

God Centered Marriages: For Children

This past week, we discussed the blessings of a God-centered marriage. We were reminded how such marriages reflect God's image, gift, and love. We considered behaviors stemming from humble hearts that strengthen our marriage bonds. Today, for those who have children or hope to, Lord willing, we'll stress the need for God-centered homes.

Perhaps the most persuasive case to promote such marriages would be this: your children will benefit and have advantages from being raised around the image, grace, and love of God. Think about all we do to ensure the happiness and success of our children. Maybe we decide on a particular private school, homeschool setting, or public school to gain an advantage. A specific college that specializes in your child's talent, which will give them an edge in the future. We take them to the baseball diamond at a young age and teach them how to hit a ball, or open up a bank account early on, and teach them the importance of saving. We work hard and invest in them because we want the best for them. We're not near-sighted with our children. We always have the long game in mind, or at least, we should be thinking that way and doing what we can for them. Why? Because we love them.

Yet, so many times these children are at a disadvantage when mom and dad aren't getting along at home. All the other benefits don't make up for a bitter mom and dad. I asked a few weeks back for a show of hands from those whose parents divorced without reconciliation. There were too many hands, and even in that moment (though this wasn't the point of the sermon), my heart hurt for you all. I know the feeling. Which is why those of us who experienced broken homes should be the first to commit to healthy ones. But there's another group of kiddos who are overlooked. Just because your parents didn't split doesn't mean there isn't division in the family. A tension you can cut with a knife. Many times, these children don't know what to do, what to say, who to turn to, or even whether they're allowed to. Unfortunately, many kids wish their parents would separate because of how intense the environment is, and you can't always claim, "They say that ignorantly," because some of the marriages do end, and the kids live lives with less stress. Of course, as you and I know, neither situation is desirable, and you end up swapping one problem for another. But it remains true. That's their experience. How sad. Today, I speak as someone who's been through a split, but perhaps also for young ones in a tense environment who have no voice but may need help.

Have we forgotten how important we are to these young souls? Yes, as someone once said to a group of us young parents: "You are God to your children." He didn't say this boastfully, but practically. From babies to toddlers, until they get a little older, their little minds can't think much outside of you, so you are everything. You help form their identity, security, and mindset. You define right and wrong (it will take them a long while before they see your flaws). It's just a given. They don't challenge or doubt.

Marriage can't afford self-centeredness when there's a spouse involved, and that only multiplies when you have children. But at least another grown adult has the wherewithal to sift through your flaws. A child doesn't have that ability just yet. You are God to them. I remember

hearing this for the first time when Cadence was just a baby, and it stayed with me ever since: "Our girls will likely grow up to marry someone like their daddy." Most newbie dads hear that at some point. It'll get ya. The same goes for mothers - their boys growing up to marry someone like their mother. But take that a step further - more importantly, the question is this: will they grow up to marry someone godly? Yet that's still not the best question, because they may choose not to marry, or marriage may just not come their way. Will they grow, having developed a healthy view of God, to love God, and desire to share in His holiness? Will they grow up to look like their true Father, or will they not know Him?

You know, I think I could actually leave the podium because you know what I'm saying and get the point. We know in our hearts how important this is, and our challenge isn't typically having a lack of information, but the heart that's ready to humble and submit to God's desire for our own souls and those of our children. I don't want to lose any possible momentum from what's been said, but I'd like to sit in one section of scripture, and no, it doesn't have to do with having good marriages for children (by the way - let me know if you find those): I'm thinking about Galatians 5:16-26.

We can discuss the role of the Spirit in our lives and how He works in and through us, but let's be clear: God the Father, Son, and Spirit want to make their home in us. Jesus taught that (John 14:23; 7:39). Jesus also taught that we all have a father: it's either Satan or God (John 8). We need to know who's housed in our beings, because we're bringing them into our home. We're giving them access to our children. We have the most impact on our children because we spend the most time with them and hold more weight than others. This is about who's in us . . . who we are in our innermost being. Not about what we do, but who we are, which is revealed by what we do. Listen, I could go on and on about specifics of marriage helping our children (how to have good communication, conflict resolution, commitment, etc), but if our hearts are not tender, it really won't help.

There's a time for difficult discussions because not all marriages are okay, and some of our children may need help and attention. At some point, we have to address the possibility of negative environments. And let me address a typical reaction in problematic marriages with children: We foolishly think we can simply focus all our love and attention on the kids and put the marriage issues aside, thinking it will help. But most of the time, the kids need you to repair the marriage so they can start to heal. You can not fix someone else when you're broken. The only one who can fix you is Jesus. I've now spent two weeks discussing God-centered marriages, but if you haven't caught on yet, I'm really promoting God-centered disciples. You cannot compartmentalize God. This father inside of you, whether Satan or Jehovah, is always with you. It may be that we need to repent, brethren, and get a new father.

The last thing I'll share: I recently had a video pop up of a comedian named Theo Von, and he was discussing his desire to find a "new story." His typical story is one of a child who had a neglectful mother. She wouldn't tell him she loved him or look him in the eyes, so over time, he began to think something was wrong with him. He sought love and comfort from others and the bottle. He found himself turning to God in prayer, and he said something I think will resonate with many of us. He described praying for God to help him fight against temptations

and bad behaviors because he was totally broken from the inside out, yet he knew that as he prayed for help, he had every intention of doing the same thing again. Have you ever felt that way? That's what Paul is describing in 2 Cor. 7:10. It's the difference between worldly and godly sorrow. One will repent, while the other talks about doing it but won't, and it always ends in regret. Brethren, if we're not living lives of holiness, at some point we're going to have to pray with hearts ready to change. At some point, we've got to humble ourselves and repent: repent because it's the right thing to do. Repent to the Lord, repent for yourself, repent for your spouse, and repent for your children. If we need to repent, let's be about it.