

## Link FM - The Family – Chapter 1

Last year we finished the series on the Grace of God. I have been praying about the new series and would like us to look at the family as part of God's plan, and the different aspects and challenges we face in a family. Today we will give a broad overview of the family, marriage and child raising, but will continue to go into these in much more detail in the following sessions.

Firstly, we must recognise that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is the first picture to us of a loving and powerful union and we can see the power of such a relationship. We know that God planned the family and His will is for a family to have a mother and a father in a loving relationship and obedient, contented children as the fruit of their union. Today very few whole families exist, either the husband/father is absent, or divorce has brought brokenness and hurt and new challenges to parents and children alike. It is said that a nation is only as strong as its family units. In all cultures today, the family is an endangered species, and modern society is beginning to believe that it is not so important anymore.

In God's eyes, our first responsibility of love, care and ministry is to our family. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* And the family is where God planned for us to be loved and cared for. Psalm 68:5 says, *“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.”* So we should look out for single people and love and care for them, too.

Kenneth Walker in his book, “Marriage”, says, *“The family is a social necessity as well as a biological fact; and*

*marriage is an essential safeguard to the welfare of children.* Marriage, is a covenant commitment to faithfulness, but today it is seen as outdated, and cohabitation seems to be the norm. There is a disintegration of moral values today, but God had a plan for a healthy family. Marriage was God's idea, and the safety and security and commitment of marriage is also where sexual relationships are most fulfilling. If you are living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, get married, so you can live in God's blessing and for the sake of your future family.

It is clear that the family faces an enemy, and an enemy must be resisted and fought. The enemy is Satan and he uses all his ammunition to undermine and break down this unit and unity of family. He knows that broken families will affect parents and children alike, and inevitably lead to further problems as a result.

By God's grace, my husband and I have been married now for 28 years and we have 4 children. Our eldest daughter is 23, working towards her Goldsmith papers. Our son started his 4<sup>th</sup> year studying medicine in Pretoria. Our second son is doing a Christian gap year at Jeffreys Bay, and our last son is in Grade 10. As a family we have faced great times and difficult times, and sometimes we've failed horribly, and some lessons we are still learning. But, together, we will encourage each other with helpful principles to enrich our marriages and help us in the raising of our children.

Let us highlight a few general pointers of a healthy family:

- 1) The best way a family is to survive is if we know God, and have the right order of authority. Ephesians 5:22 says that Christ is to be the head of the family, as he is the head of the church, and then the husband should submit to Him, and the wife is to submit to the husband and the children to the

parents. We know that when we speak of submission of women to their husbands, many hackles rise, as this makes us think of a subservient role of a woman in the kitchen. But this has often been taken out of balance, and proposed to remove all opinion and perspective from a wife, often with no love and understanding from the husband to his wife. But at face value, “submission” is what the Bible says. It goes on to say however, that the husband must be willing to lay down his life for his wife as Christ did for the church. That is the context in which wifely submission will work most effectively. We need God's Spirit and God's grace to live God's way.

2) Then, we must believe that children are a gift from the Lord and are given to us to train up and prepare for life. So, parental authority is necessary. Children should be taught to respect the authority of their parents. This is created in an atmosphere of love and discipline. Ephesians 6:1-4 says, “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother'*”. And then it says, “*Fathers, do not exasperate(or embitter) your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*” Again, these 2 verses balance each other and make submission and training possible. Though we may know this truth, we often find children have little respect for their parents, and also find little training and instruction by the parents to their children. We will be looking into this more deeply in the coming sessions, too.

We as parents need to hold our kids close and then let them go – gradually set them free. If we fail to release them, it is a certain pathway to rebellion. We need the balance not to remove authority too early, and yet to grant our children more freedom and responsibility each passing year, so that when they get beyond our control, they will no longer need it. We need God's wisdom, and need to keep the Bible as our standard in our homes, a manual from the One who planned the family.

3) We know that the basis of the family is the relationship between the husband and wife, the father and mother. If this marriage relationship is weak, then there will be resulting problems in the lives of the children, too. So we will also be looking at ways to build

stronger marriage relationships. I am sure we are all aware of the enemy's attack on marriages, and this is an area where we all need a lot more encouragement and wisdom and prayer.

It is said, that fulfilling marriages don't just happen. There are proven principles essential to develop warm and loving relationships between a husband and a wife. Many of the problems couples face are due to one simple fact, that we forget that men and women are totally different. Gary Smalley in his book, *"For better or for best"*, says the physical differences are not the main ones, but also mental and emotional differences, sexual differences and intuitive differences. We, women, seem to be more personal than men, with a deeper interest in people and feelings, while men tend to be more pre-occupied with practicalities and facts. And because of a woman's emotional identification with people and places, she needs more time to adjust to change than a man does for example. Ask God for His grace and wisdom to build your marriage.

4) We need to be praying much for our families, otherwise the devil will push open the door and bring in his destruction. Ask God to protect your marriage, your children, and that He would bring breakthrough where there are difficulties or problems. We can trust Him. Commit yourself to pray for your marriage partner, your children, on a regular basis – maybe as you iron their clothes, or lay the table, or as you prepare their food. There are wonderful books available to help us pray, like the books by Stormie Omartian found in most Christian bookshops, *"The Power of a Praying Parent"*, *"The Power of a Praying Wife"*, *"The Power of a Praying Husband"*.

Let us close in prayer for our families. *"Father, the family was your plan, so we want to pray for every family represented by each listener. We pray the blood of Jesus on us as parents and every child you have given us. Lord, we want Godly order in our families, where You are the head, and where there is love, submission and respect. We pray that our marriages will be strengthened and blessed. We need your wisdom as we learn your way of love in all our relationships. Help us to teach our children the ways of God. Thank you, Lord. Amen"*.

God bless you till next week, as we continue our study of enriching our family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 2

Last week we started a new series on the Family, which includes marriage and the raising of children. We said that we must have Godly order in our families, and that we are to teach our children to respect parental authority. They should honour us as parents, while we train them up in the ways of God. We also said that a happy marriage is the basis of a happy family, and that we should be praying much for our families, otherwise the door is left open for the enemy to come in and bring his destruction.

There is much printed material relating to raising children and enriching marriages. But many of us are just too busy to get into heavy books, and we just try to do what we can, and hope for the best. Yet, most of us fail to make this family thing work the way it was supposed to. I trust these teachings will highlight some important facts to help us all.

We will look more closely at marriage today, and how to live in a love relationship, because it is in harmony with God's will. God ordained marriage for our blessing, and gave us the potential to love. He is the one who knows best how to build love into our marriage. In every culture, God's principles will work, because it is unshakeable truth. Dr Ed Wheat has counselled hundreds of couples, and in his book "Love Life", says heartbreaking, perplexing and complicated issues can arise between two people in marriage, but "*None are beyond solution.*" The relationship you would like to have can happen, but it won't happen automatically. We need to learn how to love in such a way that there will be a responding love from our partner. Love can come to us at any age in any stage of our marriage, if we are willing to open the door and invite it into our relationship. Even if it is one-sided, we can cause it to happen. What does the Bible

say about marriage?

In Genesis 1-3 we learn that God created male and female, and that union between them was meant to bring joy. Marriage was designed by God to meet the problem of loneliness. God said to Adam, *"It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* Eve was taken from Adam's side to compliment him, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically. But this does not always happen. Dr Wheat says, *"To the degree to which you do not meet your mate's needs, the two of you are still alone."* But God's plan is completeness for the two together.

When Eve was taken out of Adam's side, he said, *"This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh."* He was saying, *"She will be as dear to me as my own flesh. She is perfectly suited to me."* So marriage was planned to bring happiness, not misery. Chapt 2:24 says, *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* We must understand that marriage begins with leaving: leaving all other relationships, even the close ties of parents. Though the man should still honour them, he is no longer under their authority, for now he assumes headship of his own family.

Dr Wheat says, *"This means that both the husband and wife need to refocus their lives on each other, rather than looking to another person, or a group, or things, to meet their emotional needs – even a career, house, hobbies, talents, or even church work. Whatever is important should be less important than their marriage."* We know that if a husband puts his business or career ahead of his wife, nothing he can buy with money will really please her. Sometimes sport or television or friends can take priority above the partner and it will inevitably lead to an emotionally bankrupt relationship.

It goes on to say that the man will be united to his wife, he will cleave to her. This is directed to the husband especially, although it applies to both partners. Cleaving means *“to adhere, to stick, to be attached by some strong tie”*, suggesting determined action. In Greek the word means *“to cement together”*, to be welded together, wholehearted commitment in every area of life. Thus everything that puts distance between the two – mentally, emotionally and physically – should be avoided, because it breaks the divine pattern for marriage. Every couple needs to face the dividing issues.

Then it says, *“and they will become one flesh”*. For this to take place, the marriage must be monogamous. It means all adultery and promiscuity are ruled out. Jesus also emphasised that the TWO become one flesh. Proverbs 6:32 says, *“A man who commits adultery, lacks judgement; whoever does so destroys himself.”* The Bible speaks of sexual union as *“knowing”* each other – which includes both physical knowledge and an intimate personal knowledge of each other. They become one. That is why divorce has such a devastating effect – not two people are left, but two fractions of one. This one-ness is compared to Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. (Eph 5:21)

But you may be asking, does that plan still work if there are one million divorces in America in one year, and almost as many in South Africa? In the book of Mark, the Pharisees tried to draw Jesus into a controversy about divorce. But Jesus focused on the Scriptures and went back to the original design in Genesis, and ended by saying, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”* (Matt 19:6.) He emphasised the permanence of marriage and told us to honour it as God intended it.

According to Dr Wheat, *“Retaining the idea of divorce in one's emotional vocabulary – even as a last-ditch option – will hinder the total effort one would otherwise pour into one's marriage. Keeping*

*divorce as an escape clause indicates a flaw in one's commitment to each other. Even a tiny crack can be fatally widened by the many forces working to destroy families.”* So let us determine to preserve our marriage at all costs, and put away even that possibility.

The opposite of intimacy is separateness. We all have tendencies to withdraw from each other, to be separate, to concentrate on our own needs and wants, to live for ourselves, to blame those closest to us in order to protect or excuse ourselves, and to do that which displeases God. Sin creates a false hunger, not for communion and fellowship, but for individuality of a destructive nature. Remember that in this first marriage, the very first family, division, blame, and hatred sprang up. That is where Satan began his deadliest work, and why a strong happy marriage is not a matter of course, but has to be contended for, and it must be kept in constant repair.

We have all been guilty of pulling away when the going gets tough. And all over we see selfish individuality leading to separateness between husbands and wives. The sin in the garden of Eden brought separation – from God and from each other. For some it may even lead to a physical separation, but that seldom enhances a troubled marriage. Dr Wheat says, *“Separateness is satanic”*. He says, *“Through Jesus Christ, Christians have the pattern for the ideal marriage, but also the purpose to fulfil that pattern and the power to do it.”*

May we approach our marriage with a new resolve to see ourselves not as separately from our partners. May we have a new determination to do all we can to build a love relationship in keeping with God's plan. Let us wives choose to be a helper to our husband – the Holy Spirit also is called a Helper. Believe that it will be possible for you to improve your marriage and remold it in the shape of the original design.

Let's pray, *“Lord Jesus, you intended for my marriage to be a blessing. I resolve to leave the people or things that separate and bring division in my marriage relationship. Lord, protect my marriage with the blood of Jesus. Thank you, that you give me the power to love and cleave to my partner. Teach me how to do it more effectively. Amen.”* God bless you till next week as we continue our study of enriching our family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 3

Last week we looked at the Biblical view of marriage from Genesis. Marriage means leaving all other people or things that have become your priority or is meeting your emotional needs. Then we are to cleave, cement ourselves to our partners, and not even allow the word “*divorce*” in our emotional vocabulary. We said that individualistic separation will bring division in a marriage, but God can give us the love and power to keep us together.

Today we look specifically at love in a marriage relationship. The behaviour and responses of the majority of married couples are influenced not by truth, but by their misconceptions about love. Your impressions of love may be from what you understood it to mean from your childhood, or the media. Some people feel one can fall in love and equally fall out of love again, and then it would be time to move on and change partners. Or love might be a mystery to you, or you base it on your teenage love affairs or infatuations, but that will certainly not be strong enough to build a lasting relationship. Or our cultures have influenced us, or we received flawed views of love from movies, television, advertisements, magazines or novels, or examples of celebrities. The point is, people spend their lifetimes looking for love and often leave a trail of broken relationships in their wake, without finding the real thing.

We are drawing from Dr Wheat's teachings in his book, *Love Life*. Again he tells us to look at the Bible as our source book on love. If our concept of love affects our marriage, it will shape our behaviour and responses to our partner, and determine our emotional well-being and future happiness. So we need to know what real love is. The whole Bible is a love story of God's love to us that we can

learn from, and Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice to bring us love and joy. Our conclusion is therefore that: *Love is always doing the very best for the object of one's love* – so there is nothing mysterious about that. But what motivates us to want to do the best for the one we love? Again the Bible shows us that love recognises a unique value in a person and chooses to affirm the value in that person. So, love is a choice. Read the book of Proverbs for practical advice, and Song of Songs, an example of passionate fulfilling love.

Many may think that love comes naturally, but the truth is that love is costly. If we do what comes naturally, we will be wrong almost every time. Dr Wheat says, *“Love is an art to be learned and a discipline to be maintained.”* We have to learn how to build these principles into our marriage on a daily basis. But it is worth the effort.

Let us first understand that love is not an uncontrollable feeling that comes and goes depending on the mood. The truth is, that love is an active power that you were meant to control by your own will. If you have the love of God poured into your heart, you can choose to love and do what is necessary to restore your marriage, and you can refuse to be enslaved by passing emotions.

The media measures lovableness by popularity, sex appeal and the use of the right products, but God's Word shows us that the real secret to being loveable to your marriage partner, involves learning to give love rather than striving to attract it – a powerful secret that relatively few people know.

This may sound mechanical for you and far from a romantic feeling, but it is not. It points the way to a genuine love that should lead to enough satisfaction and romance for any individual. If love is only based on feelings, it is empty

infatuation or sentimentality. Let us build on the truth and choose to love our marriage partner by deliberately giving of ourselves to the other. And good feelings will come if they are lost, as you change your behaviour. If we learn how to truly love our spouse, even the driest of marriages can end up with husband and wife deeply in love with each other.

Dr Wheat emphasizes the 5 different Greek meanings of love used in the Bible. The first is epithumia, which means a “*strong desire*”, and in marriage it refers to a physical desire for each other that expresses itself in pleasurable sexual lovemaking. Sex is a definite indicator of the health of your marriage, and an important aspect of your relationship. It can be improved through added knowledge, greater understanding and heightened sensitivity to each other. Mark Gungor in his book, “*Laugh your way to a better Marriage*”, emphasises this aspect in marriage as one which affects other areas as well. You might get that book as a help to bring this area back into a happy balance.

The next Greek meaning is eros, as a sensual love, a yearning to unite with and the desire to possess the beloved. It is romantic, passionate and sentimental love. This love is the kind of love that lovers fall into and write songs and poetry about, and adds colour to a marriage, but it cannot last a lifetime all by itself. This kind of love is wholly emotional and cannot be called at will, but it will come as a sure response when all the other loves of marriage are set in motion.

The third love of marriage, storge, is the comfortable and natural affection and sense of belonging to each other. It is also shared by parents and children or brothers and sisters. In marriage, storge meets the need that we always belong, knowing that our partners care and are loyal. It is an emotional refuge, an atmosphere of security in which the other loves can safely flourish.

The fourth love of marriage is phileo, which cherishes and has warm affection for the beloved, but always expects a response. It is

the love of sharing each others' thoughts, feelings, plans and dreams – also time and interests. It is communication, friendship and closeness. If you are trying to restore love to your marriage without much co-operation from your partner, you can aim for *phileo* on your part, looking forward to an eventual response when the other Biblical concepts have been put into practice.

Then the last more spiritual meaning of love, is *agape*, the totally unselfish love that has the capacity to give and keep on giving without expecting in return. *Agape* values and serves, and is shown most clearly in God's love for mankind, in Jesus, who loved and gave his life to save us from sin and death. For those who right now are trying to save your marriage and restore the love you lost, *agape* is the one you can bring into your marriage immediately. It is exercised as a choice of your will, and does not depend on feelings. It is a love of action, not emotion, and focuses on what you do and say, rather than how you feel. This love can go on when every other love fails. No matter how unlovable the other person, *agape* can keep on flowing and is as unconditional as God's love for us. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us the picture of that standard of love, but we need God's love poured into our hearts to be able to love like that. It is a mental attitude based on a deliberate choice of the will. This is beautifully portrayed in the dvd, "*Fireproof*", which you must see.

It is God's will for you to love each other with an absorbing spiritual, emotional and physical love that continues to grow throughout your lifetime together. In summary then: *epithumia* – physical desire or sexual love; *eros* – the sensual, romantic love; *storge* – caring, affectionate love; *phileo* – friendship love; and *agape* – unselfish, unconditional, giving love. So trust God to work in you and with you as you determine to love and build your marriage God's way, with more and more of His giving, *agape* love.

Pray with me as we close, "*Father, I pray that my marriage will be rich with every kind of love. Pour your love into my heart, so that I can love my marriage partner with your agape love. I receive your love by faith and I choose to love my spouse with that love. And I trust you to enrich and build our marriage to be a blessing to each other and an example to our children. Thank you, Lord. Amen.*"

God bless you till next week as we continue our study of enriching our family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 4

Last week we said that sometimes we have a wrong concept of love, and we spoke about the 5 different loves in marriage. The first, *epithumia*, speaks physical desire or sexual love; *eros* is the sensual, romantic love; *storge* is the caring, affectionate love; *phileo* is friendship love; and *agape* is the unconditional, giving and forgiving love. We said God will work in us to love and build our marriage God's way.

John Eldridge in his book, "Love and War" says, "*Marriage is fabulously hard. Everybody who has been married knows this... for heaven's sake, bring together a man and a woman – two creatures from separate solar systems – and ask them to get along for the rest of their lives under the same roof....and toss into that constantly-in-your-face-experience, all our fears, our wounded hearts, our self-centredness, our self-doubt and our resolute commitment to self-protection ... The fact that any marriage makes it is a miracle of the first order.*" Because marriage is hard, sometimes painfully hard, one's first battle is not to lose heart. We all do – it happens to the best of us. But we must recover that desire for the love that is deep in our hearts. And consider that God could bring us our heart's desire. He is the God of hope. He is, after all, the God of the resurrection. Nothing is impossible for him. So give your desires to him and remember that a better marriage is worth fighting for.

Today we look at a secret of staying in love, or restoring a lost love, and that secret is intimacy. Dr Wheat says, "*Intimacy is the special quality of emotional closeness between two people in which both are constantly alert to the well-being of the other.*" It can also mean to understand and to be fully understood by one who cares for us deeply. Without intimate relationships we tend to get lonely and

become depressed. To experience intimacy is to touch – emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. But it takes time and will to create a long-term intimate marriage.

We start with physical touching. We refer here to non-sexual caresses between husband and wife, holding hands, snuggling up, sitting and sleeping close to each other. We all have a basic need for the warmth, reassurance and comfort of closeness. If this area in your relationship with your spouse has been lost over time, begin doing these things, weaving simple physical touch into the fabric of your daily life. When you are both going your separate ways for the day, a hug and kiss is so beautiful, also when you come together in the evening. Doing this habitually will enrich the sensations of warmth and security. This is the tangible base of an intimate relationship. This kindles the flame of romantic love between husband and wife. Anyone can learn to do this. Dr Wheat says, couples must break the habit of using touch exclusively as a signal for sex. Therapists have found that actions do change attitudes, and that physical closeness should be resumed to what it was when courting.

Then we look at touching emotionally. This involves the meeting and merging of two different sets of emotions. It can certainly be a challenge, harmonising two personalities, masculine and feminine, that are so different. But emotional intimacy begins when two people deliberately share the same world – sharing time, interests, feelings, thoughts, goals, and ideals. Unless we work at this, we will soon live in separate worlds. We both need to be willing to communicate with each other, and share our experiences, dreams, fears and secrets. This can only grow in a place of safety, so if husband and wife are afraid of hurt, rebuff or criticism, it will be difficult to touch and share freely. Trust will have to be established again, as we do what 1 Peter 4:8 says, “*Love each other deeply, as love covers over a multitude of sins.*”

So we have to overlook mistakes and never criticise, and always encourage and give our partner the gift of sympathetic understanding. We can all improve on this one.

Another rule of trust should be to never let our partner down in something that really matters to him or her. There needs to be realistic expectations from each other, which requires dialogue. John Powell says, *“In dialogue there are no winners and losers, only winners. Neither partner is required to give up or give in, but only to give of himself. This is true sharing.”* We need to remember when we are talking freely, that our partner does not feel rebuked or criticised. And be willing to show your vulnerable side. Remember, that silence is almost always a negative feedback, unless accompanied by a non-verbal signal, like a smile.

This would of course mean that emotional conflict must be settled quickly. We remind ourselves of Ephesians 4:26 that tells us, *“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”* and Col 3:13 says, *“Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.”* We know that conflicts are inevitable, but they become problems only when they are not quickly and lovingly resolved. Real love will let anger go quickly in order to feel close to each other again. And we know that we all need to readily admit when our behaviour was less loving than it should have been, and give a sincere, *“I am sorry.”* Keeping up an intimate relationship is much easier that catching up after years of emotional distance.

One of the hindrances to emotional intimacy can be one's in-laws if they are interfering in any way. Though we want to keep a good relationship with them, physical distance may be necessary if there is too much time spent with them at the cost of each other. Also emotional or financial dependence on a parent does not make for a healthy marriage. We looked at the leaving and cleaving in Genesis.

Then, we need to make every effort to build our lives together, and not separately. And of course the TV, though enjoyable, can also begin to affect that emotional intimacy, as no sharing, giving or receiving happens when our eyes are glued to the set. Let us

deliberately and regularly set aside time to be with each other, because without intimacy, one or both may be strongly tempted to seek it elsewhere. So invest in emotional intimacy and find happiness that carries with it no bitter regrets.

Thirdly we look at touching – mentally. This is coming to agreement on all the important issues in our lives, and setting goals together and then accomplishing them together. This includes the whole area of budgeting and facing financial difficulties together. We need to warn each other of the “*debt trap*.” 50% of divorces are due to financial disagreements. Probably most couples today face the gnawing reality that their money just won't go round meeting the needs they have. This can be a very difficult issue to work on together. But to be financially free, requires two basic decisions: 1) Decide together not to spend what you do not have and 2) Trust God instead of trusting a loan. Unless the two of you develop the right attitudes together, finances will always be a divisive factor in marriage, no matter what your economic level. This is an important step in intimacy growth.

Then lastly, touching – spiritually. My husband and I have chosen to root our marriage in the Lord and we have proved that without that foundation, our marriage would probably not have made it. Once you receive God's life and make Him your final authority, you will find that He can restore and build your marriage to be a blessing and help you repair it when you both hurt each other. Prayer together, and worshipping at a local church together, will draw any couple closer. If we look at a triangle with God at the top and husband and wife at the base corners, the closer one gets to God the closer one gets to each other.

Let's pray as we close, *“Father, your will is for our marriages to be intimate and blessed. We trust you to help us build into our relationship, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual intimacy, to bond us together for a lasting, fulfilled marriage. We want to draw closer to you, and in so doing, come closer to each other. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your present help in our lives. Amen.”*

God bless you till next week as we continue our study of enriching our family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 5

Last week we spoke about marriage and the secret of staying in love, which is intimacy. To experience intimacy is to touch – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Physical touch and closeness woven into our daily lives; emotional touch when two people deliberately share the same interests, feelings, thoughts, goals, and ideals; and mental touch is coming to agreement on the important issues, and accomplishing them together, eg financial matters. And then spiritual touching is building our lives together on God as the foundation, and praying and worshipping together.

Today we look at a different perspective of marriage. It may be comforting for you to know that every marriage faces their set of struggles. But why does “love” so quickly turn to “war” between husband and wife? Yes, we do have an enemy that is determined to destroy us. But we also have our selves and our spouse to contend with – each of us has a history, a personality and a unique approach to make life work. John & Stasi Eldredge, in their book, *“Love and War”*, say that putting two different people together in marriage, *“is like mixing oil and water, or something more combustible.”*

I like to go to bed late and he likes to go to bed early. I like to see my family on holiday, he hates to see family on holiday, I like modern Christian music, he likes the music of the 70's! I like driving with the windows closed, he likes to drive with them open. And we live together. Sometimes couples drive each other crazy simply by being themselves. But learning to live with our opposite and all their little foibles, is part of learning to love. We all have got corners that need to be sanded and rough edges smoothed. For this wonderful process, God gives us - each other in marriage. And God

uses our marriage to shape us into more loving people. We know that opposites attract, and God is in that. Believe that He is the author of your marriage. He planned it.

But often each of the two have some brokenness, with a history to it, wounds of disappointment, or feelings of abandonment due to a father's addictions, or other sad experiences from the past. John Eldredge says, *“Our brokenness combines with our sin, and produces a style of relating, an approach to life, which to us feels so utterly justified and so perfectly reasonable, but in fact it is the very thing that will destroy us and all those around us ... Our mutual brokenness plays off each other so perfectly that it is frightening. It is like throwing a dog and a cat in a dryer!”*

Eldredge asks, why would God do such a thing as putting two opposite people in a marriage together? We are lured into marriage, through love and sex and loneliness, but then God uses it to transform us.

Like Adam, a man has been given a strength for the benefit of others, an inner strength. But when a man fails, either he becomes passive and silent, or he becomes domineering and violent. Either he doesn't offer his strength or he uses it in harmful ways. Like Eve, a woman was endowed with beauty and an ability to support – an inner beauty expressed in tenderness and vulnerability, and a gift to care and nurture. But when a woman fails, she tends to become either controlling or desperately needy. Either she refuses to offer vulnerability and support, or she asks her man to fill the ache in her soul, which he cannot do.

We all have ways we “do” life – this makes up our personalities. We can call it *“our style of relating”*, and this style colours the way we work, the way we love, how we respond, the way we handle pressure, and so on. This style

is borne out of brokenness and sin, and we are usually deeply devoted to our style and we have no intention of giving it up, even for love. So God creates an environment where we have to – it's called marriage.

You see, God knows that until we deal with our brokenness, our sin and our style of relating, we aren't going to be happy, nor those around us.

Men must come to face their style as men, where they are passive and where they are domineering, harsh or violent. As women, we have to face our style, where we are controlling and where we are desperately clingy. As God reveals these things, we make deliberate choices to turn from our style of relating and we make deliberate choices to love. A good conversation to have with your spouse is to hear how he or she describes your way of relating, not in judgement and accusation, but with truth spoken in love – to help you understand and love each other better.

It would also be very helpful for you both to know the story of each other's lives. Pieces of the puzzle of each others' personalities will begin to fit. You can come alongside your spouse and help each other to overcome difficulties much more tenderly when you know where they are coming from. Ask questions. Listen. Invite God to guide and fill the time. It will bear so much good fruit.

Sometimes we may need a Spirit-filled counsellor to help us on our journey to full healing, so God can change us and we can change the way we relate to each other. When we receive healing, we can eventually see those who have wounded us, with new eyes. Your journey may involve forgiving people. It may also need you to renounce vows you made long ago, in your pain, or in your anger, maybe to never need anyone in your life again, or never to trust a man again, or never to show your vulnerability, or never to let anyone tell you what to do.

But in our every day lives, we need to learn how to love, learn to make choices in order to love the other deeply.

Matthew 7:3-5 says, *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye”, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”*

Eldredge says there are two kinds of people in this world – the repentant and the clueless. Those who are open to looking at their life, and those who are not; people who know they need God to change them, and people who expect everyone else to change. We have great hope for the first group. The second group are choosing ignorance, and the damage they are doing will continue, and will lead to disaster.

This is why the *“apply-some-principles”* approach to marriage improvement does not work. As long as we choose to turn a blind eye to how we are fallen as men and women, and to the style of relating we have forged out of our sin and brokenness, we will continue to do damage to our marriages. Then add to that, hopelessness that things will never change, and cynicism and resignation. What are the chances then of a lasting marriage?

Let's ask God, *“How do I need to change?”* Amazing things begin to happen when we come to embrace the truth that this is about our transformation. All the happiness we long for, waits upon our willingness to be made holy, upon our learning how to love. And there is no place on earth quite like marriage for the kind of transformation God is after.

Pray with me as we close, *“Father, I know that your plan is for me to deal with my sin and my brokenness. Come and show me where and how I can change. I give myself to you and trust your Holy Spirit to transform me, in order to love my spouse deeply from the heart. Bless my marriage to become an example of your grace, to my family and others. Thank you, Lord. Amen.”*

God bless you till next week as we continue our study of enriching our relationships in our families.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 6

Last week we said that marriage is God's plan for our personal transformation. When our brokenness and sin combine with our style of relating, then men can become either passive or domineering, and women can become controlling or emotionally clingy. But when we ask God to change us personally and our way of relating, our marriages will also begin to change.

Our most basic emotional need is to be loved by another, a love that grows out of reason and choice, someone who sees in me something worth loving. So how do we meet our spouse's deep, emotional need to feel loved? Many married couples say that their love is gone; their relationship is dead. They used to feel close, but not anymore. Does it mean that once the "in-loveness" wears off, we are faced with a life of misery with our spouse or must we jump ship and try again? But could it be that deep inside hurting couples exists an invisible "*emotional love tank*" with its gauge on empty? Could the misbehaviour, withdrawal, harsh words, and critical spirit occur because of that empty tank?

Today we draw from Gary Chapman's book, "*The Five Love Languages*". He says your emotional love language and the language of your spouse may be as different as Chinese is from English. You may be loving her with your love language, but she speaks another language and will always feel unloved. We must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love, and keep the other's love tank filled up. We will look at five of these different love languages.

The first love language is: **Words of Affirmation**. Proverbs tell us that the tongue has the power of life and death. If

words of affirmation is your spouse's primary love language, he will need verbal compliments, or words of appreciation to feel loved. Words are powerful communicators of love and are best expressed in simple straight forward statements of affirmation such as, "You look great in that outfit", "You made a wonderful meal", "I really appreciate your helping with the kids."

Another way is with encouraging words, saying that we believe in them to achieve a goal that they have. What often holds us back from our full potential, is courage, and we can learn to speak this love language of encouragement. Write down statements that you can use to build him/her up.

Love is also kind and has to do with the way we speak, our tone of voice, the manner in which we speak. "*A soft answer turns away anger*". It means we choose not to carry yesterday's failures into today, we choose to forgive and show mercy. Love makes requests, not demands. Words of affirmation can be spoken in front of others when he is present, or even when absent. We can even give them little notes of appreciation. Is this your spouse's main love language? Then learn to speak it regularly and see his love tank fill up. It will change an empty marriage.

The second love language is: **Quality Time**. This means giving someone your undivided attention, looking at each other and talking. Or it could be taking a walk, and talking. It is a powerful communicator of love. If this is your spouse's love language, ask what they would like you to do together. Include two of these a week to start with. It could mean that you two go away camping for a weekend, or getting a baby-sitter for the two of you to go out to dinner. Even just sitting down at night asking and listening about her day (without watching TV at the same time) will make your spouse feel that she is valuable to you. A central aspect is togetherness

with focussed attention. The activity is incidental, but it means time with each other in a common pursuit. It communicates that we care about the other and that we enjoy being and doing things with each other. Dialogue is crucial, and means listening to what she says with eye contact, and then relaying it back to her - saying what you sense she is feeling. It does not mean giving advice or solutions, but listening and interpreting her emotions will give her a sense of being understood, supported and loved.

The third love language is: **Receiving Gifts**. A gift is universally seen as the language of love, and is something you can hold in your hand and say, "*Look, he was thinking of me.*" Visual symbols of love are more important to some people than others. It does not matter if it does not cost money. Gifts can be found or made. Stopping along the roadside and picking a wildflower can be an expression of love, or a card can be an expression of love. If you cannot afford it you can cut a heart out of a piece of paper and write on it, "*I love you*", without any cost at all. Or plant a flowering shrub or tree in honour of him / her.

Make a list of gifts your spouse has expressed excitement about over the years, maybe given by friends. Don't wait for a special occasion. If you are a spender, you will have little difficulty buying gifts for your spouse, but if you are a saver, you may find it difficult. Saving your money can become selfish, to give you emotional security, but investing in loving your spouse will be investing into your marriage and future. Then the best gift of all is the gift of yourself. Be there for her when she really needs you, whether it is a birth or a funeral, or an important occasion. If receiving gifts is your spouse's primary love language, begin with little, meaningful gifts, and see what happens in your marriage.

The fourth love language is: **Acts of Service**. The Bible says, "*Serve one another in love.*" This language is one that is a personal help of your load or your duties. You may feel that as a husband, it

is not your duty to vacuum a room, or to fix a broken pane, or you are doing enough by going out to work each day. But if you invest in doing something like that, it won't go unnoticed and will begin to make your spouse feel loved. Sometimes, just doing something with them is all they want – pick up the dish towel and dry the dishes with her. Take the hosepipe and wash the car with him. Or when your spouse is away, get the children to help you with some act of service and have a surprise waiting for him.

Discuss with each other what little things they would appreciate being helped with. Remember that requests give direction to love, but demands will stop the flow of love. No one likes to be forced to do anything. Learning this love language will require some of us to re-examine our stereotypes of the roles of husbands and wives, but it will be worth it. Speak his primary love language to him.

The last love language is: **Physical Touch**. This is a powerful vehicle to communicate love – holding hands, kissing, embracing, massaging his hands or back. If that is the primary language of your spouse, and you did not grow up in a touching family, you may need to learn to do it until it comes more naturally. Sit close together on the couch, hug each other when you go out. For some, touching their body is to touch them, and withdrawing from their body is to distance yourself from them emotionally. If your spouse's primary love language is physical touch, nothing is more important than holding her as she cries. In a time of crisis, more than anything, we need to feel loved, we can survive if we feel loved. For such a person, your words may mean little, but your physical touch will communicate that you care, and be remembered long after the crisis has passed, and equally your failure to touch may never be forgotten.

Reach out to your spouse and learn to speak their love primary love language, or even a 2<sup>nd</sup> equally dominant one. To give them again: either words of affirmation, or quality time, or receiving gifts, or acts of service, or physical touch. If you are not sure what her primary language is, notice what she does for you, which is a sign of what you should do for her. When you speak her primary love language, her love tank will fill up and your marriage will be blessed.

So God bless you till next week as we continue our study of enriching our marriages and family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 7

The last time we spoke about the 5 different love languages in marriage. We need to speak the primary love language of our spouse to effectively communicate our love to the person, in the way he or she understands. This will fill each other's love tanks, which then will bless our marriage. These are: Words of Affirmation; Quality Time; Receiving of Gifts; Acts of Service; and Physical Touch.

Today we look at conflict in marriage and how to deal with it. We may look at our spouse and sometimes see him/her as our enemy in life, but there is another enemy. We may have heard this, but somehow, we don't seem to hear it. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us, *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”* It might help us to think of Satan as a terrorist – cunning, dangerous, obsessed – looking to destroy whatever he can in your life.

Why is it certain subjects always result in arguments? Why is it every time you bring up the topic of money or her mother or your mother or your weight or how much time you spend at work – it all blows up in your face? You have stumbled into the place where the devil is working, and dealing with it means you pray directly against it.

But many of us don't live as if our marriage has an enemy. How many of us recognise what Satan is doing in our lives and actually pray against it on a daily basis? You have an enemy. Your marriage has an enemy, and the good news is, it is not your wife or husband, though it sure can feel that way, as you accuse each other!

John Eldredge in his book, *Love and War*, put the solutions to conflicts in marriage, simply like this: 1) *Find life in God* 2) *Deal with your brokenness* 3) *Learn to shut down the spiritual attacks that come against your marriage.*” He says the enemy often starts out by speaking lies into our minds, and we agree with his lies. It may start out as a thought, which we mull over and agree to again and again. It might be something like, “*He will never change*”, or “*I married the wrong woman*”, or “*He doesn't really love me*”, or “*We're just too incompatible*” or “*I won't risk being hurt again*”, or “*It's not worth the effort*”, or “*I just can't trust him again*”, or “*I'd be happier with someone else*”.

We don't recognise that these come from the pit of hell. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and was so convincing that he deceived a beautiful man and woman into betraying God, whom they walked with every day. Eldredge says, “*We tend to dismiss Adam and Eve as the idiots who got us all into this mess in the first place. But they had not experienced any wounding up to that point, they were man and woman in their glory, and yet they were deceived. It ought to give us all a healthy respect for what the enemy is capable of. Even the best of us can be taken in.*”

Satan wants us to agree with that subtle lie, to believe it and to go with the feeling. So we come under the spell of that agreement and the interpretation of events and it pretty much plays itself out and becomes self-fulfilling. If you agree that you married the wrong person, yours could very likely end in divorce over time. We need to recognise what is happening as the enemy presents an agreement, and make no room for it. Fight it, resist and send it packing to the outer reaches of hell. Recognise what is at stake here.

Ask the Lord what agreements you have been making about your marriage, about love, about your spouse. You may be

shocked to find out what you are nurturing in your heart. But as God reveals these agreements to you, you need to break them and renounce them.

That is our first step, but this subtle enemy seeks to devour. Jesus warned, he came to steal, to kill and destroy. (John 10:10) Why is it that often on your way to church together, you end up having an argument? Or when you plan an intimate time together, there is an interruption from that difficult family member on the telephone? Or your holiday trip together starts off with a heated conflict? Or you are about to have family devotions, and your child suddenly has a bad attitude. Or after the hurtful criticism from your wife, the sexiest thing starts tempting you at the office? Have you just accepted it or considered Satan's part in it?

The more we seek to make our marriage what it was meant to be, the more intense the opposition becomes. Though these attacks may surprise us, we ought to know better. But how do we handle them? The secret is: We need to maintain a united front. Satan first succeeded in breaking Adam and Eve's relationship with God, then with each other. His oldest trick is to divide and conquer. But one of the greatest secrets of the kingdom of God is the power of united prayer.

*Matthew 18:18-19 says, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."*

How powerful then when you are united as husband and wife, you are seen as one. The demons will shudder. We know that Jesus died and rose from the dead, and disarmed the enemy, and the Father gave Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth. He included us in that, as God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

The devil knows better than we do that when husband and wife stand together, they wield a great deal of power and authority. That is why you will not feel like praying and suddenly feel irritated at each other, or one of you will simply want to “*talk about it*”. Often that is the enemy's plan to prevent you from praying. But do it, pray, you will see results! You will have maintained a united front.

Now if your spouse is not an ally of yours or God, then take this word of hope in 1 Cor 7:12-14, “*If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*” So, even when only one spouse is walking with God, it has a powerful effect upon the other and their household.

Remember, the Israelites had to fight to get to the Promised Land, and they had to fight to get in, fight to clear it of enemies, and then fight to keep it so. And God is with us and fights for us. You need not be afraid of the fight. The battle can be won. Your greatest threat is to surrender without even striking a blow. Eldredge says, you can divide couples into 2 categories which will predict their future: those couples who are dealing with their brokenness and those who are ignoring it; and the most telling difference, those couples who understand that we are at war and need to stand together against the enemy, and those who refuse, for whatever reason, to face this fact.

So begin to pray together as a united front. We live in God's love story, set in a great and terrible war. Confront the true enemy and see your love story unfold. Let's pray together: “*Jesus, forgive me for giving place to destructive agreements with the enemy, in my heart. I renounce and break the agreement that ..... (the one you made). I ask for your light and for your love to come into these very places. Bring me back to what is true. And Lord, teach us how to fight the real enemy in our marriages, together, as a united front, with your authority. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*”

God bless you till next week as we continue enriching our marriages and family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 8

Last week we spoke about dealing with conflict in marriage. We said that our actual enemy is the devil who prowls around seeking which marriages to divide, to destroy and conquer. But we said, the first thing we must do is to renounce any agreements we have made with the enemy, about our spouse or marriage, and then to pray directly against his schemes, together, as a united front. When husband and wife stand together in prayer, it is an incredible power against the evil one, and we will see victory.

Today we look at our goals and plans for our marriage, together. Unless we have a common goal, we will see the mundane of life become our obsession and find that it becomes more and more meaningless. What happens is that the small unimportant issues become huge issues, and they begin to corrode our relationship, because we are not looking ahead in the same direction, to a common goal.

Marriage needs a mission. Eldredge says, *“The highest of all adventures are those where we find ourselves partnering together for a cause.”* In Gen 1:28 we read the story of Adam and Eve where it says, *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

God gave them a mission, together, and he blessed them. He makes it clear, *“You are in this together.”*

We conclude here that we are God's regents on earth, to bring his kingdom in all the many ways it needs to be brought. There is great fulfilment when we begin to realise that we have a role in God's great story, that there is

something we must accomplish in our lives. We have a mission we cannot fulfil without each other. That is God's gift to husband and wife.

Jesus came and took back his father's kingdom from the devil who had stolen it from Adam and Eve. Jesus was given all authority, and passed on the authority to us, to advance God's kingdom here on earth. We are not just waiting to catch a flight to heaven. Jesus said, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" (John 20:21)

We need to ask ourselves, "*What are our lives about?*" Our marriage is more than raising children or making a good home. Though this is our first calling, there is the danger that our the kids can become selfish, because we make them our only obsession. Then they leave the nest, and there is a huge chasm in our marriage. Most couples spend the best days of their lives just trying to make their home a nicer place. It is not that this is bad, but we as Christians have to reconcile it with Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:28-34 that we are not to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear. But we are to seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to us as well. Is not life more important than a new dishwasher or a new curtains? And why do we worry about matching towels or a bigger car? The pagans run after these things. Edgredge says, "*If our vision is too self-centred and too inwardly turned, like an ingrown toenail, it doesn't provide the sense of a shared mission God created us for.*"

In many marriages, boredom is the death knell and the precursor to an affair or an addiction. Finding a shared mission as a couple, is essential to a vibrant marriage, and that will take you to a new level of companionship. Our

hearts are made to live a life that matters, a life of significance. Surviving the week so you can hit the cinemas or restaurants at the weekend, or watch the latest sport, is not enough.

Begin to dream together. Frederick Buechner said, *“The place where God calls us, is the place where our deep joy and the world's deep hunger meet.”* Your mission together was planned in the heart of God. He brought you together for a reason, a purpose, a calling, where you need each other to share in His divine adventure. When you begin to do this, it will change and mature you and do more for your marriage than all of the holidays and dinners out, put together.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, *“Two are better than one ... if one falls down, his friend can pick him up ... two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”*. God is the third party here. Ask God what he has for you both. My husband and I are involved in a township church, and it has so enriched our lives, ministering there together.

But a dream or desire that is sometimes not shared by the other, need not be a threat in a marriage, any more than other friends need be a threat. But, *“we're in this mission together”*, will lift your marriage to a higher level, than merely playing house. You will no longer complain about who didn't put the lid on the toothpaste, because the two of you will be fighting to rescue women from the sex trade, or abandoned children, or the poor from the dumps.

Helping or ministering to anyone in need, with the love of God, together, will become a wonderful blessing in your marriage, not to mention the powerful impact on the lives of those you are touching.

One of the other keys to helping our marriages, is to be faithful in prayer together, as we reminded ourselves last week. It could even take the form of battle prayer, and as we win victories together, as a united front, we will see the enemy run! But we can take that a step

further and learn to listen to the voice of God - together. Making decisions in our families often lead to disagreements, or tension, manipulation, especially when it comes to the difficult issues, like money, family and parents. You both have different opinions, ways of approaching life. But Eldredge says, *"listening prayer will literally rescue the two of you in countless ways"*.

This may seem difficult and impossible at first, to hear what God says in the matter, and then both of you to hear the same thing! But God wants an intimate relationship with us and has made us his dwelling place, his temple. He can speak to both of us.

For us to hear him, we need to settle down, to quieten ourselves and to listen. Like the sheep hearing the voice of the shepherd and not the stranger in John 10. But it will take practice, hearing his voice. Sometimes it might just be an impression you get, a sense of what God is saying. Sometimes we will hear his voice internally. But we need to surrender all our own thoughts, fears and desires to Jesus, and yield to his guidance. And if one of you hears differently, you just quieten your hearts again and say, *"Lord, we're not sure what you are saying. Make it clear to us. We bind all confusion, and we silence every other voice."* And then listen again. Sometimes it may mean we give ourselves more time, and we get a sense of what God is saying while we are reading a Scripture, or through the counsel of a friend or pastor, or he just changes our hearts on a matter, and it's no longer an issue.

We must believe that God is much smarter than we are and knows the end from the beginning. He knows what is best when you face a difficult decision. Learn to ask for his counsel, learn to listen for his voice, together. God loves to speak to us and has many adventures for us in store. So ask Him.

Pray with me, *"Father, please show us in our marriage what your mission for us is, together, to make a difference in the lives of people. Teach us to listen to your voice, together, so we can draw on You for wisdom and help in our marriage. Thank you, that You will bless our marriage and will use us in Your Kingdom. Amen."*

God bless you till next week as we continue enriching our marriages and family relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 9

Last week we spoke about having a common goal or mission as a couple, which will greatly enhance a marriage. That was God's plan, to use both of you together in his Kingdom. We also said that we can learn to listen to the voice of God, together, when we need wisdom about important decisions, because God knows what is best for us.

But today we will be looking at some marriages that may already be in deep trouble, and humanly speaking there may be little hope. Today we speak to individuals who want to save their marriage at all costs, even though they have to do it alone, and even though they may be facing a divorce. Also, your partner may not even be open to saving the marriage. And everyone might be telling you to let him/her go, but your inmost desire is to see your marriage healed. You will need to face up to your own issues and to root your trust and your love in God and in His truth.

There needs to be full commitment to your spouse and to your marriage, regardless of how troubled your relationship may seem. We are not suggesting that the healing of a marriage is an easy process when one partner resists it. Peter in his first letter says, it is far better to suffer (if you must) for doing right, than for doing wrong. He makes it clear that God's favour and blessing shine on the one who patiently suffers to do his will. Whatever hurts you may experience on the way, in your struggle to healing, they will be less damaging than the long-term effects of divorce.

In this journey, you may become tired of rejection and not feel anything except a determination to do what the Bible says. Many can empathise with what you are going through: shock, hurt, rejection, emotional confusion, bitterness, and

pressures from all sides to make you want to give up. But hold on, and leave the results with God.

So our purpose today is to help you clarify your thoughts, stabilise your emotions and learn to behave in a consistent, purposeful way, which can save your marriage and bring a new dimension into your relationship. A marriage counsellor, Anne Carroll says, *“Most torn marriages are brought to new life, new vitality, by the interest, basically of only one party. I have seen numerous marriages saved when only one partner applied biblical principles in a wholehearted commitment to the partner and to the marriage.”*

So therefore, you need to **clarify your thoughts**. 1 Peter 1:13 says, *“Prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* Dr Wheat says, you need to prepare yourself mentally and spiritually for the challenges ahead. Begin to study the Word, and listen to it on your cellphone. One can download it for free on AudioBible on the internet.

In your heart you need to become committed to your marriage and your spouse, even though there may be another person involved. You have to first believe that God hates divorce as Malachi 2:16 says, and it continues, *“So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith.”* And we know the Scripture in Matt 19:6 when Jesus said, *“What God has joined together, let man not separate.”*

Fill your mind with positive Biblical input: Christian counselling, preaching and teaching, good books and God TV, that will affirm you in your commitment to your marriage. You need to maintain this total mental commitment to the truth or you will be swamped by waves of human opinion and bad advice, sometimes even from religious people.

Hold onto His wisdom, and trust Him with the results, as you live according to His Word. Your trust must not be in what you are doing, but must be in God and His Word. Learn to pray. Take authority over the enemy and rebuke and cancel his plans of destruction, on a daily basis.

The you must stabilize your emotions. Although you may feel you are drowning, the Word of God will be your life-line. It will show you how to let go the hurt and bitterness that will corrode your faith. Turn to the Lord when you have failed, or there is a set-back. Study the lessons God wants to teach you. This will bring an emotional stability to you when hope seems to be slipping away from under your feet.

Gloria Okes says, it is like flying by the instruments. When the clouds and fog become thick and there is a lot of turbulence, you learn to fly by the instruments. When the clouds of sorrow and confusion fill you view, learn to fly by the promises in the Word of God. With daily practice one learns not to panic or to rely on feelings, but to believe and hold onto the truths, which are dependable.

Then thirdly you come to the practical behaviour of learning to love your partner, day in and day out in such a way that there will be a responding love. Dr Wheat says, *“Remember, you become lovable by loving, not by straining to attract love. So be careful how you love.”* Loving does not mean clinging, complaining, or making demands. Moodiness, anger and emotional displays will only hinder your efforts. Loving God's way does not mean playing games, like trying to inspire jealousy or playing hard to get, or taking petty revenge. And read 1 Corinthians 13 on the “how” of loving.

We all hunger to be loved. And we want tangible proof that we ARE loved. But someone in the marriage has to take the initiative and begin the loving process. You must choose to love your partner, unilaterally at first, and show it by meeting not only his or her needs, but desires as well. Love in his or her love language of quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, words of affirmation and touch, or all

of these. These will inspire a responding love, and will bring to life your own feelings of love and keep them alive, because feelings are determined by actions, not the other way around.

If a troublesome relationship exists, there is the possibility that you must face that your partner may already be involved in another relationship. Dr Ed Wheat says, *“Be prepared to face that possibility, and prepare yourself emotionally and spiritually.”* That is the worst scenario you could face, and you will need to learn to forgive, if you are to be free to love and live and grow as a person. God can help you truly forgive. Early on you have to come to the powerful realization that YOU cannot reform your spouse, no matter how hard you try. Your only option is to become the husband or wife God has commanded you to be in Scripture, and to apply every principle of behaviour from the Word of God to the day-to-day challenge you will be facing.

Dr Wheat encourages you to avoid separation, because as long as the two of you live in the same household, you have the daily opportunity to put powerful biblical principles into action. Make him glad to be home. Don't try to reason or condemn or judge or scorn or rebuke, but accepting him the way he is, has power to bring him back to his senses. You need to prove over a period of time that you have changed before he will believe it, and that a new pattern has formed and things are not the way they used to be.

So be prepared to be “perfect” and be prepared to be rejected, knowing that God's grace is enough in your difficult situation. Hope all things, believe all things, endure all things. God is on your side, and he wants your marriage to be saved and He will help you in your persevering commitment.

Pray with me, *“Father, thank you that Your power of love is greater than any power of rejection. I cry to you to save our marriage. Help me to forgive and love my husband/wife in a Christlike way. I believe that You will change my heart. Give me the strength and faith to love and keep on loving, until you bring about change. Thank you that you are with me. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen.”*

God bless you till next time as we continue building relationships in our marriage and families.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 10

The last time we spoke to individuals who want to save their marriage at all costs, even though they have to do it alone, or they are facing a divorce. We said the first thing to do is to clarify your thoughts and begin to fill your mind with positive Biblical input, which will differ from advice people give you. Then, stabilise your emotions, lean on God for comfort, and let go of bitterness. Thirdly, learn to love, without making any demands. Love in your spouse's love language. Though you may be rejected at first, believe, hope and endure all things. God will come through for you.

Today we want to look at crises that some of us have to face in our families at some time or other. This may be the death of a spouse or close family member, or a divorce, or personal injury or illness. It may be that you have lost your job, or your business is going under. We all face troubles, but today we look at the more traumatic type of crisis or loss that you may be facing. One's life is thrown off balance. But the choices we make in a crisis, can either drive us into further trouble, or they can strengthen our potential for a rewarding life. Wrong choices in trying to cope, may drive some to alcohol or drugs, illicit relationships, for some even to suicide.

Helplessness is what we have to try to get past during these times. Dr Martin Seligman says that helplessness at a time of crisis seems to make people more vulnerable to pathogens, that cause disease, that are always around us, but some of which can be deadly.

Point values were assigned to various traumatic events in a person's life, and the death of a spouse was given 100 points, then divorce was given 73 points, 65 points were

given for marital separation, or jail term, or death of a close family member; and personal injury or illness, was 53 and so the list continues. But if life changes add up to 150 points or more in a year, it is found that people will fall ill or pick up chronic ailments.

When you first experience your crisis, while the rest of the world appears to be moving normally, you feel anaesthetised and in shock. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book on "Death and Dying", notes the following stages: first, of **denial**. *"No, it cannot be true. God wouldn't let this happen to me after I've faithfully served Him"*. This leads to the second stage of **anger**, *"Why me?" "How could God do this to me?"* Then follows the stage of **bargaining** with God. *"Maybe God's decision may be changed, if I do this or that." "I will serve you if you heal me"*.

And then the 4<sup>th</sup> stage is **depression**, which is the most difficult stage, and you will need careful attention. Depression may involve withdrawing into yourself, shrinking away from others, negative unbelief, a terrible feeling of loss, rejection, and it can even lead to suicide. It may be compared to the *"valley of the shadow of death"*, mentioned in Psalm 23. But the Psalmist continues to say that we do not walk through this valley alone, nor need we fear evil, for God is with us. Though a husband or wife is gone, we are never alone - *"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."* God is with us during each stage of life's journey. Turn to Him today in your trouble.

Then we come to the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of **acceptance**. This stage is reached where one is neither depressed nor angry about his "fate". Dr Kubler-Ross observed that acceptance is not necessarily a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings, as if the pain has gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for the final rest before the long journey ahead. She

concludes that there are a few people who fight to the end, and struggle to keep a shallow hope that makes it almost impossible to reach this stage of acceptance. They are the ones who will say one day, *“I just cannot make it anymore”*, the day they stop fighting. But the harder they struggle to avoid the inevitable, and the more they try to deny it, the more difficult it will be for them to reach this final stage of acceptance with peace and dignity.

When facing tragic news, you will try different coping mechanisms, but the one thing that you need through all these stages, is hope. If an ill patient stops expressing hope, it is usually a sign of further decline or even death.” Hebrews 6:9 tells us, as believers, *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”*

Seligman has found that the amount of control (perceived or real) a person has over his own life during a time of crisis or change, may make the difference in whether the person goes on to the stage of acceptance, or dying, either mentally in his depression, or even physical death. If a person is forced by others into a situation and at a time chosen for them, this will only aggravate the depression.

So whatever crisis or major disruption you are facing, death, divorce (which is also the death of a relationship), understand where you are in your crisis. This will help you evaluate your emotional state and help you to vent these emotions into non-destructive channels. You can choose positive responses, which can strengthen you and can enrich you spiritually. This is the time you need to turn to God for comfort, for reassurance and hope, for strength to go on, for wisdom how to handle your life in the future.

The enemy will always try to let you blame God for your pain, and in anger to turn away from Him. But the devil is a liar and wants you to become bitter and hard, to close yourself off from the comfort and love of the Father. Although we don't always have the answers

WHY things happen, believe that the heart of God is to draw you to Himself and for you to find His love and strength in your trial. The Psalms can be a great source of comfort, as you read how others have faced their trials, and yet have found that God had not left them. Psalm 147:3 says, *“He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.”* Psalm 146:6 says, *“The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.”* Psalm 138:7 says, *“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life.”* Psalm 126:5 says *“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.”* Psalm 121:1 says, *“I lift my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”*

It is when we have reached the stage of acceptance of the crisis, that faith develops and growth can follow. 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”*

Identify where you are and allow God to help you take a first step in the direction of acceptance and healing. Remember, Jesus knows all about suffering, and feels with you in your loss.

Alan Redpath said, *“There is nothing – no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can ever touch me, until first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment; but as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift my eyes up to Him and accept it as coming from the throne of God, for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the Lord, the rest of victory.”*

Let me pray for you in your dark hour today, *“Father, you know exactly what each listener is going through right now. I pray that through all their pain, loneliness and confusion, You will be their anchor and hope. Show them your great love, that can sustain them and show them that there is light in this darkness, because You are light and You are with them. Carry them through this time, and as they lean on You, show Yourself mighty and strong. Thank You, Father. Amen.”*

God bless you till next time when we will be sharing in more detail about coping with divorce.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 11

Last week we spoke about the crises we sometimes face in our families. This may be the death of a spouse or close family member, or a divorce, or personal injury or illness. It may be that you have lost your job, or your business is going under. There are 5 stages one goes through in working through a trauma. The first is denial, then comes anger, then bargaining with God, then depression and lastly acceptance. We said the enemy will want to make us bitter, but if we turn to God, He will give us comfort, hope and strength from His Word, and ultimately healing in our hearts.

Today we look more specifically at coping with the pain of divorce. You may find yourself involved in a divorce law suit, either by your own choice or completely against your will, when you wanted your marriage to work. According to Andre Bustanoby, a marriage counsellor, he says, in order to cope, you must first understand your emotions. Those feelings of abandonment, rejection, grief, self-pity, anger, failure, guilt and conflict with your beliefs, will rush in on you and overwhelm you.

We look first at feelings of rejection and abandonment. By your spouse divorcing you, he seems to be saying to you, *"You're worthless, whatever you once had, you've lost it."* And even if you initiated the divorce, you will still feel rejection. You may even come to believe that there is nothing redeemable about you. You might even become terrified of being alone. These emotions won't heal easily just with a few encouraging words from friends. You need to turn to God for His acceptance and love.

The issue of self-worth is especially difficult for a woman who is divorced, because her identity and maybe financial

security were based on that of her husband. To shake this terrible feeling of rejection and abandonment, you must turn to God, who sees in you great worth, and begin to believe Him. Each success you have as a single person will also be an investment in your feelings of self-worth. Actively throw yourself into the job of being single, and permit time to bring healing. But importantly, you must be **willing** to be a healed person, rather than an ever-grieving divorced person.

Grief and mourning is another emotion after a divorce. But why do some people hang onto their hurts? It is because they feel a certain safety from being hurt again. You can use hurt to become silent and withdrawn, or to become angry and bitter. Either way, you create distance from other people. Though there is a normal period of grief and mourning, something is wrong if your grief goes on and on.

Facing grief and denial are like facing a death, namely the death of your relationship. There will be a great sense of loss, and you will tend to forget the bad and remember the good. Often people say, *"I know the relationship was not good, but why do I miss him so much?"* Denial, though normal in a trauma, will gradually give way to the acceptance of the reality, and that at your own pace. The toughest times are the holidays and family times. But ongoing denial will lead to self-pity. You need to face the reality that the relationship has died. But a person immersed in self-pity, refuses to face that reality, and he lives in a fantasy world, and then will avoid other relationships. Self-pity also gives the hurting person self-comforting strokes from others. It is like an addiction to a painkiller that continues long after healing should have taken place.

Then, emotions of anger. Often divorced people are surprised by the anger they express over the death of the marriage. Bustanoby says there is destructive and

constructive anger. Destructive anger is anger turned inward on the self, because you find it difficult to turn it toward others. You feel angry at yourself for allowing the loss, for what you have done or left undone. It is a depressed or passive anger and makes you feel withdrawn and listless. But constructive anger (or righteous indignation, like Jesus felt) is when you feel you have been unjustly treated or not received your due. But it may prompt you to do for yourself what you have been waiting for others to do for you.

Also, feelings of failure - you feel you have failed yourself, failed your children, failed God and society, or your family, who might have thrown accusations at you. These feelings of failure will be even greater when you heard all your life how wrong divorce is, and can erode your self-worth. But you need to ask yourself, "*What can I learn from all this?*" and then, go on. Feelings of guilt are closely related to feelings of failure. They may or may not be justifiable. Unjustifiable guilt or false guilt, is when you feel guilty that you have joined the ranks of the divorced against your will. Others will often try to place false guilt on you by saying by their attitudes, "*You are wrong for what you have done*". Even a former spouse may try to make you look bad in the eyes of others. Or the children may make you feel guilty for displacing them.

Identify if it is guilt you are feeling, or the humiliation of being odd-man-out in a couple-oriented society, where you feel your status is lost. Be open to be shown where you were wrong, be willing to offer admission of your mistakes whenever possible, but confess your guilt to God. He does not hold our guilt against us when we bring it to Him. 1 John 1:9 says, "*It we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" Don't receive blame from others or a former spouse, and don't play your own guilt game. Guilt need not be carried. It can be unloaded at the cross of Jesus.

Then, loneliness – this is not an easy problem to solve. Certainly, friendships can go a long way, but often these friendships are not happening, because the divorced person is not whole. Firstly, realise that the answer does not lie in someone else, but in yourself.

Only when you have begun to fill that void by enjoying your own company, can you begin to be a good companion to someone else. Daniel Sugarman says, the person who complains about loneliness does not lack contact with other people, he lacks contact with himself. There is a difference between being alone, and being lonely. Friendship is sharing the joy of others, without feeling you must give up your own interests. Am I secure enough to be me and let you be you? Church activities is a good place to start socialising. Never make a decision on a social involvement that's based strictly on your feelings: chances are you won't feel like going. But do it! Don't concentrate only on opposite sex friendships, but same-sex friendships. Opposite-sex friendships can develop very quickly, if you let them, because of built-in signals, and it can easily lead to a free-and-easy-sex lifestyle. Bustanoby says that, "*sex without love can make you even lonelier.*" The only relationship that endures is based on both partners' affection, friendship, empathy and ability to feel self-love in that relationship. The danger is when two broken people come together and expect the other to make him or her whole. That is why God needs to be brought into your picture, because He can mend your broken pieces and bring joy and wholeness back into your life.

When you can, give yourself to other people, like the voluntary service at a church, hospital, or nursing home, that needs people who care. Give yourself to the sick and lonely. You will gain a measure of self-worth and it will take your mind off your own troubles. Sometimes the trouble of others make our own troubles shrink into insignificance. But when you get tired of working on your loneliness, just hibernate and permit yourself to fall apart. Your tears will do you a lot of good. Remember, being lonely is a natural part of being alive, and other people may be just a distraction from loneliness, not a cure. But here again, in God you can experience compassion, love and friendship.

I want to pray for you. "*Father, You see the pain of divorce in many hearts today. We ask You to show them your love and acceptance, show them that you see in them great worth. Show them that you remove all their guilt and want to be their Friend. Heal their broken hearts and restore to them joy and purpose. In Jesus' name. Amen.* God bless you till next week as we further discuss family and relationships.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 12

The last time we shared about the pain of divorce, and the feelings of rejection and abandonment that can cripple a person. But God is ready to receive you and sees in you great worth. Feelings of grief, self-pity can be healed; also anger - but you need to forgive; and guilt needs to be brought to Jesus, who forgives, and removes the feelings of failure. And loneliness - friendships can be difficult to build, because of your brokenness. So ask God to make you whole again. We said, give yourself to others who sometimes have even greater needs than yours. Allow God to restore your joy and purpose in life.

Today we want to look at the sensitive issue of abortion from a Christian perspective. Sadly, abortion is increasingly becoming acceptable since the laws in our country have changed. "*Abortion on demand*" refers to the concept that a woman has the legal authority to kill her unborn child. There is much controversy on this issue, and we are not debating our viewpoint as one of the different perspectives, but we want to share why we believe this to be totally contrary to the heart and plan of God. We will be looking at what Dr James Dobson has to say on the subject.

It is interesting that a woman who plans to terminate her pregnancy usually refers to the life within her as "the fetus", but if she intends to deliver and love and care for the little child, she affectionately calls him "my baby". Dr Dobson says, the need for this distinction is obvious: if we are going to kill a human being without experiencing guilt, we must first strip it of worth and dignity. We must give it a clinical name that denies its personhood. This has been so effectively accomplished in our society that an unborn child during his first 6 months in gestation can now be sacrificed with no

sense of loss on anyone's part. There would be a far greater public outcry if we were destroying puppies or kittens than there is for the thousands of abortions that occur in South Africa each year. The highest abortion rate is happening in our townships today amongst our young teenagers – some who are almost using it as a means of birth control. Some parents will kill an unborn child if they determine through amniocentesis that its sex is not the one they desired.

Statistics show that access to so-called “safe abortion” has not resulted in a decrease in abortions, but an astronomical increase. Reports say that one in eight pregnancies in South Africa, end in abortion today. This means that every day 233 babies are killed, more than 1500 a week and more than 85 000 per year. These statistics are having a definite impact on the moral conscience of our society, and shows the extent of the diseased minds of our young girls today. We, as the Church need to cry to God for mercy on our land, and the resulting curses that are unleashed on our nation through these licensed murders.

The change of legal attitudes towards abortion carries major implications for human life at all levels. If the rights of the unborn child can be sacrificed by the law courts, why could not other unnecessary people be legislated out of existence? The same social justification can be made toward the severely retarded, who can be seen as an expensive nuisance. Or it could be done to the very old, who contribute nothing to our society. Why should they then allow deformed infants to live? We somehow can't imagine these chilling possibilities, but why is abortion so easily justified?

There are many aspects of the evil of this abortion issue. But let us look at some Scripture evidence for God's personal acquaintance with children **before** birth. Not only

was he aware of their gestations, but He was specifically knowledgeable of them as unique individuals and personalities.

The angel Gabriel said of John the Baptist, *“and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.”* Luke 1:15. The prophet Jeremiah also wrote about himself, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart: I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* Jer 1:4,5 Both these individuals were already known to the Creator, and not inhuman embryos before birth. They were already assigned their life's work by God.

The twins were fighting in Rebekah's womb. God was aware of their very personalities and foretold their future conflicts. Jesus himself was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This fixes God's involvement with Christ from the time He was a simple cell inside Mary's uterus. And very clearly Psalm 139 describes David's relationship with God. *“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvellous – and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book! “* Psalm 139:13-16 TLB

That means that God not only scheduled each day of David's life, but He did the same for **me**. He was there when **I** was being formed in utter seclusion and formed the delicate parts of **my** body. The creator of the universe supervised **my** development *in utero*, as He did for every human being on earth. Dr Dobson says these references so clearly prove that the unborn do have a soul or personhood before they are full-term. We simply cannot rationalise that detaching a healthy little human being, in the image of God, from his place of safety, and leaving him to suffocate on a porcelain table can be justified – whether for social or financial reasons. Jesus told the little children to come to him, and some frightening warnings were addressed to those who would hurt them.

God will not hold us blameless for our 'legalised' infanticide, or murdering of children. It is by the same hand of Satan, who, when Jesus was born, had the same purpose to annihilate children, because even he knows, that *“the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.”* God says to us, as he said to Cain, who had killed Abel, *“Your brother's blood calls to me from the ground!”* It is time that the Christian Church found its tongue and spoke in defence of the unborn children who are unable to plead for their own lives.

If you have secretly or openly chosen this path of abortion, there will be those nights of sadness, guilt and wondering about the little life that could have been part of yours. Any mother's heart will ache, and every conscience, feel some shame. Then there is a path you may have chosen to numb and silence the voices, a path that may lead you into further darkness. But I want to say that there is good news, even though your secret has tormented you inside. Jesus came with the express purpose of bringing you forgiveness and freedom from your plaguing guilt. He died and took your sins, in fact, he became your sin, for you to receive His guiltless life and go free. He saw you in your confused and despairing moments. Now you can find his love and healing. Only He can take the burden from your heart and give you life instead. I believe he has taken your little half formed rosebud, and allowed the full bloom to continue in his presence, in heaven. I believe, if you receive Him today, you can still be re-united with your little one, one day, in his presence of love, beauty and perfection.

If I am speaking to you, please pray with me as we close, *“Father, you saw, you wept, you received that little being. Today I turn to you to receive me, to heal my broken heart, my haunted soul. Wash me from my sin. Forgive me and free me from this guilt. I need your life and your love to fill this ache. I want to walk in your transparent light. I now receive your huge gift of grace and mercy. Thank you, Jesus, that you came to bring me freedom. I want to help others, who thoughtlessly want to take the path that I took. Help me to be your voice to help save others from their dark choices. In Jesus' Name. Amen.”* If you prayed this with me, believing in his forgiveness, you are forgiven and free in Jesus' Name.

God bless you till next time as we continue this study on the family, and look at child-raising principles.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 13

Last week we looked at the Biblical perspective of abortion and said that God is intricately involved in the development and life of every little being, right from the very beginning and even knows each one's personality and the purpose of each one's life. We also prayed for people who had taken the route of abortion, and we believe that God will bring healing and forgiveness to every one who comes to Jesus.

Today we want to discuss some principles of raising our children to honour and obey us as their parents. There are many books available in the Christian bookshops that can give us advice and wisdom in handling our children at their different and difficult stages. At least we can comfort ourselves that no parent has had a proper training or a perfect example of being the perfect parent to their children. Yet we know that there are tried and tested principles that we easily overlook or neglect, and that we may need to re-introduce if we want respectful and obedient children.

Three of my children have already left home, and the youngest is in Grade 10. But there is a book I wish had been written when my kids were still small. We will be drawing from Dr Kevin Leman's book, called, "*Have a new kid by Friday*". He teaches how we can change our child's attitude, behavior and character ultimately. We know it is the little things that wear us down, the eye rolling, the talking back, the fighting of siblings, them giving us the "*silent treatment*", the slamming of doors, the statements of "*You can't make me do it!*" or even, "*I hate you*". It can be exhausting dealing with children from the minute they get up. Or your child may have embarrassed you in a public place, or you see signs of active rebellion and you are worried about where your child is headed. Could there be a

better way than yelling at them to get up in time for school? How do you feel as you hear them bicker over who is to use the bathroom first? Or listening to them belly-aching about what you packed them for lunch?

Dr Leman believes that there is a better way, that we don't have to play peacemaker, or rush to help our child do his homework before school. He says our job is not to create a happy child, but to teach him that if he chooses to put on a happy face, life can be happier for all of us. We as parents hold the key in our own hands. We need to understand that nothing in life is a free ride. Every person is accountable, regardless of age, for what comes out of his mouth. Our homes should be based on the cornerstone of mutual respect, love and accountability. There is no entitlement. If we play the entitlement game, we create Brats with a capital B, who think that they are in the driver's seat of life's car, who think that their happiness is what's most important in life, and that they are "entitled" to not only what they want, but anything and everything they want, when they want it.

Many of us have unwittingly made far too many decisions for our kids, given them too many choices, letting them off the hook or excusing them when they were irresponsible, ignoring the little and big ways they may have dissed us. We do it because we want our kids to like us, and no wonder they think that they are in charge, and parental threats don't work. We moms can feel like slave dogs, doing whatever our kids want us to do. Many experts say that the only thing needed is to boost their self-esteem, but the outcome is often the opposite. We want to produce responsible children to become responsible adults that we will be proud to call our sons or daughters now, and down the road.

The point is, YOU are the key to change your child's thinking and actions. For this to work, you need to decide to be a

parent and not a pushover. This book says we can change their attitudes in just 5 days, if we put these principles into practice. We will have a kid who has figured out that life isn't all about him and that other people do count in life, a child who says "thank you" for the things you do for him, a new atmosphere of mutual respect, love and accountability in our homes. The results are guaranteed to work.

Are you ready to take this new approach? There are usually about 3 options how we can react to every rude, disrespectful behaviour from our child – we can either give him a tongue-lashing, that will leave us feeling ugly and irritable for the rest of the day, and your son may sulk in his room, and you may probably end up apologising to him for losing your temper... Or you may ignore him and pretend he does not exist. It might work for a while, until he needs something from you. The point is you are not dealing with his behaviour. Or else, you could try something new and revolutionary that would nip that behaviour in the bud.

Kids do what they do because they've gotten away with it. It comes down to who is really in charge in your family? Is it you or your child? Dr Leman says we can be so concerned to be our child's friend, and not wanting to wound his psyche, always making sure he is happy, that we fail in our role as parents. We smooth all the bumps so she never has to be uncomfortable or ever go out of her way. We become their servants, doing the whims of our children, rather than having their long-term best in mind.

We become great excuse makers, "*I couldn't get her homework done, because I had a business dinner*", rather than acknowledging that she was too lazy to do it. We end up spending more time warning and reminding them, than we do training. We carry all the responsibility, much of which they should be carrying. As a result, they become more and more powerful. They're all about "*me, me me*", and "*gimme, gimme, gimme*". They are held accountable less and less and have fewer responsibilities in the family. To them family is not about what you can give, but what you can get. Few

children today have been taught to consider others before themselves. They all have a predictable strategy to get the better of you. Your child is motivated to win, because you will do anything he says. If he tries something and it works, he will try it again. If crying to get his way worked, the next time he will add a bit of kicking, too. Children are masters of manipulation. If slamming the door gets you trotting to give your teenager the cell phone she demanded, she will try something even more dramatic the next time she wants something. If we allow our child to win, he is smart enough to try the behaviour again the next time. This study will give us a whole arsenal of tools, without shooting our child down. It will help us to be the kind of parent we want to be and have a child we will want to have. These principles work for 4 year olds, and 14 year olds.

Let us remind ourselves of one general pointer of a healthy family we quoted a few months ago: The best way a family is to survive is if we know God, and have the right order of authority. Eph 5:22 says that Christ is to be the head of the family, as he is the head of the church, and then the husband should submit to him, and the wife is to submit to the husband and the children to the parents.

We need not be afraid of our children, and need to be strong when we need to, and to *"show them who is boss"*. If they never learn to submit to a parent, how will they ever learn to submit to God and obey Him? The Bible has many verses reminding us not to be afraid to discipline them when necessary. Prov 13:24 says, *"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him"*. Also Prov 22:15, *"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him."* The best is in Prov 23:13, *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death"* (The KJV says, *"save his soul from hell"*). Each child needs to be disciplined and loved by a parent.

Let us close as we pray, *"Father, help me as a parent to have the correct order of authority in my home, not to be afraid of disciplining my child in love, to save his life from hell. Show me how to be strong, yet to give him love and bring him up to honour authority and to honour You, God. Amen."* God bless you till next week, as we continue this study of godly principles in raising our children.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 14

Last week we spoke about having the correct order of authority in our homes, and not being afraid to discipline our children. We said that we as parents are the key to changing our children's actions. We also read Proverbs which said, if we discipline them with the rod, we will save their souls from death.

Today we continue our study of changing our children's behaviour. Children are like wet cement, moldable and impressionable, but as they grow the "cement" hardens. And unfortunately training takes time, and often parents don't have time and don't make time for their kids. And sometimes we allow our children to have so many extra-mural activities, that they spend very little time at home with the parents. Dr Adler says, when children misbehave, they are doing it to get our attention. If we don't pay attention to them in the right way, they end up with attitudes of revenge, and strike out at others, including you as the parent.

Dr Kevin Leman in his book, *Have a new kid by Friday*, says that when we choose to do battle with our children, we will never win in a power struggle, because we have more to lose than they. But he says there is a different way to establish our authority in the home.

Studies were done of conditioning pigeons with pellets of food as rewards, every 3 times they pecked. Then after they were trained they changed the reinforcement schedule to be different every time, and the pigeons were so confused, they did not know what to do. Children are creatures of habit. Children learn a behaviour and keep on at it to get results. We can change their behaviour. The younger the child the easier it will be to change. But how do you affect change in

your relationship with your child? You retrain your pigeon. You now use consistency and follow-through to make your point, never wavering from the goal.

If a younger child throws a tantrum, we could just walk away, and he will soon find that it is not fun to go on by himself anymore. Let's say your teenager throws you some choice words because you're having chicken for dinner – again – and she says she hates chicken. When it's time for her to go to her friend's for a visit, you say, *"We're not going to your friend today"*. Then you turn your back and walk away into the next room, and start folding clothes. Your 14-year old will pursue you. *"What do you mean, we're not going to my friend? You always take me to her on Tuesdays"*. *"We're not going because I don't appreciate the way you talked to me earlier."* You turn your back and walk away. No matter what pleading, what tantrum, what apology happens, you don't take her to her friend's. *She* has to be the one to explain to her friend why she can't come. You've made your point, and your daughter will think through her words more carefully the next time.

If you want your child to take you seriously, say your words once. Only once. Once you've said, it, turn your back. Expect your words to be heeded. There's no back talk, no argument. You say your words calmly and they're over. Then you walk away and get busy doing something else. Will your children get mad? Shocked? Confused? Will you have a few days of hassle? Oh yes! Let us ask ourselves the question, haven't you been the pigeon trying to get the reward of trying to make your kids happy? Do you really want to live like that?

Remember, children are like pigeons. They need to work a bit for their rewards. Because they are creatures of habit they need consistency and follow-through. They also need

to know they don't have free reign to run all over and still expect a reward at the end of it. Children need guidance and accountability. They need to be taught that there are consequences for their actions, or for their inaction. Otherwise their lives will end in disaster.

Your child needs to know that you mean business – what you say is what you will do. You are not to be dissed, and if you are, there will be consequences. And you will not be talked out of giving them. Just take away a privilege, even though your child thought it was his right, eg a treat at MacDonald's or a movie.

Remember, say it once, turn your back and walk away – don't discuss it with the child and don't argue about it. No more yelling, it is a much more calm approach to life. B doesn't happen until A is completed. And don't weaken or change your mind because he said he was sorry. Accept his apology kindly, but make it clear that the consequence will still be affective. The only thing that will get his attention is if you follow through with the consequence you stated.

A friend of ours was telling us about their 8 yr old, who couldn't get ready for school on time, day after day. She had a pattern to make everyone wait, and sometimes her mom would be late for work. So after reading this book and telling her once to be ready on time, and that they were leaving, they left without her one morning. Well, she had a cadenza and her dad, who was at home, very casually said that he would take her to school in his van when he had finished his breakfast. So of course their daughter got to school late, with a letter saying that she missed her lift to school because she had been late. Well, the next morning, she was waiting, the first in the car, ready to be taken to school!

Sometimes children use anger to get their way – either a seething anger or a fit of rage. What is the atmosphere like in your house? Is an angry person in control? Anger is an inactive choice to control

someone else. It's projecting your thoughts and emotions onto another person in an attempt to change their behaviour. Angry children have learned that being angry wins them something. They get attention, they get their way, people feel sorry for them. Their anger puts them in the driver's seat in their home – they will gain either sympathy about a bad day, or money for a movie, or the car keys for the evening. Your child is a skilful manipulator.

But such maladies as anger tantrums don't just appear. They fester over time. It could be an 18 month-old who felt misplaced when little sister came home from the hospital. And saying, *"You just have to get along with your sister"* will just increase the displacement he is feeling. But he needs to know, *"You are just as important to me as you always were. You don't need to throw a tantrum to get my attention. Just come to me and ask me for a hug."*

We need to teach children how to handle pressure and anger. If they talk about what bothers them, its like releasing air out of a pressured balloon. *"You seem upset. Tell me about it."* Teach him to use *"I"* statements rather than *"you"* statements. *"I feel upset when my sister goes into my room and plays with my things."* Instead of *"You is such a jerk. You know I don't want you to play with my things."* Talking in *"I"* terms focusses on how your child feels rather than pointing an accusing finger at someone else.

Proverbs 22:6 tells us, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."* Let us train our children by teaching them that actions always have consequences, and don't always try to protect them, never letting them learn how to handle a difficult situation.

Let us close as we pray for our children today, *"Lord, You alone know what is best for my children. I release them into Your care. Help me to show them that they are loved and important to me. Thank you, that I can partner with You in raising them and that I don't have to do it alone. Help me to teach them that disrespect and anger is not Your way to find solutions in life. Help me to be strong to let them know that there will be consequences to rude or angry behaviour. In Jesus' name. Amen."*

God bless you till next week as we continue this study of godly principles in raising our children.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 15

The last time we spoke about dealing with bad attitudes in our children and their outbursts of anger, or disrespectful behaviour. We said, that we as parents must let them bear the consequences for their behaviour, so that they will learn to respond to us with respect. We also reminded ourselves in Proverbs that if we train up our children in the way that they should go, when they are old, they will not turn from it.

Today we continue our study with Dr Leman, and look at the 3 most important things that matter most in raising our children – ABC, Attitudes, Behaviour, and Character. Attitude is the basis of all behaviour – negative attitude shows itself through negative behaviour: the talking back, stubbornness, whining, defiance, tantrums, showing disrespect, etc. But attitudes are caught, not taught. They often learn it from us as parents, so the key to changing our child's attitude is to change our own attitudes.

When a child defies us when we ask him to do something, we often respond with an angry attitude; we raise our voices, and lose our peace. But if we remain calm and after asking our child once, and she refuses, we pay another sibling to do it, or do it ourselves, but we take the money for the task out of our daughter's allowance. The point is, someone else is doing the work she should be doing.

When next she asks to be taken to buy her something, our matter-of-fact response is that we are not going, because we don't feel like it – no guilt, no anger, no explanation, but we remain calm and in control.

But constantly we check our own attitudes. Being treated with disrespect or rudeness, or when the kids are hitting,

spitting, interrupting us on the phone, stomping out of the room, screaming, fighting in the car, purposeful disobedience, put downs, carelessness with money, lying, not completing a project ... most of these behaviours are learnt. We need to ask ourselves in which ways have they learned their behaviours from us - maybe those white lies we told, broken promises, yelling at them when they made us angry, our response to our husbands.

*Our* behaviour we most probably learned from our parents. If you grew up in an abusive home, you find yourself yelling and lifting your hand to your child. If you grew up with parents who gave you the silent look for discipline, you'll find yourself doing the same.

Dr Leman says he has learned never promise his children anything, because promising them is saying 1) your car will never break down, 2) every day will go exactly as you've planned it, 3) you are perfect and 4) it won't rain.

When your children are driving you to the end of yourself, it is good to ask 3 basic questions, that will help view their behaviour in the most helpful light.

a) Why is your child doing what he's doing?

b) How do you as parent feel in that situation, and how are you responding?

c) Is this a mountain (something that will matter in the long run?) or a molehill? (something that is a small concern in the bigger scheme of what you want to accomplish in his life).

Remember, every child will fail, make mistakes and embarrass you. But you don't need to hold those failures over his head for a lifetime. Correct the behaviour and move on. What is most important, in the long run, is your child's character.

Character is what really counts. It's who you are when no one is looking. Character is caught from those you grow up with, mostly parents, and taught through life's lessons. Good character can be reinforced in a very natural, positive way. Commend them, *"I'm so glad you helped your sister. You saw she really needed help."* Negative character traits need us to correct them, *"I overheard you talking to your brother. What you said was unkind. You were being a bully. That is not acceptable in our home. You need to apologise to your brother immediately."*

Having character doesn't mean you are perfect. It means you have an inner standard that cares about others more than yourself. If someone has character, they will go to the person they have wronged, offer a heartfelt apology, and ask what they can do to make things right. Sometimes, when we have failed our children in some way, or lost our temper, we need to apologise to them and in so doing, we are teaching them how to deal with a mistake and rectify a relationship.

Does your child have good manners? Does she tell the truth? Does she care about being on time? Is she bothered when others cheat on a test, or does it seem "normal" to her? Is he a gimme, gimme child? Is he kind? Does your child take your "no" for a "no", or push until he gets what he wants? Does she use bad language? Does she respect her older sister's special things? Is he the kind of young man you would hire to work for your company?

Character is not only everything, it's the only thing in the long run. It is the foundation for your attitude and behaviour.

Dr Leman gives 3 strategies for success in building character in them:

- 1) Let reality be the teacher. Let nature take its course, and if necessary, you help nature along. Don't rescue your kids from the consequences of failed responsibility. It means, don't stay up until midnight to help him with a project he failed to attend to earlier. In

fact, don't do anything about it. Don't even mention it. And don't add your own discipline to it, letting reality be teacher is enough discipline in itself. And don't be a bone-digger, digging up the situation long after it's over and hitting your child over the head with the "bone". You as parent would not like another to keep reminding you of your failures.

2) Learn to respond rather than react. If the doctor says, "*You are responding to the medication*", that is good, but "*You are reacting to the medication*," that is bad. Reacting means, answering without thinking in the situation. Don't shoot their unrealistic dreams out of the water. Instead of reacting, respond by saying, "*Tell me more about that*", and dream with him, even if it cannot happen.

3) B doesn't happen until A is completed. You never have to change this strategy. It works every time with every age. If you've asked your child to do something and it's not done, you don't go on to the next event – no matter what that event is. Simply say, "We're not going". Then turn your back and walk away. Don't announce your strategy, let him figure it out. But seeing the changes you want implemented, is more about YOU than it is about your child. It's more about changing YOUR attitude, behaviour, and character.

Use consistent action, not just words. You don't embarrass the child on purpose, you correct the behaviour. No harassing, no threatening, no warning, no reminding, no coaxing, no put-downs. As you work together on Attitude, Behaviour and Character, you can work your way toward a relationship that's mutually satisfying. "*Lord, change me*", will then begin to change your children.

Let's pray for our children, "*Father, thank you that you give me wisdom today to apply in my home, to build character into my children. Help me to change my own attitudes, my responses and behaviour. And I believe that with your help, my children will be changed in their characters. Thank you that you will continue transforming their lives by the power of your Spirit. Bless our relationships in our homes. Amen.*"

God bless you till next week as we continue our study of raising our children according to godly principles.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 16

Last week we spoke about the attitudes, behaviour and character of a child. We said that most of these are actually learnt from us as their parents, and that as we change our attitudes, behaviour and character, theirs will also change. The 3 strategies for good character in our kids is 1) to let reality be their teacher 2) we as parents must learn to respond instead of reacting 3) B doesn't happen until A is completed. And consistency in our approach is the key.

Today we look at further help from Dr Leman in his book, "*Have a new kid by Friday*". Because life is speeding by, we can't afford not to take advantage of the time that we have. But the important thing to remember is: what your children think about you at any one particular moment, isn't necessarily what they will think about you for life. If we are calm and consistent, and always do what we say we will do, we will earn their respect and trust. We must look at what we want them to be down the road. If we want our child to be kind, we must teach him to be kind now; or if we want them to be responsible one day, teach responsibility to him now; or if we want them to enjoy spending time with us, start now to set aside fun times with them.

Situations that children get themselves into don't just happen, eg drug addiction, alcohol abuse, immoral relationships, shoplifting, careless motorcycle riding that leads to severe accidents, anorexia, repeated losing of jobs due to rude behaviour. All these resulted from parents not taking action when the issues were still small, eg being uninvolved in their lives, letting them get away with small thefts from your purse, allowing them get involved with wrong friends, hoping it was just a phase; not dealing with unhealthy TV or computer patterns; never dealing with rude

responses towards parents; not giving them the attention respect and love they needed. Remember that your child needs not only your attention, but also a relationship with you. Every child longs for parental approval and can't stand it when he doesn't get it. There is nothing worse than knowing you've disappointed your parent, and if that disapproval is continual, the child will rebel – the “*oh yeah? Forget you*” - syndrome.

Dr Leman says there are 3 types of parents, and who we are as a parent has a lot to do with the way our children respond to us.

1) The permissive parent – is a slave to the child; places the priority on the child, not on the spouse (husband); robs the child of self-respect and self-esteem by doing things for them that they can do for themselves; makes life as easy as possible for the child (the Disneyland experience), eg does homework for the child, answers for her, and so on; and invites rebellion with inconsistent parenting. Do you find it hard or impossible to say “no” to him, or promising him a reward if he does what you ask him?

2) The authoritarian parent – makes all the decisions for the child; uses reward and punishment to control the child's behaviour; sees himself as better than the child; runs the home with an iron hand and grants little freedom to the child. He/she barks out orders and threatens with warnings if he doesn't immediately do what you say.

3) The authoritative or responsible parent – gives the child choices and formulates guidelines with him; provides him with decision-making opportunities; develops consistent, loving discipline; holds the child accountable; lets reality be the teacher; conveys respect, self-worth, and love to the child and therefore enhances their self-esteem. It is asking them the facts of a situations and what they think about it,

before we jump to conclusions. It is giving them age-appropriate choices and looking out for their welfare, yet allowing them to experience the consequences of their behaviour.

We are in the position to leave an indelible mark on our children, without even being aware of it. The truth is that both extremes of the permissive and authoritarian approach, will cause children to rebel. With the permissive parent there are no guidelines, and children flounder; and with the authoritarian parent, everything is heavy-handed. The wise parent finds the middle ground. He majors on the relationship and minors on everything else.

It is all about having a connection with your child, loving and accepting her – no matter what she does. A family is not run by rules. For example, if your teen wants to play her music in the car, which you don't like, instead of criticising her music, rather say, *“That's an interesting beat. I like that beat, or that singer has a good voice.”* That is respectful of them and sets the stage that you are open to talk to them about anything. You may not like what they do, but that doesn't change your love for them. Many parents create a home environment that is not a fun place for their children to be. Show them some attention and appreciation. Rules don't work without a relationship.

And remember the biggest secret of all: your child wants to please you – even if she sometimes gives you the eye roll and wants you to walk 3m behind her because you're embarrassing her. But talk to your kids and talk about them in a positive way in their hearing, eg, *“I can't wait to see what Sue is going to be someday. I know it's going to be something special,”* or *“She is such a good singer.”*

Parent, you hold all the aces. You've got the bank account, the car, the house, the groceries, the power. Children have nothing except what you give them and what they'll someday inherit. But what kind

of legacy are you going to leave for them? If you want them to be healthy, independent thinkers who are kind and giving to others, NOW is the time to start. And you can start by changing yourself. If you tend towards being authoritarian, work on giving your children age-appropriate choices, eg *“What would you rather have, French toast or scrambled eggs?”* Then, seek to build a better relationship with them, ensuring that they will be standing on a firm foundation of love, acceptance and understanding.

If you are a permissive parent, you need to stand up and be a parent instead of trying to be your child's friend who must keep her happy. Being happy all the time is not real life, and without accountability for her actions, your spoilt, cheeky, little child will grow up to be a teenage brat and then an adult who back talks and can't hold down a job or hold their marriage together. Will your children always like you? No! But the goal of every parent should be to raise independent thinkers who have a healthy respect for themselves and others.

Let's ask ourselves as parents: How can we adapt our parenting style to be more balanced. And in what ways can we improve relationships in our home? These parenting principles can also work for single moms who often feel that they cannot do it on their own. Remember, a wise parent develops consistent, loving discipline, conveys respect, self-worth and love, lets reality be the teacher, and holds them accountable. Start with the end in mind, and keep the focus on your relationship, not on rules.

Lets pray for our children as we close: *Lord, I submit myself to You and realise that I need You to help me to be a wise parent. I want to partner with You and receive your gifts of wisdom, discernment and guidance. I also need your strength and patience, along with a generous portion of Your love flowing through me. Teach me how to be a responsible parent and show me how to cultivate a strong relationship with my children, and to be all that they need me to be. Bless them to become independent, yet to have a healthy respect for themselves and others. Amen.*

God bless you till next week, when we continue our study of raising children according to godly principles.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 17

Last week we spoke about the 3 different parenting styles, and said that the permissive parent robs the child of self-respect by doing things for them that they can do for themselves, and by making life as easy as possible for them. Then the authoritarian parent makes all the decisions for the child and uses reward and punishment to control his behaviour. But the wise, responsible parent provides him with age-appropriate decision-making opportunities; develops consistent, loving discipline; holds the child accountable; lets reality be the teacher; conveys respect, self-worth and builds a good relationship with the child.

Let's remind ourselves as parents today to respect our children by never doing for them what they can and should do for themselves. We don't repeat our instructions and we expect the best of them. We encourage them, because every child lives up to the expectations we have of him. Our kids need a mom/dad who will stand up and be a parent. Even if it means being Public Enemy no 1 for a while. And sometimes you have to be the one to deliver tough love, to follow through what you say. But if you do, the payoff will happen right in front of your eyes. You'll be amazed.

Dr Leman discusses the difference between self-esteem and self-worth. Self-esteem is when a child "*feels good*" about himself. If we as parents are only concerned about their self-esteem, we try to protect them from any waves in their ocean of life, and then give them everything they want when they want it. As adult children they will remain dependent on their parents when they should be taking responsibility for their own lives. Feeling good is a temporary thing and based on feelings that change from moment to moment. But by providing the types of experiences where

children pull their weight and learn responsibility and accountability, that establishes self-worth. It means sometimes he has to work hard, and save up for the cell phone, to truly call it his own, and not have everything handed to him on a plate.

Then there is another ABC for the pillars of self-worth.  
A – Acceptance    B – Belonging    C – Competence

We were reminded last week that children long for a parent's approval, and our unconditional acceptance of our child means everything in their development. Without acceptance, they will talk less and less, listen to their music non-stop, be on “mixit” with their friends even at dinner rather than communicating, because their friends accept them for who they are. It does not mean we accept their bad behaviour, but we let consequences change their behaviour, yet accept them with love for who they are.

Then secondly, every child needs to belong somewhere. If it is not your family, it will be in a gang or group that is outside your family. Give your children a vote in family decisions, don't lose your family dinners or family holidays. Say through your actions, “We're a family. We belong together.” As Christians, it is also wise to pray together from time to time.

Then thirdly, competence. To empower our children we must give them responsibility. Thank them for any initiative they may have taken to get the job done. Maybe your 4 yr old tried to tidy her room. She should feel proud of that accomplishment, even if it is not quite your standard. Allow your children to make their own lunch boxes, or clean their own shoes, or earn some extra money. That is how children get ready to move out into the adult world as healthy functioning members of society.

We matter more in our children's world than we think – which is why our parenting matters more than we think.

Dr Leman discusses praise and encouragement. He says praise can be dangerous, because we link a child's worth to what he does. And to a child's mind that means, *“If I don't do something “good” all the time, then I'm not worth anything. And Mom and Dad won't love me”*. But encouragement emphasises their actions, while giving them unconditional acceptance. No matter what they do, they know they'll always belong to your household, and can learn to be competent. All of these pillars will be knocked down by false praise, which links the worth in the person to what he has done. Even if the act or attitude is not good, to us the child herself is always accepted and worthy of our love. Eg praise is: *“You are so beautiful”* instead of *“That outfit looks great on you.”* Or *“You're so clever, you got an A in Maths”* instead of, *“Your hard work really paid off. Well done!”* Although the difference seems subtle, it makes a world of difference. When we encourage actions or attitudes, we encourage the child to be competent and to try something else, because he succeeded in that area, or to have a good attitude that will bless others. But, *“You're the greatest kid who ever walked the earth,”* is false praise and your child knows you want to make her feel good, and she will know she is not the greatest. This will break her trust in you and disconnect the relationship. Yet encouragement solidifies the 3 pillars of self-worth and spurs them on to further good actions.

Sometimes divorced parents may feel bad that they cannot give their children everything every other child seems to own. They then try to compensate by praising them for everything and linking their worth to their actions. But learn to encourage them, by commending their actions, while accepting them unconditionally no matter what they do or do not achieve.

I believe the same goes for the negative behaviour in our children.

We don't attack their person-hood when they fail and say what bad or terrible children they are. But we only focus on the negative behaviour and allow consequences to re-direct their actions and behaviour. We can still tell them and show them that they are loved, that they have worth and are valuable to us, no matter what they have or have not done. God is that wonderful example to us, and his love actually draws us closer to Him. Our unconditional love will do the same to our children.

I want to remind every parent out there that your own worth is also not in what you achieve or how you succeed in life or even in your parenting. God loves you, even though you have failed many times. God accepts you just as you are. He wants to encourage you and help you to do His will and train up your kids in these principles even when it is difficult. He promises to empower each one by His mighty Holy Spirit, to love and discipline your kids, and teach them that God also loves them unconditionally.

We know the story of the prodigal son, who, though he left his home and made many wrong choices, he ended up sitting among the pigs and realised that his home was a better place – where he was accepted and loved, and he returned. Remember the wonderful picture of the father waiting with open arms and restoring him to his position in the family. The father didn't say, *“Well, look what the cat dragged in? I hope you've learned your lesson!”* He embraced him and loved him. It is a sincere reminder for anyone who has a “prodigal”. None of us is perfect. We as parents need to be the 3-pronged foundation of Acceptance, Belonging and Competence.

Next week we will summarise all these principles of the past weeks again in the last of this series, so do listen in to review these principles by Dr Kevin Leman.

Let's pray for our children as we close. *“Father, thank you that I am not alone in raising my children. Help me to build into my children self-worth, through unconditional acceptance, and the sense of belonging and to encourage them to become competent and responsible adults one day.”*

God bless you till next week as we review all these principles in training our children.

## Link FM - The Family

### Chapter 18

Last week we spoke about self-esteem and self-worth. Self-esteem is when a child *“feels good”* about himself, which is a temporary thing and based on feelings that change from moment to moment. But self-worth is established by providing the types of experiences where children pull their weight and learn responsibility and accountability. And we said praise can be dangerous, because we link a child's worth to what he does. And to a child's mind that means, *“If I don't do something “good” all the time, then I'm not worth anything. And Mom and Dad won't love me”*. But encouragement emphasises their actions, while giving them unconditional acceptance. No matter what they do, they know they'll always be accepted and belong to your household.

Today we want to review all the principles we highlighted in the past weeks from the book by Dr Kevin Leman, *“Have a new kid by Friday”*. We said that in order for your child to know you mean business (and to keep you calm and rational):

- 1) Say it once.
- 2) Turn you back.
- 3) Walk away.

We said there are to be no warnings, threats or explanations – only action and follow-through. Our children must know we mean business, or we won't accomplish any changes. Children who have been allowed to have their own way for a while can be extremely powerful.

Then we said the important thing is your child's attitude, behaviour and character. His attitudes and behaviour are often learned from us, so as we change, theirs will change too. We said there are 3 simple strategies for success:

- 1) Let reality be the teacher.
- 2) Learn to respond rather than react.

3) B doesn't happen until A is completed.

Not even a powerful child can hold out for long under such a principle. So if there's a problem at home, you don't look at life outside the home until the problem is solved. No taking them anywhere if A is not completed. We said when we start to apply these principles, their behaviour is probably going to get worse ... for a time. It is like going fishing, you can expect that “fish-out-of-water” syndrome, when they come thrashing wildly out of the water, and be very ticked. But we have to keep the tension and not give that fish any slack. But the thrashing means you're on the right track.

Then looking at the long view of parenting, we noted 3 different parenting styles, and asked ourselves to evaluate which we fit into:

1) The permissive parent robs the child of self-respect by doing things for them that they can do for themselves, and making life as easy as possible for them.

2) The authoritarian parent makes all the decisions for the child and uses reward and punishment to control his behaviour.

3) But the responsible parent provides him with age-appropriate decision-making opportunities; and develops consistent, loving discipline. He holds the child accountable; lets reality be the teacher, and conveys respect.

We also said that we are to focus first on our relationship with our children, realising that without relationship, any rules will not be effective. We also said not to make mountains out of molehills, and to decide which areas really are important ones to address, and which we let pass.

We then looked at the difference between self-esteem (feeling good about yourself) and true self-worth. To develop the 3 pillars of self-worth, it is through:

1) Acceptance 2) Belonging 3) Competence.

And we said that praise focusses on how “good” a person is, his value lying in what he does, but that encouragement focusses on an action, while we make it clear that he is always accepted and loved.

Remember your child's behaviour is for him to draw your attention to him and it provides a power base for him (*“I'm going to show you”*). Children misbehave for a reason, because more than anything, they need a relationship with you. Consistency in your own attitude, behaviour and character, will mean the rules won't change based on your moods or life circumstances. It means you keep to your “no”.

Here again are the top 10 points:

1) Be 100 percent consistent in your behaviour, because we are retraining our kids and ourselves – to behave differently. They must know we mean business.

2) Always follow through on what we say we will do. No matter the circumstances, what you say is what you do. Never back down.

3) Respond, don't react. Use actions, not words. So close your mouth, think, and respond to the situation rather than reacting to it.

4) Count to 10 and ask yourself, *“What would my old self do in this situation? What should the new me do?”*

5) Never threaten your kids. The problem is our children know we don't mean them, because we rarely follow through on them. Eg, *“If you don't get off that chair, you're going to break your neck!”*

6) Never get angry. Don't let your children control your moods. An explosion of anger is like throwing up all over your child. If we do, apologise quickly to them.

7) Don't give any warnings. Your goal is to get your children to

listen, listen once, and hear what you have to say, and to act on it.

8) Ask yourself, "*Whose problem is this?*" Don't own what isn't yours, or force the ownership on a sibling either. Don't take over what she should be doing herself, like homework, etc.

9) Don't think the misbehaviour will go away. Kids won't stop misbehaving on their own – they gain too much by it. You have to administer consistent discipline. It is better to force a blowout than to face a slow leak, hoping your child will come to her senses one day. But when it doesn't happen, her character is formed that way.

10) Keep a happy face on, even when you want to ... do something else.

A woman once complained that her kids treated her like a slave and a short-order cook. No-one liked anything she made and they complained about it all the time. Dr Leman told her to go on strike and not to cook dinner at all for a week. She was to go out to get a bite to eat by herself, and when asked where she was going, she would just said, "Out". When she came home, she was not to do the laundry, not to wake them up for school, not to make breakfast or lunch. She would get their attention. When asked, she was to say, "*I'm done doing things for you. Until I see effort on your part, I quit.*" Imagine the shock on her kids' faces! Often times you are too good a mother, and do way too many things for your children. Our children need to step up to the plate, for life in our homes to be what it should be – a place of love, respect and accountability for actions. So let's launch our plan and stick to our guns!

Let's pray for our children as we close today. "*Lord, help me to change my approach to my children, and train them up in the way that they should go and behave, to honour me as their parent, and to respect authority and You as their ultimate authority. Help me to be consistent and strong and let consequences follow wrong behaviour and attitudes. Lord, bless them and continue to change both me and them by your Holy Spirit. Amen.*"

God bless you till next week, when we start a new series, called "*Strengthen yourself in the Lord.*"



