

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE HOME

Genesis 2:18-25

Series: Old Testament Character Studies

By David H. Roper

The Scriptures are very clear on the matter of the home. In fact, the only source from which we can receive any teaching we can count on in this area is the Word of God. If you have read through any secular marriage manuals lately, they must have impressed you at how superficial and trivial they are. They really don't come to grips with the great issues of life nor the real problems of our homes.

I've just finished reading a best seller of this kind. The author begins to make assumptions at the very outset. His basic assumption is that conflict is inevitable. Therefore, we need to learn how to be good, clean combatants. It is a sort of psychological counterpart to the Marquis of Queensberry rules of boxing--you learn how not to hit low, how not to kick your partner when she's down, and this sort of thing.

But this particular book never even recognizes the fact that conflict can be resolved, that God has a way of dealing with our selfishness and self-centeredness, of putting it away and enabling us to be reconciled and to have a healthy, wholesome married life. The only place we can find that kind of information is in God's Word.

The New Testament says that marriage is a great mystery. A "mystery," as defined in the New Testament, is something which cannot be comprehended solely by man's mind; it has to be revealed by God. It is a divine secret. There are many secrets about marriage, mysteries which the world can never uncover, but which God has revealed in his Word.

Have you ever considered the fact that you are married to a sinful, fallen person? It took me a couple of months to discover that. (It took my wife, Carolyn, about twenty-four hours!) You see, we should not get upset, uptight, nor pushed out of shape because our partner disappoints us. That is a sinful, fallen creature out there on the other end of the relationship. That is what the Scriptures say.

Most of us spend a lot of our waking hours before marriage constructing a model of the type of person we'd like to marry, a sort of composite of many different ingredients. And we go around projecting that image onto every girl we take out. Her personality and character may or may not more or less coincide.

Then you find the person who matches that image, and she's the one for you! So you marry her and discover that she is not that person at all; she is someone entirely different. What immediately goes through your mind is, "I've married the wrong person!" Of course, if you had married anybody else, it would be the same, because you are married to a flawed, fallen, sinful creature.

I am coming to see that a successful marriage, successful in terms of God's criteria, consists not in finding the right kind of person, but in being the right kind of person. In the Scriptures there are clear-cut directives as to how to be what God intends us to be. Genesis 2 is a basic passage on this subject which we need to consider.

It is so significant to me that at the very outset God takes up the subject of the home. As far as God is concerned, a good home is not optional; it is imperative. It is the basis upon which everything else is built. I am not sure we are convinced of that. So often, if our home isn't going well, we think that we can find satisfaction by pouring ourselves into our vocation, or into our children. Or we try to make our house a showpiece, or we get involved in civic affairs. We think we can write our home off.

But we cannot. If our home is not right then no area of our life is right. It is the foundation of everything we do. Therefore, we can't write it off. We have to see it as God sees it as a matter of top priority in our life and deal with it according to the knowledge which God gives in his Word. Let's begin with verse 18 of Genesis 2:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the

**man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh, and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,
"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh."**

[I wish there were some way to translate "this" more accurately. It is an untranslatable Hebrew expletive, the counterpart of our word, "Wow!" in the feminine gender.]

**"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh."
"This [the same word again] shall be called Woman,
because this was taken out of Man."
Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man
and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.**

It strikes me that our goal is to have a relationship with which we are not ashamed.

There are several principles in this passage which I would like to call to your attention. The first and most obvious is that it takes God to make a marriage. A successful marriage is not merely that two people live together compatibly. It involves a third Person. It is simply impossible to build any kind of wholesome, satisfying love relationship apart from God. Love is an exotic, something which comes from outside of us, produced by the activity of God in our life.

We can never hope to develop any kind of adequate love relationship whatsoever with our partner unless we are cultivating our love relationship with Jesus Christ. Show me a man who is out of fellowship with Christ and I'll show you a man who is out of fellowship with his wife. It is just that simple. How can we expect to lead our wives, unless we are led of the Spirit? How can you, as a wife, expect to submit to the leadership of your husband, unless you are willing to submit to the leadership of Jesus Christ in your life? There is simply no other way to develop a home. The second principle in this paragraph is that the man is the leader and the responsible party in the relationship. He is prior, in terms of that he was created first. He is responsible in terms of the development of the relationship--it is he who takes the initiative, who leaves father and mother and who cleaves to his wife. Man is the leader. There is simply no way we can get away from that.

Now before we talk about what leadership is we need to state what it is not, because there are so many erroneous concepts attached to this Scriptural idea. Leadership is not dictatorship. It is not running our homes like a drill sergeant. It is leadership after the model of Jesus Christ, who loves the church to the extent that he was willing to give himself up for it. It is that kind of leadership.

It is not, as the world tells us, batting your wife around. I thank God, personally, for a father who never once touched my mother in anger. I never saw him strike her, never saw him raise his voice in anger against her. And I knew that if I ever hit my mother, or ever talked back to her, he would have belted me a good one. I knew it. He would never let my mother wait on us kids. If we wanted something from the refrigerator we had to get up and go after it. My mother was never a slave in our house. She was honored and revered and appreciated. You see, it is not leadership to be a tyrant and a dictator, to be lord in your home in such a way that you mistreat your wife. To me, frankly, nothing is more despicable than a guy who hits his wife. That is not leadership.

Leadership does not imply that men are superior to women, or that women are inferior to men. If you look carefully at 1 Corinthians 11, you can see that Paul delineates the lines of relationship which exist throughout the world. God the Father is God over all. The Son, Jesus Christ, is subject to him. The man is to be subject to Jesus Christ. The woman is to be subject to the man. That is a chain of command, but nowhere in that chain is there any implication that anyone is inferior to anyone else. Is Jesus inferior to the Father? No, he is equal to him. But he is subject to the Father. So in our homes the fact that we men are constituted by God as the leaders of this relationship in no way implies that we are superior, or that women are inferior.

Leadership does not mean that men make all the decisions. It does not mean that we are always right. It simply means that we are responsible for the way that home goes.

Leadership involves at least two basic aspects. It involves, first, a thoughtful, prayerful cultivation of our love

relationship at every level, physical, emotional, and spiritual. As leaders our greatest concern ought to be the physical and emotional well-being of our wife. Peter says that men are to love with their wives "according to knowledge," or according to reason, because women are "the weaker vessel." By that he doesn't mean that women are weaker physically; he means they are weaker emotionally. They have a tendency to act out of their emotions. Therefore men ought to act out of reason and give reasonable leadership in their homes.

That means, men, that our wife is not responsible for bucking us up and making us emotionally stable. We are to find our security from the Lord, But it is right for our wife to lean on us for her security. Therefore when you come home and find that everything has gone wrong--the kids have been climbing the walls, the washing machine broke down, all the bills came in--and your wife is down, it is wrong for you to get resentful that your wife has to look to you for emotional strength. "But," you say, "I've been out in the world fighting dragons all day and I have a right to come home and collapse in my easy chair and read the newspaper." We do not have that right!

Now, this is not to imply that a wife should not take an active, intelligent interest in her husband's work, sympathizing with him in his problems and rejoicing in his accomplishments. Nor do I mean to suggest that a wife should inflict upon her husband a long recital of trivial woes the minute he walks in the door. She has her own relationship with the Lord and she is responsible to rely upon him for her adequacy in ministering to the needs of her family. But our responsibility as a leader is to be aware of the weakness of our wife in this area and to come home and provide the kind of stable leadership that she needs.

We are also responsible for her spiritual well-being. Paul says in Ephesians 5 that Christ sanctified the church with the washing of water by the Word. And he equates the responsibility of the husband with that of Christ. The husband is to sanctify the wife by the washing of water with the Word. As you know, to sanctify someone means to put them to their intended purpose. We are to use the Word of God (which means that we must first know it ourselves) in such a way that our wife becomes the kind of person God intends her to be.

Yes, leadership means giving thought to the cultivation of your relationship. There is not one of us men who does not give careful attention to the cultivation of our vocation. We spend hours thinking and preparing to be an adequate businessman or professional or technician or whatever our job may be. But how much thought do we give to the cultivation of our home life? Someday we are going to stand before Christ, and he is not going to ask me how much I made a year. I don't think the subject will ever come up. He is not going to ask me if I became chairman of the board. He will ask me what happened in my home. That is where I'm responsible.

The second basic aspect of leadership is that it grows out of sacrificial love. This is embodied in the expression, "a man cleaves to his wife," which is expanded in Ephesians 5 where Paul discusses the requirement for the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church. We are to be leaders, and we are to be lovers. You can't have one without the other. Leadership without love is tyranny; love without leadership is mushy sentimentality. You must have both. You have to be both a leader and a lover. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. He did not give things: he gave himself.

I know a woman who has everything--from a material standpoint--that a person could want. She drives a Continental, has beautiful clothes, a lovely apartment. Her husband gives her everything, but he never gives of himself. She's the most miserable person I know. Our leadership demands that we give ourselves to our wives, whatever that entails--our time, our energy, our substance, yes--but ourselves we are to give as Christ gave.

And we are to make our love known. You don't have to read very far through the Scriptures to discover that God loves you. He manifested his love to you, and he keeps on manifesting his love to you. When was the last time that you told your wife that you loved her? "Five years ago. It was true then, and I haven't revoked it yet, so she must know it." Men, when we were taking these girls out we were zipping around the car opening doors for them. Now it's "What's the matter, you got a broken arm?" Candy? "Naw, she's too fat already." Flowers? "Save those for the funeral." When do we really give the kind of thoughtful attention that our wives need, so as to demonstrate our love as Christ consistently and constantly demonstrates his love for us?

Of course this involves submission on the part of wives. There can be no leadership without a willingness to be led. If you do not allow your husband to lead, you defraud him of his manhood, and you defraud yourself of your womanhood. A man cannot lead unless you are willing to allow him to fulfill his obligation of leadership.

There is another principle in verse 24:

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

A marriage relationship is intended to be permanent and exclusive. The man leaves father and mother, not in the sense that he forsakes love or reverence or care for them, but in the sense that he quits his dependence upon them. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5 that to fail to give our parents the honor that is due them is really a disavowal of our faith. We must honor and respect them. But in terms of dependence we are to abandon them in order to establish this other relationship which involves cleaving to our wives. The Hebrew word means "adhere to." In some places in the Old Testament it means "pursue after." It is a very strong term meaning "to stick together, no matter what."

You won't learn that from our culture today. The contemporary mentality is, "If it doesn't work, bail out. Pull the ripcord. Find somebody else." But the Scriptures say, at the very outset, that there must be a dogged determination to make this thing go. By God's grace we will make our homes a display piece. But it takes determination.

Have you read the book of Hosea lately? Hosea was married to a prostitute. She kept abandoning him and running away with other men. She was perpetually unfaithful. But God would say, "Go get her and bring her back." So Hosea would go get her and bring her back. And she'd run away again. "Hosea, go get her." And he would go after her again. He kept loving her, and loving her, until finally she submitted to his love. It demands commitment.

"But," you say. "I'll have to suffer!" So what's new? Peter says, in 1 Peter 2:21,

For to ills you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.

Paul says, in Philippians 1:29,

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for Him.

That's right, you will suffer! But by God's grace your marriage will change as you determine to fulfill your responsibility in your home.

I was talking to a pastor recently who was relating a counseling situation he had experienced. A woman came to him and said, "I want a divorce." He said, "Well, that's pretty radical. Why do you want a divorce?" "Oh, lots of reasons." He said, "Can you give me one?" "Oh, lots of them," The pastor said, "I tell you what to do, you go home and take a 3x5 card and list all the reasons why you want a divorce. Then come back and we'll talk it over."

The next week she came back with her little list. "Do you still want a divorce?" "Right!" "Why?" "He won't pick up his socks." The pastor was incredulous. "Your husband won't pick up his socks?" "Right, that's number one!" You laugh, but do you know that every day in our community people are breaking up their homes over trivia like that? Because they are not committed! They are not willing to cleave to one another.

There is a very important principle in verse 25:

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed,

There are two interpretations of that statement. The obvious one is that they were not ashamed of their sexuality. This was before the fall, before sex became the twisted, kinky thing it is in all too many people's minds today. They accepted their sexuality. They were not ashamed of it. But beyond that there is a simple understanding. They were open and honest with one another. They didn't try to cover up. They weren't defensive. After the fall they put on fig leaves and tried to hide their nakedness, tried to pose and to be something that they weren't. But before the fall they were open. They communicated, they shared. They didn't hide anything away.

We stuff grievances way back down deep inside. We do it all the time, because we are afraid we will disrupt the unity of our home. We think we ought to operate under the policy of "peace at all costs." And so instead of quarreling we stuff it all down inside. And we stuff, and we stuff, and hide away all the little resentments and annoyances that take place day after day until finally something happens to trigger an explosion and it all comes out. And it all comes out wrong. We say things that we never meant to say, things our partners never forget.

Why? Because we aren't honest. We don't really deal with problems in our lives. We just bury them away instead of exposing them to the light of the Word of God and dealing with them in an atmosphere of forgiveness and understanding and sensitivity. We must be naked and open.

There is one final principle here. All this is a process. It is not something which happens immediately. You notice that verse 24 says that the man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. Nothing magical happens when you say, "I do." There are no ninety-day wonders in this realm. I think that is what I anticipated--that we'd walk down together and say the magic words and something would happen so that immediately all conflict would dissipate and for the rest of our lives we would live happily ever after. It might be like that in fairy tales, but it didn't work that way in our marriage. It is a process of becoming what God intends you to become, and it will continue until the day you die. You will never stop learning and growing in this area.

It is a walk, and in any walk there are failures. I have been interested to watch Joshua, our little ten-month-old boy, learn how to walk. The other day he was peering out through the bars of his little cage and he saw his two brothers running through the house, one with a football under his arm. You could just see the wheels turn in his mind. He thought, "Oh, boy, football!" So he grabbed the top of the playpen, vaulted over, and landed on the floor. He ran across the living room and out the front door and he's been out there kicking the football ever since.

You might expect that (he's a very exceptional child!) but it didn't work that way. No, he started out by crawling, and now he drags himself up on furniture, and he rakes all of Carolyn's things off the shelves. He can walk only with support. He takes a step, then he crashes. He gets up and takes another step, and he crashes again. There is failure after failure, but he's learning how to walk! Suppose, after that first step when he just landed flat on his face, he had sat down, dusted himself off and said, "Aw, Dad, I just wasn't intended to walk!"

But isn't that the way we so often approach life, in our Christian walk and in our marriage? We are making progress but a big failure suddenly hits us. We say, "Oh, good night! I'm right back where I started. I might just as well flick the whole thing in. I'm never going to achieve any measure of success in my home." But it is a walk! And walking involves failure. You will fall flat on your face time and time again. But by God's grace you will pick yourself up, dust yourself off, claim his forgiveness, and walk on in power. And you will discover that God will begin to deal with areas in your marriage which are nettlesome and bothersome to you.

Peter says we are "joint heirs of grace." That is a great expression! Grace means that there is not one of us here whose home is so good that God is impressed by it, but that neither is there any one of us here whose home is so bad that God cannot set it right. He will. Our homes are intended to be visual aids, demonstrating the relationship between Christ and his church. And by God's grace, as we learn what it means to obey him, they will be that.

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