



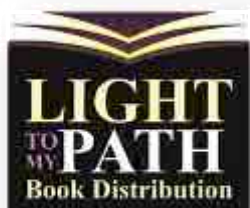
COUPLES LIKE YOU AND ME

Lessons From the
Lives of Twelve
Couples in the Bible

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

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Couples in the Bible



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Light To My Path Book Distribution
Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, CANADA

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Preface

We are all influenced by what we see around us. Our conception of the ideal couple is founded, in part, on what we see in other relationships. In this study, we will look at the lives of twelve marriages in the Bible. They were couples like you and me. They faced temptations like you and me. Some of them succeeded in overcoming these temptations. Others fell prey to them. The goal of these twelve simple reflections is to encourage you in your own married life. You will see dangers to be avoided and examples to follow. What is important is that you let the Lord guide you through these Biblical illustrations. They are for your instruction and encouragement. May this simple study encourage you in your life as a couple.

F. Wayne MacLeod

Chapter 1

Adam and Eve: The Effects of Sin in the Life of the Couple

Read Genesis 3.7-19

The Lord had just created the Garden of Eden. There He placed Adam, the first man, and gave him the responsibility of cultivating the soil. Adam lived in a perfect paradise. The beauty of God's creation surrounded him. Sickness, suffering and sadness were unknown. He enjoyed complete peace and tranquillity. He had no enemy or worry. He could have lived forever in communion with His Creator in that paradise. One would have thought that in such a situation, the heart of Adam would have overflowed with joy. Deep in his heart, however, he felt a void.

God knew this and said: *"it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18).* Although Adam lived in the presence of God in a perfect paradise, God had created him so that he would find true happiness and joy in communion with others of his kind. Adam was not made to live in isolation. Genesis 3 tells us that God created animals from the ground and brought them to man to see what he would name them. Among these animals, however, *"no suitable helper was found (Genesis 2.20b).* There was no doubt that Adam enjoyed

Adam and Eve

these animals. They were company for him and a wonderful gift of God. The problem, however, was that they did not fill the emptiness he felt in his heart. These animals only served to make Adam even more aware of his loneliness.

To meet this profound need, God caused Adam to fall asleep. As he slept, God took one of his ribs and from it created a woman. When Adam saw her, he knew that this was the helper his heart desired. She was part of him. She had been created from his own body. Adam recognised this connection. He called her “woman” because he said, *“this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh she shall be called ‘woman’ because she was taken out of man”* (Genesis 2:23). They were created for each other. They would complete each other.

We can only imagine what those first few months would have been like as Adam and Eve lived in paradise without sin and suffering. Nothing could separate them. They enjoyed a perfect and harmonious relationship. Nothing could have been more perfect.

This perfect relationship would not last, however. In Genesis 3, we read the story of how Satan tempted Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Succumbing to this temptation, she ate the forbidden fruit and gave some to her husband. Together they disobeyed the direct command of God not to eat the fruit of this tree. Through them, sin entered the garden. This sin would have a profound impact on their relationship as a couple.

Adam and Eve

In Genesis 3:7, we read that Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness and experienced shame. For the first time in their lives, they felt as if they had something to hide from each other. No longer did they experience the freedom and intimacy they had known. As a result of this shame, Adam and Eve pull back into themselves, creating a barrier in their relationship.

In Genesis 3:11-13 God came into the garden to see Adam and Eve. Realising that God was in their midst, they hid from Him. When God asked why they were hiding, Adam's answer is very revealing. He told God that Eve gave him fruit from the forbidden tree and he ate it. Eve, in turn, told God how the serpent had deceived her into eating the fruit. Neither party is willing to accept their part in the sin. They justify their action at the expense of another.

Do you see what is happening here? Pride has entered their lives. They are willing to make someone else look bad to excuse themselves. With the entrance of sin in the world, Adam and Eve experienced a radical change in their married lives. They began to think only of their own interests. They are even willing to justify their actions at the expense of their partner.

These were not the only affects of sin in their married lives. As a couple, they would experience pain and suffering for the first time. Adam would have to work hard to feed his family. Eve would give birth to children through great pain. They would experience not only physical pain but also significant emotional pain. They would experience the agony of the first murder as their son Cain killed his brother in a jealous rage. Their children would grow up under the

Adam and Eve

effects of sin in their lives. They would give their parents much worry. Having experienced the joy of paradise, this would have been a very bitter pill for Adam and Eve to swallow.

The perfect and harmonious relationship that God had created between Adam and Eve was destroyed by sin. Every couple since Adam and Eve must live with the effects of sin in their personal and married lives. Because of sin, we struggle with pride and self-centredness. We have all had quarrels that could have been easily avoided if only we thought less of self and more of our partner. How many problems in marriage have their roots in sin? The greatest enemy in marriage is sin.

Because of sin, men and women must now work hard in this sin cursed earth to provide for the basic needs of their families. Our children are born with evil natures. We must fight to keep them on the right track, even though we find ourselves slipping into the same sin. How many sleepless nights have we lost out of concern for our children and their tendency to sin? How often have we alienated our partners because of our own battle with sin?

Sin has had a dramatic effect on our lives as couples. If you want to have a good relationship with your partner, you must deal with sin. Jesus alone can give you victory over that sin. Problems began in the relationship between Adam and Eve when they turned their backs on God. The best thing you can do for your marriage is to be sure that you are walking with God and seeking His forgiveness and enabling to deal with your sinful tendencies. Only when your relationship with God is right can your relationship

Adam and Eve

with your partner be mended. Put yourself in a right relationship with God and your relationship with your partner will soon follow.

Adam and Eve destroyed their relationship because they disobeyed God and listened to the voice of sin. That sin damaged their marriage. The next time you have a problem in your marriage, ask yourself: What sin is keeping us from enjoying the communion God intends us to have? When you have answered that question, confess that sin and be restored to a right relationship with God and your partner.

To Consider:

Think about the last time you and your partner had a conflict. How could this conflict have been avoided if you thought less of your own interests and more of the interests of your partner? Were you guilty of sin in this situation?

One of the results of sin was that man would have to work hard to earn his living. Do the difficulties you experience in your work hinder you in your marriage and family? What can you do practically to deal with this?

Adam and Eve experienced shame because of their sinfulness. They attempted to hide that shame from each

Adam and Eve

other. How can confessing sin to one another be helpful in our marriage?

What practical things can you do to help your children overcome the effects of sin in their lives?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to help you deal with the sin of pride in your marriage. Ask Him to open your eyes to how you can minister to your partner and your children.

Chapter 2

Abraham and Sarah: The Question of Submission

Read Genesis 12:10-15; 1 Peter 3:1-6

The apostle Peter, writing to women, commanded them to be submissive to their husbands so that some may be won by their good conduct (1 Peter 3:1). He encouraged them to look to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, as their example:

“For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.” (2 Peter 3:5,6)

What do we know of the submission of Sarah to Abraham? Genesis 12 tells the story of how Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt because of a severe famine in the land of Canaan. As they travelled, Abraham became afraid that the Egyptians, upon seeing his beautiful wife, would kill him to take her for themselves. He knew, however, that they would very likely treat both he and Sarah well if they thought she was his sister. He asked Sarah, therefore, to say that she was his sister. This was not a complete lie for we read in Genesis 20:12 that Abraham and Sarah had the same father but not the same mother. It should be

Abraham and Sarah mentioned here that this marriage would, in the days of Moses, be considered an illegitimate marriage:

“Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.” (Leviticus 18.9)

Abraham wanted to use the fact that Sarah was his sister to their advantage. While he did not tell a lie in saying that Sarah was his sister, he was hiding a crucial fact: She was also his wife. Because of this partial truth, Sarah was taken into the household of Pharaoh and risked falling into the sin of adultery to save her husband’s life.

This would not be the only time that Sarah took this stand for her husband. Later in Genesis 20 and Sarah told king Abimelech the same lie. Abimelech took Sarah into his home as well. Happily, the Lord preserves Sarah and her integrity by not permitting the king to have a sexual relation with her (see Genesis 20:6).

In these two situations, Sarah submitted to her husband, Abraham. On the one hand, we can respect a wife who was willing to protect her husband. She placed him above herself. His safety was her great concern. She risked much for this. I can imagine, however, that this was not easy for Sarah. I do not believe that she wanted to be sexually unfaithful to Abraham. I think that when these kings took her, she prayed to her God for protection. She did not want to lose her husband. She had no secret delight in keeping this matter a secret. She submitted, however, out of respect for Abraham and his safety because she was led

Abraham and Sarah

to believe that he could lose his life if she did not keep their marriage a secret. We will come back to this illustration a little later.

In Genesis sixteen, we read that Abraham, as well, submitted to his wife, Sarah. Sarah could not have a child. She decided, therefore, to give Abraham her servant so that she could have a child through her. According to the custom of the day, because this servant belonged to Sarah, the child she bore would be Sarah's child. Abraham accepted this proposition and slept with Sarah's servant Hagar. When Hagar realised that she had conceived and was bearing Abraham's child, she began to despise Sarah. Intense jealousy developed between the two women. In time, Sarah blamed Abraham for all her problems with Hagar:

"You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." (Genesis 16. 5)

Maybe to prove his love for Sarah, Abraham gave his wife permission to do what she wanted with her servant. Sarah mistreated her to such an extent that Hagar ran away.

These two incidents in the lives of Abraham and Sarah leave us a bit perplexed. To what point am I to submit to a husband or wife? Did Sarah do well in submitting to her husband when that submission could have very easily lead her to fall into the sin of adultery? Did Abraham do well to submit to his wife and allow her to do whatever she wanted when this led her to mistreat a fellow human being? To

Abraham and Sarah
answer these questions, we need to look to the apostle Paul.

In Ephesians 5:22, we read:

*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord
(Ephesians 5:22)*

The teaching of Paul at this point is clear. The wife is to submit to the husband. In so doing, she is obedient to the Lord. The question, however, remains: Should she submit to her husband if this implies disobedience to the Lord?

What Paul told the Ephesians in Ephesians 5:22 does not mean that women are to submit to every desire of their husbands. They are to submit to their husbands as they would to the Lord. In other words, when their submission to their husbands runs contrary to the purpose of the Lord, they are not to submit. They are to submit to their husbands in such a way that in doing so, they are also surrendering to the will and purpose of the Lord for their lives.

Peter, while speaking to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5, says:

"We must obey God rather than man." (Acts 5.29)

This is a crucial verse in the context of marriage as well. The wife should be submissive to her husband but also realise that she has a higher authority to which she must submit. If by surrendering to her husband, the wife disobeys the command of God, she makes herself guilty before God. The wife ought, therefore, to submit to her

Abraham and Sarah

husband in so far as this does not cause her to turn her back on the greater will of God.

Did Sarah do well to submit to the will of Abraham when he asked her to hide the fact that they were married? I fear that if in so doing, she disobeyed the greater commandment of God, she was indeed guilty. I leave you to decide for yourself. What we need to take from this example, however, is the fact that Sarah was willing to put aside her own interests and desires for the sake of her husband. She did not fear to suffer for Abraham. She considered him to be more important than herself. She was willing to die to self for the sake of her husband. It is this attitude that is commended in Sarah. How many problems could be avoided in marriage if wives had this same attitude? In reality, it is the attitude of Christ for us. He was willing to die so that you and I could live. This sort of attitude requires that you put your partner's interest above your own. Paul put it this way:

*“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives
should submit to their husbands in everything.”
(Ephesians 5.24)*

How should the church submit to Christ? She needs to die to herself and give Him first place in her life. She needs to be willing to serve Him and even be ready to die for him. Does this characterise your relationship with your husband?

We must not stop here. In Ephesians 5, Paul also has some words to say to husband. Listen to what Paul tells them:

Abraham and Sarah

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (Ephesians 5.25-28)

Paul made it clear that a husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? Though He is Lord, He did not think of Himself. Everything He did was for her good. He humbled Himself and died for her. Paul tells us that Christ did this to present His bride to God as a bride without “stain or wrinkle.”

Let us return to the example of Abraham for an instant. Was Abraham seeking to present his wife before God without stain or wrinkle when he asked her to hide their marriage? Was he concerned about presenting his wife to the Lord blameless and without blemish when he gave her permission to mistreat her servant? It is quite possible that Abraham was not thinking about spiritual matters here. His only concern seems to be to protect himself and relieve himself from the constant fighting between his wife and her servant.

If husbands are to be the family leaders Christ meant them to be, they must humble themselves even as Christ humbled Himself for us. They must be willing to die to their interests to seek the interests of their wives and children. As household leaders, they must lead their family into a greater awareness of Christ and His purposes for them. To

Abraham and Sarah
do this, they must live and lead as servants. Ultimately, the marriage that God intends for us to have is one where both parties seek the good of the other. While God has called the husband to be the head of the family, that role must be exercised in a spirit of submission. Consider the following definition of submission and authority:

Submission

Submission does not mean being treated as a slave

BUT

Submission does mean putting his interests above my own

Submission does not mean never having to be thanked

BUT

Submission does mean persevering even when there is no thanks

Submission does not mean never letting my opinion be known

BUT

Submission does mean allowing him to have his opinion

Submission does not mean always having to say “yes” even when it goes against God’s higher authority

BUT

Submission does mean following the example of my Lord Jesus who, forsaking Himself, went even to the point of death for me

Authority

Authority does not mean taking advantage of my wife

BUT

Authority does mean an added responsibility to care for and respect her person

Authority does not mean having a wife to meet my every need

BUT

Authority does mean being accountable to God for her needs

Abraham and Sarah
Authority does not mean having to win every argument
BUT
Authority does mean having to actively seek a solution to our
disagreements by taking into account her interests
Authority does not mean putting her in her place
BUT
Authority does mean following the example of my Lord Jesus
who went as Lord and Master to the cross for his bride, the
Church

To Consider:

Wives think of the example of the submission of Sarah to Abraham. How does her example help you to understand better what God expects of you in your relationship with your husband? Think of a practical example in your marriage where you could put this principle into practice.

Husbands, what do you learn in this chapter about your spiritual responsibility in the family? To what extent do the decisions you make in your family have as their goal to present your wife and children before God without “stain or wrinkle.” What should you do to improve?

Could it be said that the husband’s authority over the wife in Scripture is a type of submission? Consider the example of Christ. What do you learn from His example?

Abraham and Sarah

Take the time this week to consider how you can serve your partner. Ask yourself the question: how can I die to self and help him or her this week?

For Prayer:

Husband:

Ask the Lord to help you to be the leader He intended you to be. Ask Him to help you to lead by becoming a servant to your wife, even as Christ did for the church.

Wife:

Ask the Lord to help you put the interests of your husband before your own even as Christ did for His people.

Chapter 3

Lot and his Wife: The Unequal Yoke

Read Genesis 19.12-26

Lot was the son of Abraham's brother Haran. Haran died when Abraham was living in the land of Ur. When Haran died, Abraham took Lot with him on his journey to the region of Canaan. We are not told how old Lot was when his father died, but obviously, he was not old enough to be on his own. Abraham raised Lot as his own son.

In Genesis 13, we read that Abraham travelled to the land of Egypt because of a severe famine that ravaged the countryside. When he returned from Egypt, his herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot began to quarrel because there was not enough room in the land for them to live together. We see from this that Lot was a young man responsible for his herd. Abraham decided that the time had come for Lot to be on his own. Abraham gave him the choice of land to possess. Lot chose the plain of Jordan because of its rich fertile soil and left Abraham to start his new life. To this point, we have no mention of Lot having a wife.

When he arrived in the plain of Jordan, Lot decided to live in the city of Sodom. This city was a wicked city, and its inhabitants were sinners before the Lord (Genesis 13:13). The decision to live in this city would prove to be a bad one. The next time we read about Lot, he is a married man

Lot and His Wife

with a family. Where did Lot find his wife? Is it possible that he married one of the pagan women of the city of Sodom?

Even though Lot knew about the God of Abraham and had grown up for a time in the family of this great saint of God, he turned his back on Abraham's faith. He married an unbelieving wife and chose to live in a wicked city.

One day some angels from God arrived in the city of Sodom. They came with a word from the Lord for Lot. God was going to destroy the Sodom and its inhabitants because of their sin. Even though Lot was no longer walking with the Lord, he was sensitive enough to His voice that he took this message seriously. Maybe he knew deep down in his heart that the God of Abraham was the true God. Believing what the angels had told him, he warned his family of the impending danger. He also spoke to his future sons-in-law concerning the announcement of the angels. His family refused to listen. They believed he was joking. They would not take him seriously.

"So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, 'Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!' But his sons-in-law thought he was joking."

(Ephesians 5.25-28)

Lot did not know what to do. The angels encouraged him to leave the city at once, but he hesitated. He did not want to leave his family behind. Seeing that he was not leaving, the angels seized him, his wife and their two daughters by the hand and took them out of the city. Once outside the city, the angels warned them to run and not look back.

Lot and His Wife

They were not to stop even for an instant, because the judgement of God was about to fall on the city (Genesis 19:17).

Despite the angel's warning, the Bible tells us that Lot's wife looked back. I do not think that this was a simple act of curiosity. I believe that she was wondering why she was leaving the city. She did not want to leave. Her life was in Sodom. Her heart was there too. She loved the ways of Sodom. She was not ready to sacrifice these things. Because of her unbelieving and disobedient heart, the Lord struck her alone with the other inhabitants of Sodom.

As for Lot's two daughters, seeing that they had lost their mother and their future husbands, they decided to get Lot drunk with wine and sleep with their father to continue their family line. Under the influence of wine, Lot slept with his daughters, who became pregnant and gave birth to two sons.

Peter tells us something interesting about Lot:

"And if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard). (2 Peter 2.7,8)

According to Peter, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented continuously in his life because of sin. He was tormented day after day because of the evil he saw around him in Sodom. Though he loved God, he was caught in a trap. He had married a wife who did not love the Lord. He lived in a city of perversion. He was losing his children to

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the influences of this sinful city in which he had chosen to live. All these things weighed heavily on Lot. They tormented him daily. He was not at peace with himself or with his God.

Because his wife did not love the Lord, Lot could not say much when his daughters wanted to marry men who did not know the Lord. For some reason, he gave his approval to these marriages. As a spiritual leader of his family, Lot had failed to lead his family into the knowledge and love of God. Where did this all begin? Everything began when he chose to live in the evil city of Sodom and marry a wife who did not love the Lord. Lot, who was weak in his faith, by choosing to marry an unbelieving wife, wandered from the Lord. His wife did not encourage him to walk in the ways of Jehovah. If anything, she hurt his spiritual walk. Even his children were drawn into the evil influences of their surroundings. When Lot did decide to speak to them about the things of God, they refused to listen. He had lost all credibility as a spiritual leader in his family.

What would have happened if Lot had chosen a wife who truly loved the Lord? What difference would that have made in his life and the lives of his children? While this may be pure speculation, I have the impression that his life would have been very different. Instead, he now lived a tormented life because he knew he had failed in his walk with the Lord. He knew he was also responsible for the loss of his wife and daughters to the sin of Sodom?

The Bible warns us of the dangers of marrying an unbeliever. Exodus 34:15,16 tells us:

Lot and His Wife

“Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.” (Exodus 34.15,16)

In Deuteronomy 7:3,4, we read:

“Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.” (Deuteronomy 7.3,4)

This is precisely what happened in the life of Lot. His life was saved only because of his uncle Abraham’s prayer to God on his behalf.

The New Testament is also quite clear:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6.14,15)

The man or woman who is thinking of marrying an unbeliever needs to consider the warning of the word of God. They risk wandering from God. They risk losing their children to sin and the world due to their bad example. They risk dividing their family. They risk losing all influence

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for good in the life of their family because of their compromise. The Bible gives us a tragic example in the story of Lot of a husband and wife who were unequally yoked. If you are not presently married, commit today to marry only a partner who truly loves the Lord and is walking with him. Don't follow the bad example of Lot.

To Consider:

What kind of spiritual influence do you have in the life of your partner? Has this influence been for good? What could be done to improve this?

What sort of spiritual example are you giving your children? What could be done to improve this

If you are not married, what does this lesson teach you about the importance of marrying a believer who is committed to walking with the Lord? If you are presently married to an unbeliever, what problems do you encounter? What advice would you give to a young person contemplating marriage to an unbeliever?

Lot and His Wife

For Prayer:

Pray for someone you know who has married an unbeliever. Pray as well for the salvation of this unbelieving spouse.

Chapter 4

Isaac and Rebecca: The Couple and their Children

Read Genesis 27.1-10

Abraham was now an old man. He was concerned that his son Isaac find a wife. It was important that he find a wife so that the promises of God to make of him a great nation be fulfilled. Because he was advanced in years, Abraham called his servant and gave him the task of finding a wife for his son.

It was not just any woman that would do for his son Isaac. According to Genesis 24, Abraham had two requirements. First, it was necessary that this woman be from his own family. She was not to be chosen from the unbelieving pagan nations. God was going to accomplish His purposes through this couple. It was important that their family be founded on God and His Law.

Second, it was necessary that this woman be willing to leave her country and become the wife of Isaac. She was not to be forced into this commitment. She needed to sense in her own heart that the Lord was moving her to marry Isaac.

Abraham's servant accepted the responsibility to go on this mission. According to Genesis 24:10, he left for Mesopotamia where the family of Abraham lived. When he

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arrived in Mesopotamia, he found a well where he knew the women of the town would come out to draw water. There at the well, he prayed for the guidance of the Lord. This was an important decision. He needed the leading and wisdom of the Lord.

Notice how Abraham's prayed. He asked God for a sign. It was not just any sign. This sign would show the servant the real character of the woman he was seeking for Isaac. He asked the Lord that the woman who should become the wife of Isaac would offer him and his camels something to drink. While I have never had the opportunity to give a thirsty camel a drink of water, I can imagine that it would not have been a simple matter. These animals are designed to store water for several days of journeying through the hot desert. The woman who volunteered to give the servant and his camels a drink was a woman who did not think only of herself. She was interested in the needs of others. She was also a woman of compassion. She was not afraid to spend her effort on a total stranger and his animals. She was a hard worker. She was generous. Was it for these qualities that the servant was looking? When Rebecca came to the well, she proved to be all the above.

Abraham's servant knew the will of God not only by the sign He had asked from the Lord, but he also put this sign to the test. There are at least three other confirmations of the will of God in this passage. The first of these confirmations is the confirmation of her family. When the servant asked Rebecca about her family, he discovers that she was a relative of Abraham. This was one of his

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master's requirements. The second confirmation came in the form of the parent's approval of the marriage. Abraham's servant told them how Abraham had sent him and how he had prayed at the well. He explained how Rebecca had offered him and his camels something to drink, even as he had prayed. This testimony convinced Rebecca's family that the matter was from the Lord. They consent to the marriage.

The third confirmation came in the form of Rebecca's consent. Abraham had told his servant that the woman must willingly become Isaac's wife. When the family asked Rebecca if she was willing to leave her country and her family to marry Isaac, Rebecca consented. She, too, sensed that this was the will of God for her life. With all these confirmations, there could be no doubt that Rebecca was indeed the woman God had chosen to become the wife of Isaac.

The Bible tells us that Isaac loved Rebecca (Genesis 24:67). They had two sons by the name of Jacob and Esau. They were concerned as a couple for the spiritual welfare of their family. The Bible tells us of their disappointment when their son Esau decided to marry an unbelieving wife (see Genesis 26:34, 35).

Their marriage was not perfect. It was their children who would place a barrier between them. It all started in Genesis 25:27, 28:

"The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac who had a taste for wild

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*game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob.” (Genesis
25:27,28)*

Isaac and Rebecca soon began to play favourites with their children. Rebecca always seemed to protect and promote Jacob above Esau. On one occasion, she heard the aging Isaac ask his son Esau to go out into the forests and catch him some wild game. He intended to give his blessing to Esau as the eldest son. Seeking to promote Jacob above Esau, Rebecca decided to deceive her husband into giving him the blessing instead. She told her son Jacob to bring her two young goats. She prepared them and asked him to go to her father pretending to be Esau so he could receive Esau's blessing. While Jacob was initially unwilling to engage in this sort of deceit, his mother pushed him, and he finally accepted. Together they succeed in deceiving Isaac.

When Esau discovered that his blessing was stolen from him, he swore that he would kill his brother Jacob. Upon hearing this, Rebecca told Jacob to flee to her family in Mesopotamia until Esau's anger subsided. To justify what she did, she went to her husband Isaac and told him that she was worried that Jacob would marry one of the Canaanite women of the area. She wanted him to go to Mesopotamia to find a wife among her people. She was not honest with Isaac. She did this to protect her preferred son. Rebecca is willing to deceive her husband. In so doing, she shows her lack of respect for him in his old age. What drove her to this point? Was it not her jealousy for the well-being of her favourite son Jacob?

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What do we learn from the story of Isaac and Rebecca? We discover how the couple who truly loved and respected each other in the beginning were separated because of their children. While children are a real blessing from the Lord, they can also come between husband and wife.

Is it possible that you are guilty, like Isaac and Rebecca, of giving preference to one child over another? Do you discipline one child more severely than another? Do you expect more of one than another? Do you grant special favours to one over the other? This can cause problems in your family life. It could even create division between you and your partner.

How many heated discussions have you had with your partner over how to raise your children? Child rearing can cause a significant division in your marriage. We can become so focused on our children that we no longer cultivate our relationship as a couple. When these children leave our home, we find ourselves living with a partner we hardly know any more.

Any couple realises that when you have children, you no longer have as much time for your partner. Priorities shift. Our children now monopolise the time we used to spend in communication with our partners. Once again, this can cause the couple to drift apart.

Someone once said that the best thing a husband could do for his children is to love their mother. There is truth to this statement. You can have a very good relationship with your children and be lacking in your life as a couple. This can only harm your children. In our day, children need to

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see a real example of a mother and father who love each other. It is not always easy to find the balance between our obligations to our partner and our children. What this meditation teaches us, however, is that we need to be careful that our children do not place a barrier between husband and wife. May God help us to maintain a proper balance.

To consider:

Think about your relationship with your partner. Is this relationship a source of blessing for your children? Do your children see how much you and your partner love each other? Do they have in you an example to follow in their marriage?

Is there any way in which your children have taken you from your partner? What can you do to change this for the good of both your children and your partner?

For Prayer:

If you have children, ask the Lord for wisdom in finding a balance between your relationship with them and your spouse. Ask Hm to help you as a husband and wife to be one in this matter of raising your children. If you do not

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presently have any children at home, pray for another
couple you know. Ask the Lord for wisdom and balance in
their lives.

Chapter 5

Jacob and Leah: The Unloved Wife

Read Genesis 29.31-35

Because of his deceitfulness, Jacob was forced to leave his country to go to Mesopotamia, where his mother's family lived. He had tricked his brother out of his birth right and blessing. Now Esau swore that he would kill Jacob. Jacob fled his country to save his life.

Arriving in Mesopotamia, Jacob stopped near a well. It was here that the shepherds gathered to water their sheep. He asked them if they knew Laban, his mother's brother. They informed him that one of Laban's daughters was coming to the well to water her father's sheep. It was by this means that Jacob was introduced to Rachel.

The Bible tells us that Jacob loved Rachel (Genesis 29:18). He spoke to her father about taking her to be his wife. Laban agreed on the basis that Jacob would work seven years for her. Jacob was more than willing to do this, and so the agreement was made between the two men. On the day of his wedding, however, Laban gave his older daughter Leah to Jacob instead. The wedding was consummated, and the deceit was not discovered until the next morning. Jacob was not happy. In his anger, Jacob went to see Laban. His father-in-law told him that it was not the custom to marry the younger daughter before the

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older. He promised him his younger daughter Rachel if he would work another seven years for her. Jacob was forced to agree.

We discover from Genesis 29:30 that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. This created tension in the family as both sisters battled for the attention of their husband. Leah would suffer greatly over the years in this battle. God saw her pain, however, and came to her rescue. Leah bore Jacob many sons. Rachel, however, could not have children.

What is interesting in this story are the names of Leah's children. These names indicate the intense struggle she had in her battle for her husband's affection. The first child of Leah and Jacob was named Ruben. Leah gave him this name because she said, *"it is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."* (Genesis 29.32b). She was hoping that because she had given Jacob this son, he would love her.

When she gave birth to her second son, Leah called him Simeon. Genesis 29.33 tells us that she named him Simeon because *"the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too"* (Genesis 29.33). Her pain is obvious. She is looking for anything that would make Jacob love her. She wants to be loved.

Leah called her third son, Levi because she said, *"now, at last, my husband will become attached to me because I have born him three sons"* (Genesis 29.34). After three sons and at least three years of marriage, Leah still has

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not won the heart of her husband. She still longs to be loved but is being starved of her husband's attention.

When her fourth son was born, Leah called him Juda, which simply means "praise." She has a sense that the Lord is blessing her. While her husband did not love her, God had not abandoned her. For this, she would praise His name. After this, Leah stopped having children.

Rachel, who had been the object of Jacob's attention, could not help but feel jealousy in her heart when she could not give her husband a son. She decided to give Jacob her servant so that he could have a son through her. This son would become Rachel's son by law. Bilhah gave to Jacob a son whom Rachel named Dan because she said, "*God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son (Genesis 30.6)*". Her vindication was against her sister Leah who was giving Jacob many sons.

Rachel's servant, Bilhah, gave Jacob a second son. Rachel named him Naphtali because she said, "*I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won (Genesis 30.8)*". She now had a certain confidence in her heart that Jacob's attention was sufficiently turned away from Leah again.

The struggle between these two sisters continued for many years. Seeing what Rachel had done, Leah also gave Jacob her servant and had two sons through her servant Zilpah. Eventually God opened Leah's womb again, and she bore her husband two more sons. The name of her sixth son is of importance to this study. She calls him Zebulon because she said, "*God has presented*

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me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honour because I have borne him six sons (Genesis 30:20).

After six sons and well over six years of marriage, Leah is still fighting to gain the support and love of her husband. She wants her husband to love and honour her. What a sad story this is. For years Leah was married to this great saint of God and never had the assurance of his love. Could it be that throughout her entire married life, she never knew if Jacob loved her. The sad thing about this story is that it is so true even in our day. How many husbands and wives do not have the assurance of their spouses love and acceptance?

What do you do in this situation? How do you deal with a marriage that has gone sour? We see two things in the life of Leah that ought to help us answer this question. First, Leah never stopped trying to win the love and approval of her husband. This struggle went on for years. To complicate issues, Leah had to compete against another woman. This was not easy for her. The temptation would have been to give up trying and become bitter and hard. She would have been tempted to push him aside and make his life miserable. She could have given up and got on with life without her husband's love. She refused to do this, however. She had promised herself to Jacob, and she would persevere in her relationship with him. She was committed to doing what she could to make her marriage work. More than this, however, she was committed to fighting for his love. She didn't want a marriage without love. Her love for Jacob never died. While she was not

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fulfilled in her own life, she was committed to doing everything she could for her husband. What an example of patience and genuine love we have in the story of Leah. She gives us a beautiful example to follow.

The second thing we need to see in the life of Leah is that while she did not always have the love and support of her husband, she was encouraged in her God. In Genesis 29:32, she said: *“the Lord has seen my misery (Genesis 29:32)*. In the following verse, she says: *“the Lord heard that I am not loved (Genesis 29:33)*. She praised the Lord for her child in Genesis 29:35. In Genesis 30:20, she recognised that her child was a special gift from the Lord God. In all these things, Leah was aware of the hand of God at work in her life. She knew that while her husband did not love her as she would have liked, God’s love and compassion for her did not change. She found great comfort and assurance in this. It could very well be that this is what kept her going against all the odds.

It is true that Leah’s relationship with God did not take away the pain of her husband’s rejection, but it did give her the strength to face this rejection. Even if her husband was not there, God would never leave her. Are you in Leah’s situation today? Maybe you need to be reassured of God’s care and compassion. Never will He leave you or forsake you. In Him, there is strength and love to continue. Leah’s strength came from her relationship with God.

Leah gives us here a very powerful example to follow. If you suffer like Leah in your marriage, may God become as real to you as He was for her.

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To consider:

Can you identify with Leah's struggle? What do you learn from her example?

What does the example of Christ teach us about how to deal with similar situations?

Where does the strength come from to persevere in a situation like Leah? What blocks the receiving of this strength?

Maybe you are guilty of Jacob's sin. What do you need to do to make things right with your partner? What holds you back?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to help you show more love to your partner. Are you presently in Leah's situation? Ask God to become more real to you. Do you know someone else in Leah's position? Commit them and their partner to the Lord.

6

Moses and Zipporah: Distractions

Read Exodus 2.16-22

Having been forced to leave Egypt, Moses fled to the land of Midian. He stopped by a well to rest from his journey. As he rested, seven young ladies came to the well with a flock of sheep. While they were watering their flocks, some bad shepherds came by and drove their sheep away. This incensed Moses, who took the defence of the ladies, drove these evil shepherds away and helped the women recover their sheep. Little did he know that among these ladies was one who would become his wife.

Moses returned with these women to their home where he met their father, a man named Jethro. It was not long before Jethro discovered that Moses had no place to go. A man in his household would be a help for Jethro. He asked Moses to consider staying with him and working with his sheep. We understand that, to the Egyptian, raising sheep was a detestable job (see Genesis 46.34). While Moses had grown up in the house of the daughter of Pharaoh, he was forced to put his background aside and make a new life for himself. He accepted Jethro's offer and stayed with him.

Zipporah was one of Jethro's seven daughters. He gave her to Moses to be his wife. Zipporah gave Moses a son

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named Gershom. Moses chose this name because he said, *"I have become an alien in a foreign land"* (Exodus 2.22). They had a second son called Eliezer in remembrance of how the Lord had delivered Moses from the hand of Pharaoh (Exodus 18.4). Moses realised that Midian was not his home. He had grown up in Egypt, but he was an Israelite separated from his people. He had a tremendous burden for his people and their oppression in the land of Egypt. At this point, Zipporah did not understand just how great a weight this was for Moses.

Forty years passed. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. He told him that He wanted him to return to Egypt to deliver His people from their bondage. Initially, Moses found it hard to believe that God would be calling him to this task. After a deep struggle with God, however, he accepted the job. Genesis chapter four tells us that Moses packed his bags, took his wife and sons and began the long journey back to Egypt.

On their way to Egypt, the Lord God attacked Moses and was going to kill him (see Genesis 4.24). What was the problem? We find the answer in the response of Zipporah. She took Gershom, their son and, with a flint knife, she circumcised him. It was only then that the anger of the Lord turned from Moses. The problem seems to be that Moses had not taken the time to circumcise his son. Zipporah was not Jewish. She had not been brought up with the people of God. Yet as a foreigner, she was the one to circumcise Gershom according to the tradition of Israel. Zipporah was not pleased with Moses. She took Gershom's foreskin and

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threw it at Moses' feet and said, "*you are a bridegroom of blood to me (Exodus 4.25).*"

While we are not told what the response of Moses was to Zipporah in this situation, the next time we read about her is in Exodus 18. Here we read that after Moses had delivered the people of Israel from bondage, Jethro came to visit him bringing Zipporah and Moses' two sons Gershom and Eliezer to him. Exodus 18:2 tells us that Moses had sent his wife back to her father. We are not told the circumstances of Zipporah's return to her father. What we do know is that she set out with Moses on her way to Egypt but was not there when he delivered his people from bondage. Is it possible that Zipporah's response to Moses in this matter of the circumcision of their son resulted in Moses sending her home? We are not told.

While there is no doubt that Moses was one a great man of God, his family life may not have been everything the Lord meant it to be. The question I ask myself is this: Did Moses' family suffer because of his intense devotion to the work of God? Why was it that Moses never made the time to circumcise son Gershom and speak to him about his covenant relationship with God? Why did he send his wife home to live with her father instead of bringing her to Egypt with him as he had initially planned? Was his wife even a believer? Obviously, the Lord had a very important ministry for Moses in Egypt. It does seem to be a paradox, however, that while he is making great strides in his spiritual calling, his family is not with him. Who was instructing them in the ways of the God of Israel while Moses was away? Jethro, Zipporah's father and father-in-

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law to Moses' children, was a priest of Midian. His faith was not the same as the faith of God's people. Was he instructing his grandchildren in his pagan religious ways in the absence of Moses? While Moses was successful in delivering the people of Israel from their bondage, was Moses as successful in his family life?

What does all of this tell us about marriage and family? It tells us that we can be faithful and successful in the work of the Lord and be a failure in our family life. It tells me that it is possible to be involved full time in helping people grow in their walk with the Lord and neglect the spiritual health of our own family. We can become so involved in church, religious activities or our work that we forsake our responsibilities to our partners and children. The apostle Paul recognised this tension in the life of the married couple:

"I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs -- how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world -- how he can please his wife -- his interests are divided. (1 Corinthians 7.32-34)

In saying this, Paul is not telling us that it is wrong to be married. What he is telling us is that if we are married, we need to recognise that we will have to concern ourselves with the cares of our family. He told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5.8:

"If anyone does not provide for these relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5.8)

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This is a stern warning from the apostle Paul. The Bible exhorts us who are married to watch over and provide for our families. How easy it is to neglect this matter. Will your relationship with your husband and wife suffer because you have become too busy (maybe even in spiritual matters)? May God help us not to fall into the error of letting other things take us away from our spiritual responsibility to our children and partners.

To Consider:

Have you been able to find a balance in your work and family life? What things are you doing to assure that you have ample time with your husband or wife or with your children?

What are you doing or what more could you be doing to encourage your children in their walk with the Lord?

Are you a source of spiritual encouragement for your husband or wife? What kind of things can you be doing to bless them?

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For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to reveal to you how you can have a greater spiritual influence on your children and spouse. Confess your shortcomings in this matter and ask for his enabling to make things right.

7

David and His Wives: The Temptation to Look Elsewhere

Read 2 Samuel 3.14-16; 11.1-4

I am not sure why it is, but people never seem to be content with what they have. The proverb “the grass is always greener on the other side” seems to ring true in so many lives today. People always seem to want what someone else has. Unfortunately, even their husbands and wives are not sheltered from this temptation. David had this problem.

From 2 Samuel 3.1-5, we understand that David had at least six wives (Ahinoah, Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah). We also know of two other wives (Michal: 1 Samuel 18.27; Bethsheba: 2 Samuel 11.26,27). We know, therefore, that he had at least eight wives. Let’s take a look at three of these wives.

Michal

Michal was the first of David’s wives. She was the daughter of King Saul. Saul had given her to David so she could be a stumbling block for him. Listen to the words of 1 Samuel 18.21:

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“Now Saul’s daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. ‘I will give her to him,’ he thought, ‘so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.’” (1 Samuel 18.20,21)

Even though David did not see himself worthy of being in the king’s family, when his servants falsely assured him of Saul’s love for him, he accepts to marry Michal. Michal truly loved David. Her father Saul, however, hated him. One day, King Saul sent his men to the home of this young couple to kill David. Michal, knowing what they intended to do, informed David and helped him escape through a window (2 Samuel 19.9-12). It was by this means that David and Michal were separated one from another. In the meantime, Saul gave Michal to another man (2 Samuel 25.44). During his time of flight from Saul and separation from Michal, David took two other wives (1 Samuel 25:43).

When Saul died, David took the throne. Being king was not without its difficulties. As a sign of allegiance to David, Abner, his former enemy, asks the king to make a covenant with him. David agreed only on one condition. Abner was to get his wife Michal back for him. Agreeing to this condition, Abner went to the home of Michal who was now married to a man by the name of Paltiel. He took her from her husband and brought her to David. Listen to how the Bible describes this event:

“Her husband, however, went with her weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim.” (NIV 2 Samuel 3.16)

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What a horrible picture is painted for us in this story. Here was David who had several wives at this point. He was not happy with this, however, and felt compelled to take Michal from her new husband. While at one time she was his wife, she now belonged to another.

What makes this picture even more horrible is that fact that this relationship with Michal would become very bitter. One day, as David returned from battle, he was celebrating and dancing before his army. When Michal saw his behaviour, she “despised him in her heart.” She spoke to David about this when he returned to the house. The result of this conversation can be seen in 2 Samuel 6:23:

“And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.” (2 Samuel 6.23)

Is it possible that David had no more sexual relations with her? We are not sure. What is sure, however, is that things did not go well between David and Michal. Would she have been better off with her other husband? What is striking about this story is how easily David took Michal from her husband for himself.

Abigail

The second wife of David that we are going to look at is Abigail. At this point in his life, David had left Michal and was being chased by Saul. He and his men come to the region of Carmel. They needed supplies. In this region, they meet a couple by the name of Nabal and Abigail. David asked Nabal if he could give him and his men

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something to eat because they were weary and tired from their journey. Nabal refused saying:

“Who is David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?” (1 Samuel 25.10,11)

When David heard the response of Nabal, he decided to attack him. In the meantime, Abigail discovered what her husband had said to David and his men. She decided to appease the anger of David before it was too late. She prepared two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep, five sheaths of grain, and a hundred cakes. Loading this food on donkeys she brought them to David and his men. When David saw her, he said:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgement and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.” (1 Samuel 25. 32,33)

Thanks to the intervention of Abigail, Nabal was saved from the hand of David. Ten days later, however, the Lord took Nabal's life (1 Samuel 25.38). What is vital for us to notice here is the response of David to the death of Nabal. He wasted no time in sending his men to Abigail to ask her to become his wife. Something does not seem right in this picture. While we do not have any idea here as to how much time has passed between the death of Nabal and David's proposal, the passage would almost leave us to

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believe this happened rather quickly. David had become attracted to her when she came with the supplies for his men. It is interesting to note that the writer of 1 Samuel describes Abigail as being a very intelligent and beautiful woman (1 Samuel 25.3). This was a hard combination for David to resist.

Bathsheba

The next wife we will look at is a woman by the name of Bathsheba. She was the wife of one of David's soldiers. While David was out on his roof one evening, he saw Bathsheba bathing. He could have turned his head and walked away. David, however, allowed himself to be tempted. The passage tells us that this woman was very beautiful. As in the case of Abigail, David found this very hard to resist. He inquired as to the identity of this woman. He discovered that she was married to Uriah, one of his soldiers. Despite her marriage to Uriah, David sent his messengers to get her and bring her to his palace. She became pregnant through David.

This left David in a complicated situation. He decided to hide his sin. He sent for Bathsheba's husband on the pretext of asking for information on the battle. He was hoping that Uriah would go to see his wife. This way, the whole matter could be hidden. Uriah did not go to his wife, however. David, therefore, sent word to the Joab, the military commander, to set Uriah in the heat of the battle so he would be killed. When Uriah was killed, David quickly

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married Bathsheba. To hide his adultery, David resorted to deceit and murder.

David is described in the Bible as a man after God's heart. He walked close to God. A quick look at the Psalms will show us that he had a certain spiritual maturity. Even though he loved the Lord, David wrestled with his sexuality. He was often tempted to look elsewhere and not be content with the wives the Lord gave him. This problem is not unique to David alone. Many men and women wrestle with this issue.

What lessons do we need to draw from this brief meditation? First, we need to realise that no-one is sheltered from the temptations David felt in his life. Even David, the man of God, fell flat on his face. How many times have we seen this sin repeated in our day? How many respected men and women of God have fallen prey to the pull of Satan and the flesh? Pastors, evangelists, and ordinary men and women have all fallen. If it could happen to David, it could happen to you and me. Sometimes the people who are the most surprised are the people who have fallen. They never imagined it would ever have happened to them. How we need the grace of God to keep us from falling like David.

The second lesson we need to draw from the life of David is just how important it is for us to learn to be content with the partner the Lord has given. God intends that we find our fulfilment in our partners. Listen to what Solomon tells us:

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“May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a gracious deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.” (Proverbs 5.18,19)

Our partners are not meant to be enjoyed for a time and then thrown away. While David had many wives, he still was not happy. He still looked elsewhere. He had never learned to be content with what God had given him. Because of this, he was tormented by this insatiable desire for someone more beautiful, more intelligent, more exciting. That appetite was never satisfied. Only by looking to his own wife and learning to love her as God intended could that unending craving be stopped. Sure, it meant putting up with a few faults. It may have meant dying to his ideas and preferences and giving in to his wife in certain areas. Maybe it meant taking more time or spending more effort to make things work. The result, however, would have been worth it. He would have discovered that the woman his heart was always looking for was his very own wife. Yes, hidden beneath all those perceived differences and conflicts, is the partner God has chosen for you. What a sad thing it is would be to go through life without ever discovering that God really did know what He was doing when He gave you your partner.

To Consider:

Look at your relationship with your spouse. Can you say that you are genuinely content with the partner God has

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given you? Make a list of things for which you thank the Lord concerning your husband or wife.

Take the time this week to speak openly with your partner about your relationship. Is there something you need to change in your relationship?

What do you need to do when you are tempted to look elsewhere? What makes you want to look elsewhere? How can you deal practically with this in the coming days?

For Prayer:

Take time to thank the Lord for your spouse. Thank Him for things He has given you in your husband or wife. Ask the Lord to help you be truly content with His provision. Confess your sin of not being as thankful as you ought to be.

8

Solomon and His Wives: More Valuable than Rubies

Read Proverbs 27.15; 31.10

I do not know of anyone in the Bible who had as many wives as Solomon. According to 1 Kings 11:3, he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. With so many wives, there must be something he can teach us about marriage. As one of the wisest men who ever lived, his counsel is very important.

What was the experience of Solomon about marriage? The Bible tells us that Solomon loved foreign women. These foreign wives, however, were a snare for him in his walk with the Lord:

“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.” (1 Kings 11.4)

It was not that Solomon did not know any better, he had grown up in a godly home. He loved the Lord and had a personal relationship with him. He knew what he was

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doing. He loved his wives and wanted to please them. It is interesting to note Solomon's actions in 2 Chronicles 8.11:

"Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, 'My wife must not live in the palace of David the king of Israel, because the places the ark of the Lord has entered are holy.'" (2 Chronicles 8.11)

Does this not reveal something significant about Solomon and his relationship with this wife? Solomon knew that his Egyptian wife did not love the Lord. He knew that her ways were contrary to the purpose of God. He also had enough understanding and respect for the things of God that he refused to allow her to live in the city of David, where the ark of the covenant was housed. He knew that God would not be pleased if he chose to let her stay in Jerusalem. As king of Israel, Solomon lived with a divided heart. Because of his wife, he is forced to compromise his faith.

Many years later, the prophet Nehemiah, speaking to the people of Israel, who had just fallen into the sin of intermarriage with foreign wives, said:

"Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women." (Nehemiah 13.26)

The choice of one's partner will have a profound impact on your relationship with God. There is no other individual who will have as much impact on your life as your husband or wife. Solomon felt the full effect of the evil influences of

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his wives. What would he want to say to a young person seeking a husband or wife today? Let's let him speak.

Don't get yourself caught into a trap you will regret for the rest of your life.

Listen first to his words in Ecclesiastes 7:

"I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. (Ecclesiastes 7.26)

Notice what Solomon tells us here. He tells us that there is something more bitter than death. Something that could make you want to cry out for death. That is, a partner who has become a snare and a trap. Solomon knew what he was talking about. We have already seen how his wives had been a snare for him. They led him to turn his back on God. His life became miserable. He described this as a pain more bitter than death. How many times has this happened in our day? Things start so well for you as a couple. You love each other. You are happy together. I do not doubt that this is how Solomon felt initially. What he didn't consider, however, was the spiritual condition of his wives who would, over time, began to drag him down. This is also the case of wives whose husbands don't know the Lord.

It is impossible to read Ecclesiastes 7.28 without experiencing a certain sadness. Here is a man who

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appears to be disappointed in marriage. Listen to what he says:

"While I was still searching but not finding – I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all." (Ecclesiastes 7.28)

Here is a man whose heart cried out for some positive spiritual input in his life. He had male friends with whom he could talk about the things of the Lord, but among all his wives, he could not find one with whom he could share in spiritual matters. This was an obvious grief for him. How many husbands and wives since Solomon have shared the same pain.

Solomon had much to say about bad relationships.

*"... a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones."
(Proverbs 12.4b)*

"Better to live on a corner of a roof than to share a house with a quarrelsome wife." (Proverbs 21.9)

"Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered woman." (Proverbs 21.19)

These passages are not meant to downplay women. They can be applied to men as equally as women. What they are saying is that there is a pain worse than death. That pain is to be found in a marriage relationship gone sour. Solomon challenges us to choose our partners wisely realising that the person you choose will have more influence on you and your walk with God than any other person on this earth. A wrong choice can be disastrous.

Solomon and His Wives

A good partner is one of God's greatest gifts

We have seen the negative side of this matter. Solomon turns us now to the positive side. Solomon tells us that one of God's riches blessings is a good partner. There is nothing in life that can be compared to a good partner. Listen to what he says:

"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies" (Proverbs 31.10)

*"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown"
(Proverbs 12.4)*

"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18.22)

". . . a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Proverbs 19.14b)

Have you ever taken the time to consider what God has given you in your partner? Solomon would have given his kingdom for a good wife. Solomon knew the value of the right partner. How about you? Do you appreciate what God has given you in your partner? How many couples will go through life taking each other for granted, not realising what God has given them in each other? What would it take for us to understand the truth of what Solomon is telling us here?

The marriage relationship is one of the most beautiful relationships that exist. It can also be the most painful. A big part of how it will turn out depends on the partners involved. It may not be too late. You may yet be able to

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turn your marriage around. Start by recognising what God has given you in your partner. Commit yourself to make the most of your marriage. May God help you to realise the great gift He has given you in your partner.

To consider:

Make a list of all the positive influences your partner has had on your life. Thank the Lord for these things. Take time this week to speak to your husband or wife about this.

How would things be different if you truly understood the value of God's gift to you of your partner?

What do you contribute to the good of your spouse? What other things could you be adding? Speak to your partner about this.

For Prayer:

Take time to thank the Lord for what He has given you in your partner. Ask Him to help you to be a source of blessing for him or her. Have things gone sour in your

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marriage or a friend's marriage? Ask the Lord for strength
and patience. He is the God of the impossible.

Boaz and Ruth: The God who Cares for Widows

Read Ruth 1.1-5

Naomi and her husband Elimelech were Israelites who arrived in the land of Moab with their two sons. It was here that Elimelech died leaving Naomi a widow with two boys. When the two boys had grown up, they both married Moabite women. One was called Orpah and the other Ruth. Sometime later both husbands died leaving both Orpah and Ruth widows as well. Naomi was left alone in a foreign country with two widowed daughters-in-law. With nothing left for her in Moab, she decided to return to Israel.

Naomi called her daughters-in-law together and told them she was going to return to Israel. She encouraged them to return to their mother's house. While Orpah was quite happy to do so, Ruth decided to stay with Naomi.

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to go back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and you God my God.'" (Ruth 1.16)

It was by this means that Ruth and Naomi returned to Israel as two widows depending on God to provide for their every need. Ruth and Naomi took up residence in

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Bethlehem. The whole town seemed to be moved by their plight. Naomi wrestled with her lot in life. When her old friends asked: "Can this be Naomi?" (Ruth 1.19) she would respond:

"Don't call me Naomi . . . Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." (Ruth 1.20,21)

At this point in the history of Israel, there was no social security. These widows would not have received a regular cheque from the government. They were forced to make their own living. They did not even have a family to depend on. They were truly alone. Probably one of the most challenging things they had to deal with was the fact that they did not have any children to carry on the name of their family. Their family name would end with them. This was a painful matter for them both. It was as if the Lord had abandoned their family.

Understanding their need, Ruth decided to take the initiative and went into the fields to gather up the grain that remained when the labourers had harvested. The law of Moses stated:

"When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." (Deuteronomy 24.19)

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The field that Ruth chose to glean belonged to a man named Boaz. Unknown to Ruth, this man was a relative of Naomi. When Boaz asked his workers who this lady was who gathered the grain that remained, they told him it was the daughter-in-law of his relative Naomi. Hearing this, Boaz decided to help Ruth. He commanded his men to allow Ruth to gather as much grain as she wanted. He even asked them to leave a little grain behind so she could collect it. By the end of the day, Ruth had gathered a large quantity of grain.

When she arrived home, Naomi asked her where she had been gathering grain. When she discovered that it was in the field of Boaz, Naomi was overcome with joy. She told Ruth that this man was their kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 2.20).

In the Old Testament, when a man married a woman and died without having a child to carry his name, it was the responsibility of his brother to marry the widow and give her a child. The child born to this union was considered to be the child of the dead husband. This child would carry the name of his mother's first husband even though he was not physically his son. He would legally become the inheritor of his dead father's estate.

If the brother did not want to take the widow and give her a child, he was to approach the elders of the city. In the presence of the elders, his brother's widow would take off his shoe and spit in his face as a sign of contempt. He would then carry the shame for the rest of his life. From that point on, his family would be known as the "Family of the Unsandaled" (see Deuteronomy 25.5-10).

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Naomi saw in Boaz a ray of hope for them as widows. Maybe through this man, Ruth could have a child to carry the name of her family. She took the matter in hand. She told Ruth to find out where Boaz slept at night. She was to sneak in at night, uncover his feet and lie down. When he discovered her presence, she was to ask him to spread the corner of his garment over her because he was her kinsmen redeemer. What is happening here? It is quite likely that Ruth lay at the feet of Boaz as a sign of submission to him. She is coming with a petition. Many commentators see the uncovering of the feet as a quiet and modest way of waking Boaz from his sleep. We understand from the context there was another man who was a closer relative to Naomi. Naomi, however, may not have wanted Ruth to marry him. She had her eyes set on Boaz. According to the law of the land, this other relative was to be given the first choice. Could it be that Naomi told Ruth to go to Boaz at night to secretly convince him to marry her and not the other relative? When Boaz woke from his sleep and saw Ruth, she asks him to spread his cloak over her. This was Ruth's way of asking Boaz to marry her.

This so moved Boaz that he made up his mind to go to the city to work out the details. The other relative gave Boaz the right of redemption and Boaz was free to marry Ruth. Through Boaz, Ruth had a son by the name of Obed. Obed would become the great grandfather of king David and eventually through this line, the Lord Jesus Himself would be born. This family would become the greatest of all families in Israel. God had not abandoned these widows in their need.

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What does this story teach us? A whole book of the Old Testament is devoted to telling the story of how God cared for two widows in their affliction. He had a great plan for their lives. He knew their pain. He would come to their aid. He would not abandon them. Maybe you have lost your husband or wife. God knows what you are going through. He is the God of widows and widowers as well. Throughout the Bible, He calls His people to reach out a compassionate and loving hand to the widow in her need. God has a very special place in his heart for those who suffer the pain of a lost husband or wife.

To consider:

Are you a widow or widower? What are your concerns? Do you think God is concerned about these matters? Are there any special promises in Scripture for these concerns?

As a married person, what would life be like for you without your partner? Is there anything you can do to minister to the widow or widower in your midst?

For Prayer:

Do you know of an individual who has lost a husband or wife? Take a moment to bring them before the Lord. Ask Him to meet them at the point of their need.

Samson and the Woman of Timnah: God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in the Life of the Couple

Read Judges 14.1-4

The above passage is very troubling for those who believe that the Bible teaches that a believer should not marry an unbeliever. Samson, on his journey to Timnah, met a young woman he wanted to marry. This young lady was not a believer in the God of Israel. When he returned home, he told his parents that this was the woman he wanted as his wife. As God fearing Jews, the response of his parents is quite understandable:

"Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife." (Judges 14.3b)

What is troubling about this passage is the fact that the Judges 14:4 tells us that Samson's parents did not know that this matter was from the Lord. How are we to understand what is taking place here. Was it the will of the Lord that Samson marry an unbeliever? Does this mean that there are times when it is acceptable for a Christian to marry a non-Christian? To find an answer to this question, we must look further into the passage. The passage tells us that it was the will of God that Samson be given an

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occasion to confront the Philistines. God was going to use his relationship with this Philistine girl to accomplish his purposes in the life of Israel and give them victory over their greatest enemies. Let's look at this in greater detail.

While his parents disapproved of Samson's choice of wife, they gave in to his insistence. In verse four, his parents went to Timna, very likely to ask the girl's parents for their daughter. On this occasion, Samson killed a lion young lion that had attacked him. He did not mention this incident to anyone, however.

Sometime later, in verse Judges 14:8, the family returned to Timnah. This time it was for the wedding. As they passed by the location where Samson had killed the lion, Samson noticed a swarm of bees had built a hive in the abandoned carcass of the lion he had killed. Upon their arrival in Timnah, Samson's parents prepared a great wedding feast, as was the custom. These wedding celebrations would last for approximately seven days after which time Samson and his wife-to-be would be officially married. During the wedding celebrations, Samson told his male friends a riddle: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong something sweet" (Judges 14.14). The agreement was this: If his friends could guess the meaning of his riddle during the seven days of the wedding celebrations, he would give them thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. If they did not guess the significance of this riddle, then they would own him the clothes.

Samson's friends could not find the meaning of the riddle. They decided to pry it out of Samson's wife-to-be. They threatened to burn her and her family if she did not get the

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answer from Samson and give it to them. With this sort of motivation behind her, she did her best to get the answer from Samson. After many days of nagging Samson finally gave her the answer. She told it to Samson's friends. On the seventh day of the feast, Samson's friends come to him with the correct answer to the riddle. Right away, Samson realised that something was wrong. He knew that they had obtained the answer from his wife. She had deceived him. Samson became so angry that he went out and killed thirty Philistines, brought their clothes to his friends and returned home, leaving his wife in the midst of the wedding celebration.

Could it be that this was the Lord's way of forbidding Samson from marrying an unbelieving wife? Did Samson ever complete the marriage ceremony or did he leave his wife at the altar? It would appear that Samson never lived with his wife. When the bride's father saw that Samson had left her, he gave his daughter to another man. This passage could never be used as a justification for the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever because Samson never lived with her as a husband.

Why did God allow Samson to go through this painful circumstance? God was using this incident in the life of Samson to prepare him for the task to which he had been calling him. This incident provoked the anger of Samson against the Philistines. We have already seen how he went out and killed thirty Philistines to give their clothes to his friends. This was only the beginning. In Judges 15:1-5 Samson returned to Timnah to reclaim his bride. When he discovered that she had been given to another man, his

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anger was flared up once again. This time, to get even, he took three hundred foxes, attached torches to their tails and set them free in the grain fields. The Philistines lost much grain that year.

What Samson did, provoked the wrath of the Philistines. When they discovered who had burned their fields, they retaliated by burning Samson's wife and her father to death. This caused Samson to declare: *"Since you've acted like this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you"* (Judges 15.7). This was the start of a great campaign of hatred against the Philistines. For the rest of his life, Samson would fight against the Philistines. He would become God's instrument to deliver the Israelites from their oppression. God used Samson's relationship with an unbeliever to call him to this role.

This whole story speaks to us about the sovereignty of God in the life of the couple. We see how God hindered Samson from marrying an unbeliever. Does this mean, however, that God will always keep me from marrying someone who is not right for me? Does this give a young person the right to marry whoever he or she wants believing that if God doesn't want the wedding to take place, He will stop it as he did for Samson?

We can thank the Lord that, in the case of Samson, the Lord hindered him from doing something that was against His will. We need to understand, however, that just because the Lord allows something to take place does not mean that we are in His will. Sin has been spreading throughout this world since the time of Adam. This does not mean, however, that God wants sin to spread in this

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manner. God allowed Cain to kill his brother Abel. Does this mean that this was God's desire for Cain? While we can praise the Lord that He can take our bad decisions and use them for good, we need to realise that God is not obliged to stop you and me from ruining our lives by bad choices.

We do serve a sovereign God. How I thank Him for how He has protected me and kept me from sin on so many occasions. This does not mean, however, that I can sit back and do as I please, expecting him to bail me out every time. I must learn to take responsibility for these matters. He has given me His word to guide me. I must live by its teaching. When God's word tells me it is wrong to marry an unbeliever, I must obey.

The question of God's sovereignty not only relates to the question of the partner I choose but also to the type of relationship I enjoy with the partner I do have. How many couples have resigned themselves to accepting a mediocre marriage saying that if God wanted them to have a closer and more intimate relationship than He would do something about it? We use the doctrine of God's sovereignty as an excuse for laziness and mediocrity. Don't blame the ruts you get yourself into on the sovereignty of God. Look to His Word? Take time to study the purpose of God for a godly marriage. Listen to Solomon tell you to rejoice in the wife of our youth (Proverbs 5.18). Study the passages that speak about forgiveness and unconditional love. Think about how the Lord Jesus loved you. Take His command seriously to love your partner in the same way. When you have heard the

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Word speak to you, seek God's enablement to apply it. Don't live your life as though your dry and broken marriage is God's sovereign plan for your life.

To consider:

What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and your responsibility in your marriage?

In what way is it possible to use the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to justify our own will and to encourage spiritual laziness and apathy?

Consider what you have learned in this meditation. Has God been speaking to you about a particular area of your life that you need to deal with today?

For Prayer:

Have you or someone else you know resigned themselves to mediocrity in their marriage? Do you know a believer who is saying: "If God wants me not to marry this unbeliever, He will stop me"? Pray that their eyes would be opened to the clear teaching of the Word of God and that they would recognise the error of their thinking.

The Prophets and Their Wives: Symbols of God and His People

Read Ezekiel 24.18, 19; Hosea 1.2; 3.1

For the most part, we know very little about the wives of the Old Testament prophets. They remain hidden behind their husbands. Their relationships with their husbands, however, teach us some fundamental truths. We will look briefly at two couples in this reflection.

Ezekiel and his Wife

What we know about the wife of Ezekiel is hidden in just a few verses of his prophecy:

*“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears.’
(Ezekiel 24:15, 16)*

The only way we know that the Lord was speaking about Ezekiel’s wife in these verses is from what happened in verse 18:

[18] So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded. (Ezekiel 24)

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The fulfillment of the prophecy came with the death of the prophet's wife. Verse 18 tells us that when she died, Ezekiel did as he "was commanded" and did not lament or shed any tears for her.

This passage is important because of what it tells us about the relationship between Ezekiel and his wife. These verses seem to show us that Ezekiel dearly loved his wife. She was for him, "the delight of his eyes." How many husbands can say this about their wife today? It is relatively easy for us to deceive other human beings. They look at our marriage relationship and think that things are going well, but deep in our heart, we know they are not. Humans can only look at the externals. God, however, looks at the heart. When God told Ezekiel that He was going to take away the "delight of his heart," He spoke as one who knew full well what he felt about his wife and what she meant to him. It was because of this profound love between Ezekiel and his wife that the Lord decided to do what He did.

"Ezekiel, I am going to take away your wife, the delight of your eyes," said God. "When I do, you must not mourn her loss or shed any tears." Ezekiel was to go about his business as if nothing had happened. How hard this would have been for the prophet. Why was God asking him to do such a difficult thing?

It was by this means that the Lord would capture the curiosity of His people. They would come to Ezekiel and ask him why he was not mourning for his wife. This would allow Ezekiel to share the word of the Lord with them. God was going to take something very precious to them, as

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well. Their land would be taken away; their children would perish in the battle. They would be driven into captivity and live as foreigners in a nation that was not theirs. Their neighbours would not mourn their loss. They would continue as they had always continued in their absence.

To make this message strike home, God decided to give them a shocking and practical example of what would take place. Ezekiel's marriage became a symbol of God and His people. It would speak to them about the pain that was ahead for them if they persisted in their sin and rebellion. What a powerful lesson. Maybe you are asking yourself, why would God go to such a measure to communicate this truth? Why would He take Ezekiel's wife? God willingly took her life so that through her, other lives might be saved. If by her death, many would repent of their sins and be saved, then her death was not in vain. God spoke to His people through the symbol of marriage to remind them of what they stood to lose by their persistence in sin.

Hosea and Gomer

Let's look at another example. Hosea, the prophet, married a woman by the name of Gomer. We learn from Hosea 1:2 that Gomer was an adulterous wife. God asked Hosea to marry Gomer in particular. While the priests of the Old Testament were only to marry virgins, Hosea, as God's representative was to marry an unfaithful wife. We can only imagine the stories that would have circulated in the region of Israel about Hosea. "There's the prophet whose wife is a prostitute." "Did you hear that Hosea's wife is

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living with another man?" These stories would not have been easy for Hosea. His reputation as a man of God was at stake.

If Hosea ministered today, he would very likely be quietly removed from his ministry. After all, you can't have a preacher whose wife is living with another man (Hosea 3:1). How could Hosea speak to the people about the will of God when his own wife did not concern herself with even the basic principles of morality or marital fidelity?

In Hosea 3:1, the Lord asked Hosea to love his wife even though she was loved by another man and had been unfaithful to him. He was to love her just as God loved His people. We see here the reason for Hosea's marriage. Hosea's marriage was a symbol to the people of Israel of their own unfaithfulness to God. When they looked at Hosea and Gomer, they would see their relationship with God mirrored back to them. They would also see God's great faithfulness and compassion towards them despite their rebellion.

God uses the illustration of marriage more than any other to visualise His relationship with His people. Our marriages ought to be examples to the world of the love, compassion, and forgiveness of Christ. As believers, your marriage speaks to the world of the love of Christ for his people. We examine those who come to the Lord's Table or to Baptism to be sure that they do not dishonour these great symbols of our faith. Are we as careful in helping believers who struggle in their marriages?

The Prophets and their Wives

Maybe you have a husband or wife who does not love the Lord. You are asking: "How does my marriage symbolise the relationship between Christ and the church?" Are you not in the same situation as the prophet Hosea? Hosea's faithfulness to an unfaithful wife mirrored God's faithfulness to a rebellious people. Your patience and devotion towards your unsaved spouse can demonstrate to the world something of God's love and patience towards them. He loves us despite our sin. He loves us despite what we have done to Him. He loves us even when we do not love Him.

What a powerful symbol we have before us in marriage. May our marriages be clearer reflections of Christ and His desire for His people.

To Consider:

In what way does your marriage symbolise the relationship between Christ and His people? What lessons do you learn from this relationship that can help you in your relationship with your husband or wife?

What things do you need to change so that your marriage more clearly reflects the love of Christ?

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For Prayer:

Ask for forgiveness for times when your marriage has not been a good example for others to follow. Ask for God's strength to make things right.

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Aquila and Priscilla: United in the Work of the Lord

Read Acts 18:24-26

The first time we meet this couple is in Acts 18. Aquila and Priscilla were a Jewish couple who had left Italy as religious refugees. The emperor Claudius required that all Jews leave Rome. They were forced, therefore, to leave their home and find a new place to live. When Paul met them for the first time, they were living in Corinth as tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3).

While we are not told the details about how Paul met this couple, it is possible that it had something to do with their common trade as tentmakers. It is not clear if they were believers when Paul met them. Paul, however, decided to work with them for a time.

There are a few things that we need to notice in the life of Priscilla and Aquila. Notice, first that though they had recently come from Rome as refugees, they did not hesitate to welcome the apostle Paul into their house. Together, as a couple, they exercised this ministry of hospitality toward the apostle.

After a year and a half in Corinth, Paul felt it is time for him to leave. Acts 18:18 tells us that when the apostle left Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him. They did

Aquila and Priscilla

not hesitate to leave their home to stand with the apostle Paul.

While they were in the city of Ephesus, a travelling preacher by the name of Apollos came through preaching the word of the Lord. Apollos spoke with great zeal and enthusiasm, but he had gaps in his understanding. When Aquilla and Priscilla heard him, they recognised his potential right away. They took him into their home and *“explained to him the way of God more adequately (NIV Acts 18.26b).”* The result was that Apollos’ ministry was greatly enhanced and many people were touched through him. Once again, Aquilla and Priscilla were used of God to minister to His servant.

The apostle Paul wrote the following about this couple:

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet the church that meets at their house.” (Romans 16.3-5)

According to this passage, Aquilla and Priscilla had risked their lives to save the apostle Paul. Paul was indebted to them for this. Paul, in turn, would go on to bring many Gentiles to the Lord. Notice, as well, that the church in Rome was meeting in their house. Again, their ministry of hospitality is much in evidence.

We discover in 1 Corinthians 16:19 that Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to the church in the region of Asia. Paul sent greetings to them in 2 Timothy 4.19 when he wrote to Timothy, who was living in Ephesus. Surely

Aquila and Priscilla

this couple would have also been a support to the young pastor Timothy in the church of Ephesus.

Aquila and Priscilla are always mentioned together in the Bible. The Bible speaks of them as a unit. All their efforts were one. Together they risked their lives for the apostle Paul. Together they offered their home in Corinth to Paul as his base of operations. Together they offer their home to the church of Asia and the church of Rome. Together they took Apollos aside and ministered to him. Together they stood behind the young Timothy in Ephesus. They proved to be one of the most influential couples in the life of the early church.

Aquila and Priscilla serve the Lord as a couple. They could not have done what they did if they were not of one mind. They supported and complimented each other in their service of the Lord. What an example they are to us. Do you experience that sort of unity in your marriage? Do you and your partner compliment each other in your gifts and abilities? Are your efforts focused in one direction like Aquila and Priscilla, or are you and your partner pulling in opposite directions?

The Lord has brought you and your partner together for a reason. How do your spiritual gifts complement each other? In what way could it be said that together you are stronger? Aquila and Priscilla stand before us as an example of a couple unified in mind and purpose in the work of the kingdom.

Aquila and Priscilla

To consider:

In what way do you and your partner compliment each other? How could it be said that that you are stronger together?

How has your partner been an influence on you for good? Do you stand behind the calling of your partner? What is God's role for you in that calling?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to show you how your gifts and the gifts of your partner work together for the glory of the Lord. Thank the Lord for your partner's talents. Ask the Lord to help you encourage your partner in his or her spiritual ministry and growth.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

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