorious in Christian warfare unless I’m married, unless I’ve got a woman by my side.”

Now I wouldn’t dare to speculate on what the ladies say. Is it possible, I’m asking, is it possible that there are women who say deep down inside, “I could never really live the Christian life unless I was married”?

Are there men and women who would say, “You know, I have a good Christian friend, and that Christian friend is so dedicated, so strong, so spiritual that they are a real support to me. If something happened to take them out of my life, well then, I couldn’t live the Christian life because I can’t do it alone”?

Somebody whose name I do not know told the following story. He said:

I went into the police station one night to pay off a parking ticket and there was an old lady in front of me who was trembling all over. I went and paid the parking ticket and as I was headed out, I saw the lady sitting in a corner on a bench absorbed in a book. And so I said to the lady, “Is there any trouble? Is there anything I can do?”

And the lady replied, “No, thank you.” She says, “You see, I was home alone reading this mystery book. I got so scared as I was reading it that I decided to come down and finish the book under police protection.”

Now folks, I think there are a lot of people for whom the Christian life is just a great

Can You Do It Alone?

big mystery, and they are scared. They are scared, and they feel they need to try to live it under the protection of somebody else — their spouse, their church, their friends, their relatives — because deep down in their hearts they do not have enough confidence in God to see that through, and therefore they say, “I can’t do it alone.”

Did you notice how Deborah responded to this? She could have said to Barak, “Shame on you, Barak. What are you, a man or a mouse? Shame. Shame. Shame on you. Don’t you have courage? Don’t you have faith in God? Why aren’t you the man that you ought to be?” Now, if Deborah had said something like that, she’d have been right. She would have been 100% on target.

But instead, her answer to Barak is tinged with the mercy and also the firmness that is characteristic of the God that she served. So, Deborah said to Barak, to paraphrase, “Yes, I will really go with you, but I want you to know that there will be no glory for you in the journey that you are taking. God will give Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

Hey folks, is this Ladies’ Day, or what? I mean, we have the only female judge. We have a man who will not go to war without a woman. The female judge says, “God’s going to give the honor of executing the opposing general to a woman.”

Well, that’s what happened. Deborah got up and went with Barak, and Barak proved to be a very good recruiter. He gathered an army of 10,000 people from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. He went up to Mount Tabor, and the scouts of Sisera reported that is what Barak had done.

So Sisera, going out from the place where he lived, Harosheth Hagoyim, mobilized his entire army, his 900 chariots, and all of his military forces. There, they were mobilized in the valley through which ran the River Kishon.

If you had been in the army of Barak up in Mount Tabor, and if you looked down at that huge force of soldiers and iron chariots, I am betting it looked pretty scary. Did you notice it was not Barak who gave the command to attack?

It was Deborah who said, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?” (Judges 4:14)

So Barak and his men swarmed down from Mount Tabor. They swept through Sisera’s army. Amazingly, folks, the Bible says, “And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak” and his men (Judges 4:15).

How did this happen? There are some clues in Judges 5:15-21. Apparently, just before the battle or during the battle, it rained very hard, and the River Kishon was swollen and overflowed its banks. Guess what? The ground all around must have become very muddy.

Think what that would do with the chariots. Can’t you just imagine? The chariots getting their wheels sunk into the mud. The drivers trying to whip their horses into action. The horses rearing their front legs and trying desperately to pull the chariots and the archers, some of whom were falling out of the chariots. The whole army of Sisera was in mass confusion.

Barak and his men swept through Sisera’s army and struck them down. Not a man of them was left except for Sisera.

When Sisera saw that the battle was going against him, guess what he did? He hopped down off his chariot. No use trying to drive a chariot through the mud. Sisera took off on foot. Barak took off after Sisera. But God was never going to let Barak catch up with Sisera, because God would not give Barak the glory of defeating in person the opposing

general.

Can I tell you about one of the observations that I have made over more than four decades of Christian ministry? Here it is: There are lots of families where the man will not take the spiritual leadership of the family.

Sometimes you will see the wife and kids at church while the man is back home watching television. Men like this hardly ever gather their family around them and read and discuss the Bible with their wives and children. They hardly ever gather their family together to have family prayer. They leave it to the woman. They let her lead in the spiritual battle while they sit back and don't do their part, much less take the lead.

Would you like a bachelor's-eye view of this kind of situation? Maybe you wouldn't. I'm going to give it anyway. You know what? If the Lord had given me a nice Christian wife and had given me children to rear,¹ and I wasn't well out in front of them spiritually — well ahead of them spiritually and leading the way, blazing the path for God — you know what I'd feel like doing? I would feel like going home and crawling into a closet and shutting the closet door and hiding there for shame.

Fathers, guys, if you are not the obvious evident leader of your home spiritually, shame on you. Shame, shame, shame on you.

There was an incident that happened right here in Dallas, I don't know how many years ago. The chances are good that it happened at the Texas State Fair, but I'm not positive of that.

There was a prize-winning hog on display. You know how prize-winning hogs look, don't you? They are fat. They are well fed. If hogs can have a contented expression, they have contented expressions on their face. Sometimes as you watch them, they are sound asleep. It looks like they do not do much but eat and sleep. That is probably true.

There was this prize-winning hog on display. There was a boy who was displaying the hog, and he had a poor, pale, sickly look on his face. He was thin and emaciated. He seemed to be trying to find out how many cigarettes he could smoke in the shortest amount of time.

Guess what? The hog, the prize-winning hog belonged to the father of this boy. At least from the outset, from the outside, it looked as if the father had been more successful in raising his hog than he had been in raising his son.

Fathers, are you awake? God does not give you any prizes for raising prize-winning hogs and showing them off down at the state fair. He does not give you any prizes for having a good job, for buying a nice home, for putting food on the table and clothes on your children's back, because that's what you ought to do. The prize comes when you raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and they love God and walk with God. They are your prizewinning treasures and trophies.

You will never raise children like that unless you lead your home. Even if your wife will not cooperate, you can do it alone with the help of God.

So, there was Sisera running for his life. He had once been commander of a chariot force of 900. Now, he was reduced to the level of a foot soldier trying to get away. As Sisera runs, he sees a tent. He recognizes the tent. It is the tent of Heber the Kenite. This was not a Jewish man. Heber was a descendant of Moses' father-in-law. There was peace between Heber and Jaban, king of Canaan.

So Sisera may be saying to himself, "You know, I think I've got it. I think I'm safe

¹ Zane never married and never had biological children.

Can You Do It Alone?

now. I can just get into this tent and get hospitality there, and the laws of hospitality will protect me from my enemy.”

Sisera comes to the entrance of the tent and Heber’s wife, whose name was Jael, comes out. She says, “Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me” (Judges 4:18).

Sisera goes in, and he is really very tired. So he lies down, and Jael puts a blanket over him. Sisera says to Jael, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty” (Judges 4:19).

So instead of bringing Sisera water, Jael brought Sisera milk, probably goat’s milk or maybe it was cow’s milk, I don’t know. But please remember that this was a long time before refrigeration. So this was not a nice, cold glass or bottle of dairy-made milk, fresh out of the ice box. The chances are good that the milk was warm.

Sisera drank the milk, and because he was so tired and covered with a blanket, and because he had drunk the warm milk, he was about to fall asleep. He said to Jael, “Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there any man here?’ you shall say, ‘No’” (Judges 4:20). Just say, “No,” like in the present campaign.²

Sisera falls asleep. Instead of going outside and standing guard, Jael picks up a tent peg — maybe like a nail, or maybe a wooden stake. Jael grabs a hammer and, very softly, she steals in the direction of Sisera. If we had been standing there, we might have said, “Jael, be careful what you do. Don’t you realize you have got a man’s tools in your hand? I mean, isn’t it the men who have to drive the nails into the ground with the hammer? Are you sure you know what you are doing, Jael?”

I bet she did know what she was doing. In fact, I bet every time Heber moved and the men got out there and were setting up the tent again, that Jael was out with them, pounding the tent pegs with the guys. She certainly knew what she was doing.

When Jael got to Sisera, she raised that tent peg and raised the hammer. I don’t think her hands were shaking. I don’t think she was thinking to herself, *I wonder if I’m going to miss. I wonder if I’m going to hit the ground and wake him up and then I’m done for.* No, I think she was very confident. Apparently, one blow, and the tent peg went down through Sisera’s temple and all the way through his head and into the ground beneath him.

Then Jael goes out, and she meets Barak, and she says, “Come, I will show you the man whom you seek” Judges 4:22.

Barak went in. There was Sisera dead. Guess what? Barak discovered that a woman had done his work for him. A woman had done his work for him.

My friends, all over the world, there are courageous women whose husbands have left them, whose husbands have deserted them, whose husbands refuse to take leadership. The woman does what the man should have done. The man loses the reward. He loses the honor of raising his children as they ought to be raised. The honor and the praise goes to the woman who did it herself.

Now, I am going to close. I have got to be very careful with what I say in these closing remarks. This week we have had our newspaper headlines filled with — and our television screens full of — a sex scandal that concerns President Bill Clinton and an intern who was, at the time, 22 years of age, not very much older than his daughter.³

² “Just Say No” a campaign in the 1980s and early 1990s, was initiated by First Lady Nancy Reagan to discourage illegal drug use.

³ News of the President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky scandal broke in January 1998.

Can You Do It Alone?

I feel that in all of the media coverage, one thing has been forgotten: The most innocent victim of all of this, who has been forgotten, is Chelsea Clinton, who is going to college out on the West Coast.⁴ Can you imagine how she must be agonizing now as these stories fill the news media?

I want us all to understand this: If parents — starting with fathers — fail to fulfill their obligations before God as husbands and fathers or as wives and mothers, the sure victims of all of these failures will be the children. They are the ones who suffer the most.

So if you're a father, or if you're a mother, or even if you are a person who thinks that someday you will become a father or a mother, let me urge you to go forth into the battle of life with complete confidence in God's ability to see you through. Trust totally in Him, no matter what the opposition looks like. Never, never, never say, "I can't do it alone."

Father, if You are with us, we are not alone. We do not need anyone else with us but You. I pray that You will teach us this, and that, through our confidence in You, we may give You the opportunity to win magnificent victories for Your glory. I ask this in Christ's name.

⁴ Chelsea Clinton attended Stanford University from 1997-2001.

Chapter 11

Samson's Dad

Now, consider for this chapter the following text from the Bible: Judges 13.

Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, "O my LORD, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."

And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!"

So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?"

And He said, "I am."

Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?"

So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her

Samson's Dad

observe.”

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, “Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You.”

And the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD.” (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the LORD.)

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, “What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?”

And the Angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?”

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on— it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar—the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. When the Angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the LORD.

And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!”

But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time.”

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

- Judges 13

One of my favorite characters in the Bible is Samson's dad. Now I think you will agree with me that many people know the name *Samson*. In fact, people who know very little about the Bible would recognize the name *Samson*, and they would be able to say he was the strongest man who ever lived.

But if somebody was asked, “What was the name of Samson's father?” the chances are good that 99% of people would not be able to come up with the name *Manoah*. Yet the interesting thing is, my friends, that Manoah gets a whole chapter in the Bible — Judges 13. In this chapter it is possible for us to learn some very important truths from the father of Samson.

Now I presume that I don't need to convince you that fathers have a very important role in the home. I may not need to convince *you*, but the society and culture round about us probably needs some convincing. An item appeared in the *USA Today* for May

of 2000 with the title, "What Father Involvement Means." Let me just read you a few short excerpts of this. It begins by saying that more than one fourth of American children — 17 million — don't live with their fathers. Think about that for a minute. Nearly one fourth of American children — 17 million — don't live with their fathers.

What have they discovered about the absence of a father? Girls without fathers in their lives are 2.5 times more likely to get pregnant and 53% more likely to commit suicide. That's an astounding figure. Girls without fathers are 63% more likely to run away and 37% more likely to use drugs.

Boys and girls without fatherly involvement are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to go to jail, and nearly four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems. The role that God has given to the father in the home is a very important role indeed.

What kind of a father did Samson have? Well, this chapter reveals the character of his father with the usual skill and insight that we find in the Bible. God was in the process, at this point in the history of the judges, of raising up a new judge who would be an instrument of His justice against the Philistines, who were oppressing his people. That judge, of course, was to be the famous Samson.

So on one occasion, the wife of Manoah was apparently out in the field, and the Angel of the Lord appeared to her. Now, even though she does not recognize Him right away as the Angel of the Lord, and Manoah does not, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was one of the ways in which God Himself manifested Himself to the people of Israel from time to time and under various circumstances.

So the Angel of the Lord says to Manoah's wife, to paraphrase, "You are no longer going to be barren. You are going to conceive, and you are going to have a son. Now, while this son is in your womb, be careful that you don't drink wine or strong drink, that you don't eat anything that is unclean under the Law, because your son is going to be a Nazarite from the womb."

Now, we need to understand that the Nazarite was a special category that is described for us. For example, in the book of Numbers, it was possible for a Jewish man to take the Nazarite vow. Apparently, he could specify for how long this vow would last. This is an Old Covenant arrangement. When a man took the Nazarite vow, the things he did not do were: number one, he did not cut his hair at all; number two, he did not drink wine or strong drink or eat anything that was inappropriate for him to eat; number three, he did not touch dead bodies.

So the Nazarite, for the period of his Nazarite vow, was not allowed to do any of these things. Now, while Samson is in his mother's womb, she is not to do things like drinking wine. But it is Samson himself who is to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb, which means his hair will never be cut, and he will never drink wine or strong drink.

So, when Manoah's wife gets this revelation from God, she runs to Manoah. The Scriptures are careful to show that she repeats the information that she got from the Angel of the Lord exactly as she got it, so that Manoah gets all the facts here.

So, Manoah prays. It is a good thing in this kind of a situation to pray, don't you agree? But it would have been nicer if Manoah had said something like this: "Lord, this is wonderful news. I want to praise You because Your power is going to take away the barrenness of my wife, and You are going to give us a son. Lord, please give us the strength to do the things that You have asked us to do." That would have been a good prayer, don't you agree?

But instead, Manoah prays this: "O my LORD, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born" (Judges 13:8). Say what? "What are we going to do with this child?" Well, the answer is really in the Word of God.

If this child is to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb, then from his earliest years, they are not going to cut his hair. In fact, that was explicit in the Angel's directions. They are not to let him drink wine. They are to keep him away from dead bodies.

The Word of God had already told them what to do. The Angel of the Lord had told his wife what she should do. And Manoah says, to paraphrase, "We've got to find out what we should do."

But you know how God is. He is very gracious to His sincere children, however dumb they may be in the requests that they make in their prayers. He sends the Angel back. But please notice that the Angel of the Lord does not come to Manoah. The Angel of the Lord comes to the wife again out in the field. So she goes running to her husband and she says, to paraphrase, "The Man who appeared to me the other day is here. He's come back" (Judges 13:11).

So Manoah goes out and says to Him, "What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" (Judges 13:12) To paraphrase, "Are you the man that spoke to my wife?"

The Man responds, "Yes."

Manoah says, "All right. Tell us, what's his work to be?"

Notice the answer of the Angel of the Lord to Manoah: "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe" (Judges 13:13-14).

In terms of new information, there is zero — an absolute zero. All the Angel of the Lord does is repeat the information He's already given to Manoah's wife. At this point, it would have been very nice for Manoah to say, "Oh, I apologize to You. I made You come back here just to repeat what You'd already told my wife. I should have realized that You would tell her everything she needed to know in the first place, and the rest of it is what we get out of the Law of Moses. I am so sorry for having bothered You like this."

But Manoah cannot let it go. He just simply cannot let it go. So in verse 15, he says, "Please let us detain You." No apology from Manoah for bringing the Angel of the Lord back, but Manoah wants the Angel of the Lord to stay a while. Manoah says, "...and we will prepare a young goat for You."

Now, Manoah is thinking, probably, of the standards of hospitality. If he had a guest in his house, under his roof, he would feed his guest. But this is not a guest under his roof. This is out in the field. But still, Manoah has got to get it right. He may be thinking, *We really need to do something hospitable for this man who has brought us this message.* So Manoah says, to paraphrase, "You know, hang around a little while and let me feed You."

To paraphrase, the Angel of the Lord replies, "I'm not going to eat your food. If you want to use the young goat for a sacrifice, you are going to have to sacrifice it to the Lord" — because at this point, Manoah does not know he is basically talking to the Lord.

It would have been nice for Manoah to have said, "Oh, I am so sorry. I should not try to detain You like this in the first place. I brought You back when You did not need to come. And now I'm trying to keep You around, and You are not going to eat the food,

anyway. Why should I bother You?" But Manoah cannot let it go.

In verse 17, Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" In other words, Manoah is saying, "I want to be very careful that You get all of the respect and honor that You are due because You are making this prophecy. When the prophecy is fulfilled, I want to honor You. So tell me Your name."

And the Angel of the Lord says to Manoah, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" (Judges 13:18), which is a polite way of saying, "It is none of your business."

Now, Manoah should have said, "Oof! Not only have I brought You back, not only am I trying to keep You around when You do not need to stay around; now I am getting nosy with You. I am trying to get Your name when I have no business to ask Your name. You have not offered me Your name. You are a messenger of God. Why should I want Your name?" But he can't let it go. He cannot let it go.

The Angel has said the magic word: "If you want to offer a sacrifice." The Angel did not say, "You should," but, "If you want." "If you do offer a sacrifice," the Angel of the Lord says, "it has got to be to the Lord."

So, Manoah rushes off to get the young goat. On a rock there, he kills the goat and offers it with a grain offering on the rock. Then, to the amazement of Manoah and his wife, the Angel ascends in the flame up to heaven and disappears. And then they realize that they have been talking to the Angel of the Lord.

Manoah then says, "Isn't this wonderful that we have actually had this marvelous experience? I realize I blundered by getting Him back here. I was foolish to try to retain Him. I was nosy to try to get a name that I was not entitled to get. But this is such a wonderful experience that we have actually encountered the Lord in the Person of the Angel of the Lord." What's that you say? You don't see that there? That's not what Manoah says?

No, instead Manoah says, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" (Judges 13:22) Ouch!

Now I have often said to men that a lot of men, and maybe you're one of them, are very lucky if they are married to a sensible woman. The one asset that Manoah has in this story is the sensible lady that he is married to.

When Manoah says, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" Manoah's wife says, "Cool down, honey, and don't get upset." Well, she doesn't quite say that, but you understand that is about what she meant.

She said, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time" (Judges 13:23).

In other words, she says, "If the Lord had wanted to kill us, would He have accepted a sacrifice and a grain offering from us at this time? Not only that, would He have given us the kind of information and the kind of news that He has given us? He says we're going to have a son. What's the point in Him killing us, after telling us we're going to have a son, and before we even have this son, mind you." I get the impression that Manoah calmed down with the sage advice of his wife.

What's wrong with Manoah? Very simple. His relationship to the living God is tinged with a deep element of fear. He is fearful. So when he gets information that God is going to give them a son, he is worried they do not have enough information. He wants more.

When the Angel actually returns, he is worried he isn't showing Him the right

hospitality, so he tries to offer hospitality. When he asks for His name, he is worried that he won't be able to honor the Angel properly after His words are fulfilled. Now he thinks this is the end.

Manoah is a man who obviously believes in God, but at the same time, he is scared of God. He is frightened in his relationship with God. He is the kind of person that thinks, "Boy, if I don't do this just right, God will zap me."

You know that kind of mentality? "If I don't get up in the morning and say my prayers for 15 minutes, God is going to get me." Or, "If I don't read my Bible for 20 minutes in the morning, God is going to get me." (It is all right to read in the evening — just that you are reading it.) But fear can enter in. Was this the kind of father that Samson needed? I don't think so.

I like to imagine Samson coming to his father at the age of 14 or 15 and saying to Manoah, "I have a problem. All of my friends make fun of me because my hair has never been cut. I have so much hair on me, and they all tell me that I look like a girl." You know how kids are. They probably started telling Samson that from his earliest years. "You look like a girl, Samson. Only girls wear their hair like that, that long."

"Now," says Samson to his dad, "they are starting to bring out wine glasses because they think they are old enough to drink a little wine. I can't drink any wine because I'm a Nazirite. They are making fun of me: 'Oh, you can't drink with us, right? We are going to enjoy this in front of you,' and all of this. What do I do, Dad?"

Wouldn't it have been nice if Samson had a father who said to him, "Look, you are acting in obedience to God's word to you. God told your mother before you were even born that you were to be a Nazirite. The Word of God says that as a Nazirite you are not to do certain things. What you need to do is to be strong on the basis of God's Word — to stand your ground and to realize that God will help you. God will defend you, and God will be with you. Don't worry about your friends. Don't get scared. Stand firm on the simple Word of God."

Can you imagine Manoah ever saying that to Samson, since he didn't know how to do it himself? Manoah is scared in his relationship to God. How can he teach his son to be brave and courageous in the Lord?

Now the sad thing is that Samson needed that kind of a father figure in the home. It appears from the life of Samson, among other things, that he was driven to prove his manhood. So he is always hooking up with the wrong type of woman. He does not want to marry an Israelite girl. He wants to marry a Philistine girl. After that collapses on him, he has affairs with a harlot in Gaza and with a woman named Delilah. Putting it very simply, he is not attracted to the good girls. He is attracted to the bad girls because it proves his manhood. If he is attractive to them, then he must be a man.

Can you imagine a guy growing up with this long hair and probably getting all the kidding that he got? When he became a man, he was driven to a very significant extent by his need to prove himself a man.

In addition to that, it appears that Samson had at least a subconscious desire to get his hair cut. Remember his relationship with Delilah. He tells her three lies when she tries to find out the source of his strength. Each lie gets closer to the truth. Then, to our dumbfounded amazement, after she has proved that she will do whatever he tells her to do to remove the source of his strength, he tells her the truth.

Samson says, "If the locks of my hair are cut, I'll be weak like any other man." I think Samson unconsciously knew this, if not consciously knew this: *She will cut my hair. She*

Samson's Dad

sure will. I can't do it myself, but she'll do it. Sure enough, Delilah did. It was a disaster, because Samson lost his eyesight and his freedom till the day of his death.

I want to suggest to you that Samson suffered in his adult years because he had a dad who was fearful in his relationship to the living God.

The role that God has given to fathers in the home is extremely important. Now, maybe you are a father here and your problem is not that you are fearful in your relationship to God. But if you have a very significant personal or spiritual weakness, be assured that it will have an effect on your family and on your children. Let me mention a couple, just to illustrate.

Indifference to the Lord. I'm not talking about a person who does not come to church. I am not talking about a person who won't send their kids to Sunday school. I am talking about a dad for whom God is not in the first place in the home. And you know who's going to be the first person to discover that? Probably your wife, and after that, the kids. The kids come to church, perhaps, and they hear that they should love the Lord with all their heart, that they should be dedicated to God. Then they go home to a dad who watches TV more than he reads his Bible, who prefers sports to spiritual activities, and on and on it goes. Don't you think that that kind of a dad will have a negative influence on his children? You better believe it. They will. Let me try another one.

Here is a dad that loses his temper at his wife. For example, he uses loud and harsh language in addressing her, yells at her. I am talking about Christian dads now. Now, the Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). It is clear that none of us can think of the Lord as losing His cool with His church or screaming at His church. When a father does that in the home, particularly when he does it repeatedly, it has a very negative effect on the kids.

Now that also goes for the ladies, right? This goes for the ladies, too. You don't scream at your husband. That's contrary to the Scriptures too. You are supposed to be submissive to your husband. If you have screamed at your husband, the best thing for you to do is to go to your bedroom and ask God to help you to never do it again — even give you lockjaw, if necessary, to keep you from doing it again.

But I am not talking to the ladies directly, only indirectly. I am saying to the husbands that if there are significant flaws in your spiritual character, your children will see them. They will be negatively impacted by what they see and by what they hear in the home.

May I ask each of the fathers to do something? Please just think for a minute. If your children came to you one by one, and you asked them, "What is my worst failing as a father?" what would they tell you? If you cannot figure out what they will tell you, ask your wife, because she probably knows. They probably told her.

The point that I am making is that there is an enormous privilege in being a father, but there is a very solemn responsibility. I think we can be very sure that God will hold all of the fathers responsible for the kind of people that they have been in the home. The father's role is more important in its own way than the woman's role. The father is the head of the house.

Manoah is an example of a dad whose character subverted the future life of a son whom God wanted to use and did use in spite of the flaws that he had.

Now I know that many parents pray for their children, and I commend parents for that. It is important for us to pray for our children. But I also want to say this. I have long had the belief that one of the reasons that children have strayed from the Lord is because they have seen and heard things in the home which have subverted their

Samson's Dad

Christian walk.

I think it is possible that we have parents reading this — both fathers and mothers — who need to ask themselves very seriously whether they have met the obligations that God has for them. Whether there are significant flaws in your personality, in your character, or in your relationship to God — significant flaws that have negatively impacted your children.

I think you should ask God to correct those flaws in you at the same time that He is correcting the flaws in your children.

There was a minister who had three boys. One day, a stray dog came to their house, and they didn't know who it belonged to. So they took it in, and the three boys fell in love with it.

Then one day there appeared in the newspaper an advertisement advertising for a lost dog. One of the distinctive features of the description of this lost dog was it had three white hairs in its tail. It was apparently not a white dog, but had three white hairs in its tail. The minister, in the presence of his three sons, took the dog and very carefully plucked out the three white hairs.

After a while, somehow or other, the owner of the dog found out where his dog had gone and came to the house to claim it. The dog apparently recognized its former owner. But the minister stepped forward and said, "Didn't your advertisement say that your dog had three white hairs in its tail? As you can see for yourself, this dog doesn't have them."

The owner of the dog had to turn around and go home without his dog. Later, the minister said this: "We kept the dog, and I lost my three sons for Chris," because after that, the sons did not seriously take the messages that their father preached, because he did not practice what he preached.

Please, parents, in the presence of the Lord, ask the Lord to show you any inconsistencies that you may have in your life that are harmful to your children, and ask God for the grace to correct those habits. If you're a father, make it your objective that by the grace of God and by the strength that only God can give you, that you will be the father that your children need you to be.

Chapter 12

Me or Him?

Before examining 1 Kings 2:1-12, let us briefly consider 1 Kings 1. First Kings 1 may be titled “The Story of the Palace Fixers.” With great literary skill, the author of 1 Kings has drawn aside the curtain and allowed us to look in on palace politics and the way that palace politics determined the successor to King David on the throne of Israel. What we note particularly in 1 Kings 1 is that there is nowhere any mention of the idea that Solomon was the man that God had chosen to succeed David.

What happened was that when Adonijah tried to set up his own kingdom, those who were left out of his gathering feared for their lives. They knew that they had to counteract Adonijah’s plot. They did this by using a vow that David had made to Bathsheba — that her son Solomon would sit on the throne of Israel. They manipulated David and all of the events to bring about the result that they desired, which was the establishment of the kingdom of Solomon.

We are very struck by the fact that the greatest name in the history of Israel, in terms of the greatness of his kingdom, came to the throne without any clear indication from the prophetic word of God that he was the man to be king.

Now in the passage we are about to read, we have David’s final charge to Solomon. Remember that at this point, David and Solomon are both kings in Israel. This was not unusual, apparently, in the Middle East when the aging father was no longer able to carry out all the duties of the office of king. He elevated his son, who was then a co-king with him. When the father passed off the scene, then the son was the only king. So this is an exchange between the two kings — the father and the son. I think it’s very interesting to see what happens in 1 Kings 2:1-12:

Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: “I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,’ He said, ‘you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’

“Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me. That is¹ what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.

¹ In 1 Kings 2:5, Zane preferred translating with *That is* instead of *and*.

“But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother.

“And see, you have with you Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a malicious curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim. But he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ Now therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man and know what you ought to do to him; but bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood.”

So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. The period that David reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Down through the years of human history there has always been a keen interest in the last words of important people. We are always interested to know what some famous person — whether it’s a politician, an actor, or a celebrity of some kind — has said on their deathbed, or close to dying. Although we can’t prove that these are the very last words that David spoke, and they probably are not, they are nevertheless David’s final charge to his son Solomon, who is taking over the kingdom and will replace David as king of Israel.

One of the things that makes last words interesting is that when you’re facing death, there’s no particular reason to pretend about things anymore, wouldn’t you agree? There is no particular reason to deceive people, no particular reason to play a role. You are facing death. You are about to go. Therefore, very often the last words of people are a real window into their hearts and into their souls. We can look through these last words and see what the people that have spoken these last words are really like.

It seems to me that in the last words of David, we do have a window on David’s heart, a window on his soul. I regret to tell you that as we look through this window, we are not exactly pleased or inspired by what we see.

David starts out his final words to Solomon in a way that sounds very impressive to us. He says:

“I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn...”

- 1 Kings 2:2-3

To put it very simply, David is saying to Solomon, “Obey all of God’s Law so that you may be successful.”

I really don’t know what was going through Solomon’s mind at this point. But if I had been Solomon sitting there, I suspect the following thoughts might have occurred to me as I heard this:

Me or Him?

Okay, Dad. You're telling me that I should walk in all of the commandments and statutes of the Law of Moses, right? But do you realize, Dad, that almost everybody in the palace knows the story of how you committed adultery with my mother when she was, in fact, the wife of one of your soldiers. Then, when my mother was pregnant, you got her husband back from the battlefield, and you tried to get him drunk so he would go down to his own house and cover up your sin.

When you failed in doing that, you sent him back to the battlefield. Apparently, you got Joab to make sure that he was killed in battle, and then you married my mother. Although the child that she was pregnant with died, I was born later.

Dad, don't you think that my half-brothers and my half-sisters in this palace haven't taunted me and mocked me because of the way in which my mother was brought into this palace? Dad, are you not the man who has multiplied wives, even though the Law of Moses instructs the king not to multiply wives?

Dad, aren't you the man who ordered that some of Saul's descendants be executed for Saul's crime, even when the Law of Moses said that the children shall not be put to death for their fathers? Dad, where do you get off telling me to obey the Law of Moses when you have a record like that?

Now, I don't know what was going on in Solomon's mind, but wouldn't you agree that thoughts like that could have crossed his mind?

You know, one of the mistakes that parents make is that they tell their kids to do right and then they, the parents, do wrong. One of the earliest things that I had said to me when I came into this ministry,² maybe 40-plus years ago — I remember a parent saying to me, "I don't know what went wrong with my child. I always told them right from wrong."

I said in my heart, *You told them right from wrong, but did you show them right from wrong? Or did you show them that wrong can be right sometimes?* It is very tragic for parents not to model before their children the obedience that they wish their children to have.

Why did David want this obedience from Solomon? Well, did you notice in 1 Kings 2:4 that he wanted this obedience from Solomon so that God's blessing could rest on Solomon and so that God's blessing could rest on the nation of Israel which Solomon would rule, and so that the nation could have security and peace and happiness and joy? What's that you say? You don't see that there? That's not what it says.

Look at the reason that David gives for Solomon to be obedient to the Lord. 1 Kings 2:4:

"that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

Can you believe this? David is saying, "Solomon, I want you to walk in the ways of God. Solomon, I want you to be a successful king so that God can fulfill His promise to me so

² Victor Street Bible Chapel in Dallas, Texas, where Zane ministered for about 50 years.

that I can always have a son sitting on the throne of Israel.”

Whatever happened to God’s blessing on Solomon? Whatever happened to God’s blessing on Israel as a reason for Solomon obeying God? “Look!” says David, “I would like to be the head of the line of kings that goes on and on and on and on. Solomon, do not blow it. Don’t blow it for me, because God has promised that if you and all my children will be obedient, then I’ll never lack somebody sitting on the throne of Israel.”

Are you shocked? Yes and no. Do you know why parents sometimes are really sad that their kids have failed? Let’s face it: Because their kids have embarrassed them. Because their kids have made them look bad as parents. Because their kids have disgraced the family. Sometimes parents will actually say that to kids. “How could you do that? You’ve disgraced us. No member of this family has ever done something like that. I’m embarrassed.” Whatever happened to the idea that it is terrible if our kids do wrong because of the trouble that that brings to our kids?

I think that if I were a parent, I would do a very careful checklist. I suspect there is no parent who does not want their child to walk with God and keep God’s commandments. But why do you want it? For yourself, for your family, or for your kid and for the glory of God in your kid?

Not too good a start for the last words of David, wouldn’t you agree with me? That is his general command. But now he’s got some specific instructions.

He says, “You know about Joab.” Joab, of course, was the son of David’s sister, Zeruiah, and therefore a nephew of David. Notice what David says in 1 Kings 2:5:

“Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed.”

What did Joab do to you, David? David says, “Well, I was in the process of making a treaty with Abner. Joab interfered with that by killing Abner. I was planning to make Amasa the new commander and chief of the armies of Israel. Joab interfered with that and he killed Amasa.”

You might be tempted to say in response, “David, yeah, maybe Joab did do you some damage, but have you forgotten you killed those two guys?”³ But notice the priority David has with “what Joab did to me” first, and then what Joab did to these two commanders that he killed.

But of course, David knew that Joab was covered with bloodguilt. Notice what David says at the end of verse 5. David says, “[H]e [Joab] shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet.”

In other words, David is saying, “It is just as if Joab had smeared his belt that held his sword with innocent blood. It is just as if he had trampled in the blood of these innocent men. He is a bloody man.”

Did you notice that David could have said, “Because of that, one of my last acts as king of Israel is that I am going to order an executioner to bring Joab right here, and I am going to execute him. I should have done it a long time ago, but at least I can do it before I die. We’re going to have him executed.”

³ *two guys* refers to Uriah and to Saul’s descendant(s) mentioned in previous paragraphs.

Me or Him?

David did not say that. We read in 1 Kings 2:6, “Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.”

In football, this is called a lateral pass. You are not running the ball. Somebody else is running it. It is also called passing the buck.

David is saying, “I should have killed Joab. I should have executed him for the innocent blood that he shed, but I’m not going to do it. Will you please do it for me? Find a way of doing it. You’re a smart man. Find a way of doing this. Bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood.”

Parents should never pass their unfulfilled responsibilities on to their children. Here is a dad who says to his son, “You know, son, all my life, I wanted to give a really big monetary gift to the church. I’ve wanted for years to give \$1,000 to the church, and I never really got around to it. Would you please give a big gift to the church someday for me?”

Or, here’s a mom who said, “I always felt God wanted me to teach Sunday school” (she’s speaking to her daughter), “but somehow or other, I never found time to teach Sunday school. Would you please teach Sunday school someday, for your mom’s sake?”

And on and on it can go. Sometimes it’s not that direct. Sometimes it’s not that specific. We just kind of, you know, pass along our little unfulfilled responsibilities to the kids, and we say, “I wish you would do this. I didn’t ever get a chance to do it, but would you do this for me?”

That is what David is doing here, isn’t he? He said, “I never got around to executing Joab. Would you please take care of that for me?”

Now, I’m glad to say that there is a little bit of a bright spot here because David goes on in verse 7 to give instructions regarding the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite. David is saying to Solomon “Let them be among those who eat at your table, because they came to me when I fled from Absalom, your brother. Please continue my kindness.”

David had already rewarded Barzillai, but he wanted his son to continue to express gratitude. There is certainly nothing wrong, is there, with parents saying to their children, “Look, so and so is very good to me. Any chance you have, please do good to them.”

But this little bright spot in David’s final words is swallowed up in the darkest piece of this entire speech. Look at it, in 1 Kings 2:8:

“And see, you have with you Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a malicious curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim. But he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’”

David is about 70 now, probably. I don’t know whether David’s memory is failing or whether he just prefers to remember his oath to Shimei in this way.

According to 2 Samuel 16:5-14, Shimei had cursed David and thrown stones at David as David was fleeing from Absalom. After this incident, according to 2 Samuel 19:18-19, Shimei came down to the River Jordan when he realized that Absalom was overthrown and David was going to be king again. Shimei falls down before David and he says,

“Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take it to

heart.

For I, your servant, know that I have sinned.”

2 Samuel 19:19-20

Over the objections of Abishai, David swore to Shimei by the Lord, “You shall not die” (2 Samuel 19:23). But now David says that the oath he swore to Shimei was that “I will not put you to death with the sword” (1 Kings 2:8).

Notice what David is basically saying to Solomon, “Now, therefore, do not hold Shimei guiltless, for you are a wise man. You know what you ought to do to him. Bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood. I told him I wouldn’t kill him, but I didn’t tell him you wouldn’t. Please take care of this, too. Please get rid of Shimei for me.”

One of the very worst things that parents can ever do with their children is to pass along to their children their grudges, their bitterness, their resentments, and a wish that somehow or other their children might be involved in getting even with the people who hurt them. It is like the parent says to the kid, “Don’t you ever go to that person’s house. You just keep in mind what they did to me. Okay? You remember what they did to me. Don’t you ever go to their house. Don’t you ever help them.”

You don’t think parents say that? Yeah, parents do say that. They pass on to their children the grudges, the resentments, the hatreds, and the animosities that they have developed during their lifetime. What a terrible inheritance! What a terrible legacy for a parent to leave to a child!

David had apparently extended unconditional forgiveness to Shimei. That’s what Shimei had asked for, and David had apparently done it. But now, as the years have passed, David is going to pull that back.

David is saying to Solomon in these final words: “I don’t really completely forgive Shimei for that. I don’t think I really said that he wouldn’t die at all. Solomon, could you take care of that for me? Solomon, please do that.”

What is missing from the final words of David? I’ll tell you what is missing. The glory of God. Everything that David says to Solomon in these final words is centered on David. David is saying to Solomon: “You obey God and you be successful so that I can have kings sitting on my throne forever and ever. You take care of Joab that I failed to take care of. Get rid of him. Be kind to Barzillai because he was good to me. You finish out the grudge that I die holding against Shimei, the son of Gera.”

David’s final words are all about *me*. *Me, me, me*. There is not a word here about doing anything for the glory of the God of Israel. What a contrast with the Lord Jesus Christ, wouldn’t you agree?

The future king of Israel — when He came to earth, everything He said, everything He did was for the glory of God, His heavenly Father. He was willing to sacrifice His own interest completely. He was obedient unto the death of the cross.

I think that not only as parents, but as individuals, we ought to really ask ourselves the question, “What is our life about?” Is it about us or is it about God? Is it about glorifying God? Is that the message that we’re communicating to our children?

There was an elderly lady whose memory was failing her. She had once known great stretches of the Bible that she could recite by heart. But as she grew older, she could only remember one verse of the Bible.

The verse that she could remember was beautifully spoken by Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12:

Me or Him?

I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.⁴

But as time went on, she forgot a lot of that verse.

Finally, she was down to a phrase from the verse, which she repeated over and over again: “That which I have committed unto Him.” That is all she could remember. “That which I have committed unto Him. That which I have committed unto Him.”

Finally, she lay on her deathbed, and her loved ones were gathered around her deathbed. They saw her lips moving. They thought she was asking for something. Somebody leaned over really close to hear what she was saying. She was saying the one word out of the verse that she still remembered. She was saying, “Him, Him, Him.”

Now, if you and I were lying on our deathbed, if some of us were picking out the key word to repeat over and over again, it might be *me, me, me*. Happy is the Christian whose life is so centered in the Lord Jesus Christ that what life is all about is Him, Him, Him.

There is a song that I like to sing. I close this chapter with some of the words from that song. As you read them, would you ask yourself whether these words express your goals and your objectives in life?

How can I say thanks
For the things You have done for me?
Things so undeserved,
Yet You gave to prove Your love for me;
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude.
All that I am and ever hope to be,
I owe it all to Thee.

To God be the glory,
To God be the glory,
To God be the glory
For the things He has done.
My Tribute by Andraé Crouch, 1971

⁴ King James Version

Chapter 13

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

In 1 Kings 14:10-11, let us consider the words from the message of Ahijah the Shilonite, which he gave to Jeroboam's wife when she went to see him. She was to report back these words to Jeroboam, and no doubt did, to Jeroboam:

Therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the LORD has spoken!

1 Kings 14:10-11

Now, consider for this chapter the following text from the Bible, 1 Kings 15:25-16:14.

Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin.

Then Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him. And Baasha killed him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. And it was so, when he became king, that he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he had sinned and by which he had made Israel sin, because of his provocation with which he had provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger.

Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days.

In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah became king over all Israel in Tirzah, and reigned twenty-four years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin.

Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani, against Baasha, saying: "Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust and made you ruler over My people Israel,

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have made My people Israel sin, to provoke Me to anger with their sins, surely I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the fields.”

Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Baasha rested with his fathers and was buried in Tirzah. Then Elah his son reigned in his place.

And also the word of the LORD came by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD in provoking Him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and because he killed them.

In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha became king over Israel, and reigned two years in Tirzah. Now his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him as he was in Tirzah drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, steward of his house in Tirzah. And Zimri went in and struck him and killed him in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place.

Then it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he was seated on his throne, that he killed all the household of Baasha; he did not leave him one male, neither of his relatives nor of his friends. Thus Zimri destroyed all the household of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which He spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, by which they had sinned and by which they had made Israel sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their idols.

Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

1 Kings 15:25-16:14

Someone has said that those who refuse to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat it. Someone else has said that the only lesson that history has taught us is that man has not yet learned anything from history. There is a remarkable truth to that, and certainly it is often exhibited in the affairs of nations.

At the beginning of this 20th century (1900s) Great Britain was one of the most powerful nations on the face of the earth. But one of Britain's poets said this. He said:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.¹

Well, that proved almost prophetic for Great Britain. Her wealth had accumulated, but

¹ “The Deserted Village,” by Oliver Goldsmith, 1770.

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

her population was decaying spiritually and morally. Now, as we close the 20th century,² Great Britain is a second-class power in the world, whose main claim to fame is her alliance with the United States.

We might ask the question, “Will the United States learn anything from this?” As we enter the 21st century, we are a rich and powerful nation, the richest on the face of the world. Yet we recognize that within our society and culture, there is spiritual corruption and spiritual and moral decay. Will we learn anything from this?

Well, the chances are good we won’t. It may well be that by the time the 21st century is ended, if the Lord tarries that long, that America, too, will be a weak and second-rate national power.

Men have a tendency not to learn the lessons of history. That is not only true of nations, but also of individuals. It is sadly and tragically true that we as individuals can pass through experiences that are devastating to us, that are tragic, that are troubling, and that are deeply disturbing. Yet having passed through them, we can so conduct ourselves that those experiences are repeated again in our lives and in our homes.

Therefore, the question that I would like to address to you is this: “What have you learned from your personal history?” May I repeat that? What have you learned from your personal history?

I am going to begin with a puzzle based on the passage of Scripture that we have read. I want you to work on this puzzle and see if you can figure out the answer. I am going to tell you the story of a king, whose name I will not mention. I am not going to give you a name, but I want you to figure out which king’s name fits this story.

This king came to power because of the failures of a king who preceded him. But instead of learning from the failures of the king who preceded him, he repeated his mistakes and involved himself in idolatry. As a result of this, a prophet of God sent a message to him and announced to him that because of his sins, God’s judgment would fall on his family, and that all of his male children would be wiped out. Despite this warning, the king continued to follow the sinful practices that he had before.

When this king died in peace, his son came to power, and his son ruled for two years. In the second year of his son’s reign, one of his son’s military commanders conspired against this son, killed him, and took the throne himself. In order to protect himself from any of the descendants of the former kings rising up and claiming the throne, he wiped out all of the male descendants of these two kings and destroyed their family entirely, thus fulfilling the prophetic Word of God. I have given you no names here. Right?

If your answer to this question is that I am describing the career of Jeroboam and his son, your answer is 50% correct. If your answer to this question is that I am describing the career of Baasha and his son, your answer is also 50% correct. If your answer is that I am describing the career of Jeroboam and his son, and Baasha and his son, your answer is 100% correct.

Isn’t this striking? I can tell the story of either king without the names and the places, and it fits them both. You see, Jeroboam came to power as a result of Solomon’s sin and because Solomon had involved himself in idolatry. But Jeroboam learned nothing from Solomon’s failure, and he continued to walk in an idolatrous path.

Finally, Ahijah the Shilonite sent a message back to Jeroboam through his wife,

² Zane gave message in 1999.

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

telling him that because of his sin, his family would be destroyed and that all of his male descendants would be wiped out. Despite this warning, Jeroboam continued to walk in his sins, and he died in peace.

But his son Nadab took over, and he walked in his father's sins, too. In the second year of Nadab's reign, Baasha conspires against him. Now we are not told in so many words that Baasha was a military commander, but that's almost an irresistible conclusion. Baasha maintained warfare during the entirety of his reign. Nadab was engaged in a siege and, undoubtedly, Baasha could not have taken over the kingdom if he had not already been a prestigious military leader. I think it is an inevitable conclusion that Baasha was one of Nadab's top military commanders.

Baasha kills Nadab. In order to preserve himself against any of the descendants of Jeroboam rising up later to claim the throne, Baasha executes all of the male descendants of Jeroboam and Nadab.

Baasha therefore takes the throne. But he took the throne because Jeroboam had been judged by God. But Baasha walks in exactly the same sins that Jeroboam walked in.

Finally, God sends a message to Baasha through Jehu, the son of Hanani, the prophet. The prophet Jehu basically says, "Because you have walked in these sins, God is going to punish your family. He is going to wipe out all of your male descendants." Jehu, in 1 Kings 16:4, even uses virtually the same words that were used by Ahijah the Shilonite in 1 Kings 14:11.

The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.

- 1 Kings 14:11

The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the fields.

- 1 Kings 16:4

Baasha learns nothing from this. He continues in his sins, and he dies in peace. His son Elah takes over.

In the second year of Elah's reign, Elah dies. Elah is not engaged in a battle at the time of his death, unless you want to call it "The Battle of the Bottle." The Bible tells us that he was drinking himself drunk in the house of his steward, Arza, who was over the king's household.

One of Elah's military commanders, a man named Zimri, a commander of half his chariots, conspires against Elah and kills Elah. Then, to protect himself from any of the descendants of Baasha rising up to claim the throne, Zimri fulfills the Word of God through Jehu the son of Hanani, and Zimri wipes out all the male descendants of the family of Baasha. Isn't that something? Reruns, one after the other.

How about us? Jeroboam learned nothing. Nadab learned nothing. Baasha learned nothing. Elah learned nothing. What have we learned from our personal history?

Do you know, it is a surprising fact that sociologists today tell us that the experiences to which we are exposed in our birth family, even the unpleasant experiences, have a tendency to be repeated in the families that we ourselves establish.

For example, here are children that grow up in a home that is split apart by divorce. The kids are emotionally torn apart by the divorce. Maybe in their hearts they say, *I will*

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

never let this happen in a marriage of mine. I will never send my children through something like this. Surprisingly often, when they grow up and get married, they go through divorces. They send their children through exactly the same thing that they went through.

Or, here is a family where there has been physical abuse. One spouse is abusing the other physically, or one or both of the spouses are abusing the children.

By the way, it is not always the man who does this. I was watching the Oprah Winfrey Show,³ and it was featuring battered men — men who had been physically abused by their wives. These are not reported as often as the other kind of abuse, because the men are very embarrassed to go to the police and say, “My wife did this to me.” They had a guy or two on there that had been hospitalized as a result of the violence of the wife. One of the guys was a six-foot guy and he said, “My father always raised me never to hit a woman.” But apparently the mother of his wife did not raise her not to hit a man, and she did it.

So kids grow up in homes where this physical abuse occurs. The kid says “That will never happen. I will never strike my partner. I will never treat my kids that way.” What happens? The studies show that, very frequently, abused children or children out of abused homes become themselves abusers. It is a solemn fact.

Now, maybe the abuse is not physical. Maybe it is verbal. You know, the type of thing where the spouse blows up at the other spouse or at the kids. They scream and shout and throw a tantrum. The kids sit there and watch that and they say, “That’s awful. I’ll never put my kids through that.” Guess what? They do.

The other side of the coin is what we call passive-aggressive behavior. The passive-aggressive person is the guy or gal who does not want the confrontation. That is not how they handle it. They do not explode. They do not cuss. They do not shout and scream. They withdraw. They won’t talk. They go to their room. They go out for the rest of the evening, for the rest of the weekend, or whatever it is. The kids say to themselves, *Oh, that’s awful. I will never do that.* And guess what? They do.

Here are kids that grew up in a home and then discover that their parents lie a lot. You know, they lie to each other. The kids know that the parents are lying to each other. Or maybe they lie to the government. They don’t report all their income. You know, maybe they don’t pay all their bills honestly. The kids see what a mess that can land them in. When they grow up, guess what? They lie, too. And on and on and on and on it goes.

For those who have heard me speak frequently about my own parents, you probably have drawn the conclusion that I had pretty good parents. I should tell you that my parents were not angels from heaven. They would have told you that their sons⁴ were not angels from heaven, either.

There were some things about my parents that I did not really like. A number of years ago, I woke up to the horrifying fact that there were some habits and practices manifesting themselves in my life that were precisely what my parents had done that I did not like. I had developed some of my parents’ own bad habits. Now, that is a shocker when you realize it. As you get older, you do get more and more like your parents sometimes. Hopefully, some of these features are good. But in my case, I could recognize

³ Daytime talk show, hosted by Oprah Winfrey, that ran from 1986 to 2011.

⁴ Zane’s parents, Virginia and Z. C. had two sons, Zane and David.

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

some features that were bad. I had to really turn to the Lord, and I had to tell the Lord that I need to get rid of this.

Obviously, when you have picked up something that you've imbibed from your home life and your parental experience in the past, it is not only conditioning, but also genetics. It takes some special grace from the Lord to deal with habits like that.

First of all, it is hard to recognize them. We often slip into them when we follow the way our parents cope. We conduct ourselves in situations the way our parents conducted themselves. We picked up all sorts of things.

Sometimes we fail to recognize that it is even there. But when we do recognize that it is there, then sometimes it is a very significant spiritual struggle to deal with it. So that's why I'm asking you the question. What have you learned from your personal history? What things could you have picked up from your home and background that are still a part of your life that God Himself would like to see dramatically changed?

Wouldn't it have been nice if Jeroboam had come to the throne and said, "You know, I am on the throne of the 10 tribes of Israel because Solomon got involved in idolatry, and I'm not going to touch idolatry with a 10-foot pole."

But when Jeroboam went ahead and did get involved in idolatry and got that message from Ahijah the Shilonite, wouldn't it have been nice if Jeroboam said, "Oh my. I have done what Solomon did. I have got to turn to God in repentance and ask for His forgiveness and mercy."

By the way, in a few chapters later, in 1 Kings,⁵ we will meet a wicked king who did exactly that, and got mercy from God. Wouldn't it have been nice if Jeroboam had done that?

Wouldn't it have been nice if Baasha had come to the throne and said, "You know, I'm on the throne because Jeroboam was involved in idolatry, and I'm not going to touch it with a 10-foot pole." However, Baasha goes ahead and touches it. Then Baasha gets his message from Jehu, the son of Hanani. Wouldn't it have been nice if Baasha had then said, "You know, I've done what Jeroboam did. I need to turn to God. I need to repent. I need to ask God to give me His forgiveness and mercy." Wouldn't that have been nice? Isn't it astounding that neither Baasha nor Jeroboam did that?

Now sometimes we get to the place, when we get older,⁶ where we say, "You know, I have done this all my life, and I don't think I'll ever change. I think I will always do this. I guess I will just have to take the punishment that God's going to give me for it." We get kind of hard-headed that way. We say, "You know, I'm sorry. That's me. Can't change that. So, you know, if God's going to whip me, let Him whip me."

But wait a minute. Neither Jeroboam nor Baasha could have afforded to say that, because God hadn't just said, "I'm going to whip you." God said, "I'm going to wipe out your family." Both Jeroboam and Baasha. If they had other children, they did not die in peace. If they had grandchildren by that time, they did not die in peace.

I think one of the most solemn Scriptures that there is, and one that is repeated a number of times in the Law of Moses, is talking about God being merciful and gracious, but it also talks about how He will by no means clear the guilty. He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and the fourth generation.⁷

Think about that for a minute. He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto

⁵ See King Ahab in 1 Kings 21:17-29.

⁶ Zane was about 67 years old when he gave this message.

⁷ See Exodus 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9-10.

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

the third and fourth generation. That means father, son, grandson, great-grandson.

Why is that? Because the children repeat the sins of their fathers, and sometimes they pay a more disastrous penalty than their fathers did.

What am I trying to tell you? I'm trying to tell you that if there are things in your personal history that need changing, it's not for your own sake alone that you should change them, but also for the sake of your children, your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren.

On the Oprah Winfrey Show that I was referring to there was a woman who admitted that she yelled and screamed at her husband. She figured that her husband did not pay attention to her when she talked. Therefore, her method of getting his attention was to, you know, go into orbit. She did this, and she admitted that it was wrong.

But as the program progressed, she also mentioned the fact that she had two girls who I assume by this time were almost grown. She assured Oprah and the psychologist who was on the program with Oprah that she never yelled at the girls. Therefore, what she was saying to Oprah was, the girls weren't hurt by this.

Oprah and the psychologist would not allow her to get away with that. Oprah and the psychologist said, "Oh yes, they were. Oh yes, they were."

Every time parents fight in front of their children, it subverts the self-esteem of the child. That's the modern psychological way of describing it. But the biblical way might be to say this; "It helps to teach the child how to cope in the future." It is not a bad bet that this woman's two daughters will someday marry and scream at their spouses, because that's what they saw their mother doing. That's the way their mother coped in her relationship.

So, what about it? What have you learned from your personal history? Who are you imitating?

If you are imitating the wrong people, may I suggest that the right Person to imitate is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the gentle, gracious, loving, compassionate, and forgiving Jesus. That's one of the reasons we gather together at church.

We are here to learn to follow Him. We are here to learn to become more and more like Him. That may take some very direct dealing with habits and practices that we have in our lives, which we have not expunged from our lives because they have been there for so long.

The songwriter said:

Oh, teach us more of Thy blessed ways,
Thou Holy Lamb of God!
And fix and root us in Thy grace,
As those redeemed by blood.⁸

That's a good prayer to pray. "Oh, teach us more of Thy blessed ways, Thou Holy Lamb of God! Lord Jesus Christ, teach me to be more like You. Teach me to react to my spouse. Teach me to react to my children. Teach me to react to my fellow Christians. Teach me to react to the people I work with as You would react, more and more."

The Apostle Paul said:

⁸ *O Teach Me More* by James Hutton (1715-1795).

What Have You Learned from Your Personal History?

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

- Galatians 2:20

It takes faith to lead this kind of a life. But there's no need for us to imitate our forebears. No need for us to imitate our parents, our grandparents, or the other members of our family because we now have a Savior who will lead us into imitation of Himself. As He does so, He will change us and transform us so that we are more and more like Himself.

Chapter 14

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

Let us consider 1 Kings 21:17-19. These verses constitute the last appearance of Elijah to King Ahab.

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?"' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours."'"

1 Kings 21:17-19

Now, consider for this chapter the following text from the Bible, 1 Kings 22:26-40.

So the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I come in peace."'"

But Micaiah said, "If you ever return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Take heed, all you people!"

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, saying, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "Surely it is the king of Israel!" Therefore they turned aside to fight against him, and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded."

The battle increased that day; and the king was propped up in his chariot, facing the Syrians, and died at evening. The blood ran out from the wound onto the floor of the chariot. Then, as the sun was going down, a shout went throughout the army, saying, "Every man to his city, and every man to his own country!"

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria. Then someone washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood while the harlots bathed, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken.

Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, the ivory house which he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Ahab rested with his fathers. Then Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

- 1 Kings 22:26-40

The title of my message is “You Can’t Dodge God’s Arrow.” I think that those who attend the church will agree that Victor Street Bible Chapel¹ is a grace church, and that it is our tremendous privilege to preach the simple gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone. We love to proclaim, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”² We all understand this.

We would agree with the young man I heard in a Northern Baptist church many years ago. He had drifted away from the Lord. In his testimony to the church, he said he never doubted his salvation because he understood that you couldn’t do anything to earn it and you couldn’t do anything to lose it.

Hopefully, most of us would also agree that if a Christian walks away from the Lord, if a Christian turns away from His paths and lives in sin, then the chances are very high that God will intervene in that Christian’s life with parental discipline and with chastening, as we might call it. That God will bring that Christian troubles with the intention of straightening that Christian out and turning that Christian back to Himself.

However, many Christians have a problem with another facet of Scripture, which I would like to put this way: Suppose we have, indeed, turned back to the Lord. Suppose that we have, in fact, confessed our sins, and our sins have been forgiven. We have been restored to fellowship with God, and we are walking with God. We are attending church, reading our Bibles, and praying our prayers. Many Christians feel that when that is true, that the sins which they committed before they turn back to God are kind of shoved under the rug by God. They do not crop up to bother us anymore.

Now it is wonderfully true, of course, that when God forgives, He really forgives, and He restores us to fellowship with Himself. When we are saved, we are given a perfect righteousness in Christ. But it is not true that there are no consequences to the things that we have done in the past, whether or not we have been forgiven for them.

How do I know that? Because the Bible tells me so. Remember Galatians 6:7:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Please notice that that statement does not say, “for whatever a man sows, there is a *good chance* he will also reap.” Neither does the statement say, “for whatever a man sows, there is a *high probability* that he will also reap.”

¹ Zane ministered at Victor Street Bible Chapel for about 50 years.

² Acts 16:31

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

No. This is a law that God has built into life and experience.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption,

- Galatians 6:7-8

It's like the farmer who goes out into the field and plants wheat seed. He expects, and in fact gets, a wheat crop. Or he plants tomato seed and he expects and gets a tomato crop.

If we sow the seed of sin, we can expect the crop of corruption. Now that's very hard for us to accept sometimes. When we are walking with God and when these consequences crop up in our lives, we are tempted to think that God is being unfair with us. We forget that this is a principle of life.

It seems to me that in the life — and particularly at the death — of Ahab, we meet a man who really didn't believe in the consequences of doing something that God had told him not to do. You remember that Jehoshaphat was visiting Ahab at Samaria.³ Remember, also, that Ahab has had a very good run of military successes. He has beaten the Syrians twice in warfare.⁴

Though the Bible does not tell us about it, Ahab apparently was one of the major kings in an alliance of kings that fought the Assyrians from Mesopotamia to a standstill at the Battle of Qarqar. Ahab had more than half of the chariots in that battle, according to an inscription of one of the Assyrian kings.

Ahab was on a roll, militarily speaking. Apparently, Ahab has become one of the major powers in that part of the world. He is very confident that he and Jehoshaphat can engage in war at Ramoth Gilead and get Ramoth Gilead back from the king of Syria.

Understand that *Syria* is different from *Assyria*. Syria was right to the north of Israel. When Jehoshaphat asks for advice from the prophets of God, Ahab collects 400 of them, all of whom encourage him to go.⁵

Jehoshaphat's not completely comfortable with that. He says, to paraphrase, "Could we possibly find somebody else to ask about this?"⁶

They bring Micaiah, the son of Imlah, whom Ahab regarded as his bad news bear, because Micaiah never said anything good about Ahab.⁷ Earlier, in 1 Kings 22:15-23, Micaiah had basically said to Ahab, "If you go to battle, you won't come back alive."

Now, I submit to you that Ahab didn't believe that. How do I know he didn't believe it? Two things. Number one: He went to battle. If you really believe that this is your last battle and that you could stay alive by staying away from the battle, you don't go to battle, right? Ahab went to battle. It is also apparent that Ahab took a few precautions to be careful that he survived this battle.

Apparently when they got up to Ramoth Gilead, he turned to King Jehoshaphat, the godly king who had become his partner in this war, and basically said, "Look, I'm going to disguise myself. You put on your royal robes and go into battle."⁸ Now, when we first

³ 1 Kings 22:1, 10

⁴ 1 Kings 20

⁵ 1 Kings 22:6

⁶ 1 Kings 22:7

⁷ 1 Kings 22:8

⁸ 1 Kings 22:30

see this, we might say, “Dumb, dumb, dumb. Why does Jehoshaphat fall for this?”

But the first question is, “Why is Ahab doing it?” I don’t know exactly, but remember that when Ahab had executed a treaty with the king of Syria, the king of Syria had given him space in the market at Damascus where he could send his merchants.⁹ Kings being what they are, I suspect that some of the men who went up to Damascus under cover of being merchants were actually spies. It is pretty obvious that Ahab probably tried to collect all the intelligence he could about the intentions of the king of Syria and about his military power.

It looks to me as if Ahab has some inkling of the fact that the king of Syria has decided that in this war, the king’s objective will be to kill the king of Israel. The king of Syria believes that if he can kill Ahab that that will deflate the balloon, and that will repulse the attack. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what happens, although not in the way that the king of Syria was planning it. So, I think that Ahab probably had some intelligence of the fact that he was going to be a focus in this battle.

It was not too unusual for a king to go into battle on a royal chariot. But Ahab may have said to Jehoshaphat something like, “My spies tell me that the king of Syria is only interested in me. You can go into battle, and you will be perfectly safe.” I don’t know what exactly Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, but it looks like Ahab is using Jehoshaphat as a decoy.

That is what Jehoshaphat almost became, because the king of Syria had given command to his 32 captains of his chariot forces to not engage in battle with anybody but the king of Israel. They attack Jehoshaphat, thinking that he is the king of Israel. Jehoshaphat cries out, and somehow they discover this is not the king of Israel. Maybe he has a Judean accent. Or maybe Jehoshaphat says something when he cries out that reveals that he’s not the king of Israel. I don’t know. But as soon as they discover he’s not the king of Israel, the captains of the chariots withdraw from him.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Ahab is in the battle in disguise, and the Syrians have not the remotest idea where he is. Even though he was the focus of their campaign, he has gone into the battle and is obviously thinking, *I am going to come back to my country because they are not going to find me anyway. I am going to be disguised.*

Before Ahab left, remember what he said to Micaiah? Ahab instructed his servants in front of Micaiah, “Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I come in peace” (1 Kings 22:27). Ahab is saying, in effect, to Micaiah, “The next good meal you are going to have is when I come back. You will be so glad to see me when I come back in peace, because that will be the end of your starvation diet.”

So Ahab is a man who thinks that he has got all the bases covered, right? He doesn’t believe that he is going to fall in battle here. He believes that his disguise will be effective and that he will survive.

I just want to pause here to make an application. You know, it really does seem to me that sometimes you and I, as Christians, do what amounts to putting on a disguise. We think that will help us to avoid the consequences of the past. I am not talking about putting on a church personality when you come to church on Sunday morning and being something else at home.

⁹ 1 Kings 20:31-34

¹⁰ 1 Kings 22:31-33

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

What I mean is, once we have turned back to the Lord, once we've begun to follow the Lord, we would like to forget about what we have been in the past. We would like to deny that those things really pertain to us anymore. *That is not the kind of person that I am. I am this kind of person.* We carry that mentality into our experience of problems. We think if God causes us problems now, now that I am this kind of a person, that is not right.

Remember what Paul said? Paul said, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). Paul is saying, "I know who I am. I am an apostle, but I don't deserve to be an apostle because, in fact, I was a persecutor of the Christian church." Paul never forgot that.

Toward the end of his life, when Paul is writing 1 Timothy, he said, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). You notice those words? Not of whom I *was* chief or *used to be* chief. I *am* chief.

If you look at the context of that passage, you will find, once again, that Paul is thinking about the period of time where he was a blasphemer of the Christian faith, where he persecuted the Christian faith. Paul is presenting himself as a model of the grace of God. Paul is saying, "I'm number one on the list of sinners. If God can save me, He can save anybody."

But notice that Paul's sense of who he was, was not separate from the reality of his past. In fact, it was the recognition of the reality of his past that made the grace of God seem so wonderful, so marvelous, so splendid to him.

What happens to us as Christians is we forget what we have been like five years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, or much longer ago than that. My mind does not go back that far, right? I think about what I am now. Therefore, I think about what I deserve from God now. I forget that what has brought me to this place out of all of the ashes of my mistakes, failures and sin is the triumphant grace of God.

What am I saying? When we disguise ourselves, we kind of pretend to be somebody that we are not. Who are we really? We are the person who has done all the things that we have done and said all the things that we have said.

Let me make that personal. Zane Hodges is the guy who has done all the things that Zane Hodges has done and said all the things that Zane Hodges has said. I am glad most of you don't know what a lot of these things were, but God does.

We are disguising ourselves if we do not admit that to ourselves. We are fooling ourselves if we think that the things that lie in the past have no consequences whatsoever, that God will sweep them utterly under the rug, and Galatians 6:7-8 will not apply.

That is a mistake because the simple point is that you can't dodge God's arrow. Now the story of Ahab's death is a very remarkable one. Understand, Ahab has got everybody in the Syrian army fooled, right? Nobody has the slightest notion of where Ahab is.

A Syrian archer is drawing his bow. He is not aiming at Ahab. He hasn't the foggiest notion where Ahab is. He is aiming at all these Israelites out here and hopes his arrow hits something. He does not know whether it will. He draws his bow and releases the arrow, which takes off. It flies up and it flies down. Guess what chariot the arrow finds?

It finds Ahab's chariot. And guess what, folks? It not only finds Ahab's chariot, but it finds a break in Ahab's armor. It strikes Ahab in the joint between two pieces of armor.

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

If it had bounced off the armor, he would have suffered no damage.

Do you see this? This has nothing whatsoever to do with the planning of the king of Syria. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the activity of the 32 captains of the king of Syria. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the intentions of the Syrian archer.

This is God's arrow, and it lands exactly where it is supposed to land. When we disguise ourselves and don't quite admit that we are the people who have done and said all the things that we have done and said, we are sometimes very surprised when the arrow strikes.

Let me try to bring this down to the local church setting. In my church, we have a parents' prayer meeting in which we are praying for our adult children who have gone astray. One of the remarkable things is that there is not a regular family in the entire church who doesn't have an adult child who has gone astray to pray for. Isn't that interesting? Every single person who has been a long-term member of my church has somebody that they need to pray for within their own household or among their adult children. Should this be a surprise? I don't think so.

You see, much of what we experience in life is the fruit of what has gone before. I have been with my church for 45-plus years. I know many of the parents there for a very long time.

Over the years, I know some of the things that have gone on in the homes of my church, because in a little church, word gets around and people talk. I can truthfully say that in a lot of homes, a lot of things have gone wrong.

The dynamics between the husband and wife have often been very poor. The commitment of one partner to the other has been superficial, shallow, or non-existent. The way problems are dealt with in the home has been, in many cases, poor.

One of the things we have to keep in mind is that during the youngest years of children, parents make impressions on them that are only with the greatest difficulty and by the power of God reversed. The young children see things in the home that they should never see between a husband and wife. They hear things in the home that they should never hear between a husband and wife.

The young children know, in ways that people who attend church with their parents don't know, how real their parents' Christianity is. They know whether their parents are consistent with their Christian faith or whether they are not, whether their parents are deeply committed to God or whether they are not, whether their parents act like they mean business with God, or whether their parents just go to church and come home and they are their old selves again. All these things go on in many Christian homes. We should not be so surprised if there are consequences that parents begin to reap in their children because they can't dodge God's arrow.

My dad is my spiritual hero. There are a number of reasons why my dad is my spiritual hero. But one reason is that David (my brother) and I never for a single moment that I can recall doubted the sincerity of my dad's commitment to God.

I do not ever remember my dad missing church and staying home for any reason other than sickness. He didn't stay home to read the morning papers or to listen to the Washington Redskins on the radio (we did not have television). He did not stay home because he wanted to go fishing. He took us to church, and he raised two boys that never got away from church.

Now, he did not raise two angels. My brother was a lot more of an angel than I am. I won't bore you with all the ways in which I'm not an angel. But neither one of us ever

got away from church, because our dad's example was that church had a very high priority.

My dad was the most genuinely unselfish person I have ever known. I cannot remember a single decision that he made that I thought was a selfish decision. Maybe he made them and I didn't notice it. He probably did. He was human, okay? But he was genuinely unselfish. If you want to make an impression on your kids, be unselfish.

Another thing was that my dad always treated my mother beautifully. He never raised his hand to her. He never raised his voice to her in all the years, that I can remember. We knew that my father loved my mother deeply, and he showed it by the way he related to her. I'm not saying they didn't have arguments. But even in an argument, my dad did not raise his hand, his voice, and did not bluster.

What the kids see their parents do and say, what they see happening in the home, is part of the reason that children have problems later on. One of the best things that we can possibly do as adults is to accept that as a fact. You and I can't go back and change what we have done. Isn't that true?

We can get God's forgiveness. We can get God's grace to handle the problems that have arisen, but we can't go back and undo it. So, let's accept the fact that we are who we are and that we will reap whatever consequences God deems appropriate for us to reap. But we can use the experience of reaping these consequences as an occasion for obeying God, trusting God, and getting to know Him better.

I have great hope that if parents who have children that have gone astray stick together and pray for their children, we are going to see a lot of these children return to the Lord. I cannot make a prediction as to when it will happen, but I believe it will happen because God is able to do the healing work that we need to have done, even when we have made serious mistakes.

But Ahab is a very potent lesson for us. Did you notice that he props himself up in his chariot¹¹ because he doesn't want to leave the battle yet? Because he knows if he does leave the battle, that will end the battle. Ahab was right about that. Little does Ahab know that while he is bleeding onto the chariot floor, he is preparing for the fulfillment of God's Word. A lot of blood wound up in that chariot.

When Ahab finally does die, the army goes home. Ahab is buried. Then they take Ahab's chariot out to a pool to wash the blood out. (Apparently, it was somewhere near this pool that Naboth had been murdered — this is the murder that Jezebel had arranged so Ahab could get the vineyard he wanted.¹²) And the dogs licked the blood.

But what is also very striking here is that this was a pool where the harlots bathed, the prostitutes bathed.¹³ What a comment this is upon the moral condition of Ahab's kingdom. We have prostitutes in Dallas, but I don't know that we have a public pool where they take off their clothes and bathe in front of people. You can be pretty sure there were lots of men who gathered at this pool and were deciding which of these prostitutes they wanted to be with.

There was a shame and a disgrace in having your blood licked by dogs, but notice the place that God chooses for this to happen. By a pool where Naboth apparently had been murdered. By a pool that was a symbol of the lack of moral authority that Ahab had exercised in his kingdom. What a dreadful end.

¹¹ 1 Kings 22:35

¹² 1 Kings 21:1-15

¹³ 1 Kings 22:38

You Can't Dodge God's Arrow

What is the lesson of Ahab's life? It is that although Ahab knew the power of the prophetic Word of God, had seen such power in the miracles of Elijah, and had seen such power in the victories God had given him, Ahab never submitted himself fully to the authority of God's Word. Ahab dies because he didn't believe what God told him would happen if he went into war against Ramoth Gilead.

I was interested by the fact that only after the author tells us about washing Ahab's blood out of the chariot that he tells us something about the ivory house that Ahab built and the cities that he built.¹⁴ Apparently, Ahab presided over a fairly prosperous kingdom. At this point, he built himself a splendid ivory palace. Archaeological expeditions have found ivory objects from this period. The country was doing well economically.

It is just as if the author of Kings says, "Oh, yeah. By the way, you might be asking why I didn't mention the ivory house, why I didn't mention the cities that Ahab built. If you are interested in those things, you can go to the chronicles of the kings of Israel. That's not my business. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a man who died by disobeying the Word of God."

What should we decide to do? We have all made mistakes. I am also embarrassed because I could embarrass myself badly by telling you about some of mine. But the point is, we have to learn from them. We have to learn that the only safe course of action is a course of obedience to the Word of God. That whatever the mistakes may be in the past, God is able to handle the problems that arise from those.

There is no point in multiplying our problems down the road or increasing the difficulties that lie ahead. Now is the time to be fully committed to follow the instruction and leading of the Word of God and to trust Him for whatever may lie ahead.

¹⁴ 1 Kings 22:39

Chapter 15

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

Now, consider for this chapter the following texts from the Bible: Proverbs 10:1 and 1 Kings 22:41-53.

The proverbs of Solomon:

A wise son makes a glad father,
But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.

- Proverbs 10:1

Jehoshaphat the son of Asa had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the LORD. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. Also Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, the might that he showed, and how he made war, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And the rest of the perverted persons, who remained in the days of his father Asa, he banished from the land. There was then no king in Edom, only a deputy of the king.

Jehoshaphat made merchant ships to go to Ophir for gold; but they never sailed, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber. Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships." But Jehoshaphat would not.

And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place.

Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; for he served Baal and worshiped him, and provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done.

1 Kings 22:41-53

Earlier, we read the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 10:1, and his words give us a little bit of a surprise. In the first part of the proverb, he says, "A wise son makes a glad

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

father.” We can understand that part of it, because if a father is wise enough to want a wise son, if he has a wise son, it will make him glad. But we would have expected Solomon to say the reverse of that and say, “But a foolish son is the grief of his father.” But instead of that, if you noticed it, he says, “But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.” How interesting.

Now there may be more than one reason why the proverb is put that way, but I want to suggest to you that sometimes this occurs more frequently than it ought to happen. Unwise fathers who have unwise sons, do not really care that much about it. A father may say, “Oh, well, I was like that when I was young.” Or, “Oh well, my kid did something really stupid and he deserves what he’s getting.”

It is conceivable for a father to react rather coldly to the problems of a foolish son, but it is very much more difficult, I think you will agree, for a mother to do that. Even if the mother is not grieved by the foolish conduct itself, she may very well be grieved by the consequences into which this foolish conduct leads her son. So, “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.”

It seems to me that we have a wonderful illustration of this principle in our passage from 1 Kings 22. To put it very succinctly, in these verses, we are confronted with a wise son and a foolish son.

Before I go any further, let me ask you a question. Many parents are praying for many of their adult children, and they want to see many of them come back to the Lord, come back to church. That is a perfectly worthwhile objective. But I wonder if we have clearly crystallized in our minds that our objective is more than just to get our kids sitting in a seat on Sunday morning or at the Lord’s Table.¹

What we really want our children to do is to become wise—to live a wise life, to allow God to direct their life, to bless their life and to deliver them from the troubles that come from not living wisely.

I hope that is what the Christian parents are praying — for their children who have gone astray — as your long-term objective. Yes, we do want our children at church. Yes, we do want them at the Lord’s Table. But above all, we want them in these places because only by coming into the presence of the Lord and learning from God, can they learn to become wise sons and daughters.

This leads to another question. Do we want for ourselves the same thing that we want for our children? If we want our sons and daughters to be wise, do we ourselves want to be wise and live wisely under the blessing and direction of God? Those are issues that I think we ought to consider for a few moments as we look at the wise son and the foolish son.

Now, everybody could probably already tell me who the wise son was. Jehoshaphat. Now, the Scripture tells us that he was the son of Asa. Asa was a godly king who reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah. What is really impressive about Asa is that he reigned for 41 years, which was one year longer than David reigned and one year longer than Solomon reigned. He had a long reign. By the time he died, his son Jehoshaphat was 35 years old.

Now in the ancient Middle East, this might have been a fairly mature age for a son to ascend the throne. Certainly, it is a good age for a son to ascend the throne. We worry

¹ Victor Street Bible Chapel, where Hodges ministered for over 50 years, observed the Lord’s Supper each Sunday. It was considered the main meeting of the church and the meeting prescribed in the New Testament.

about a person that becomes king at the age of 21 or at the age of 25. But at the age of 35, there must already have been in Jehoshaphat plenty of evidence of the wisdom with which he would conduct himself and his reign.

Although we have nothing stated here about Asa's reaction to this, I feel that it is almost certain that before Asa died, he realized that his son Jehoshaphat was wise and ready to reign over the kingdom. I suspect that Asa died happy with the thought, *I have a wise son who will rule over my kingdom.*

That's exactly what Jehoshaphat proved to be. The first thing that we notice about Jehoshaphat is that he was very directly focused on pleasing the Lord. Notice that in 1 Kings 22:43 it says, "And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the LORD."

What a beautiful example of a father providing a role model for his son. Isn't that the case? Asa had walked in the ways of the Lord. His son Jehoshaphat walks in the ways of the Lord, and not only walks in the ways of the Lord, but doesn't turn aside from them. He goes straight ahead to do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

I presume that's what we want for our children, isn't it? First of all, we want them to be completely focused on the Lord so that they are determined, above all other things, to do what is right in the sight of the Lord. All parents who have children 15 years old and older know that there comes a point where you can't control what they do. They go out there and they do what they decide to do. What we want for our children is that they decide to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Obviously, this suggests that both husband and wife ought to be role models of what is right. You lose the ability to rear your children after they leave home, but you do not lose the opportunity to be role models to them. As long as God leaves you on this earth, as long as you are here with your children, your children ought to be able to look at you and see that you are living for God. That is what Jehoshaphat clearly saw in Asa.

When Asa was dead, Jehoshaphat walked in all the ways of his father and did what was right in the sight of the Lord. However, Asa had a blind spot. Even though Asa did his very best to root out idolatry in Israel, he did not touch the high places. Now these high places we should not understand as being places where idols were worshiped, but apparently they were places where the Lord was worshiped, so that on various hills and on various mountains the children of Judah would build altars, and they would offer sacrifices.² But what we discover is that this was directly contrary to the revealed will of God in the book of the Law, because God had commanded his people to do all of their sacrificing at the altar in His temple in Jerusalem.³

We do not know why it was that Asa never touched these places. Maybe he figured, *I have uprooted idolatry and, after all, they are worshiping the Lord. We will just let them go ahead and do that.* But the prophets do not think that it was a good procedure. What is interesting here is that the blind spot which Asa had is a blind spot which Jehoshaphat had. The very same failure that was present in Asa was present also in his basically wise son, Jehoshaphat.

You know, sometimes parents say, "I don't know why my kid acts like that. I don't know why they have that attitude. I don't know why they behave that way." Sometimes you can find the answer by going to the mirror and looking in the mirror. The face that

² See 1 Kings 3:2.

³ See Deuteronomy 12:1-14.

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

looks back out at you may be the face of the reason why the kid behaved like that.

Not only do children have a long-term tendency to pick up our good habits, they also have a very strong tendency to pick up our bad habits. The blind spots in our lives are likely to be the blind spots in their lives. What does that mean? That means that we as parents have to ask God to show us our blind spots. We have to ask God to teach us what may be wrong with us that we don't see. The words of the psalmist are relevant here:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

- Psalm 139 23:24

We may look in the mirror and say, "I am a pretty good father. I am a pretty good mother." But what we say about ourselves may not be the same thing that God says about ourselves. Therefore, we ought to be open to God to show us the weak points in our personalities and behavior, as well as the strong points. So, though he was committed to God, Jehoshaphat shared exactly the same blind spot that his father Asa had had.

Then we are told that Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.⁴ Now, ever since the kingdom broke up into two parts, the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, there had been periodic wars. Obviously, Jehoshaphat thinks in terms of the futility of Israelites fighting with Israelites. And so, he makes peace with the king of the north. Jehoshaphat is a peacemaker.

You remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." A wise son or daughter will be a peacemaker. We do not want our children to be disruptors — people who are always causing trouble in the home, people who are causing trouble on the job, or people who are causing trouble in the church. We would prefer, I trust, for our children to be the kind of people that make peace and see other people at friction and try to make peace between them. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."

But please don't think that Jehoshaphat was a Mr. Milquetoast.⁵ He was not a royal softy. Notice in 1 Kings 22:45:

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, the might that he showed, and how he made war, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

Jehoshaphat made peace with his brethren in the northern kingdom. But when he had to fight a war, he fought it. There are some records of wars in 2 Kings 1, as well as in the account of 2 Chronicles 20.

Although we want our children to be peacemakers in their relationships with others, we also want them to fight the good spiritual fight of faith, do we not? You cannot get through a Christian life without waging war against the principalities and powers, and the spiritual wickedness that is in the heavenly places. You remember in Ephesians 6:11-

⁴ 1 Kings 22:44

⁵ Mr. Caspar Milquetoast was a fictional character created by H. T. Webster in 1924. Mr. Milquetoast was known as a timid, submissive and overly cautious person.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

So, we want our children to be peacemakers in their relationships with other people, but we also want them to fight the forces of the enemy, to resist the attacks of the devil, and to win the spiritual battle in their own life and experience.

Then we're told in 1 Kings 22:46, "And the rest of the perverted persons, who remained in the days of his father Asa, he banished from the land." The reference here very probably is to homosexual activity, probably the type of activity that went on in connection with the worship of idols. You remember that Asa had banished the perverted persons from the land of Judah.⁶ But some of them had either snuck back in or managed to elude Asa. So, Jehoshaphat takes up where Asa left off and banishes the remainder of the perverted persons from the land. So, Jehoshaphat as a wise son was also a moral person.

Is this something we also want for our children? Don't we want our children to be moral people? Now, let us admit that in our society and culture that is awfully hard. You turn on a television story, you will find, more often than not, the hero of the story and the heroine going to bed with each other. They are not married and not even planning to marry. It is presented as something perfectly acceptable.

If you watch the media culture of our day, you will find that people who criticize homosexuality are regarded as homophobic and prejudiced. We live in a very immoral society, and a wise son or a wise daughter will be a person who walks in morality and will encourage morality in others. Jehoshaphat knew that his land was better off without people like this, without the homosexuals. He banished the ones that were left from the days of his father. He was a moral man.

Then we're told in 1 Kings 22:47, "There was then no king in Edom, only a deputy of the king." What does that have to do with anything? Well, remember that Edom was to the south of Judah. What we are being told here must be connected with what we have already been told about Jehoshaphat making peace with the Northern Kingdom. On his northern border, Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. On the south, Jehoshaphat had control of Edom, so that Edom had no independent king. A deputy, apparently, of Jehoshaphat ruled in Edom. What does that mean?

It means that Jehoshaphat worked to secure the borders of his people. Though there was no war on the north, he had control of Edom in the south. He was eager to enhance the security of the nation over which he ruled. He was a wise son in that he provided security for God's people.

I hope that you want your sons and daughters to do the same thing for their families. I am not just talking about giving them a house to live in and putting up burglar bars, if necessary, and putting food on the table. I am also talking about other forms of security that are very important in our day and time. I am talking about emotional security and

⁶ 1 Kings 15:12

about psychological security.

One of the things that the wider culture is realizing is the enormous damage that is done to children as a result of divorces. You are probably aware that the statistics today show that about one out of every two marriages ends in divorce. The people that are always the most deeply wounded by divorce are the children in the home.

There was a book that was published recently, not by a Christian person, but by a secular person who followed the children of divorced homes — a substantial number of them — over a long period of years. The conclusion that she reached was that the damage done to children as a result of divorces is damage that can extend into their later years. The conventional wisdom had been that after a few years, they get over the divorce. But her research indicates otherwise. Way down the line, children are hurt by the divorces that have occurred in the homes where they have lived.

To make one very simple application, a child that has been through a divorce in the home may be unable to enter into a satisfactory marriage of their own. They may have learned to distrust marriage or distrust a partner and therefore be unable to form the kind of solid binding relationship that ought to be a part of marriage. What is actually happening with children in divorce is that their security structure is being undermined by the fracturing of the parental bond.

My hope for all Christian parents is that you want your children to be wise, not only wise in the fact that they marry, but wise enough to make their marriage work, and work hard at it — that the family is secure and children feel security. One of the points that this woman made was that it may actually be better for husbands and wives to stay inside an unhappy marriage just for the sake of the children. That's so old-fashioned.

Modern therapists have been saying, "You can't get along. Divorce and the kids will get over it." But this woman is suggesting that maybe it would be better, in terms of the future of the kids, if the parents stayed together even though they are not happy in the marriage. But we live in such an "enjoy it" culture, that is very hard for people to make that kind of sacrifice in our day and age. But wise sons and daughters ought to know the importance to their children of a stable home and of the emotional and psychological security that needs to be there in order for their children to grow up properly.

Finally, another and last trait of this wise son is that he learned from his mistakes. Jehoshaphat built some ships that were intended to go to Ophir to search for gold, and the ships were wrecked. Now that's all we're told in the book of Kings about it.⁷ And that would be enough for a king to say, "You know, God must not have wanted those ships to go, because He sent a storm and wrecked them."

As a matter of fact, what we learn from 2 Chronicles 20:35-37, is that God made sure that Jehoshaphat got the message. Eliezer — the son of Dodavah of Mareshah — the prophet came to him and basically said, "What business did you have aligned with Ahaziah in this venture? Ahaziah is a wicked king, and God has destroyed your works."

What we are told in 1 Kings 22:49, however, is that after the ships were broken up, Ahaziah basically said, "Let's start over again. You can build the ships, and my men will go with you and your men in the ships."

⁷ 1 Kings 22:48

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go with your servants in the ships." But Jehoshaphat would not.

- 1 Kings 22:49

This is a very simple little statement by Ahaziah: "But Jehoshaphat would not." Jehoshaphat had learned from his experience, and he did not repeat his mistake.

Be assured of this if you are a parent, because we know ourselves and we know it is true of us: You cannot go through life without making mistakes. Okay? I am not talking about kids that are letter perfect in every way. Even your wisest sons and daughters are going to make mistakes. But one of the fundamental issues is: Do they learn anything from it? Do they learn from their mistakes? Do they learn not to do what went wrong in the first place? Part of being a wise son and daughter is to learn from the things that we do wrong.

Let me summarize here. What we see in Jehoshaphat as a wise son is that he was focused on doing the right thing before the Lord. He was a peacemaker. He was also an effective warrior when he needed to be. He was a moral person. He provided security for his people. He learned from his mistakes. Pretty impressive, don't you agree? Even with the falls, a very impressive example of a wise son. A wise son makes a glad father.

Who do you suppose is the foolish son in our passage? Easy giveaway question. Ahaziah. Now mind you, Jehoshaphat came to the throne at the age of 35 and reigned 25 years. We are not told how old Ahaziah was when he came to the throne. But guess how long he reigned. Two years.

Guess what Ahaziah did? Well, you remember Jehoshaphat. He walked in the ways of his father, Asa. Ahaziah did the same thing. 1 Kings 22:52:

He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.

Ahaziah had all the wrong examples. Now, this is a little unusual for the book of Kings to say that somebody walks in the way of their father *and* mother, but remember the father was Ahab and the mother was Jezebel.

When it comes to trying to decide which of them had the most negative influence on Ahaziah, I think it is a draw. Ahab was a weak ineffective king in terms of his spiritual strength and commitment. Jezebel was a strong Baal worshiper. They produced a son who not only walked in their ways, but also in the ways of Jeroboam, the first of the kings of the divided kingdom who set up the golden calf worship.

Mind you, the chances are very good that Ahaziah was alive at the time that Elijah called down fire from heaven on the altar, defeated the prophets of Baal and then had the 450 prophets of Baal carried off and executed.⁸ If Ahaziah was not actually there on Carmel, it is certain he heard the story.

Guess what he did? Did he learn anything from that? Zip, nothing at all. In 1 Kings 22:53, we read, "for he [Ahaziah] served Baal and worshiped him."

How dumb can you get? These are the prophets who could not get fire down from heaven. These are the prophets who got themselves executed by the prophet of God. But

⁸ 1 Kings 18:1-40

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

you know, Ahaziah was probably thinking “It is my mother’s god. She likes Baal, so I’m going to worship Baal.”

Ahaziah “served Baal and worshiped him, and provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger, according to all that his father had done” (1 Kings 22:53). To put it very simply, Ahaziah made God mad.

What happened to Ahaziah? Well, we will find out in 2 Kings 1. But let me just give you a foretaste. Ahaziah had an accident. He fell through the lattice, apparently the window lattice of his upper chamber in the palace in Samaria. He was seriously injured. He took to his bed to recover and instead of recovering, he died. He died after two years.

Ahaziah provoked the Lord to anger. Anyone who provokes the Lord to anger is inviting trouble. May I suggest, they may even be inviting death.

Here is an interesting fact. By the time that Ahaziah had fallen through the window and injured himself fatally, Ahab was dead. Ahaziah would not have been the king if Ahab was not dead. But guess who was still alive? Jezebel. She was still alive. She had been widowed two years before in the death of her husband, Ahab. Now she loses what was probably her oldest son.

Now, Jezebel is a hard, tough case. But she had to go to her kid’s funeral. I call him a kid, but he is a grown man at this point. I would be very surprised if even Jezebel didn’t shed some tears at the death of her son, who had just come into the power of the kingdom, fallen through the lattice, injured himself and basically killed himself in the accident. A “foolish son is the grief of his mother” (Proverbs 10:1). I think 1 Kings 22:41-53 shows us the contrast beautifully.

Two of my good friends, a husband and wife, were suddenly killed in an automobile accident last year. Apparently, they didn’t suffer very long at all. The husband had expressed the wish, some months before, that if he died, he would like to go with his wife, and God granted him that request.

They left behind four kids — one daughter and three sons. Now, please understand that the husband was, as far as I could tell, something of an electronics genius. He had started his company in his garage. By the time I knew him, he had a multi-million dollar electronics company with a factory over in Europe. And suddenly he’s gone. And guess who’s left behind? One daughter and three sons.

The business is on their shoulders. The husband gave with extreme liberality to the work of the Lord and he helped Kerugma⁹ enormously. We could never repay him for what he has done for Kerugma.

What are the kids going to do? Well, all four of those kids are committed to God. All four of them were determined to carry on the business as well as they could in the absence of their father. They were determined to continue as God enabled them to give to the Lord’s work in the same way that their father gave.

That’s exactly what they had continued to do. Almost from the beginning, when they took over the company, God began to bless the company. In a recent conversation with one of the sons, he mentioned the business and said the sales are going through the roof.

Now, God is honoring those four children. He is leading them as they lead the company. He is blessing them as they give to His work.

Do you think the father and mother know about this? I don’t know. They may not

⁹ Kerugma, Inc. was a non-profit corporation that funded the writing ministry of Zane Hodges. Zane did not receive royalties from any of his books, nor did he receive support from any other grace organization.

A Wise Son and a Foolish Son

know about it yet, but if they do know about it, or when they do find out about it, what a joy it is going to be. Their kids stepped right into their shoes, had a deep commitment to God, ran the company well, and continued to support the Lord's work all over the country.

Isn't that the kind of kids we want? We may not turn over to them a multi-million dollar business. But our life goes on through them, and hopefully they will be wise sons and daughters.

Chapter 16

What Do the Neighbors See?

Now, consider for this chapter the following texts from the Bible: Luke 1:5-7 and 57-66.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Luke 1:5-7

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.

So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called.

And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Luke 1:57-66

They rode the same school bus dozens of times. Their paths crossed in the aisles of their local grocery store. At one time, they only lived a block apart. And yet, neither one of them realized that they were looking for each other. Neither one of them knew that they were actually mother and daughter.

You see, about 20 years ago,¹ Shirley Vaughn Flournoy gave up her little baby daughter Sherilyn to adoption. But shortly after she did so, she regretted it. She spent years searching for her daughter unsuccessfully. Many times, the thoughts crowded in on her, *Where is she? How is she? What is she doing?*

Meanwhile, her daughter, Sherilyn was equally eager to locate her true mother. At the age of 11, she called everybody by the name of *Vaughn* that was listed in the Kansas

¹ Message given at Victor Street Bible Chapel in Dallas, Texas in 1986.

What Do the Neighbors See?

City, Kansas, telephone directory, not realizing that her mother's name had been changed to *Flournoy*.

Early in 1985, Sherilyn contacted an adoption worker in Kansas City. In August of that year, the adoption worker located her mother living in the city of Dallas. On the very day that she found this out, Sherilyn took the 13-hour bus ride from Kansas City to Dallas. She was joyfully reunited with her mother.

Sherilyn moved into a two-bedroom apartment with her mother and her 14-year-old sister in Oak Cliff.² As you can imagine, mother and daughter had a lot to talk about. They talked and talked and talked, and sometimes they almost forgot to go to bed. It was during these conversations that they made some surprising discoveries.

Not only did mother and daughter have similar facial features, and not only did they wear their hair alike and have almost the same taste in clothing, but they found out that from 1976 to 1979, they had lived only four blocks apart, and that one year they had only lived a block apart. They discovered that the mother had worked as a substitute school bus driver in Kansas City area and that one of her regular passengers was her daughter. For a period of time, the mother actually delivered newspapers to the very house where her daughter was living. Sherilyn discovered that two of the children with whom she played in the middle school band were actually her half-brother and her aunt.

Needless to say, mother and daughter were having a ball. They admitted that they quibbled about some of the things that mothers and daughters always quibbled about — things like housekeeping, men, and dating. But after a month together, the thrill had still not worn off.

Shirley Flournoy was quoted as saying, "I always prayed and hoped that one day she would have enough initiative to strike out and look for me. One day she did."

Sherilyn was quoted as saying, "I feel like I've got a new beginning, a new life now. Now I think things will look up for me. Now I'm ready to relax and settle down and enjoy my job."

A photograph that appeared in the Dallas newspaper showed Shirley and Sherilyn with their faces right together. One thing was completely obvious. These two women were family. These two women were mother and daughter. Now, that's a charming story, don't you agree?

But it is also an effective reminder that some of the strongest ties that exist on the face of the earth are the ties that exist between parents and children and between children and parents. Someone has said, "Blood is thicker than water." They were absolutely right.

It really probably is not a surprise that two of the most popular shows on television today are programs that are focused basically on happy families. One of these shows is *The Cosby Show*.³ The other show is actually entitled *Family Ties*.⁴ That is what I would like to talk to you about — family ties.

Did you know that the ties that bind your family together are not only crucial for the success of your home, but they can have a profound effect on the people who live all around you? The question that I want to let you think about very seriously is this: "What

² Oak Cliff is a neighborhood located in Dallas, Texas.

³ *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) was an American situation comedy featuring the Huxtable family, an upper-middle-class Black American family living in Brooklyn, New York.

⁴ *Family Ties* (1982-1989) was an American situation comedy featuring the Keaton family. The parents — liberal Baby Boomers and former hippies— were raising their four children.

What Do the Neighbors See?

do the neighbors see?” That’s an important question. “What do the neighbors see?”

Now I sort of suspect that just about everybody has some really great memories about neighbors who have lived next to you over the years. I will never forget the neighborhood around South Sixth Street in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where my family and I lived over 35 years ago while I was finishing grade school and completing my high school education.

To our left lived an elderly couple named the Redmons.⁵ We treated them real nice because they were our landlords. To our right lived a family called the Adams. They had only one child, a daughter named Alice. She was very nice.

Down the block a couple of doors lived the McLeods. Mr. McLeod worked with my dad at the Army depot. Mary was in my class at school and went through the rest of grade school and high school with me. I have to say this: She got prettier and prettier! But I was a slow mover even in those days. A good-looking guy in our school beat me to the punch, and he married her.

Across the street from us lived the Dixons. They were kind of a rough-hewn family. Their reputation was established one day when Mr. Dixon chased somebody off his front porch with a baseball bat.

Down the street on the other corner lived the Fields. They had a teenage boy named Bert who was one of these guys that was always skating the thin edge between being a pretty nice guy and becoming an out-and-out thug.

Around the corner on our side of the street lived the Bennetts. Ted Bennett was one of our best buddies in the neighborhood. Everybody in every neighborhood needs a Ted Bennett. He was the plump, pudgy, good-natured guy whose parents are as nice as the day is long.

If you had asked any of these people who Zane Hodges was, they might have said, “He is the bookworm that lives up the street, who is skinny as a rail and wears gold-rim glasses that look like they belong on a man 60 years of age.”

But that’s the neighbors. Aren’t they great? I have always said, “What would a neighborhood be without neighbors?”

Maybe I will surprise you by telling you this: that the passage of Scripture that we have read is basically about the neighbors.

Now maybe you thought it was about John the Baptist or about his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth. Of course, there is a sense in which that is true, because this family stands at the very center of this story. But basically, the key to this story is to be found in the relatives and in the neighbors of this family. Or to put it much more simply, the key to this story is what the neighbors saw.

Now, I don’t need to tell you, do I, how a neighborhood works? Every self-respecting neighborhood has a neighborhood grapevine. Sometimes news travels on a neighborhood grapevine almost as fast as the speed of light.

I want you to sort of listen in with me to a conversation between two neighbors of the family of John the Baptist. We are going to pretend that their names are Sarah and Salome. Their imaginary conversation one morning goes something like this.

Sarah: “Salome, you will not believe the news that I have for you today.”

⁵ Names of families and individuals have been changed.

What Do the Neighbors See?

Salome: “Sarah, don’t keep me dangling. What is your news?”

Sarah: “Well, Salome, do you know that old lady named Elizabeth who is married to the priest?”

Salome: “Yes, I know her. What about her?”

Sarah: “Salome, that woman is pregnant. I swear to you, that woman is pregnant. Salome, believe it.”

Salome (after a double-take): “Sarah, it can’t be. Elizabeth is at least 60 years old. If you want my personal opinion, she’s pushing 65. There’s no way that woman could be pregnant.”

Sarah: “That’s what I thought, too. But I saw her. She kept herself out of sight for five months. And this is the sixth month of her pregnancy. All you need to do is look at her, and you know she’s pregnant. And that isn’t all. There’s something else too.”

Salome: “Well, okay Sarah, what is it? What else is there?”

Sarah: “You know her husband, that old man, the priest Zacharias? He has lost his voice. He cannot speak a single word.”

Salome: “Aha. It sort of serves him right. I always did say that old man talked too much. But how did that happen?”

Sarah: “Well, they say it happened the last time he was down in Jerusalem to do his duties in the temple. One day he had to go into the temple to burn incense. He was perfectly all right when he went in, but when he came out, he couldn’t say a word. Everybody figures that he had some kind of a vision. But of course, he can’t tell us about the vision because he isn’t able to talk.

Salome: “Sarah, I’ll hand it to you. If your news is right, this is the biggest thing that has happened in our village since the drought five years ago. I only hope everything goes perfectly all right with Elizabeth because, you know, it’s bound to be tough having your first child at the age of 65.”

Now I admit it: I made that conversation up! But I am willing to bet that in the last four months of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, there were at least a dozen conversations very much like that. I have to feel that over that community there was a shadow of concern for this elderly woman who was pregnant for the very first time in her life.

Something might happen to that pregnancy because this was before the days of hospitals, before the days of pediatricians. Even if Elizabeth went her full term, something could still happen to her, or to the child, or to both of them during the labor pains of childbirth. Can’t you imagine how the neighborhood grapevine electrified that community when it was able to report that, not only had Elizabeth passed safely through

What Do the Neighbors See?

the experience of childbirth, but that she also had given birth to a beautiful, bouncing baby boy.

Above all things, the people in that community were struck by the amazing mercy of God to this elderly woman to whom He had given a child in her old age. The Bible tells us that, “When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her” (Luke 1:58). They rejoiced with her.

Now listen to me very carefully. If you live long enough in one neighborhood and if you have a Christian home where God is feared and respected, sooner or later, God will magnify His mercy in your home, and your neighbors will see it. You see, if God gives us a child at all, no matter at what age that child may come to us, that is a token of His mercy because the Bible says, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3).

But every parent should know this — that in the process of raising children, there are all sorts of problems. There are trials. There are troubles. There are heartaches. There are moments of anxiety and concern. All of these experiences are opportunities for God to magnify His mercy in our home so that our neighbors can see it.

Don’t you see what is happening here? Because of God’s amazing kindness to an old lady and an old man who loved Him and feared Him, a whole network of family members and the neighborhood saw the magnifying of the mercy of God. They saw what God could do in a household that feared Him.

But then came the second surprise.

I am willing to bet that when the infant, John the Baptist, was circumcised eight days after he was born, more people attended that circumcision than had ever attended a circumcision before in that tiny little village in the Judean hills.

I mean, this is something that you would want to tell your children and grandchildren about, like this: “Kiddos, I actually saw the circumcision of a little baby boy whose parents were in their 60s. I was there. I saw it myself.”

I doubt very much if anybody in that community wanted to miss this important religious and social event. I have to feel that the neighbors and the relatives turned out in force. But believe me, they could never have guessed what was going to happen next.

You see, everybody who came to that circumcision sort of figured that this little baby would be named *Zacharias* after his father. They had already begun to call him *Zacharias*. Can’t you just hear them? “Itchy coo, *Zacharias*.” “Why little *Zach*, you are one cute little pumpkin.” “Here, *Zachie* boy, let your Aunt *Maggie* hold you.”

While they were doing this, all of a sudden *Elizabeth* interrupted. I’m giving you a free translation of *Elizabeth*’s words. “Hold it! That little baby boy of mine is not named *Zacharias*. He is going to be called *John*.”

They respond, “*John*? *Elizabeth*, you can’t be serious. There isn’t anybody on either side of your family named *John*. You can’t call this kid *John*.” After a few minutes, they were getting a little exasperated with this stubborn old lady who had made this off-the-wall suggestion.

So, they turned to the head of the house, probably expecting that he would veto his wife’s suggestion, and they made motions to *Zacharias* to indicate to him that they would like to know what he wanted to call the baby. Surely, he wants to call this little baby *Zacharias* after himself.

Zacharias motions for a writing tablet. They hand him a wax writing tablet. With a pen or a stylus, he writes some words in the wax. These words are so definite that they

What Do the Neighbors See?

settle the issue once and for all, because Zacharias writes, “His name is John” (Luke 1:63).

His name is John. The Bible says, “So they all marveled.” They all marveled, but they really didn’t need to marvel. Even if they didn’t understand it right now, they were going to understand it before they left the house that day.

You see, the angel Gabriel had told Zacharias that his son would have a special place in the plans and purposes of God. This child was to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ, and his name was going to be *John* (Luke 1:26-38).

What Zacharias and Elizabeth were doing was something that they had been trying to do through many years of their life. They were obeying the Word of God. In this splendid moment in their lives, husband and wife — father and mother — are united by the strongest ties that can ever bind parents together. They are deeply committed to the will of God for their child. They were profoundly committed to the will of God for their little baby boy.

Tell me, Christian parent, what do you really want for your children? Would you be satisfied for your children to grow up and have a nice, prosperous life? Would you be satisfied if they had a nice home and a happy family? Or are you and your partner in marriage concerned, above all other things, that God’s plan, God’s purpose, and God’s will for your children should be fulfilled?

Just this past July 1986 at the Christian Booksellers Association convention in Washington D.C., one afternoon, a middle-aged couple walked into the Redención Viva⁶ booth and sat down on our sofa. It turned out that they ran a bookstore somewhere in the Atlanta region. As I recall, they bought some of our books to sell in their store.

After we had finished our business together, we began to chat. These parents were telling me that they had a grown daughter who was married to a graduate of Dallas Seminary. This graduate of Dallas Seminary was committed to going over to Japan to serve the Lord as a Christian missionary.

I think I said something about Japan being a long way from Atlanta, Georgia. This is the answer that the mother gave me.

She said yes, she knew that Japan was a long way away and, of course, they could wish that their children would be closer to home. But she said, “One time I was talking to a woman back home, who said this to me. The woman said to me, ‘I would a whole lot rather have my children a long way away serving the Lord than near to home living in sin.’”

Then the woman who was talking to me said this: “Of course, my husband and I wish that we could see our daughter and her family more than we will be able to see her, but we are pleased that she will be serving the Lord in Japan.”

There was something about the look on her face when she had said this and something about her words that sort of ran a thrill across my heart. Here were two parents whose primary desire for their daughter was the will of God.

You want to talk about family ties? You want to talk about them? Here is the strongest family tie there is. A husband and a wife, a father and a mother, fully yielded to the will of God — for themselves first, and for their children.

Suddenly it happened. I mean, there was that wax tablet, and on it were the words

⁶ Redención Viva was the publishing company founded by Zane Hodges and Luis Rodriguez. At this time, it would have published *The Gospel Under Siege* (1981), *Here Walks My Enemy* (1982) and *Grace in Eclipse* (1985).

What Do the Neighbors See?

that express Zacharias's obedience: "His name is John." Suddenly, Zacharias didn't need a wax tablet anymore. Suddenly, he didn't need to write notes to communicate. The Bible says that immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue was loosed, and he spoke praising God.

When I read this story, I feel like saying to Zacharias, "Old man, you have come a long, long way. Old man, you have come a long way since that day in the temple when you couldn't believe the words of the angel, when you thought that you and your wife were too old to have a son. Now, nine months later, you are doing what you ought to have been doing at the beginning. You are praising God before your family, your relatives, and your neighbors."

Husbands, fathers, listen to me. There are too many Christian homes all across the country where the husband is the silent partner in religion. If you are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, you are not only the head of your household, you are their leader in praising and worshiping God.

Husband, father, be honest. When was the last time that you gathered your family together and led them in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving because of the blessings that God had bestowed upon your home? When was the last time you did it? Hear me. That's not your wife's job. That's not your children's job. That's your job.

A number of years ago on one of the highways of this nation, there was a tragic automobile accident. It claimed the lives of four young people who were riding in the same car. It was evident that liquor was responsible for this tragedy. They found broken liquor bottles in the midst of the debris and among the mangled bodies of the four young victims.

The father of one of the girls who was killed was beside himself with frenzy and anguish at the untimely death of his beautiful daughter. With a loud booming voice, he swore that if he could find out who had given these young people their liquor, he would kill him.

Later on, at his home, he went to the cupboard where he kept his favorite beverages. He opened the cupboard and he found a note written in the handwriting of the daughter who had died. The note said this: "Dad, we are taking along some of your good liquor. I know you won't mind."

Fathers, husbands, that's the bottom line, isn't it? What do your kids find in your home? Do they find all your bad habits that you are not getting the help of God to conquer? Do they find your indifference to the Word of God? Do they find the empty beer cans that you guzzle while you watch the Dallas Cowboys football team on Saturday afternoon?

Or do your children find a father who is overflowing with the praise and worship of God? Believe me, if that is what your kids see in you, your neighbors will see it, too.

Is it any wonder that the Bible tells us that after these events, the fear of God fell on all of those who lived around Zacharias and Elizabeth and on all of their neighbors. Word of these things spread throughout the hill country of Judea.⁷ Everybody who heard about it knew that God was at work in that home. They were asking the question, "What kind of a man will this little baby grow up to be?" Pay attention. Happy and blessed is the home where God is working and where the neighbors can see it.

There is a delightful little Mexican legend about a farmer named Ysidro. According

⁷ Luke 1:65

What Do the Neighbors See?

to this legend, one day Ysidro was farming on his little plot of ground, and an angel came to him. The angel said, "Ysidro, the Lord wants to see you. Come with me." But Ysidro was busy and he refused to go. Later the angel came back and the angel said, "Ysidro, unless you come with me, the Lord will send wind and drought and wither your corn."

Now, Ysidro had fought the wind before, and he knew that drought could be relieved by the water from the river, and so he refused to go. Two more times, the angel came to Ysidro and two more times, Ysidro refused. Finally, the angel came and said, "Ysidro, if you don't come with me, the Lord will send you a bad neighbor." Ysidro stopped right in the middle of the row of corn he was working on. He looked at the angel and he said, "I will come with you now. I can stand anything but that."

Dear Christian friends, God forbid that we should be bad neighbors to our neighbors. But the only way to be a good neighbor is to have a home that is filled with the obedience and worship of God. A home where the mercy of God is magnified before men.

Let's face it, shall we? There are lots of your relatives and there are lots of your friends who have never seen a home like that. They have never seen it. Maybe they never will unless the home in which they see it is yours.

Father, by Your mercy, and by Your grace, and by Your enablement, make each family reading this be a good neighbor to their neighbors for your glory. I ask it in Christ's name.

Chapter 17

But the Money Was Gone

Now, consider for this chapter the following texts from the Bible: Luke 15:11-24.

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

- Luke 15:11-24

In January of 1989, Brian Krelli was working as a bartender at Tia's Tex Mex restaurant on Midway Road in Dallas. One Monday in that month, about 11:30 a.m., he happened to notice a ziplock bag outside of the restaurant, lying by a trash bin. Now, it so happened that one of Brian's jobs at Tia's was to put all of the bank deposits into a bag just like that bag, put it in the safe, and wait for it to be picked up by an armored car company. So, Brian knew exactly what he was looking at. In fact, the name of the restaurant to which the bag belonged was on it. A bank deposit slip indicated that the bank contained \$9,856.42.

Now Brian would not have been human if the thought had not crossed his mind that he could just pick the bag up and walk away with it, and no one might ever know the difference. But he said later, "I knew that I couldn't have lived with that. I knew it wouldn't have been right."

So he picked up the bag, and he took it in to Joe Lloyd, the manager of Tia's, who

But the Money Was Gone

called the armored car company of the restaurant to which the bag belonged. After a while, the armored car company came and picked it up. Apparently, one of their couriers had dropped it without realizing it as he was doing his pickup rounds.

After that, Brian just went home to his residence in Farmers Branch¹ and he lay down in his bed. It was apparently there, for the first time, that he began to imagine all of the things he might have done with that money. Right up at the top of the list was a brand new Ford Mustang or a brand new Chevrolet Corvette.²

At an interview at the restaurant, he told the reporter that there was a kind of a giddiness, a kind of a light half-headed happiness that he had felt when he had all that money in his hands, even though it was in his hands for only a very brief time. But the bottom line remained the same: There wasn't going to be any new Ford Mustang. There wasn't going to be a new Chevrolet Corvette, because the money was gone. It had been returned to its proper owners.

Now frankly, friends, I could hope that each of us, if we were confronted by a situation like that, would show the same honesty as was shown by Brian. But wouldn't you agree that the chances are very good that holding that much money in our hands would be kind of exciting? If it were taken away, if it were lost or stolen, we would certainly feel disappointed. We would certainly feel let down. We might even feel just a little bit depressed because the money is gone.

I want you to look carefully with me at the story of a young man to whom something bad happened, and then to whom something good happened. His story ends with feasting and music and happiness. But across that lovely, bright and sunny conclusion to his story, there hangs a long, dark, slender shadow. That shadow could be described with these words, the title of this chapter: "But the Money Was Gone."

Now I strongly suspect that just about everybody reading this is very familiar with this story. This may, in fact, be the best known of all the stories that Jesus told which are recorded in the New Testament. Many know that we call this story the story of the Prodigal Son.

But before you decide that you know all there is to know about the story, let me just ask you a question. Did you realize that there is a very good chance that the Prodigal Son was a teenager? You know why?

I understand that it was customary in those days for young men to be married somewhere between the ages of 18 and 20. Very often, their parents arranged for these marriages, especially parents that were wealthy. Obviously, this young man had a wealthy father, but apparently no marriage had yet been arranged for him. Apparently, he leaves the family farm by himself. He returns to the family farm by himself.

This leads to the suggestion that the prodigal son may have been about 17 years of age. Do I need to tell anybody reading this that the seventeenth year of a person's life can be one of the most spiritually dangerous years of their entire career? In fact, the late teenage years are particularly dangerous for Christian kids. If you are just turning 17, or if you are already 17, then welcome to Temptation, Texas. Welcome to Dangerfield, USA.

So you see, here was a young man, maybe no older than 17, and he comes to his dad one day, and he says something like this. He says, "Dad, I know that I'm going to get a lot of money when you're old and you die, but I don't want to wait for that. I would like

¹ City in Dallas County, Texas.

² Ford Mustang and Chevrolet Corvette are American sport cars.

you to divide your inheritance between me and my brother right now so I can have some money now.”

Please remember that under the Jewish law of inheritance, if a family had two sons, like this family did, the oldest son inherited about twice as much as the youngest son. So, this younger son was looking forward to about one-third of his father’s wealth and property.

Apparently, there were also arrangements that could be made to give an heir his inheritance up front. But it seems likely that if that happened, he didn’t get the full inheritance yet. The father, for example, would keep the property. If the boy was looking forward to maybe one-third or three-ninths of his father’s inheritance, maybe he took two-ninths, if he took it early. But whatever the amount was, he wanted it.

Did you notice the father of this kid doesn’t say to him, “That is just about the dumbest request you have ever made in your entire life. Have you forgotten that you are 17? You have never had anywhere near that amount of money to manage it. I know how you are. You are not mature yet. You are not responsible yet. I don’t dare put that much money in your hand. You will go out and waste it for sure. No, sir. Come see me when you are a lot older than you are right now.”

He didn’t do that. Doesn’t that sound like a father? Come on, folks, aren’t there thousands of fathers who would have said something like that?

But according to Jesus’ story, the father doesn’t say a thing. He simply divides his livelihood between his two sons.

Wouldn’t you know it? I mean, you could have predicted it from square one. After only a short time, this young man turns all of his inheritance into money. It may have been jewels. It may have been sheep and goats. It may have been a lot of them. He turns it all into money.

He leaves home, taking all that money with him. He is attracted by the bright lights of the city, the faraway country. He goes there. He is on his own. He’s out from under his father’s control. Luke 15:13 says that Jesus says he “wasted his possessions with prodigal living.”

Again, did you notice, when he walks out the door the dad is not there blocking? When he walks through the gate of the farm, his dad is not there sticking out the leg to trip him up. He lets him go.

Dear Christian parents, when your kid reaches 17, 18, or 19, you have effectively lost control of their lives. If you have not yet instilled in them your standard, your commitment to God, and your love for Him, you won’t do it when they reach 17.

Let’s be honest about this, shall we? It is hard in our society today and in our culture today to raise a kid who does not go astray when he reaches his late teenage years. That is difficult. But it’s not impossible. Here is what it will take.

First of all, it will take tons and tons and tons of prayer, beginning when they are very, very young and continuing throughout all the years of their life.

Here’s something else that moves them: It will take sitting down with them one-on-one — starting very early in their lives — and opening your heart to them and sharing your love for God, your commitment to God’s Word, and your heart’s desire that they should live for God, as well. It takes doing that over and over again through the years that they are growing up.

Here’s something else it takes. It takes living before them a godly and consistent Christian life. If your kids figure out that you are a hypocrite and that you wear one

person on Sunday and another person the other six days of the week, you have lost the ball game right there.

If you have failed to do this in the growing years of your kids, then when they become teenagers, when they become determined to wander away from God and from the standards that you hope they would follow, you really will not be able to stop them. No matter what you do, no matter what rules you lay down, no matter how many times you ground them, no matter how tightly you pull the purse string, and no matter how many times you give them the \$75 lecture, by that time, out of necessity, they will go if they decide to go.

In our story, the father did not try to stop his son from leaving. He let him go. In this, we learn something very significant about God, our heavenly Father. You see, when any of us believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the free gift of everlasting life, we are born into God's family. We become God's sons and God's daughters.

Maybe some of you were saved when you were very young. As you were growing up, you sort of said to yourself, "I love God. When I grow up, I am going to serve God."

But then, as you reached your teenage years, you looked at things differently. The far country of sin with all of its excitement and bright lights looked so good to you. So maybe you walked away from God. Maybe you turned your back on His Word. Maybe you even left church.

And you know what? God did not try to stop you. He did not lock the door of the church. He did not send a posse of angels to corral you, arrest you, and bring you back. He did not zap you to the ground with the bolt of lightning. What did He do? He let you go. God let you go.

I kind of suspect that at first, it was great out there in the far country. Here is a teenager probably loaded with money. So, it is showtime. It is play time. What's on the schedule? Is it wine, women, and song — and then any other?

And then one morning, he wakes up, and guess what? The money is gone. The money is gone. This kid has spent his last shekel³ and he can't remember where he did it. It might have been in the beer joint the night before. Might have been that he spent it on the gal he met, but it's gone.

It is pretty hard to buy food when you don't have any money. To make things worse, the far country was in a period of economic recession. It was famine time in the far country. When you have a famine, the food prices shoot up. Jobs are scarce. This guy is desperate.

He finds a citizen in that country that will hire him. It is not very much of a job. In fact, from the standpoint of the Jews, the lowest job of the low. For Jews, pigs were unclean and their meat was forbidden by the Law of Moses. Here is this young fellow. He finds a man who will send him out to the field, and his job is feeding pigs.

He is not worried about having pork chops from the pig. He is not worried about having bacon. He is so hungry, he would be glad to eat some of the slop that the pigs are eating. He sits there watching the pigs munching happily on those carob pods and carob fruit. It probably didn't taste like anything. The kid's mouth is watering. He'd love to get one of those carob pods, if only somebody would give it to him. Then, guess what happened?

Jesus says, "...he came to himself" (Luke 15:17). It was kind of like waking up out of a

³ Ancient coin.

bad dream.

This young fellow basically says, “What a fool I am. What am I doing out here? Well, all the hired servants back at my father’s farm have full meals and they have food left over. I am out here sitting next to the pigs, and I am jealous because they have slop. But I have nothing.

“I know what I’ve got to do. I’ve got to go home. I’ve got to go back to my dad. I’ve got to apologize to him and tell him, ‘Father, I’ve sinned against heaven and in your sight. You don’t need to treat me like a son anymore. Just put me on as one of your hired servants, and I’ll pay for everything you give me.’”

Isn’t it obvious why the father let his kid leave? What good would it be to the father to force his kid to live where his kid didn’t want to live? When he let him go, you better believe the father was hoping that someday his kid would wake up and he would say, “I’d rather be back home with Dad than where I am right now.”

When you drift away from God, that is why God let you go. He is not going to tie you up and nail you to the pulpit. He is not going to hold you a prisoner. What good is that to God? If you don’t want to have fellowship with Him, why should He force it?

But don’t you see? Out in the far country you can learn what life is all about. Hopefully, out in the far country you will wake up. Maybe before you wake up you will crash and burn. That is what this kid did. He crashed and burned, but he woke up and he went home.

Now listen parents, if you have kids that have gone astray, that is what you need to hope for, and more than hope for. That is what you need to pray for every day. Every single day of your life, pray that God will wake them up and make your straying children realize that it is better to be close to God than far away in sin.

So what did this young boy do? Well, he did just exactly what he decided. He got up. He left the far country. He went back to the farm.

As he walked through the door, there was his dad standing with his arms crossed and a dark frown on his face. Dad says, “Well, it is about time. Look at you. You are a mess. That tunic you are wearing is just a collection of rags. Your face and your hair look like they haven’t been taken care of for months. Look at your feet and ankles. They are caked with mud. Where have you been? Out in a pigsty?”

There are a lot of parents, a lot of fathers, that would greet their returning children that way. Am I right? You better believe it! You see, they are still angry at the kid. They are angry because that kid has disappointed them, caused them heartache, caused them trouble, and caused them embarrassment.

They can’t wait until the kid comes crawling back on his hands and knees, begging for help. When the kid does, Dad is going to go nuclear. He is going to blow up. There will be shrapnel all over the place.

But not this father. Apparently, he looked down that road every day. On this particular day, at a far distance, he saw a figure that he thought he recognized. His heart was stirred with compassion and sympathy.

Then he did something that was very undignified for an elderly Jewish man. He ran down that pathway. When he reached his son, he threw both arms around his neck and gave him kisses on each of his cheeks.

The son is probably embarrassed by this. This is not the greeting he was expecting to receive. He feels unworthy of it. He is only able to say part of what he wanted to say: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be

called your son” (Luke 15:21).

The father apparently listens to this in silence. When they get back to the farm, he gives his answer. The father basically says to the servants, in Luke 15:21-24, “Bring out the best robe. Put it on him. Get a lovely ring and put it on his hand. Get a new pair of sandals and put them on his feet. Then the rest of you, hurry, hurry, hurry! Kill the fatted calf that we have been preparing. Prepare a dinner such as we haven’t had here in a long time, because tonight we are going to celebrate. Because this son of mine was so far away from me, it was just as if he was dead. Now he is alive. I have got him back. This son of mine was lost, and today I found him.”

Maybe you are saying, as you listen to the close of this story, “That is wonderful. That is the way God does it. If I have a kid, that is the way I would respond to him.”

Maybe you are saying, “It is a great ending because everything is just exactly like it was before. Everything is just as it was before.”

No, it is not. Things are not just as they were before. Oh yes, everybody is happily feasting, but the money was gone. This kid left the farmhouse loaded with money. He comes back a beggar.

Yes, my friends, when a Christian goes astray from God, God will certainly receive them back as soon as they come back. But a Christian who is away from God is always spending money. They are always spending money. I am not talking about literal money. I am talking about spending the time, the energy, and the abilities that could be used to lay up treasure in heaven, that could be used to win eternal rewards. Oh yes, God will receive the Christian back, but the rewards that could have been won will be lost forever.

Remember this, God is gracious and God is forgiving. But the days that we waste will never come back to us again. The money will be gone.

Some years ago at the State Fair of Texas, there was a young boy — I would say he was probably a teenager — who was displaying a prize hog. The hog was big and fat and comfortable. The boy was skinny. He had a bad complexion. It looked like he was trying to set a record smoking as many cigarettes as he could smoke in the shortest amount of time. The owner of the prize-winning hog was the father of the boy. The father was a champion at raising his hog, but a failure at raising his son.

Parents, would you like to know how to raise a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter? Here is how you do it.

Never, never pray with them, except at mealtimes. Never sit down and talk to them about your love for God and your hope that they will love God, too. Never bring them to church. Always send them with somebody else.

Cuss in front of your kids. Drink wine and drink beer in front of your kids. Or maybe just have it in the ice box. They will know what it is for. Lie to other people in front of your kids, so they can learn to lie as well.

Shout at your wife when you are mad at her. Scream at your husband when you are mad at him. Yell at your kids when they annoy you.

Buy your kid everything he could possibly desire, hoping that that will drive him to be good. Lay down such strict rules that your kid will not be able to wait till they get out from under your control.

Please don’t forget this: Be sure that you ignore what you hear — all that good stuff that you hear at church — so that your kids will rapidly learn that if it is not important for you, it is not important for them.

But the Money Was Gone

If you do any of these things, or if you do all of these things in your home, get ready. Prepare to shed some heavy tears as your children drift away from God.

But if they do drift away, or if they have drifted away, here is what you do. You dedicate yourself to becoming the Christian person you should have been years ago. You dedicate yourself to praying for that kid every day of your life, even if it takes years and years.

If you do those things, God will open your kid's heart, and your kid will return to the loving arms of his heavenly Father. And then you and God will have a party.

Father, we are touching on truths from Your Word here that come very close to home. Help us to understand that You are a loving heavenly Father and that even some of Your children have gone astray.

For any who have children like that, let them find their hope and their expectation in Your love and Your grace for their kids. Seal to each person whatever it is that You want them to hear from Your Word in this chapter. I ask it in Christ's name.

Chapter 18

Children Lost Yet Found

Then Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

So He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

- Luke 18:28-30

The unusual story that I’m about to tell you was first reported in 1985 by the Associated Press. Barry Hennessy, who was a real estate broker in northern Virginia, was born in 1936 at Mercy Hospital in Denver, Colorado. When his mother, Wilma Hennessy, brought him home, there was a thought in the back of her mind that said, *I’m not sure this is my baby.*

In fact, when she got home or on the way home, that is exactly what she said to her husband. She said, “I’m not sure this is my baby.” Her husband was so shocked by that, that she never mentioned it again.

But somewhere around 1981, she came into possession of an adult footprint of Barry, whom she had raised. When they compared that footprint with the footprint on his birth certificate, they were not the same. In fact, a fingerprint analyst analyzed the footprints and stated that the two footprints were from different people. Wilma Hennessy told the media that the two footprints are like night and day. “The baby footprint has three *H*’s in it, and the adult footprint doesn’t have any at all.” Then she added, “Any mother would want to know. It doesn’t mean that I love the other one less.”

Wilma began her search by requesting that Mercy Hospital in Denver open its records of babies that were born on the same day as her son Barry. Apparently, they refused. In speaking of the switching of babies, they said, “Practically speaking, it’s impossible.”

But that didn’t stop Wilma Hennessy. She searched for Mercy Hospital birth announcements in the local newspapers for May of 1936. She compared the names that she found in those birth announcements with names in old telephone books.

Finally, she was able to locate a man who was born on the same day as Barry. He was a pastor in Wichita Falls, Texas. His name was Ralph C. Hodges.

Now, Hodges was quoted as saying that he first met Wilma Hennessy when she came up to him after a service and explained her search to him. So, Pastor Hodges was very cooperative. I hope you think that is natural for every Pastor Hodges.¹ He took off his shoe and his sock. He allowed her to roll ink on the sole of his foot, and then he stepped on a piece of white paper.

When she looked at the footprint, Hodges said, “I could sense her emptiness. It was not what she was looking for.”

Now, I am sorry to say that I do not know whether Wilma Hennessy ever found her

¹ Zane was a pastor at Victor Street Bible Chapel.

real son. I did not see any other reports on this story, but I think we can agree on this — that every parent reading this would agree with me that they sympathize with the feelings of Wilma Hennessy.

If you had a child whom you had never seen since they were born in the hospital, wouldn't you want to be reunited with them? Wouldn't you want to find your lost child? That is what I would like to talk to you about. Lost children.

Do you know that there are many ways in which parents can lose their children? But if you are going to lose a child, the very best way to lose a child is to lose that child to God.

Therefore, I would like to discuss with you the subject that is the title of this chapter: "Children Lost Yet Found."

Did you ever stop to think that the Apostle Peter had a mother and father? "Well," you say, "yes, of course he did." Everybody had a mother and father, but isn't it true that we do not think about them very much?

Do you know the name of Peter's father, which is actually given in the Bible? His name was *Jonas* in Greek. We would say *Jonah* today, the name of the Old Testament prophet.

Now, we do not know the name of Peter's mother, but we do know the name of a brother, who was Andrew. For all we know, Peter may have had other brothers, as well.

We know that Peter, at least at a later time, was married,² and that he had a son named Mark.³ If we put together all of the information that we find in the Bible, it would be a very good guess to say that Peter probably left home to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in his early 20s.

Now if that is correct, Peter may already have been married. He may already have had some small children. It is not at all unlikely that he was living with his young family under the same roof of his mother and father. He may have had other brothers who were at home.

Don't you see that when Peter left home to follow the Lord Jesus Christ around on the hot dusty roads of the land of Palestine, his parents lost their son to God.

Stop and think for a minute. In the passage that we read just a few moments ago, Peter raises a point with Jesus, where he is expecting an answer. Peter says to Jesus, "See, we have left all and followed you" (Luke 18:28).

I think it is very possible that in His response to Peter, Jesus is actually mentioning the things that Peter has left, for Jesus basically replies to Peter, "There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not be greatly rewarded" (Luke 18:29-30).

Now, please do not misunderstand what I am saying. We are not talking here about a man who turned his back on his family and never saw them again. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking, however, about a man who was so committed to the Lord Jesus Christ that it meant that at times he was going to be separated from his loved ones.

Now, as you read a moment ago, we know that Peter was married. The evidence of the Bible seems to be that at a later time, his wife traveled with him on his preaching missions.⁴ Probably even his son Mark went on some of those missions. While Jesus

² See Matthew 8:14 and Mark 1:30.

³ See 1 Peter 5:13.

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 9:5.

was leading Peter around the land of Palestine, whenever they got close to Peter's home, don't you think that Peter dropped it on his family? I'm quite sure that he did.

So, we are not talking about abandoning our family once and for all. But we are talking about people who are committed to Jesus Christ, and their commitment sometimes takes them away from home.

Tell me, Christian parent, would you be willing to lose your child to God like that? You know, some parents kind of secretly hope that their children grow up, get married, and settle down real close to home so that they can see them whenever they want to see them. But sometimes the will of God for your children may take them a long distance away. Are you prepared to accept that for your son or your daughter?

I shall never forget one time, when Luis and I were exhibiting at a Christian Booksellers Association convention.⁵ One day, when Luis had stepped out of the booth for a brief break, a man and his wife came into the booth. It turned out that they owned a bookstore in Atlanta, Georgia. They sat down on the little couch that we had rented for the convenience of our customers. They bought some Redención Viva books to sell in their bookstore.

Then we started to talk, and the mother informed me that her daughter was married to a student at Dallas Seminary who was planning to become a missionary in Japan. I think I said something about the fact that Japan was a long way from Atlanta, Georgia. I will never forget the response that this mother gave to me.

She said, "Yes, Japan is a long way from Atlanta, Georgia, but," she said, "I always remember something that a woman said to me one time. She said to me, 'I would a whole lot rather have my children a long way away serving the Lord than near to home living in sin.'"

Then she added this. She said, "Yes, my husband and I realize that if our daughter goes overseas, we will not see her or her family as often as we would like to see. But we are pleased that she will be serving the Lord in Japan."

Wow! What a marvelous Christian way for a Christian parent to think about their children — to be happy, no matter where their children are, if their children are living for God.

Is that how you as a Christian parent think about your sons and your daughters? Is that what you want for them? Is that how you feel about them?

Well, know this. You will never be able to feel that way about your children unless you yourself are committed to God. May I repeat that? It is tremendously important. That is a wonderful way to feel about your children. But you won't be able to feel that way unless you are firmly committed to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Had Peter made a good move? Had he made a wise decision when he got home? You better believe it. That was one of the best decisions he ever made.

You see, just a few moments before, Peter had been listening to an interview between Jesus and a young ruler who was very rich.⁶ Peter had heard Jesus challenge this ruler to sell what he had to distribute to the poor. Jesus had said, "You will have treasure in

⁵ Zane Hodges and Luis Rodriguez founded a publishing company called Redención Viva in 1980. Their initial publication was *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works*. At the time of this convention in 1986, Redención Viva would have also published *Here Walks My Enemy* (1982) and *Grace in Eclipse* (1985).

⁶ Luke 18:18-27

heaven, and come, follow Me.”⁷

Well, of course, the rich young ruler was not even saved. He had never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. So, there was no way he would be willing to do that if he was not even saved. But Peter was saved, and all of the disciples were saved except Judas. We know that from the Gospel of John.⁸

Sometime after they got saved, they made a decision to become the disciples of Jesus Christ. I am sure that when Peter heard about treasure in heaven, he wanted to know, “What is in it for us?” So he said, “See, we have left all and followed You” (Luke 18:28). The Gospel of Matthew says that Peter also said, “Therefore what shall we have?” (Matthew 19:27).

Jesus’ response to Peter is very impressive and very inspiring. Jesus says, “There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time” (Luke 18:29-30).

Do you know what Jesus means? Very simple. He is saying that the one who follows Him sacrificially will have wonderful rewards for that, even in the present life. Or, to put it another way, Jesus is telling His disciples that a life committed to Him is the most rewarding and satisfying life that anyone can live. Do you know that? Is that what you desire for your children? Is it?

John Broadus eventually became a famous biblical scholar, but in his younger years, in the town where he was living, John got saved. The very next day, he went to a schoolmate of his, a red-haired awkward young boy named Sandy Jones. John Broadus said to Sandy Jones, “I wish you would become a Christian. Won’t you?”

Sandy Jones replied, “Well, I don’t know. Perhaps I will.”

But not very long after that, in the little meeting place where both of them attended church, Sandy Jones believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for the free gift of everlasting life. Almost immediately, Sandy walked straight across the meeting place and he stuck out his hand to John Broadus and he said, “Thank you, John. Thank you, John.”

John Broadus grew up. He became a great biblical scholar. He even served as the president of a Baptist theological seminary. But almost every summer he would go home. Every time he did, he would always encounter Sandy Jones.

Now Sandy Jones was an old farmer wearing plain clothes, as awkward as ever, and wearing boots with red dirt. But every time John would encounter Sandy Jones, Sandy would stick out his big bony hand and he would say, “Howdy, John. Thank you, John. I never forgot you, John.”

The story is that when John Broadus lay on his deathbed surrounded by his friends, he said to his family something like this: “You know, I think one of the sweetest sounds that I will hear in heaven, outside of the greeting and welcome of Him whom I have tried to love and serve, the next sweetest sound will be the sound of the welcome of Sandy Jones who will stick out his hand to me and say ‘Howdy, John. Thank you, John.’”

Do I need to tell you that John Broadus had already tasted in this life some of the rich joy of heaven? There is hardly any privilege and joy greater than leading someone else to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and knowing that we will be reunited with them on the shores of the kingdom of God. That is one of the great rewards of living for Jesus

⁷ Luke 18:22

⁸ See John 6:64 and 17:12.

Christ.

Many years ago, a small fishing fleet went out to sea from a small harbor on the eastern coast of Newfoundland. During the day, a terrific storm came up. By nightfall, none of the ships had returned safely to the port.

All night long, wives, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts were pacing up and down the beach, wringing their hands and calling upon God to save their loved ones. To add to the horror of the night, one of the cottages caught on fire. They could not save it, because all the men were gone. The cottage blazed brightly and then it burned completely to the ground.

The next morning, the crowd joyfully saw all of the fishing vessels returning to the port. But there was one face in that crowd that was covered with sadness and despair. It was the face of the wife of the fisherman whose cottage had burned down. When her husband came ashore, she rushed up to him and she said, "Oh husband, we're ruined. Our home and all that is in it was destroyed by fire."

Her husband replied, "Thank God for the fire. It was the light of our burning cottage that guided all the ships safely back."

One of the marvelous joys of living in dedication to Jesus Christ is to find that God can take apparent tragedies, deep disappointments, and horrible frustrations, and He can turn them into great victories. And these victories bring joy to our hearts.

Do your children understand that? Do your children understand that the most rewarding kind of life they can possibly lead is a life dedicated to Jesus Christ? But know this: Your children cannot understand this — do not expect them to understand it — unless you as a Christian parent understand it yourself.

But that is not the end of it, is it? That is not the end of it at all. Jesus says, "There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come *eternal life*" (emphasis added, Luke 18:29-30).

Let us be frank, shall we? There are lots of churches in this country where these words would be seriously misunderstood. Some people would say that Jesus is teaching that unless we live a sacrificial life of discipleship to Him, we will never get into the kingdom of God, and we will never have eternal life at all. I hope that you know that is the wrong way to understand this.

We understand, do we not, that Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he that hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24)?

The moment that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from hell, on the authority of God's Word you can know that you have, right then and there, eternal life, that you will never come into the judgment of Hell, and that you have already passed out of death into life.

If there is anybody reading this who has never understood that for themselves, I have to tell you, you are not saved. No matter how good you think you are, you are headed for the judgment of hell. What you need to do, right this moment, is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the absolutely free gift of everlasting life.

Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). But remember this: Jesus also said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). May I point out to you, that those of us who receive the free gift of eternal life can also have that wonderful eternal

life in great abundance as a reward in the age to come?

Here is an illustration. Let us suppose that I told you that my pockets were filled with balloons. Let us suppose that I said, "I am going to give everybody a free gift of a balloon," then I reached into my pocket and I started tossing balloons out in all directions.

As soon as you caught a balloon, would you have a balloon? Yes, and it would be a free gift from Hodges. But what are you supposed to do with a balloon? Blow it up.

You know what? I hate all games in which the competitors have to blow up a balloon. If you ever watched me try to blow up a balloon, you'd know that as a balloon blower, I am a bust. Now, you wouldn't think a preacher like me would have any trouble with this, would you? But I do. The most I can usually get is a tiny little ball, you know, at the end of the balloon. Then I look at everybody else with a big balloon, or a bigger balloon. or a great big balloon.

That is kind of the way it is with eternal life. When you get eternal life, it is kind of like a skinny balloon. God expects you to blow it up. He expects you to breathe into His gift the breath of a life of fellowship with God. The more you do that, the bigger your balloon becomes.

You know something? When we get to the shores of the kingdom of God, there are going to be some Christians who have only the same little old balloon, or maybe no bigger a balloon than I could physically blow up. But there will be other Christians who have big balloons, and bigger balloons, and even bigger balloons.

Because, you see, Jesus gives us eternal life, not that we might just sit on it, but that we might expand it and enrich it so that our reward in the future is an abundant experience of everlasting life.

You want to talk about compound interest? This is compound interest, folks. A life of dedication to Jesus Christ pays off big here and now. But it pays off even bigger in the age to come.

Hey parents, be truthful with yourself for a minute. Is that the kind of experience you want for your children? Is it? Well, do not expect it to happen if you do not want that very same experience for yourself.

I understand that in the city of Rochester, New York, there is a river that runs through the city named the Genesee River. It flows between steep and crooked banks on either side of it. Many years ago, a man who lived in Rochester returned from a journey by train. When he got off the train, the only thing that was on his mind was going home and greeting his wife and children.

So, as he hurried through the street, he had a bright vision of his home in his mind. But suddenly, he was distracted by a group of excited men who were standing by the banks of the river. He shouted to them, "What's the matter?"

"Well," they shouted back to him, "a boy is in the water."

He shouted back, "Why don't you save him?" But a moment later, he was taking off his own coat, throwing it to the ground. He leaped into the water. He grabbed the child, who was frantic, and though the child struggled, he managed to get that child to shore.

When he brought the child to land, he wiped the water out of his face, and he brushed back the hair from the boy's face. Then he made an amazing discovery. He said, "Heaven, this is my boy. This is my boy." He had leaped into the waters to save somebody else's boy, but the boy he saved was his own.

Did you know that when Christian parents leap into the waters of self-sacrifice and

Children Lost Yet Found

dedication to God, that they are able to save people from wasted lives of sin that can lead rapidly to death? Christian parents, it very often happens that among the people you rescue like that are your own sons and your own daughters.

Listen to me. If you lose your children to a life of sin, that is a horrible and tragic loss. But if you lose them to God, then you really find them, for you find in them a wonderful joy, both in the present time and in the age to come. Believe me, if this becomes a reality for your sons and daughters, obviously they have become children lost, yet found.

Father, for those parents who are reading this, I pray that You will inspire them, first to be dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ through and through, and then to desire this deeply for each of their children. I ask this in Christ's name.

How to Be the Spouse and Parent God Wants You to Be

Question: How much insight on marriage and parenting could possibly come from Zane Hodges, a 65-year-old man who never married and had children?

Answer: Although Zane was a lifelong bachelor, he gained valuable insights into marriage and parenting from his parents, the many couples and families he observed and counseled over the decades.

Question: How much insight on marriage and parenting in the Bible could possibly come from Zane Hodges, a seminary professor and Bible teacher?

Answer: Read this book and find out about the woman who wrecked the world, the man who went along to get along, the couple who played hide and seek, friendship in marriage, a wise son and a foolish son, and children lost yet found.



Zane Clark Hodges (1932-2008) taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years as a Professor of New Testament Greek. He ministered for almost 50 years at Victor Street Bible Chapel, a small inner-city church in Dallas, Texas. Hodges was known for his faithfulness to the text of the Bible through study and prayer. He ministered to many from all walks of life and all ages. For more information on his life and work, visit the Zane Hodges Library at ZaneHodges.org.



ZaneHodges.org