

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Help! We're Married: Help! What happens next?

Today we come to the last talk in our present series which has been a practical look at marriage and parenting under the titles: 'Help! We're married', 'Help! We're invaded', and 'Help! We're stretched'. I'm sure many can identify with the challenges of managing time, money and commitments. Our talk today is entitled, 'Help! What happens next?'

I guess there is a danger that if we take a 'one size fits all' approach to this talk, it could easily become a case of 'one size fits nobody'. Our personalities, priorities and circumstances can be very different, so it is better to approach this talk with this in mind, rather than thinking we are all the same. I'm sure we are all aware, too, of just how much our lives can change and very quickly! I am reminded of the lyrics of one of John Lennon's songs when he wrote,

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans",

or the words of Robert Burns when he wrote,

*"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley,
an' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain for promis'd joy".*

So we might have it all planned out; find and marry the right partner; have our children; enjoy the years of family life; the children grow up and leave home; they find Christian husbands or wives; and the grandchildren come along, all healthy and happy. Meanwhile we have a bit more free time and maybe a little more expendable income too, so it's time for some holidays and taking life a bit easier. Maybe even retirement! How wonderful if things always turned out as we hoped and planned but we all know that life is not like that! Suddenly we are hit with illness or unemployment or some other disaster and these plans go out of the window. Not that I think it is wrong to have these hopes but often our deepest disappointments come as a result of our unrealistically high hopes.

The context of our talk today is our marriages and our families. It's good to be reminded again of God's thoughts in the beginning that marriage is between one man and one woman and is a lifelong commitment. In Genesis 2:24 we read, *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."* During His ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ quotes this verse and adds, *"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"*, Matthew 19:6.

Sadly even amongst Christians we hear of marriage breakdown and families being torn apart. Often this is as a result of infidelity and unfaithfulness by a husband or wife who fails to live up to their marriage vows. We live in a country where extra marital affairs and divorce are common place and no longer raise eyebrows. As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to be careful not to be conformed to this age; there's always the danger of being pressed into this world's mould! (see Romans 12:1-2).

The Apostle Paul gives us the secret to a happy and lasting marriage in his epistle to the Ephesians: *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"*, Ephesians 5:22, 25. We should not fail to see the lessons from these verses. They would tell us that the wife needs to be careful about submitting to her own husband. Sometimes we laugh, about it but to see a domineering wife 'hen-pecking' her husband is a truly awful thing. As husbands, we need to love our wives. We should not fail to show our wives affection and that is much more than a few easily spoken words. Have you ever noticed that it is recorded only once in the Gospels (John 14:31) that our Lord Jesus said that He *"loved the Father"*? That made me think! I believe He didn't need to continually say the words because His whole life was living proof that He loved the Father. If we husbands say we love our wives, let's make sure we show it in our actions. Christ's love was clearly demonstrated for the church when He hung upon the cross to redeem her to Himself.

As we get a little older, perhaps we need to be reminded of our marriage vows. My wife and I have just celebrated our silver wedding anniversary, so for us 25 years have passed since we took our vows to each other, before God, and witnessed by family and friends. We promised "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and (in my wife's case, to obey), till death us do part, or until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Marriage is not only a Christian rite, it is a Creatorial rite. The Lord Jesus Christ performed His first miracle at a Jewish wedding, in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) and the history of marriage goes right back to the beginning in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:24).

Unbelievers, too, need to be reminded of the seriousness of marriage as the vows exchanged between non-Christians are the same as those exchanged between Christian couples. Marriage is between one man and one woman and is a lifelong commitment.

Children should be a product of marriage and not conceived out of wedlock. I know this seems old fashioned and 'behind the times', but it's what the Bible teaches! The idea of a same sex marriage is contrary to the will of God who created us. We read in Genesis 1:27-28, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."* Procreation is impossible between those of the same sex and any move to normalise this is a move away from what the Bible clearly teaches.

'To have and to hold from this day forward' - what happens next? Well nothing happens next; our circumstances may change but our commitment and love to each other must remain the same. The love and affection shown perhaps more openly in the early days of our lives together should still be there. Isn't it sad when you hear of couples growing apart or reaching the point where they no longer love each other? The church at Ephesus were chastised by the Lord Jesus because they had *"left their first love"*, Revelation 2:4. We can be guilty of the same failure in our marriages.

The things we did for each other, the time we spent together, the love we showed for each other at the beginning - how much have we allowed 'first love' to fade over the years? The world we live in is certainly no help to us. Many ignore marriage in favour of short term and casual relationships which can be abandoned at the first sight of trouble. The media, who seem obsessed with so called celebrities, report on their fast and loose and often promiscuous behaviour. As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to be marked by faithfulness in every department of our lives but none more so than in our marriages. We owe it to our spouses to be faithful!

'For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health' - what happens next? Well again nothing happens next, but perhaps these vows are put to the test more as we grow older. We would all prefer the 'better', the 'richer and the 'health', but what if the opposite turns out to be the case?

As Christians we cannot expect our lives to be exempt from the problems faced by mankind generally. I know some preach a prosperity gospel which promises all problems solved when you come to Christ, but that's not the Gospel the Apostles preached. Many of the early church were persecuted even to death for their faith in Christ. Today in many countries Christians are discriminated against, persecuted and even killed.

Even in our land believers can be marginalised and made to suffer for the name of Christ. The Saviour preached the Gospel to the poor and many Christians find themselves in poverty and need. Being a Christian does not mean our financial circumstances will be automatically improved although we should not be surprised if the steady consistent lives of Christians are rewarded with promotion at work or success in business. In Job 5:6-7 we read, *"Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."* So we may say there is something of an inevitability that sickness and trouble of one sort or another will affect us during our lives. Christians are not exempt from disease and death; these are common to all mankind.

The question is what effect do these things have upon us personally and as married couples? Things which have the potential to drive us apart should actually drive us together and closer to our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to learn to heed Peter's exhortation, *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"*, 1 Peter 5:7. Almost certainly we will be affected by sickness and ill health as we grow older. In the natural way of things, we may well have to take care of ageing parents dealing with disease and death. Sometimes against nature's way, it is the young who suffer and need our care and support. I remember some years ago seeing an older Christian man help bear the coffin of his son who had died as a result of a long battle against illness and hear him say "that a father never expects to bury his children". So almost inevitably we will be called upon to support our spouses through bereavement and loss as the years pass.

'To love and cherish till death us do part, or until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The New Testament uses two different Greek words for 'to love', *agapaō* and *phileō* but there are other words for love which it does not use. We don't have the time today and I don't have the ability either, to go into detail but it is an interesting study. I understand there are five different Greek words for love. We will all recognise the word *eros* for example, it's the root word for erotic. Although frequently used today, the Bible never uses this word. The love we read about in the Bible is not an emotional, passionate, sexual love but a constant, unchanging and selfless love which always has the blessing of the one loved in view.

The word most used for God's love is *agapaō*, "*For God so loved the world...*", John 3:16. It's the same kind of love that we should show to each other, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye love one another*", John 13:34. The Apostle Paul uses the word charity in 1 Corinthians 13, but it is the same root word *agapē*. "*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; ... doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ... charity never faileth*", (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

The meaning of the word cherish is to hold something dear, to care for something that we really value as precious. If we love and cherish our spouses in this way, we will fulfil our marriage vows and receive the joy and blessing God intended for us in our earthly relationships whilst awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. So even in times of distress and sadness we are 'better', 'richer', 'healthier' and 'happier' together, just as God intended for our blessing: "*Heirs together of the grace of life*" as Peter tells us in his first epistle, 1 Peter 3:7.

Those of us who have children know that bringing them up is not easy. The care and attention they need from the day they are born is very demanding. Our children are a tremendous blessing from the Lord and we should never forget that, but they can also be hard work. It has always been a great source of encouragement to me to know that our children are prayed for every day. In our weekly prayer meeting an older brother habitually prays for all the children in our company by name. He probably doesn't know it but this is a great encouragement to us all.

How much we as Christian parents need the prayers of the people of God for wisdom and guidance to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And even more so as they get up into their teenage years! Many of the decisions which have long lasting outcomes are made in their teenage years. The education system requires them to make choices about the subjects they study in order to prepare them for work or further education. Boyfriend and girlfriend relationships begin and sometimes end just as quickly. We trust, too, that the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ begin to impact on their lives. How wonderful to see Christian young people being baptised, remembering the Lord in His death, and beginning to serve the Master.

I knew a lovely old Christian man who evidently prayed for his family, because when he died, his daughter asked the question, "Who is going to pray for us now?" You see, she was conscious of her father's daily prayers for her and the other members of the family. We need to remember this as we grow older. The younger ones need our daily prayers. My father was speaking to a brother in the Lord who had something in the order of 16 grandchildren. He made the 'off the cuff' comment that he must struggle to remember all their names and was told, "Never! Every day each one is named before the Lord in prayer." What an example for good grandparents!

As our children reach adulthood, we as Christian parents (and grandparents) need to counsel them in relation to whom they will choose to marry. It is vital that they marry 'in the Lord' as to be yoked together with an unbeliever is a violation of Scripture, 2 Corinthians 6:14. How many troubles would be avoided in the lives of young believers if they obeyed the clear guidance of Scripture! If our homes have the happy atmosphere of Christian love this should be a valuable object lesson to our children who will desire to have the same experience in their own homes when the time comes. My wife and I have not reached this point yet in our experience, so what I say in the next few minutes is what has been observed over the years.

Happy it is when sons-in-laws and daughters-in-laws just fit in to the family and the natural relationship we have with our children carries on seamlessly once they are married. Happy too, if and when grandchildren come along there are frequent visits and the occasional overnight stay, to let dad and mum have some time off. I remember my grandparents babysitting for us and almost invariably the night would end with a Bible study, or as we got a little older my brother and I would find ourselves standing behind the organ stool preaching a sermon to our grandparents. We were never stuck for a verse, as Grandpa seemed to know the whole Bible off by heart! By God's grace, both of us preach regularly in our local assemblies; what a lot we owe to those nights!

However, as we have said things don't always go to plan. Maybe the son-in-law or daughter-in-law is rather keener on their family than ours. Stresses and strains may be just below the surface and it is about all we can do to keep our emotions in check sometimes. Maybe foolishly and against all counsel our children will marry non-Christians or those who have very little spiritual interest. Perhaps sickness or unemployment or some other issue will cause strain and worry. We maybe feel shut out and become frustrated, feeling almost powerless to help for fear of interfering or being misunderstood. There are so many things with the potential to drive us to our knees and to supplicate God on behalf of our now grown up children and their families.

Returning to the title of our talk, "Help! What happens next?", I trust you can see that there are so many variables that it is impossible to predict what we will face in the future. However, the main thing is that we face these things (good times and bad) together as husband and wife and as families. God is interested in families and as husbands and fathers we have a responsibility for our wives and children, both naturally and spiritually. We have a responsibility to act in a priestly way for our families. It is clear that this was the case from the beginning with men interceding before

God and offering sacrifices on behalf of the members of their families. Abraham and Job would be clear examples of this (see Genesis 18:23-33 and Job 1:5).

The Lord's return is near and we can be sure of that. The time of our responsible service will soon be over. Let us be marked by the features of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23) that we may have the Lord's commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

May God bless you all.

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