

Bolting the Door

Lesson 18

***“He saith unto them. Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so”
(Matthew 19:8).***

FOCUS

Unfortunately, for many couples, at the first sign of trouble, the first serious disagreement, or the first really hurtful exchange of words, they are “out of here.” Divorce is a door that is wide open when trouble shows up.

God’s people need to rise and fight the enemies of family life. The downfall of families is never God’s will. In the Old Testament He tells Israel that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16, *NIV*). Jesus stated that “from the beginning it [divorce] was not so” (Matthew 19:8). The Creator meant for families to be the backbone of society and the church. His desire was for a father and mother, who love Him and each other, to raise children to love and serve Him too. Together this family unit was supposed to serve each other and those outside their home unselfishly.

What I Have Learned

INTRODUCTION

In *What My Parents Did Right* (compiled and edited by Gloria Gaither), Jill Briscoe (British author and speaker) tells of a well-known saying in her parents’ home: “When the doors on a marriage are shut and bolted and a fire breaks out, all your time and energy goes to putting out the flames.” Her parents did not view divorce as an option—that door was bolted—so when there was a problem in the home, they spent all their efforts correcting the problem and preserving the marriage. When a couple enters marriage with this type of commitment, there is a much greater chance that their family will survive.

This will obviously take work on *both sides* of the marriage partnership. As we have seen in previous lessons, God’s Word agrees with this plan and gives us many weapons and methods to use to “bolt the door” against divorce and stay inside the marriage, working to do away with any destructive force.

PRESERVING MARRIAGE

God's family plan will work. Since marriage is the beginning of the family unit, its failure must be considered the root cause of the destruction of families everywhere. How can we "save the marriage"?

- **The first step is a determination to obey God's Word.** We cannot look at marriage as anything other than God's special design for the beginning of the family—a commitment and vow for the rest of our lives.

"And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matthew 19:4-5).

- **We need to understand that God's will and purpose for marriage is for our benefit and pleasure.** He never intended us to suffer and struggle alone but to share the joys and sorrows of life with our spouse.

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2: 18, 22-25).

- **Always keep in mind that we are made in the image and likeness of God.** A daily reminder that marriage is supposed to be a model of Christ will help keep the focus on the priority of making the marriage work. Our goal is to be a reflection of His relationship with His church.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27).

- **One of marriage's greatest blessings is a result of keeping yourself pure in body.** Many children are not taught by example to keep themselves for their future spouse. We have to begin training our small children to assure that they follow this practice all the days of their life.

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from

fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4).

- **It is vital to the building of a strong marriage to know your duties and obligations.** Enter marriage with an understanding of the role you should play. God has given us specific jobs as men and women, and if the marriage is going to work, we must live out these roles.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18).

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29).

When these commands are obeyed, both the husband and wife are blessed, and the marriage can succeed.

Many principles in God's Word will help a marriage succeed, but these last two points cover them all.

- **Always walk with the Master.**

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7).

Invite Jesus into your marriage. A lot of the things we say and do would change if we practiced His presence. Jesus' first miracle was performed at a wedding. He wants to perform a lot more miracles by saving marriages everywhere.

- **Pray together.** One of the best ways to walk with the Master in your marriage is by praying with your spouse. This may take time and patience to get started, but it will work. There are many passages of Scripture that support this statement.

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20).

As Dr. Norman Vincent Peale (one of New York City's most famous pastors) has said, "I

have married hundreds of couples and counseled hundreds of others, and I have never yet known a marriage to fail where the couples had—or had acquired—the habit of praying aloud together.”

- **Never give up—keep working on the marriage.**

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

“Marriages are made in heaven, but we are responsible for the maintenance work.”

(Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes

Compiled by Robert J. Morgan)

“Working” at marriage involves every day—all day long. It means that neither spouse takes the other for granted. Conscious effort must be made to express the love and commitment that brought them together in the beginning.

Dr. Nathaniel Branden in “Advice That Could Save Your Marriage” (*Reader’s Digest*) suggests several ways to show affection to a marriage companion:

- Tell each other “I love you” often.
- Be physically affectionate (hold hands, hug each other, or sit close together when talking).
- Express your love sexually.
- Mention the things you admire and appreciate about your spouse.
- Share thoughts and feelings, talk about what is on your mind and heart, and confide in each other.
- Express love by giving gifts or doing little acts of kindness for each other.
- Find time to be alone together with your spouse.

These suggestions take effort, but they will strengthen your relationship and bring joy into your marriage.

WHAT ABOUT CONFLICT?

Every marriage has disagreements. The secret is to use biblical principles to resolve them so that both parties will feel that they have been understood. This will take work, but again, it will strengthen your marriage.

These Scripture references (taken from the article “How Do We Fight Fairly?” in *Preserving Christian Homes*) will help you when you have a conflict with your spouse:

1. Be patient.

“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11, NIV).

2. Stay calm.

“If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest” (Ecclesiastes 10: 4, NIV).

3. Listen carefully.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Proverbs 18:13).

4. Do not answer too quickly.

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19, NIV).

5. Speak gently.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1, NIV).

6. Be very careful when you do speak.

“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin” (Proverbs 13:3, NIV).

7. Be careful not to cause the problem to get any worse.

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (Proverbs 17:9, NIV).

8. Do not seek revenge.

“Do not say, ‘I’ll do to him as he has done to me; I’ll pay that man back for what he did’” (Proverbs 24:29, NIV).

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

9. Do not say everything that comes to mind.

“Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down” (Proverbs 26:20, NIV).

10. Trust the Lord to solve your conflicts.

“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you” (Proverbs 20:22, NIV).

11. Make sure everything is settled peacefully before you rest at night.

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

As with every other problem faced in marriage, God’s Word gives us the answer for solving our conflicts. If we cling to this advice, God will work His miracle in our marriage.

PRESERVING THE FAMILY

When two people make a decision to work together, following Christ’s example and Word, the proper foundation for a family has been laid. Through good and bad, God is the head of everything in the home, and He gives grace and strength.

One basic commandment of Jesus will help preserve the family more than anything else we can do. In human relationships, this is one of the most difficult commandments ever given. Peter came asking Jesus how many times he was supposed to forgive a brother (or sister) who had wronged him. Jesus’ answer is one we need to remember and obey prayerfully.

“Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22).

Jesus explained what He meant with a parable about an unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35). This man had been forgiven a great debt, but he refused to forgive the man who owed him a very small amount. His punishment was severe and a lesson to us all. Matthew 6:14-15 explains why:

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

The bitterness and anger that develop in a marriage, especially over conflict, is a direct result of forgetting this important principle. No matter what men do to us, God commands us to forgive. Even though it is difficult rule to follow, it is a must for family life.

- Forgiveness begins with Mom and Dad and must be worked on diligently and consistently. Mom and Dad teach forgiveness by example when they forgive each other, their children, other family members, their neighbors, and anyone who hurts them.
- Children need to be taught to forgive from earliest childhood. Many times this begins with learning how to forgive brothers or sisters.
- Sometimes parents need to ask their children for forgiveness. This is one of the best ways children can learn how to forgive.
- They learn the same lesson of forgiveness at school while getting along with other children.

Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 4: 29-32) gives some sound advice—especially for families:

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (NLT).

Oh, the difference forgiveness makes in any home!

**“I can forgive, but I cannot forget” is only another way of saying, “I will not forgive.”
Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note—torn in two and burned up, so that it
never can be shown against one.**

(Henry Ward Beecher)

CONCLUSION

When we bolt the door against the idea of divorce, and work hard together with God

and His plan, our families can be a witness to others. The prophecy of Isaiah concerning the salvation of Israel can be applied to families who follow God and work together to build their homes for Him.

“The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old waste cities, the desolations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:1-4).

Some of the characteristics of strong families that develop when God’s Word is followed (taken from *Fantastic Families* by Dr. Nick & Nancy Stinnett) are:

- Happiness;
- Parents and children who get along well as they practice the love of Jesus;
- A relaxed and open atmosphere in the home with relationships that are free of conflict;
- A family unit that actively reaches outside their home to affect others for eternity.

This is possible when the family works together to love God, each other, and those around them. This is God’s perfect will for families.

When was the last time you asked God for help with your family? There is no greater time than the present to ask—believing. God’s promises are true and they are for you—and me too.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7).

What Have You Learned?

1. List eight (8) things that can be done to “save the marriage.” Give Scripture reference to support each.

2. List seven (7) ways to show affection to a spouse

3. What is the secret to resolving disagreements in a marriage?

4. List eleven (11) points to resolving a conflict. Support each with Scripture

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5. What is one (1) basic commandment of Jesus that will help preserve the family more than anything else? Support your answer with Scripture.

6. How many times are we supposed to forgive? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

NOTES