

Parenting and Healthy Relationships

Do I Feel Good about My Marriage?

In giving a spouse to the first man and marriage to the couple, God included with these gifts two purposes. He, himself, had observed that it is not good for a person to be alone. Therefore, one purpose of marriage is that one would have a sense of wellbeing with another person.

God's other given purpose for marriage is reproduction. We can, from time to time, ask of our self and our spouse: Is the will of God being realized in our marriage and family? Do we together have a sense of wellbeing? What does wellbeing mean in the family?

Between spouses we can define it as being an equal and balanced human relationship, based on love. In such a relationship, the spouses together bear responsibility for the family: responsibility for one's own and the other's faith, love, welfare and the rearing of the children. Being the object of love is not based on how useful I am, but on what kind of person God has made me.

Instructions of God's Word for Human Relationships

When asked about the important things in life, we often prioritize our family as the highest. Can this priority also be seen in our lives? Do I, when making choices, consider how it might affect the welfare of my spouse or children? If the family is important to me, then my time and presence will be set aside for it. I might have to decide between interesting job tasks, a higher standard of living, or spending time together at home. The love between family members can be compared to a fruit tree sapling. The more I nurture and nourish this love, the more it will produce fruits that are good and sweet. Sometimes when conducting a wedding I have told the new couple, if you want a happy marriage, make one another happy.

What does God's Word teach us about family life, marriage and parenting? It was the Lord of Life, Jesus himself, who gave the most important pointers to the people of His time—and us. He urges a person to love God above all things and one's neighbor as him- or herself. In the Golden Rule, as it is called, He instructs us to do unto our neighbor that which we would want done to ourselves. These are the bits of Jesus' advice for each one's everyday life, which are fully integrated with one's faith-life.

What might this advice mean for us on a practical level? When our little child awakes in the night to cry, I could ask myself: "What would I want someone to do for me right now?" I sure do know the answer to that—I would hope that my spouse would get up and go take care of the child. Therefore, I am supposed to get up and tell my spouse: "You just keep sleeping, I will go take care of the child!" In that way, I would be treating her in accordance with Jesus' advice. Now, that's practical application!

Discussion Builds and Cares for Human Relationships

We surely do enjoy getting good feedback, kind words and expressions of love. We also feel joy when our own words bring happiness to others. A small child or adolescent thirsts for good feedback and encouraging words like a plant needing water. Does this not also apply to us adults? When we come home from work or are at home awaiting our spouse to return, the first seconds of encounter are important. Do I feel longed-for and welcome, or do I hear unkind words, such as, "Isn't the food ready yet?" Or, "Where have you been dilly-dallying?" Or, "You

promised to be back already an hour ago.” Little words mean a lot. They express the feelings of the heart, as in, “Oh how wonderful that you’ve come!” Or, “I’ve missed you. It’s so good to be home!”

In wholesome marriages and family lives, each and every one, without exception, may fearlessly express feelings and hopes and share both joys and sorrows. There is no need to worry about belittlement or domination. Our duty is to listen and hear, not only with our ears, but also with our hearts. The person who has difficulty in coming to grips with his or her own bad actions or other problems, may evade the truth by denying the accuracy of the other’s observation, saying, “I don’t have any problems. That’s your problem! I don’t need any help. You’re just imagining all that.” Love means also setting oneself in the other’s place and accepting responsibility for the interpersonal relationships within a family. Even when one is unable to him-herself see any problems.

The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us to lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and slows our journey forward (Heb. 12:1). We know what releases us from sin—the preaching and believing of the gospel of forgiveness. From this arises the desire to go and seek help for the problems experienced by the family. We can also freely seek and accept professional help if a family is suffering from, for example, violence, mental health problems or misuse of power. God’s Word urges us to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), not to suppress the others or subjugate them under one’s own authority.

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath” (Eph. 6:4)

When we, as parents, receive a child as a gift from God, we are also receiving Jesus too, as it is written: “And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.” The way we rear our children has consequences. In referring to the last judgment, Jesus pointed out: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

When my child fails in some way, will I be able to understand the situation from his or her point of view? What kind of discussion would I be hoping for? I would not want to be blamed. I would know what I’ve done and feel guilty. I would need gracious counseling, as in, for example, “This didn’t turn out well, but let’s try to learn from it. It’s not possible to always be successful. I love you, and I want to help you going forward.”

Parenting is not always easy. It requires setting boundaries, holding them firm, and then restating them. We feel exhaustion, and we do not always know how to do it right, and we fall into sin. If we rear our children in anger and with physical or mental violence, we may destroy a very fragile being. It would be good for the parents to get together and discuss parenting that is in accordance with the Word of God. How should we set secure borders but also express unconditional love and acceptance toward every family member? We can pray to God for an answer.

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Discussion Points

1. How is the sense of wellbeing between spouses reflected in family life?
2. How do I prioritize my time to benefit my spouse and family?
3. How can we create an atmosphere in our home that encourages communication?
4. Discuss the role of love, forgiveness, and setting boundaries in child-rearing.