



CROSS CURRENTS IN THE FAMILY
(PART 4)

*Marriage
and the
New Testament*

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Note: *This is the fourth and last instalment of the Family Sermon series by Bishop Emeritus Rev Dr Robert Solomon. The first three instalments can be found in our previous issues of FaithLink available at faithmc.sg/faithlink*



Jesus is interested in your marriage and He can use your marriage to fulfil His eternal purposes. God knows about marriage since the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5) is described as a marital relationship; with Christ as the groom and the Church as the bride.

Marriage is the first institution created by God after the creation of man (Genesis). In the New Testament, Jesus begins His public ministry by completing His first miracle at a wedding in Cana (John 2).

That's how important our marriages and families are to God. This God who does miracles at a wedding feast, can do miracles in our marriages and families. He can turn something ordinary (water) into something extraordinary (wine)!

And that's the promise that is given to us in the Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE IS FOR SANCTIFICATION

Marriage is the laboratory and means of grace by which God makes us better people; it is the crucible for sanctification with great potential for growth into holiness. We become less self-centred, selfish, lazy or irresponsible.

The close relationships that we have in a marriage and family make us realise and recognise how terrible and sinful we

actually are: Unforgiving, naggy, unreasonable, being angry, holding grudges, etc.

On the spiritual front, Satan makes us bitter. But God uses the struggles and tensions of marriage and family life to mould us into what He wants us to become.

THE CALL OF MARRIAGE

Most people think the purpose of marriage is to have happiness but marriage is a call to holiness. God is at work in a marital relationship, making us Christ-like and the kind of people that we were meant to be. We become more loving, gracious, forgiving, patient, etc.

This changes our perspective of how we view marriage and our families. If we just pursue happiness, we will never find happiness and never become holy. But if we pursue holiness, we become holy and happy.

Happiness is a by-product of holiness. That is the way that God intended marriages to be. So instead of complaining about your marriage, even when it's difficult, start thanking God!

How about praying: "Lord, I thank you for this man/woman, who's often a big challenge to live with, but because of him/her, I'm

stretched in my patience, faith, hope and love."

THE LINK BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND FAMILY

The church is a group of families, and families are part of the Christian community. No family is meant to exist independently in a vacuum. God put us together to encourage, minister and inspire one another.

The Church is a larger family that fellowships, encourages and helps families that are struggling as we should not be suffering alone. Families without the church will struggle and the church without families will fail too because the church is only as strong as its families; and the family is only as strong as the church to which it belongs. It is therefore necessary to bring together these realities of how the church and families can actually work together.



INSTEAD OF BLAMING, HOW ABOUT EXTENDING **GRACE AND GRACIOUSNESS?** THIS IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF THE **GRACE OF GOD** IS BROUGHT INTO OUR FAMILY LIFE.



ENGAGEMENT VERSUS DISENGAGEMENT

In the olden days, a lot of family life was quite engaged at home – there was no WhatsApp, mobile phones, or television. When families came to church, they disengaged; children, youth, women and men all went their separate ways so that they could meet other people of the same kind.

But today's world is different. Families are disengaged at home because of technology, media and other influences.

Each person is on their own mobile device talking to others not physically there. They may be physically present together but emotionally and spiritually distant and disengaged. These disengaged families come to church and continue being disengaged.

So perhaps we need to find ways that families can come together and engage them. We need to be creative in thinking about this. For instance, how about multi-generation or intergenerational worship, once in a while? Or instead of individualistic evangelism,

families pray for a few families they know and find ways to befriend, minister and reach out to them with the gospel as a family venture?

Families can help the church by participating as families instead of as individuals.

GOD REDEEMS FAMILIES

"The Christian Family" is a very good book about the family by Judith and Jack Balswick. It points out that God's grace transforms family life and we need His help for marriage and family. He is the Redeemer God whose intention is to help us not just as individuals, but as families.

Family and marriage should be a commitment to love and be loved, and in His redemption, there is transformation from hating to commitment. Some people hate their family members to the extent they don't talk to each other.

Children hate their parents because their parents were distant, absent, or abusive. We complain about each other, hurling blame instead of committing to love and be loved.

In Genesis God asked Adam, "What happened? Why are you hiding from me?" To which Adam replied, "It is the woman *you* gave me.", blaming both God and Eve. To Adam, God gave him the "wrong" woman and if it were another woman, his life would have been much better.

Blaming is a very common phenomenon in marriage and family.

"You are the reason our children go wild/fail."

"You are the problem."

Instead of blaming, how about extending grace and graciousness? This is only possible if the grace of God is brought into our family life. We learn how to forgive and to be forgiven. And instead of using hurtful words or forcefulness, we can learn how to minister and empower, to serve and to be served, and move from hiding from one another, to intimacy – to know and to be known.

THE LANGUAGE OF RELATIONSHIPS

The language of intimacy, words of love or affirmation, is the language of relationships. It is one of the difficulties in family life and should be learned within a family.

As we grow older we learn the language of information – the ability to name and list things e.g. car, cup. We learn the language of control or motivation when we discover that words have power to move people and make them do things, such as a teacher instructing the class to sit or stand.

Unfortunately, we often forget the language of intimacy as other languages become more prominent.

We master the language of information and control. At work our bosses or supervisors use the language of information and control to give deadlines or instructions, and we cannot respond with the language of intimacy as it is inappropriate.

Returning home, if we forget to "turn off" the two languages, we may use the language of information and ask questions like, "Any letters?" "Any homework?" "How much?" "Anything to pay?"

Or we use the language of control and say, "Finish your food." "Turn off the TV." "Do your homework." "Go to bed."

GOD LONGS FOR INTIMACY WITH US

How often do we use the language of intimacy?

"I'm so proud of you!" "You look sad today, what happened?"

Likewise, when a couple court, they often use the language of intimacy. But how often do we use it in married life?

We have to work hard at it. We speak like computers using information and control instead of using the language of intimacy in our family life, making it difficult to build family life, marriages and intimacy.

Similarly when we pray, we tend to use the language of information: "Lord, I pray for Mr Tan warded in SGH, diagnosed with..., treated with... etc." We bombard heaven with information as if heaven doesn't know! Or we use the language of control: "God I want the rain to stop now!"

But all God really wants to hear from us, first and foremost, is the language of intimacy which is how The Lord's Prayer begins: "Abba" – our heavenly father, telling God about how great He is and how much we admire Him and worship Him. That's the language of intimacy!

BRING JESUS INTO OUR FAMILIES

When we reframe our minds, we change the arrangement or look at things differently from another perspective.

For instance, when David faced Goliath in battle, it may appear mismatched, with David on a suicidal mission against a giant. But when we reframe the situation, it helps us to realise that the living God is the larger giant!

Likewise, we can reframe our family portraits by bringing Jesus into our families. If Jesus is in the picture, it gives us hope. No matter what our condition, difficulties or how intractable our problems seem to be, the Lord is willing to come into those situations to make all the difference.

Because with Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm. 