

STORM-STRONG FAMILIES ...LOVE WELL (Part 2)

Ephesians 5-6 Husbands, love your wives. Wives, be subject to your own husband. Children, obey your parents.

The Most Precious Thingⁱ

It happened long ago that a young man and a young woman fell in love with each other and decided to marry. They had almost no money, but they did not hesitate over that. Their trust in each other gave them faith that their future together must be a bright one, as long as they had each other. They happily chose a date on which they would join hearts and souls.

Before the wedding, the girl came to her fiancé with a request.

"I cannot imagine our ever wanting to be apart." She said. "But it may be that, in time, we will tire of each other, or that you will be angry with me, and want to send me back to my parents' house. Promise me that if this should happen, you will allow me to carry back with me the thing that has grown most precious to me.

Her fiancé laughed, and could see no sense in what she asked, but the girl was not satisfied until he had written down his promise and signed his name to it. Then the two were married and began their life together.

They set their minds to improving their worldly position. They were both willing to work hard at it, and soon their patient industry found reward. Their first successes made them even more determined to put poverty behind them, and they worked harder than ever before. Time passed, and their purses swelled. They became comfortable, then well-to-do, and finally rich. They moved to a bigger house, found a new set of friends, and surrounded themselves with all the trappings of fortune.

But in their single-minded pursuit of wealth, they began to think more of their things than of each other. More and more, they quarreled about what to buy, or how much to spend or how they should go about increasing their riches.

One afternoon, as they were preparing a feast for several important friends, they argued about some trifling matter – the flavor of the gravy, or perhaps the order of seating at the table. They began shouting and accusing each other."

"You care nothing for me!" cried the husband. "You think only of yourself, and the jewels and fine clothes you wear. Take those that are most precious to you, as I promised, and go back to your parents' house. There is no point in our going on together."

His wife went suddenly pale, and stared at him with a distracted look in her eyes, as if she had just seen something for the first time."

"Very well," she said quietly. "I am willing to go. But we must stay together one more night, and sit side by side at our table, for the sake of appearances in front of our friends."

The evening arrived. The feast began. It was as bountiful as their ample means allowed. When, one by one, the guests had succumbed to its influence, and her husband, too, had fallen asleep, the good woman had him carried to her parents' cottage and laid in bed there.

When he woke the next morning, he could not understand where he was. He raised himself up on his elbow to look about him, and at once his wife came to the bedside.

"My dear husband," she said softly, "your promise was that if you ever sent me away I might carry with me

the thing that was most precious to me. You are that most precious thing. I care for you more than anything else, and nothing but death shall part us.”

At once the man saw how selfishly they had both acted. He clasped his wife in his arms, and they kissed each other tenderly. That same day they returned home and began to devote themselves once again to each other.

This parable – entitled “The Most Precious Thing” -- of a young couple who faced...and almost lost to...the storm, has been in the folklore of Eastern Europe countries for centuries. There’s nothing new under the sun (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9).

- What young couple eager to marry doesn’t begin **with tremendous naïveté** about whether or not their love will last?
- What young couple doesn’t get **caught up in the press** of trying to make it in their careers, the taskmaster of being successful, of becoming increasingly wealthy and admired by all their friends?
- What young couple doesn’t too often **find themselves in angry, even violent arguments** which evaporates their love...time after time after time...so that eventually the relationship comes to the breaking point?
- What young couple isn’t **so blinded to what is really going on** until...if they are fortunate, something happens to jolt them to their senses...and demands a recalibrating about what is the most precious thing?

Even if you didn’t find yourself in this story, there is still much to learn from it. Because a Storm-Strong family takes the time and makes the effort to invest in the most precious thing that makes them strong. Such a family – all the members of such a family, intentionally invests in **love**.



Not surprisingly,
this starts
here...

Not surprisingly, it starts here. With a man and a woman who ask and answer together these questions – “Why has God brought us together?” and therefore, “What *kind of couple* are we going to be?” In short, what is *our* most precious thing?



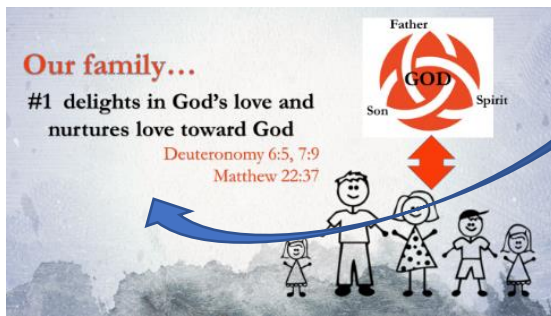
What kind of family will we be?

Then, and only then, can you ask and answer the 2nd question: What kind of family will we be?

- * Will we be a family that is **Jesus/gospel** centered?
- * Will we be a family that eagerly fears the Lord?
- * Will we be a family that **invests in loving** God & each

other?

So what are the “growing in love” family basics? Let’s step through 4 of them together --



BASIC #1 One of the great portions of Scripture you can read with your family is found in Deuteronomy 6 and 7. Let's begin in 7, and then to 6.

Deut 7:6 "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people

that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but **it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath** that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, **the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments**, to a thousand generations, ¹⁰ and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.

^{7:12} "And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. ¹³ **He will love you, bless you, and multiply you.** He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. ¹⁴ You shall be blessed above all peoples.

Deut 6:1 "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear the LORD your God, **you and your son and your son's son**, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and **be careful to do them, that it may go well with you**, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Now...before you bring me up on charges of "bad interpretation," let's discern wisely what we are reading here. These words were spoken originally, and specifically, to *Old Testament Israel*, some 3,400 years ago So how shall we understand them and apply them *today*?

On the one hand, these were promises from God specifically intended for young families in Israel under a special arrangement with God. God specifically promised them that if they would love Him and obey His laws, the nation and all the nation's families would be blessed in a way that the world had never seen. Literally, *everything* (no miscarriages, no disease, no crop failure, etc.ⁱⁱ) –

everything would go well with them...if they as a special, chosen nation loved and obeyed.

Today, in the N.T. Church era, these “everything will go well” promises have not been promised to Jesus’ disciples. Today’s body of Christ is not ethnic, O.T. Israel, and we Christians today do not live under the Old Covenant of the Law. So we live in a different era. But there are some striking similarities – between these ancient promises and what we find in the N.T. -- when it comes to God loving us and we loving God. Christians and Christian families are assured

- God **has loved us** (and loves us) with great love, and chosen us in Christ for every possible spiritual blessing that God can give (Ephesians 1:3-14, 2:4-10)
- God **will bless any Christian and any Christian family** with a solid foundation when it listens to and obeys the Lord in its family life (Matthew 7:37-39)
- The Lord has **a special love and presence** with those who are thankful (1 Thess. 5:18) and who will listen to Him and obey Him (cf. John 14:21)ⁱⁱⁱ

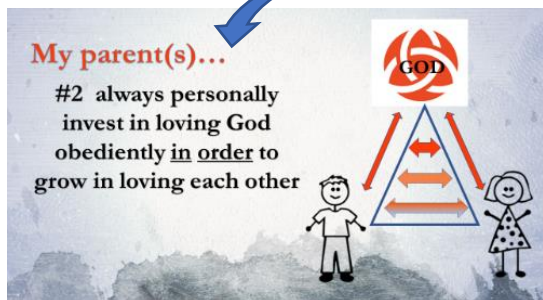
How can a family nurture its love for God in response to God’s love for them?

In 1897, journalist William Allen White had the chance to meet President Theodore Roosevelt in 1897 for the first time. The report of his encounter was instructive. “I have never known such a man as he and I never shall again,” remarked White. “He overcame me. And in the hour or two we spent that day at lunch, he poured into my heart such vision, such ideals, such hopes, such a new attitude toward life and patriotism and the meaning of things, as I had never dreamed men had.”

“After that,” admitted White, “I was his man.”

(Someone said) -- *If a mere mortal can have such an effect on another, how much more our Lord? If we will spend time with him in prayer and in Scripture, we too will find our hearts filled with vision, with hopes, with a new attitude toward life and the meaning of things, and afterward we too will say with thankfulness, “I am his.”*^{iv}

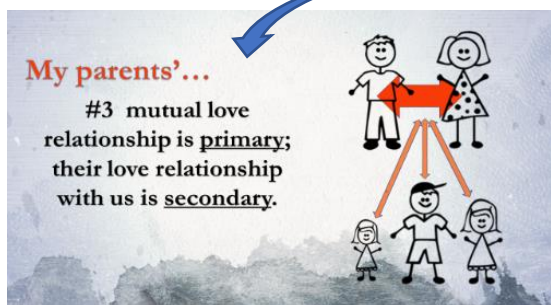
Dad, mom, grandpa, grandma, uncle or aunt...the best investment you can ever make toward the Lord building your home “storm strong” is to intentionally taking the time to be with Jesus – to fall in love with Him and all He is and how He loves, and all we have in a God who will bless us when we love Him. Your kids saying – as bottom line who you are as a family, “We delight in God’s love, and we spend time loving God back.”



BASIC #2 This diagram is powerfully simple. It illustrates that the closer I draw near to God in fellowship, in prayer, in listening to the Holy Spirit, in yielding to Him and what he wants to “redo” in my life, the closer we come in our one-flesh

one-heart relationship. In listening together to God. We get what “the most precious thing” is.

The challenge is, of course, when one spouse or the other is going in the opposite direction. Gentlemen, draw near to God. Get your Ph.D. in the character and self-less love of Jesus Christ, and you will know how to love your wife the way Jesus loves the church (Eph 5:25-30). Dear ladies, young and old, draw near to God. Get your Ph.D. in the character and love of the Lord Jesus, and you will know how to love your husband and place-yourselves-under his leadership (Eph. 5:22-24), as is fitting in the Lord.



BASIC #3 Why is understanding this important? Take a deep breath here and drink this in. Listen well to John Rosemond in his excellent *Parenting By the Book: Biblical wisdom for Raising your Child*.

Genesis 2:24 is the record of the moment when God, after He created man and woman, **established marriage as the foundation of the family**, the child-rearing unit. **It is the first family principle.** Before a married couple begins having children, they should be devoted and faithful to each other. That means in the sexual sense, of course, but it also means that no other relationship or enterprise of any sort should come before their relationship with each other.

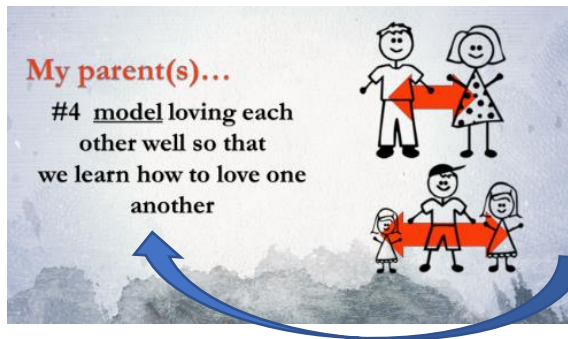
After they begin having children, for them to be “one flesh” means – listen up! – no other relationship or enterprise should come before their relationship with each other. In other words, being one flesh with children means the same thing as it does without children. The relationship a husband and wife have with their children should not, must not, come before their relationship with each other, and the enterprise of being parents (parenting) should not, must not, come before the enterprise of being married. Husband/wife trump father/mother.^v

You say, “Hey wait a minute...our kids are EVERYTHING!” One of you recently wrote me and put it this way:

Our kids and their activities is the focus of our family life right now. Not our marriage. We give so much to the kids we have little left for each other. Early on in my marriage, I never understood why couples would divorce after the kids left home. It has now become crystal clear. Marriages are neglected for years to focus on the children. We don't feel that we have the time to prioritize our marriages, and instead they slowly erode away.

Wow...do I appreciate that honesty. So let's get this right. If the children are in position #1...they're in the wrong position. You two being “one-flesh” is primary; you two investing in your “agape” (self-sacrificing) and “phileo” (i.e., friendship) love is *critically* primary. From that strength flows solid parenting. It's the reason why the New Testament Scriptures contain a lot more revelation about

about the husband-wife relationship than it does about the parent-child relationship



Basic #1 We spend time understanding God's love for us, and expressing our love Him

Basic #2 Dad and Mom are growing in love for God, and thus in love for each other

Basic #3 My parent's love for each other is primary; we kids find our anchor in their relationship

Basic #4 ...

In *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas^{vi} offers this:

Many years ago, a few close friends celebrated our high school graduation by hiking on Mt. Rainier. Just before I attempted to jump a fast-moving creek, one of my friends advised me, "Just make sure you fall forward!" The advice was well heeded. Even if I didn't make the jump, as long as I kept my momentum going forward, I wouldn't be swept into the stream.

The advice stayed with me through the years. I believe that Christian marriage is also about learning to fall forward (together). Obstacles arise, anger flares up, and weariness dulls our feelings and our senses. When this happens, the spiritually immature respond by pulling back, becoming more distant from their spouse, or even seeking to start over with someone else, somebody "more exciting."

Yet maturity is reached by continuing to move forward past the pain and apathy. Falls are inevitable. We can't control that, but we can control the direction in which we fall—toward or away from our spouse.

You and I teach our kids how to "fall forward" in forgiveness and agape love with each other. Why?

Because real love – the kind that God has for us, and thus the kind we can have for each other

THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN LOVING

¹ Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

THERE IS NOTHING SELF-CENTERED ABOUT LOVING

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

THERE IS EVERYTHING COMPLETE/RIGHT ABOUT LOVING

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love

You and I teach our kids, our grandkids—shucks, we all teach each other in the body of Christ --

whether 1 Corinthians 13 can be lived and bring true joy in real life, or are simply sweet-sounding words fit for plaques you can buy at Hallmark stores.

STORM-STRONG in LOVE

Let me wrap up with this. If there is one characteristic that I discern in all of the "storms" which

parents and kids face today, it's the presence of PRESSURE. Everyone feels stress; we are anxious society. This guy went to his therapist...

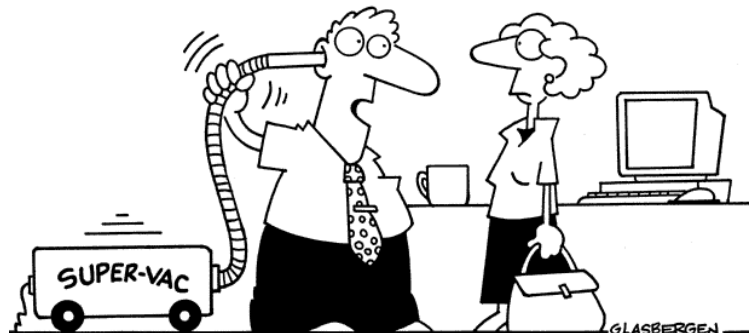


This guy's getting some suspect advice...

"It says, 'Take one step at a time.' Wait a second, that can't be right."

This guy's figured out what a "Super Vac" is for...

Copyright 2002 by Randy Glasbergen.
www.glasbergen.com



"It's just something I do every day at 5:00 to get rid of stress before I go home."

- **Financial pressure:** to make it financially, to provide, and the stress that comes when you are spending too much or coming up short
- **Career pressure:** to advance in a chosen field and be considered successful
- **Comparison and Social pressure:** other couples, other families. They seem to be doing really well. Why can't we find experience that friendship, that rhythm of teamwork?
- **Social pressure:** we find ourselves anxious whether or not kids at school will like me, or not if I don't agree with them or dress like them or do the foolish things they think are cool
- **Pressure of never-ending activities...** so the marriage takes a back seat
- **Pressure: "Are we getting it right?" pressure** – everything from what I'm feeding my kids to how I'm disciplining my kids to what I am modeling for my kids
- **Solo Pressure** of not having a spouse to team with, or having a spouse that's not on God's team, or you're in a blended family and the blend isn't going so well.

But here's the truth...

Your kids will not remember nor truly treasure the incessant activities. The pressure they feel from their unloving, uncentered classmates will eventually evaporate away. They really won't care how much money you made nor how high on the career ladder you were able to climb. Nothing of all of that will last.

But what they will remember...and be shaped by...was whether or not their parents taught them the basics...about how much God loves them, and how to love Him in return. How a family is bonded in "falling forward" in love through all the ups and downs—because that's how mom and dad loved each other. Giving them a centered security in God's love and their love, and then to extend that love toward others.

The Most Precious thing. Storm-Strong families learn together how to love well...and also what not to love (which we will take up in part 3).

Copyright 2019 © David A. Staff
All rights reserved

ⁱ This story of a young wife who matches words of love with a deed of love echoes the stratagem of the wives of Weinsberg. Variations of the tale are found in the folklore of eastern Europe. Included in William J. Bennett, ed., *The Moral Compass: Stories for Life's Journey* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), 511-512.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who **loves** me. And he who **loves** me will be **loved** by my Father, and I will **love** him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21 ESV)

^{iv} Thomas Bailey and David Kennedy, eds., *The American Pageant*, 9th ed. (D. C. Heath, 1991)

^v John Rosemond, *PARENTING by THE BOOK: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child* (Howard Books, 2007), 117-118.

^{vi} Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Zondervan, 2000), 154-155.