



MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRY

MWC

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

**Promoting love, prayer, fasting and
family devotional times**

**May 7- June 17, 2007
Prayer Focus Weeks**

May 6, 2007

Dear church family,

One of our mission statements is to build prayerful marriages and families that acknowledge and believe that prayer is the first line of defense and not the court of last resort against the evil attacks of the enemy. We know the times that we live in necessitate even more a shield of protection against the wiles and evil schemes of the enemy. What more effective weapon can we use to effect this protection than prayer! A family focused on praying to the Lord Jesus Christ has a foundation that may be shaken at times, but will always withstand anything that comes against it.

In this regard, the Marriage and Family Ministry, in cooperation with the Intercessory Prayer Ministry, is sponsoring “Prayer Focus Weeks on Marriages and Families” from May 7 to June 17, 2007. Each week will have a different prayer focus and the daily devotions will center on that. Adults can definitely use these devotions and those families with children should tailor each devotion according to the age of the children. Enclosed also are suggestions on developing family devotional times including a family covenant that seeks to promote love within the family in various ways.

We hope that this family devotional written by those from our church family will be the springboard for MWC church families to develop family devotional times. It is important for parents to have their children involved in family prayer because this helps build the children's relationship with the Lord and also teaches them the importance of prayer.

We suggest that you combine these prayer times with fasting in the way the Lord leads you. For Jesus it was not a case of *if* we would fast but *when* we fast (Matthew 6:16-18). John Maxwell wrote in his book *Partners in Prayer* that “combining fasting with prayer can result in a spiritual atomic bomb that pulls down spiritual strongholds and releases the power of God in your life.”

We claim and expect the mighty power of prayer, fasting and agreement to be manifested through marriages being restored, families being strengthened, prodigal sons and daughters returning to the Lord, and physical and financial healings – all for the glory of the Lord!

C.H. Spurgeon said, “Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray.” Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace expecting and believing the mighty work of God in our marriages and families!

In His service,
Efren and Benilda Salvador
(on behalf of the Marriage and Family Ministry)

Family Devotional Times

When planning family devotional times, consider the purpose and clarify the purpose with others in your family. Some purposes for family devotional times include: "to relate to God as a family," "to practice faith habits as a family," and "to share in forming family memories."

Think about the appropriate time for your family devotional. Some possibilities include: at every meal or time your family is together; at a weekly set-aside time when all members of the family are generally present; at a special time once a month for an extended time. Additional special times might include school vacations, times of celebration, or times of distress.

Things to Do

Memory Meal. Share special memories of times when you shared love with someone else. Tell stories about how you felt love as a child. Let each family member describe a memory.

Family Night. Set aside a regular time for sharing activities of family fun together. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who live different lives from yours). Or a different family member could plan each family night, with the activity based on agreed-upon criteria.

Hymn of the Month. Select a hymn to learn as a family. Sing it at each meal, before bed, while driving to school, or at other times. If there are children in the family, keep the youngest in mind as you consider hymn content and length.

Prayer of the Month. Take time to think about and write down your thoughts for a prayer about love to be prayed at mealtimes. Be sure to include people who are less fortunate, people you are thankful to know, ways to show love, and reminders of how much God loves each one in your family. Family members could write the prayer together or take turns writing a "Family Prayer of the Month."

Thanksgiving Prayer. Offer a thanksgiving prayer at mealtimes in which you insert family members' names; for example, "Dear God, I thank you for my Grandmother Rose."

Refrigerator Reminders. Post on the refrigerator a Scripture passage, line from a hymn, inspirational thought, or brief prayer. Change the passage each Saturday. Reserve this place on the refrigerator near the door handle at eye level.

Scripture/Prayer/Thought for the Day Cards. Buy a spiral notebook of index cards. Write a favorite Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day about love on each card. Illustrate each card. Each day, turn over one of the cards to reveal the Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day. Read the card aloud.

*"Family Devotional Times" was written by Susan Hay, Director of Ministries with Youth, and Mary Alice Gran, Director of Ministries with Children.
(www.gbod.org/family)*

FAMILY COVENANT

In order that our family may be one that promotes love with one another, we promise one another to:

1. Seek God's presence through regular Bible study, reflection, and prayer together.
2. Love one another unconditionally, loving the person even while lovingly expressing behaviors that might need to be changed by that person.
3. Seek ways to praise and lift up actions of others in the family that show ways family members are sharing God's love and showing love for others.
4. As a family, decide on a way to offer service to people outside our family circle.
5. Share at least one family meal per week. For those with family not in the same location, decide on a common day for a meal each week. As you dine separately, pray for one another or call one another and pray together by phone.
6. Seek out stories of love at church, in the newspaper, on the internet, at school, at work, and at home. Tell these stories to one another.

Signed by:

All family members must sign the covenant.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

Single-Parent Families

Week One: May 7-13, 2007

(Mother's Day—May 13)

Time is the most precious commodity for adults raising children alone. Chores, homework, school activities, work demands, and church commitments sometimes feel too numerous. Sometimes establishing a family devotional time is complicated by visitation and custody circumstances when there has been a divorce. Providing a friend in faith or prayer partner for the adult parenting alone helps give support for establishing faith practices in the home.

Monday, May 7, 2007

Tuesday, May 8, 2007

Worry Not

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:26-33

We all do it – that thing called worry. Some of us are even self-proclaimed worry warts. We can all get caught up in that “woe to me” attitude from time to time, especially when things around us begin to fall apart. We know it doesn't help our situation, but we still worry.

As Christians, we also know that God provides our every need. We are his special and precious children. Our focus should be on Him. He knows how we feel and the desires of our heart. He takes care of us. It not may be in the way we expect, but he is there. Just look and you will see him – maybe in a child's smile, in a friendly hello, in an unexpected gift or phone call. It's good to take charge of your situation and plan to improve. Just be sure to consult with the expert, our loving Lord God. He is our provider, our Jehovah Jireh. (Paulette Schulte)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to lean on you at all times. I ask that my thoughts are filled with only you and that my actions reflect a confidence in knowing you are the one in control of my every need. Teach me to turn the control over to you. And in doing so, that I might find peace in not worrying for that which is already taken care of! Amen.

Carry Each Other's Burden

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
Galatians 6:10

Raising children is a tough and challenging task even with both parents present in the family but more so for single parents. It is hard to imagine what they have to go through each day. I praise God for those who continue to seek His ways amidst their difficult circumstances. I share with you a story I read in the internet from a single Mom:

I am a single Mom. Since my divorce four years ago my children and I have each been challenged on our faith journey. Every evening we have a fifteen-minute praying/sharing time. It seems that everyone has a very hectic schedule. This has challenged my patience many times. It challenges all of us to take time for our faith. But we had found that after my divorce we needed to look at ourselves as a family and to refocus on who we are for each other.

It hasn't always been easy. There were many hurts and angers. But we have learned that even in our brokenness, we are growing each day in our awareness of how much God loves us. We are increasing in faith, hope, and love and we are learning to share these gifts with others.

As the body of Christ, we are called upon to do good especially to the family of believers. May we learn to have a sensitive and compassionate heart to those around us, especially to single parents who continue to walk in faith and raise their family in God's ways.
(Benilda Salvador)

Prayer: Dear Lord, you know the challenges and limitations that single parents encounter. We ask you to give them rest from their fears and soothe their anxious hearts. Let your holy angels hover around them and their children. May we always keep them in prayer and offer to help in any practical way to ease the burdens and heavy load they carry. This we pray in your most precious name. Amen.

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

What If?

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

What if my child dies without warning, or my teenage daughter gets pregnant, or I'm not able to pay the mortgage, or God forbid, what if we get attacked by terrorists and my children are not able to grow up and live in peace?

These are fears that we all struggle with daily, horrors that can bring devastation and pain to our families, fears that can weigh us down and keep us from enjoying the joy God has promised.

However, in the midst of all our fears God has given us a most excellent way to overcome. He has given us love, and there is no fear in love... "It always protects, always trust, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

We must remember that with love the fears of the world are neither here nor there. Instead we must focus on the one blessed fear that is liberating...the Fear of God! (Troy Davis)

Prayer: *Father God, we trust you to provide for us, to protect us, to cover us with the blood of Your Son Jesus. With you we have no fears, no doubts, and no uncertainties. Boldly we walk into the future knowing that the battle has already been won, the enemy already defeated, and our destiny already preserved. We fight mightily with all we have, and when all else is depleted, these three remain: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love! In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Thursday, May 10, 2007

Pressing On

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

October 10, 2006, a day that will live in infamy. The day my marriage died.

I found myself a stranger in a strange land, without a home, a car, and kids to love and teach on a steady basis. Depression, alcohol, suicide and myriad voices all called out to me in offering their solution. "Come and join us, we'll take away the pain. Mourn this day forever."

Now only did I have to begin a new life as a single parent, a every other weekend father, but had to establish a home, keep my job, learn to survive knowing the two that were one flesh were now torn apart. There were not enough Kleenex to keep up with the tears and I became a refugee in my own world.

But the Holy Spirit spoke to me softly, telling me He would take care of my burdens and provide for me. "Do not be tempted, for I will provide you a way if you trust Me. Just press onward."

And I did. I followed not knowing where I was going and how, but listening to Him.

So we left behind the ashes, the tears, the anger and He provided me with what I needed: strength and honor to parent alone, a home, security at work, a car and even a tax refund. He never left me, not once, and I will never ever doubt He calls me friend. (John D'Antona)

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for carrying and saving us even when the world turned its back. We thank you for pointing the way and guiding us through the deserts of single parenting and the unique challenges it brings. Keep us from looking back at what has happened and towards the promise of Your riches and glory that lie ahead. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Friday, May 11, 2007

Coping with Life

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you.

Leviticus 24:35

What good is it brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without food and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:14-17

Single parents face a myriad of challenges: financial hardships, few or expensive child care options, in some cases abuse by the ex-spouse, endless struggles to be both mom and dad - often magnified when there are babies and younger children in the home, employment issues particularly the ability to get back into the work force, etc.

Not every circumstance is the same, but without a network of support, someone's life could become disheveled or worse. The body of Christ can help to meet some of these needs in practical ways, such as having networks of people, who are available and skilled in the areas of need. I am not suggesting a free ride without consequences. After all, we want people to be responsible but when all is said and done, those who are attempting to walk genuinely with the Lord, be diligent and a good steward, they are worthy of help. (Ron Swaby)

Prayer: Lord, I pray for single parents, whatever their circumstance that they may always know that you never give more than one can bear. So I lift them up in whatever circumstances they find themselves today. I pray that they keep their eyes focused on you, and that we can be a blessing to them in a practical way today. Amen.

Saturday, May 12, 2007

I am not Alone

Fear not for you shall not be ashamed: neither be confounded and depressed... For your Maker is your Husband - the Lord of Hosts is His name - and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; the God of the whole earth He is called.

Isaiah 54:4-5

I am sure like me there are a couple of things that God is still working out in you. For me, I worry, I get fearful and I get anxious about this and that. As a single parent, it is further compounded by the fact that you feel so alone. I believe that I have come a long way from worrying not because of me but because of two things: first, I have chosen to believe the Bible as the infallible and errorless word of God and second, because time and time again God have proven that He is abundantly able to do anything and everything. Think about it since God is able, no need that you have is beyond Him and He has promised to never "leave you nor forsake you." You are not alone. (Leslie Cato)

Prayer: O God, how great is Your goodness, Your grace, Your provision and peace. To you, O Lord, who sees my heart, bears my grief, feels my suffering, knows my needs and understands my failures. You cannot change. You are El Shaddai, my all and all. Amen.

Sunday, May 13, 2007

The Exchange

"For your Maker is your husband..." Isaiah 54:5

It was the summer of '97. Three years passed marking my official separation from my husband with divorce papers soon to follow in the fall. While away on a missions trip to El Salvador, the Lord gave me a scripture preceding the divorce. It was Isaiah 54. The entire chapter left me in a state of awe and wondering how God could know and describe my circumstances with such clarity.

As I began to study the passage, the first verse that struck me was Isaiah 54:5. "For your Maker is your husband..." Soon I realized that God was preparing me to receive Himself as my new partner. Here was the exchange. I was never alone. Thus began my journey as a single parent with my Lord as my husband.

Through the years this passage has served as the foundation of my relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I have found God to be faithful and true to his Word. Every promise and provision has and is continually being met.

The road to single parenting has been made much smoother knowing that my husband, my Maker is directing my path. (Rita Hinton)

Prayer: Father in the name of Jesus I pray that every single parent would declare You as their mate. May that exchange prove to be the best decision they have ever made. Amen.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

Older Couples

Week Two: May 14-20, 2007

Sometimes as couples age — and particularly if they have had children in the home but are now empty-nesters — they no longer think of themselves as a family or see themselves included in family activities at the church. As we age, we must continue to grow in faith. Many older couples maintain a healthy devotional life, engaging together in such activities studying Scripture, and practicing acts of service in the church and community.

Monday, May 14, 2007

Still Caring

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:11

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

The house is quiet. It speaks of peace, but a place of loneliness as well – the children are gone, the “nest” is empty.

At one time we took care of their lives. We spoke commands: “*Wear your sweater! Eat your vegetables! Be in by 11:15!*”

A sense of anxiety comes upon us as we see them enter a sometimes cruel, hostile world where our presence is diminished. They seek their own way in careers, marriages, and in raising their children.

Our heavenly Father knows the heart of a parent. He has provided powerful reassurances to us daily as we pray for God to watch over our children. We know that He has a set of armor that will help them stand firm against the fiery darts that Satan may hurl at them. His Holy Spirit is available to guide them.

We can pray daily for the armor of God to protect them, for a hedge of protection to surround them, for the Holy Spirit to guide them – whether they are little children at home or adults far away. And we can rest in the blessed assurance that God is covering, protecting, and guiding – He cares. (Bill and Jan Scheerer)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are awed by your love for us. We are grateful that your love extends to our loved ones, far and near. We pray that we will experience that peace that can only come from knowing that you love and want the best for our children, even more than we do. Thank you for that assurance. Amen.

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

Many Waters cannot Quench Love

Place me like a seal over your heart, or like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, and jealousy is as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters can not quench love, neither can rivers drown it. Song of Solomon 8: 6-7

For just as love is as strong as death, so God sacrificed his only begotten son so that we could have life more abundantly. Agape love is unconditional, not shallow, or warm and fuzzy, but obedient, caring, and committed. Love can not be killed by time or by trials and tribulations. Love is priceless and even the richest king can not buy it. We were bought with a price. So freely God gives his love, and we are expected to impart this love to others. In our younger years we are working out our imperfections and working through our adversities with God's help and his Word. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. The love of God constrains us, and nothing can separate us from his love. The bond of unity and love, coupled with commitment is established to reinforce our later years. (Abel and Joann Epps)

Prayer: Jesus, we thank you for your unconditional love that teaches us to love each other as we age. We pray for every older couple that they would be guided by your Holy Spirit and your Word. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Discipline = Love

My child, do not reject the Lord's discipline, and don't get angry when he corrects you. The Lord corrects those He loves, just as parents correct the child they delight in.

Proverbs 3:11-12

The word "discipline" is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. Most people generally think of it as punishment or as something unpleasant.

We need to understand that discipline is something you do FOR a child. Punishment is something you do to a child when discipline fails. The purpose of discipline is positive—to produce a whole person, free of the faults and handicaps that hinder maximum development.

The word "discipline" comes from the word "disciple", one who is a follower of a teacher. Our greatest example is Jesus who followed whatever His Father told Him to do. *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can do only what he sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does."* John 5:19-20

As we read the word of God we see that Jesus delights in us and shows us how to live a life that will produce blessings for us and our families. (Marion Bucci)

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the times that you have showed your love for us by gently disciplining us. Jesus, we want to yield ourselves to you so we may be a vessel that you can work through. Thank you for loving and caring so much for us! Amen.*

Thursday, May 17, 2007

Count your Blessings!

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

Wow! These verses are so fantastic that many in Christ have never realized how blessed they are. This blows depression right out of the water. So let's do what an old hymn tells us to do: *"Count your many blessings and see what God has done."*

We are chosen by God so that we would reflect God's character in our daily lives. As adopted children of God we are with full rights as sons and daughters of God. That right doesn't happen when we die. It is a right that we immediately have. And with that right we are blessed in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In the now we find that there are spiritual gifts that become available as we step out in faith. His promise is that these signs will follow those who believe. We overcome not by our power, but by His. That is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:4 *"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with demonstration of the Spirit's power..."*

Remember as Christians we are a new creation, a royal priesthood, an heir of God, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, appointed by Christ to bear fruit, seated with Christ, and one that the devil has no power over you. In fact the Lord holds no blessings back and supplies us with our every need. (Pastor Dave Bucci)

Prayer: *Almighty God it is difficult to understand how much you really love me. When I begin to count all of my blessings and begin to see who I am in Christ, it humbles me. I realize I don't deserve your blessings. But, as I read your Word, I begin to understand what love really is. Therefore help me to be like Christ and truly be a son/daughter of God and express that same love to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Friday, May 18, 2007

Shine, Don't Whine!

Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.
Philippians 2: 14-15

We sing "Shine, Jesus, Shine" as we truly desire His light to permeate the darkness, despair and deception in our world. Looking up into a clear, starry night sky is captivating. The beauty of these heavenly diamonds has been perfectly and purposefully set in place in the universe like a fine piece of jewelry. Clouds and storms often obstruct our view of this constant light spectacle. The atmosphere becomes thick and impenetrable to the eye, no beauty to behold.

Likewise, grumbling and disputing veil God's glory in our lives and diminishes our testimony. Complaining expresses grief, pain and discontent. It charges accusations and leads to arguments and discord. The atmosphere is uncomfortably disturbing with tension and strain, not only for the parties involved but for anyone in close proximity. This hovers over many homes, work places, etc. and is depressing. No one wants to stay.

However, the Word of Life dispels gloom and darkness. As we hold onto the Word of Life, we are blameless and pure – not sinless, but wholeheartedly devoted to doing God's will. "He shows us the path of life; in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures forevermore." (Psalm 16:11).

Let us hold out the Word of Life for others to find the path of life. (Johanna Astuto)

Prayer: Lord, help us not to complain and argue because this is an expression of unbelief, the behavior of an unbeliever, and prevents us from doing what pleases You. We desire to be devoted to Your will, to be a peacemaker, and to linger in Your presence so that we can shine in the fullness of Your joy, to attract and bring light to those who are stumbling in the darkness. Amen.

Saturday, May 19, 2007

Continue to do Good

Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Let us not become weary in doing good, at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
Galatians 6:7-10

It's so amazing what a kind word can do to our hearts. Asking someone how they are doing today and really listening can do wonders. It doesn't take much at all to do this. All it takes is a willing heart. It could be someone in the bank or the grocery store. It could be someone saying how nice you look today. Seize the opportunity. Get their attention, then share what God has done for you. Oh come on now, I'm sure you have many stories you could share, I know I sure do. Share how God has helped you in times of trouble. Share how He has delivered you and forgave you. Perhaps you've gone through what they are going through right now. Sharing what God has done for you can make such a big difference to someone with a broken spirit.

What a wonderful opportunity we have to be used of God like this, sharing with others about His mercy and love. Imagine how great it would be if you planted seeds and were able to encourage someone with a broken spirit today. You might even start a chain of events that could make its way into their homes. So, today try to make a difference in the life of someone. God can use you to bring hope to a weary soul. God can use you to do some planting, feeding and encouraging. You're never too old, too sick or too tired to do God's work. Trust God and He will empower you in all that you do. Will you do that? Will you let Him use you? Don't give up and don't become weary. God's Word reminds us that at the right time we will reap a harvest. He will give you the strength and words to accomplish what He wants you to do. Believe it! He won't let you down. (Jeanette Ingrassia)

Prayer: Father, thank you for giving us the opportunity to encourage and love others as you love us. Help us to share our experience and help others to grow in You. Amen.

Sunday, May 20, 2007

To All Things There is a Season

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Just as there are weather seasons, such as winter, spring, summer, and fall, there are personal seasons of life. Seasons represent change. Seasons come and go, and no one season lasts forever. Isn't it beautiful to witness the spring showers bringing flowers? Yet there is nothing that compares to a cool summer's breeze. Then comes the fall with the shedding of the leaves, and we begin to wind down, because we know that winter is near and we begin to make preparations. We soon adjust and find comfort and warmth, as we sit by the fire enjoying coffee and tea with family and friends, knowing that Christmas is coming and will bring cheer.

Likewise, there are seasons in marriage. When you meet and marry, it's good to reflect on the seasons that you have already endured. As you reflect you will surely see the Lord's goodness, love and mercy. There were days of peace, love and laughter, and there were times of sharing your dreams and goals. We now have found peace in some of the troublesome times. That was also a time and season.

We watch as our children grow up and go off to college, and even get married. This is a normal and bittersweet experience, but the Lord is faithful as we soon hear the footsteps of the grandchildren and gaze upon their little faces, we know that these little ones could only have been sent from heaven above.

As with wine, godly marriages will only get better with age. So couples, sit back and relax with the Lord, and the joy of the Lord will be your strength. This is your best season yet. You've toiled and sowed, now God would have it that you reap sweet blessings and peace.

Know that the master is not finished with you, do not close shop; God still has work for you to do. (Roselyn Rivers)

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for your faithfulness, truly you have been good to us. Please continue to strengthen us to do those things that you would have us to do. Our desires are to live for you and be godly examples to our children and for those who are to come. In Jesus' name, we ask. Amen.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

**Singles (never married, widowed
or divorced without children)**

Week Three: May 21-27, 2007

Whether never-married, widowed, or divorced, singles are part of families. First and foremost, they are part of the church family. They are part of a biological family, whether any other family members occupy the same household or not. Many are part of an intentional family — friends and loved ones who uphold one another and care for one another. Some participate in family devotions with family members by e-mail and phone even though they are separated by distance.

Monday, May 21, 2007

Time with the Lord

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; This I say for your own benefit; not to put restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:32, 35

Some of the best times I ever had in my devotional time were when I was single. This all started in 2000 when I first came to New Jersey. I left every thing behind me in Pennsylvania: girlfriend, friends and the comforts of home. When I moved out here I knew no one and had no close friends to hang out with. It was just me and God. I wasn't concerned with too much else other than my job and working at the church where I was the youth pastor. So when I would go home it was like I was going home to Jesus. I would talk to him when I was watching TV, cooking, cleaning and whatever else I was doing. When I would have my devotions my mind was completely on him.

Since I have been married, my mind has been focused a lot on my wife and kids. I always want to spend time with them. I am also concerned about providing for them. Things like these sometimes tend to climb to the top of one's prayer list and distract one from really pressing in on the presence of the Lord. Before time didn't matter; any time was a good time. Now I have to be more creative in how and when to have a devotional time.

It's great to be single or married. But if you are single now, count it a blessing because you can easily focus on God and then trust Him for what He will provide in His perfect time.

(Pastor Obadiah Clark)

Prayer: Jesus, I thank you for this time that I am single. In this season, however long or short it may be, please help me to be more focused on you. Show me what you want to teach me in this time and how you want me to use my time for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Respect for the Gift of Singleness

God sets the lonely in families.

Psalm 68:6

...God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.

1 Corinthians 7:7

Think it is easy living as a successful Christian single in 2007? Not so! At a time when there are more singles than ever, being single has never been harder. It takes strength of purpose to drown out distractions and live a godly life. To the world, being single implies images of a lonely person. But when we have Jesus in our life, nothing is farther from the truth. Once a person enters into a personal relationship with Christ, he or she is united with the Lord, never to be alone again. The book of Psalms explains, "God sets the lonely in families."

The apostle Paul (who remained single) is responsible for sharing the truth that has affected the justification, redemption, and reconciliation of millions. Here's what he says about the subject of singleness and marriage: "...God gives some the gift of husband or wife, and others he gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried." According to Paul, happy singleness is a gift. So whether it's for a season, until marriage, or for life, respect the unique gifts and talents that God has given to you for His glory. And let His joy be your strength.

(Cara Rounds)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for your surrounding love, mercy and goodness. Lord, reveal the gifts and talents that lie within each of us to be used for your glory and honor. Help us to be content in every season of life. Replace the feeling of loneliness with joy and expectation for your perfect plan to unfold in our lives. Your joy will be our strength. Amen.

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

Thursday, May 24, 2007

With a Song in my Heart

God will supply all your needs according to his riches in his glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

When you feel discouraged or hopeless, remember that God has a promise just for you. You never have to make a tough decision by yourself. You have the right to call upon the Holy Spirit who will guide you into all truth. (John 15:13)

Your spouse may pass away and people may come and go for one reason or another but you are never alone. Jesus tells us...“I will ask the father, and he will give you another helper, that he may be with you forever.” (John 14:16)

One of the biggest struggles women face today is loneliness. That is why our heavenly father has given us the Holy Spirit, who will abide with us always.

God knows that you can never muster up the strength to fight your daily battles alone. In order to equip us, God enables his love to flow by giving us the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5: 22-23)

During a season when my life was in turmoil, the Lord gave me a song in my heart. The song *Because He Lives* says, “I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, my fear is gone.” Indeed the Lord has brought me through many valleys.

Today, I want to encourage you to stop trying to do everything by yourself, instead make the Lord Jesus the Master of your life, surrender all to Him and let Him place a new song in your heart. (Phyllis Esposito)

Prayer: Father, your Word says you will never leave us nor forsake us, We ask that your Holy Spirit guide us in our daily walk with you, and may we always give you the glory, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Remember Always

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the powers of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Luke 10:19-20

In times of trouble remember always
In times of loneliness remember always
In times of need remember always
In times of distress remember always
They're only spirits that lurk around to hurt us and to keep us down, but rejoice for the Lord our God has given us the authority to trample and be free in Jesus' name. Whatever our circumstances, we need not fear for the Lord our God is with us today and forever.

(Joanne Verdone)

Prayer: Father God, thank you for Jesus' blood, for our salvation, for now He is glorified and will always be. Lord our God, we thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit and we will continue to rejoice and be still for you are God. Please bless our loved ones, friends and neighbors and be with them as you are with us. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, May 25, 2007

Waiting for the Right One

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.
For what do righteousness and wickedness
have in common? Or what fellowship
can light have with darkness?
2 Corinthians 6:14*

Do you want to marry the “right” one? May I suggest that you make a list of what you want in your spouse and keep adding to it when something strikes you as an important characteristic. The Lord said when we delight ourselves in Him, he will grant us the desires of our hearts. He is a jealous God and does not want anything to replace Him as being first in our lives. He also said we are to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto us.

For those of you dating an unbeliever, the Bible says to not be yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). The difference will matter after the sparkle is gone and the struggle begins. The Lord wants to give you the best and fulfill your hearts desires. He wants your union to be one that will glorify Him and bring you both closer to Him. Waiting may be the toughest part. Some of you may have been waiting a long time. Make your Lord the lover of your soul.

Ask your daddy in heaven to grant you the grace to wait for that special person He has ordained for you. You deserve the best gift that the Lord has for you. So don't settle for second best. Be sure that you are able to hear from Him inside of you as well as through the Word.

(Julie Verdi)

Prayer: Father, I ask that you give the grace to any single person in MWC to wait for the right person you have ordained for each of them. Remove all anxiety and impatience from them. Apportion unto them great faith to believe your promises for they are “yes” and “Amen.” You said when we delight ourselves in you, you will grant us the desires of our hearts. We trust and rest in you, Lord, to bring these single men and women to the right person at your perfect time. May their union glorify you and may they grow together in you and not away from you. Consecrate our relationships and bind us together with your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Saturday, May 26, 2007

The Hug

*He heals the brokenhearted,
binding up their wounds.
Psalm 147:3*

*You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever!
Psalm 30:11-12*

A widow began to tell her story. “I asked him to pick up milk on his way home from work. He should have been home by now, he’s never this late. Suddenly I realized that he wasn’t coming home. A wave of grief and despair swept over me as I was shocked out of my daydream and back into cold reality. I was alone now.

My pastors, brothers and sisters in Christ had the best of intentions and seemed to say all the right words, but nothing would comfort me. Coming home from work and sleeping alone was the worst time of the day. I missed him so much. He always made me smile and laugh.

A few months later, while at the library, my grief and loneliness once again overwhelmed me and I began to cry. Suddenly a woman, a perfect stranger, sat down beside me and grasped my hand. She wrapped me in her arms and gave me a big hug. She asked me if there was anything she could do for me. How did she know that a hug was just what I needed at that moment?

I look back at that day as a turning point in my life. The Lord felt my grief and sent that woman to show me that I am loved and will never be truly alone. He opened up my heart to love again.” (Steven and Sharyn Krogh)

Prayer: Lord God, we pray that that you will turn any grieving widows' mourning into joy and dancing. Let their hearts be opened to your love and help them to put their trust in you. Help them to remember that you are always with them and will never leave them. Thank you for your comfort in times of sorrow. Amen.

Sunday, May 27, 2007

He Knows

*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in him,
and He shall bring it to pass.*

Psalm 37:4, 5

Do you believe He knows? When we hear an expert give advice in his or her field, don't we generally listen, believe it and then do what the expert says? What about our heavenly Father? Isn't He an expert, even more so than man? He created us in his image. He knows our thoughts, desires and needs. If you are thinking about a spouse, if you desire a companion, if you have a need for sexual intimacy, commit this to the Lord and trust that He *shall* give it to you and bring it to pass. You may have your own plans about how you will get a spouse, but the Lord says, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Since He's the expert, whose plan do you think you should follow? If the Lord's plan is for you to remain single, know that He will give you peace in that decision. Obey your heavenly Father, seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Be busy in the things of the Lord. Jesus said: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it *shall* be done for you." Persevere in the asking. (Lynn Wilkinson)

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, you know the plans you have for me. You know the desires of my heart. Reveal your plans to me that I may do your will. You are my provider. I ask that you provide the spouse that you have determined for me. If it is your will for me to remain single, make that clear to me and give me your peace Jesus. I love you and thank you for your divine guidance. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

Foster, Adoptive and Blended Families

Week Four: May 28–June 3, 2007

Those who serve as foster families may feel like a revolving door, with children or teens entering the family then exiting — often at short notice. Establishing and maintaining patterns for faith sharing can be particularly difficult for them. Those who have found ways to do this often mention that this is part of the family practices they introduce to the children and youth as they enter their home.

For some adoptive families, there may be times when trials beset them as the reality of the adopted child's birth origin is revealed. It is crucial that love and understanding continue to be manifested by adoptive parents, and adopted children realize the blessing that someone intentionally decided to have them as their children. Being able to establish family devotional times and faith practices will go a long way in strengthening the bond between them.

Challenges occur also in blended families where a new stepfamily is formed that includes children from previous marriages. Being able to establish family devotional times will help families not only to survive but to thrive.

Monday, May 28, 2007

Adopted!

...You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

Isaiah 62:2

...I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Revelation 2:17

I understand from both sides of the fence about being adopted. To give my stepchildren full benefit rights, I had to satisfy the law. I had to give them my name. After we went through the adoption procedure, my children's official records were updated to show me as the biological father, and they had a new name. Their past was erased. They now have a new lineage, with full rights afforded to them because I gave them my name.

I also know what it means to be adopted by God through Jesus Christ. To give me full benefits with God the Father, the law had to be satisfied. It was through Jesus.

Now, I'm born again, the records have been erased. I now have a new lineage, and a new name, with full sonship rights. (Rich Demoro)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you that you now call me son. That I am your child and you are my father and you freely give me all the rights and benefits of a son. Amen.

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

Gift from the Lord

Behold children are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.

Psalm 127:3

In Psalm 127, God calls children a gift of the Lord. We should take very good care of this precious blessing and gift from God's hand. It costs no money to build self-esteem into a child's life. It costs no money to share the love of God with a child. But there is a higher price involved in raising a child and it will cost you something. It will cost you time, patience and persistence in teaching and leading them in the ways of the Lord. You must give children your time, not just when it's convenient but also when they know you have to sacrifice to be with them. You must show an interest in things they consider important, even when that takes a lot of effort. In Proverbs 22:6 it says that if we train a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. That means, we are to raise our children to be Christ-centered and bring them up knowing the Lord and all His ways.

Perhaps you are wondering, how can I do all these? When you follow the Holy Spirit's guidance and are walking in the Light of Jesus, your actions, your attitudes, and focused attention can demonstrate unconditional love to your child. This is that greatest gift anyone can give to a child. After all our heavenly Father pours out His unconditional love on us every day. He showed us just how much by giving us the greatest gift ever, His Son Jesus Christ. So, we should take His example and give the gift of love to all children as well. Encourage them. Pray for them. Keep at it and never give up on any child. For such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven, too! (Jeanette Ingrassia)

Prayer: Father, thank you for blessing us with children. Help us to grow them in Your ways. Amen.

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

Foster Children - Who are they?

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes! Cease to do evil, learn to do right! Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, and correct the oppressor. Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.
Isaiah 1:16-17

I picked the fatherless. They are fatherless at birth and have no clue as to who dad is. Foster dads are the first dad to most of them. WOW! Just think about that. Never having a real dad, flesh and blood. You have a guy as a dad figure but not a real DAD! The guy is telling you what and what not to do. Who does he think he is? He is not my dad and I don't have to listen to him. Or the lady either. I'll just tell my Mom and go home and live with her. That's the child's point of view of the situation. Even after unsuccessful attempts to find the father, the child still has questions: "Who is my dad? Am I wanted? Does he know about me? Does he love me? Is he dead or alive? How can mom not know him?" Foster kids! The fatherless! (Tom Stratz)

Prayer: Oh God, I pray for the foster children in the world. How it must hurt to feel unwanted by their parents. Or that their parents can't take care of them but other men and women can. That even if strangers open up their homes to them and try their best, it is still not enough for the child because it hurts so much for the child. I pray that You will comfort the children in the way that only You God can. Meet them where they are Lord and hold them in the palm of Your hand and carry them. In Your holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.

Thursday, May 31, 2007

But the Greatest of These is Love

And these remain: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.
2 Corinthians 13:13

I have been thinking about love and just how amazing it is. God is love. Jesus told us that we ought to love one another and that people would know that we are his because we love one another.

I remember at the age of nine years old I was adopted by my aunt and uncle. They had two biological children of their own. I must admit coming in I felt that I would be treated or loved differently or less than their biological children. To the contrary, I was met with love, kindness, and understanding. The love shown to me relieved my fears, as they would often remind me that they had chosen to bring me into their home to be one with their family.

I have found that love is the key. When you love someone, you do not notice or mind where they have come from, or what shortcomings they may possess. You just love them and want the very best for them; love is selfless. Children especially need love. If you are contemplating or have already adopted a child or have fostered a child, you will need love, faith, and hope, but the greatest of these will be love. (Rosalyn Rivers)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your love. Help us to open the doors of our home and lives that we may show your love to those that need it. Thank you for bringing us into your family. And we, now as brothers and sisters, call you "Father." Help us, oh Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday, June 1, 2007

Serving Children Through Foster Care

Whoever receives one of these little ones in My Name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.

Mark 9:37

Little Jordan said to his mommy, "Are their different kinds of families?" Mommy wanted to make sure what Jordan was really asking, so she tried to get a specific question. "What do you mean?" she said. "What is a foster family?" he said. Mommy said, "A foster family is a family that cares for children, who can no longer be cared for by their own families." It is a safe place where children can go where they can be taken care of. It's a special way to serve Jesus by teaching children about God's love and salvation. Little Jordan looked at his mom and said, "Can we be a foster family?"

Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to care for the fatherless and orphans. There is great reward that comes along with foster family care. There is also an awesome responsibility. We have a short time to teach them about Jesus. The body of Christ is important to a foster family. We can pray for them and encourage them and their children. Maybe there are some of us that can answer little Jordan's question with a yes. (Karen Stratz)

Prayer: Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve You and your children. Thank you for Your wisdom and guidance in dealing with each child. Father, raise up families that will open their homes to children who desperately need You. Thank you to the body of Christ who so generously love and support us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Saturday, June 2, 2007

Love That Binds

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.

Colossians 3:12-15

When we vowed to love honor and cherish one another seven years ago it was not exclusive to one woman and one man. Rather, we also swore ourselves to one boy and one girl. He brought to the union a son and I a daughter. It was beautiful, sentimental, and touching. The reality of our blended family and the unique challenges we faced soon surfaced. The hurt feelings, lack of parental bonds, different pasts, and uncertain futures are in many ways still being dealt with. We have since added to our melting pot another son, one that is the common thread of us all.

As parents we are the ones who set the precedence in our homes. We are watched and copied for what we do right and wrong. When you are dealing with a child who has a past that does not include you, it is easy to feel rejected and ineffective. In this passage we can see that what is primary is to interact with love. Love, as it says, is what binds us and will bridge whatever separates us. This love is expressed with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness. This is not something that comes naturally though. It is what we choose. How we decide to act. What we put on and put forth. Love is what binds caregiver and child (foster, adoptive, step, grand or natural) into a true family. (William and Jennifer Forquignon)

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the blessing of children we can impact for you. Remind us of how you first loved us that we might put on the clothing of love and bind the families that can only be formed by your grace. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Sunday, June 3, 2007

God is in Control

But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him.

"This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Exodus 2: 2-10

Adopted. The word carries a sense of loss. For some reason, a child is not being raised by his parents. Why did God allow this?

Yet we see in Scripture instances of God using and choosing adoption in order for His perfect will to be performed. Moses was born into an impossible situation. All the Hebrew boys were to be killed. His mother's desperate act of setting him out on the Nile ended up saving his life. God placed Moses into the very household of Pharaoh. There, as an adopted prince, Moses received the best of everything – food, clothing and an education.

Moses would need the skills and education he gained from his adoptive family in order to lead God's people. God was in control in this most horrible of circumstances. Moses' parents could never have foreseen the ways God would use their child; they only knew that they were giving him a chance at life. But God was actively guiding these actions so that the prayers of His suffering people could be answered. This adoption was God's best plan for Moses – not an afterthought. God had this planned from the start. (Louise Jasko)

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to see your hand working even when the way seems hard. Help us to appreciate and learn from the families you have placed us in. We thank you that you are in control even when we can not understand. Help us to fulfill your plans for our families. Amen.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

New Couples and Couples in General

Week Five: June 4-10, 2007

Couples who are new in their relationship — no matter their age — may find it difficult to talk about faith with each other. When the congregation provides guidance for devotional times in the home, those who are new in their relationship can use this information to begin lifelong practices.

Those who have been married for a long time also need to be reminded of the importance of having family devotional times and the crucial need to continue doing so even when the children are no longer in the home.

Monday, June 4, 2007

Guard Your Tongue

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

Luke 1:18-20

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.

Luke 1:57

"Immediately, his (Zechariah) mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God." Luke 1:64

"A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth; from the produce of his lips he shall be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Proverbs 18:20-21

The words that we speak are important. In order to keep Zechariah from pronouncing his unbelief, God shut his mouth! Zechariah's words would not taint the promise; God just wouldn't allow it! When Zechariah's mouth was opened, what came out? Praise to the Lord! As husband and wife, trust the Lord together, believing His word and his promises. Let praise always be on your lips, not only to God, but to each other. We should be kind to one another and say nice things that edify and build our marriages instead of hurtful words that can tear them down. Condemning speech in little things can be the root cause that later destroys a marriage. Let the "fruit of your mouth" be sweet; not only will it build your marriage, but your faith as well. (Shelli Busby)

Prayer: *Father, You are the everlasting father, whose shadow does not turn! Let us take your words like medicine and heal our hearts and mouths. Let us be ever mindful of what we say to you and each other, so we can build our faith and lift each other up. We pray that we learn from your perfect advice! We worship You! In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Marriage: A Need-Meeting Relationship

*God looked at all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.
Genesis 1:31*

God enjoyed His creation. We know that because every time He made something, He looked, and said "This is good." When God looked at all of the animals and how they each had a mate and then looked at Adam, He saw that Adam had a need and said that "it was not good for man to be alone." So God created Eve as the solution to meet that need.

True love is a commitment to the development, security and well-being of the person being loved. When we love we are committed to fulfilling the needs.

Let's pledge to choose to meet the needs of our spouse and have a primary interest in giving versus getting. Our love will be manifested in many ways. It will be given freely (Romans 5:8), unselfishly (Philippians 2:6-7), through our own choice (Ephesians 1:6-7), for our spouse's development, happiness & welfare (Ephesians 5:21-25), sacrificially (John 3:16), without fear (1 John 4:18), and through loving words and deeds (John 10:27 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7) (Rudy and Leslie Cato)

Prayer: *Father, in the precious name of Jesus in whom you have shown what it truly means to love. I thank you for your continuous outpouring of love that you show me everyday, every hour, and every minute. I thank you for your grace and mercy that cover us. I thank you for the forgiveness that you have given me. Father, thank you for the knowledge, wisdom and courage to do that which you ask of me today to love my spouse as you love me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Wednesday, June 6, 2007

Spending Time Together

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

In today's society, we are continually told that we are each individuals, and that our personal needs should come first. There are numerous clubs and groups that are created to meet the individual needs of either men or women. Too often, after the marriage vows are completed, two people share a last name but continue to live separate lives. Having individual interests and activities are not wrong. However, when our individual activities leave us with no time to spend with our spouse, we are straying from God's original intent for marriage.

Think back to the dating process of spending large amounts of time together, doing anything that would allow us to spend time with our future spouse. It could be taking a walk, going to dinner, or simply spending an evening talking. The important thing is that we never forget the enjoyment that comes with spending time together.

Relationships are made stronger through time, and not just time, but time spent together. This includes our relationship with God and our marriage relationship. When daily pressures and stress become too much, we should be able to just pull away with our spouse and not have it be an exception, but a normal part of our relationship. (Charles and Rachel Basden)

Prayer: Lord, help us to make spending time together a priority and allow this time to make our relationship stronger. We thank you for the opportunity that we have to spend our lives with each other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday, June 7, 2007

Getting Involved Together

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

While time spent with your spouse is extremely important and necessary, time spent together working in ministry, is just as important. When God created us individually, He knew the plans He had for us. Just as those plans included ways for us to minister to others in your singleness, those plans also included ways for spouses to minister together, as a couple.

How is this possible when the gifts of husband and wife are so different? Just as these differences and similarities work together within the marriage relationship to minister to and strengthen one another, God wants us to also use the balance in our relationship to minister to others. We weren't brought together just for our own benefit, but to also benefit those God puts in our lives.

This does not mean that a husband and wife have to be in leadership in a ministry, but a couple should be involved in some ministry together. We all have individual gifts and those gifts must be used for God, as is required by our Lord. The church is a safe haven and family for believers, not just for the individuals, but for couples as well. If we never get involved together, we miss out on a valuable opportunity to bless the Lord with our marriage. If you aren't already doing this, pray together and talk with your pastors to find out how your marriage can most benefit the church body. Just as a couple working together benefits the family as a whole, when each couple does their part in the church, the church body as a whole will benefit. (Charles and Rachel Basden)

Prayer: Lord, help us know how we can best minister to the church body together. We thank you for all that our relationship means to us, and we thank you in advance for how we can walk together in the plans you have for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday, June 8, 2007

Saturday, June 9, 2007

Providing for Your Own

*But if anyone does not provide for his own,
and especially for those of his household,
he has denied the faith and is
worse than an unbeliever.*

1 Timothy 5:8

You were especially created by God to meet the needs of your spouse, needs that no one else can meet. Although neither of you may be whole individually, together you are one flesh. Treasure and value your spouse. Never take him or her for granted. Right after your love and worship for God himself, love your spouse. Take care of your spouse. Treasure your spouse. Even unbelievers know you are supposed to do that, and if you don't do it, you are worse than they are.

Newlyweds, remember how you care for your spouse during the tender years of budding matrimony, and continue to do so even more throughout the years. Those of you who have already laid the foundation of marriage and are in the midst of building a family -- although you may be pulled this way and that by this child or that task, nevertheless, remember your spouse and how they depend on you for love and support. Seasoned partners in marriage, your spouse has become your best friend, the one who knows you better than anyone else, so look out for them. Although you have seen the depth of their strength in the midst of many crises, they still need you -- give them your full attention, your complete devotion and your total love. To all husbands and to all wives, love your spouses even as you love yourself, and God will be pleased. (Tony Wilkinson)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us the relationship between you and your Son and between your Son and his bride, the church. We have seen your devotion, your commitment and your love. May we imitate your works as we love our spouses, never taking them for granted, but instead showing them the same care and the same concern that you show. May your wonderful Holy Spirit show us the deepest needs of our spouses, and then cause us to meet those needs with compassion and abundant love. In your name, Jesus, and by your power, Amen.

How Love Becomes Wounded

...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.

1 Peter 3:9-10

My wife and I have the privilege of counseling pre- and post-marital couples. One of the distinct differences between the two is that pre-marital couples unknowingly conceal their deeper feelings behind an invisible veil. They don't do this intentionally, but out of love for one another. That's not necessarily a problem, however, once married, the chances of this becoming a problem vastly increases. Why? The reason is simple; because couples begin to share their deeper feelings and emotions towards issues that they ignored during their dating season. Sharing their deeper problems and concerns is a good thing, what makes it bad is if they fail to communicate these feelings, or listen to their spouses concerns with a spirit of love in their heart and mind.

How each person responds to a matter makes all the difference in having a healthy marriage, versus facing what could potentially become an unending "war of words." Peter warns us in 1 Peter 3:9 of "*not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*" Failing to communicate and or respond in love could cause a young couple's love to become wounded; once wounded, the solution to their issues become more difficult to resolve.

Remember "a wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention."

(Pastor Joe McCain)

Prayer: Father God, in the name of Jesus, I ask your blessings be over every young couple whose heart you have just touched. I pray that you minister daily to their hearts, minds and lips as they minister to one another. May their words be seasoned with salt and pleasing to one another's souls. I ask this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday, June 10, 2007

Third Party in our Marriage

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

Psalm 127:1

“Loved the wedding! Invite me to the marriage.” – God. “What a perfect reminder!” I said to myself when I read that line in a book! After taking care of all the nitty-gritty details of the wedding as if it were a grand production number, have we made sure, once the wedding is over, that we have not forgotten to invite to our marriage the most important person in our guest list?

I sometimes hear the phrase “third party involved” as the reason for the break-up of some marriages. Someone had rudely interrupted or rather had been allowed to rudely interrupt a marriage.

In my own marriage there is always a third party involved – a permanent fixture in our home. However, it is someone my husband Efren and I have agreed should always be involved in our marriage and it is no other than our Lord Jesus. His presence as a third party helps us to better understand and be patient with each other, especially during our not-so-lovable moments and to ask for forgiveness for any wrong we may have done to each other. It allows us to bear the tough times in our lives knowing fully well that this earthly life is merely a prelude to the main symphony of eternal life. In the peaks and valleys of our married life, the Lord has been the only constant calming presence that has allowed us to experience His joy and peace that come only from fully resting and trusting in Him.

As we build our home, we know that it is His strong foundation that will allow us to stand firm amidst the storms of life and continue to abide in Him. As we raise our children in the ways of the Lord, we know that we are helping them to be spiritually strong and well-equipped to handle the challenges of life and be a blessing to others.

Let us always remember to make Jesus a part of our marital equation. Jesus – don’t leave home without Him! (Benilda Salvador)

Prayer: Lord, we thank you that through you we can securely build our marriages and families. You are our cornerstone and firm foundation. We continue to entrust the marriages and families of Monmouth Worship Center into your care and protection. This we pray in your mighty and precious name. Amen.



PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE WEEK

Families with Young Children

Week Six: June 11-17, 2007

(Father's Day—June 17)

If you were to ask families with young children about their devotional time, many would laugh, saying, "What devotional time? I can't even have time alone to go to the bathroom!" They would also be quick to remind you that with their children's short attention spans, lack of reading ability, and limited vocabulary, family devotions seem to be something for the future, not for now. However, the prayer life of a young child can be rich. The routines of meal and bedtime prayers open the door to family devotions.

Monday, June 11, 2007

A Gift to our Children

And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism, and God's word.

Ephesians 5: 25-26

It is my wife Benil, who prepares our meals most of the time. Occasionally, with our kids' help, I do surprise her with breakfast (while she is still asleep) or dinner (when I am off from work and she is still on her way home from work). Our kids are always enthusiastic as I tell them my plan. One sets the table and the other helps me make a nice food presentation. We enjoy our meals even more during those times. My wife is always grateful and the children happy to be part of the preparations.

As a father, I believe that one of the best gifts I can give my children is to show them by example how much I value and love their mother. One day, my kids will grow up and, if it is part of God's plan for them, will also be married and have children of their own.

I may not always do it right, imperfect as we all are, but I know that our loving heavenly Father will see my heart and equip me so I can do my best. My wife and I pray for the godly spouse that the Lord will raise up for our children. I pray that in my own way, I am able to help my children discern the kind of lifetime partner that God wants them to have through the example I show in loving their mother.

(Efren Salvador)

Prayer: Lord God, I thank you for my family. I know that through your help fathers can be godly examples to their children. Equip us, O Lord. We thank you that your mercies are new every morning so that each day is always another chance to do right by You. Continue to bless the marriages and families of Monmouth Worship Center. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, June 12, 2007

Be an Encourager to your Children

You children always obey your parents, for this is what pleases the Lord. Fathers, don't aggravate you children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.

Colossians 3:20-21

"Mommy! Mommy!" The seven-year-old girl shouted while running through the house. "Jennifer, the girl across the street, is having a lemonade sale. I want to have one also." The girl's mother very uncaringly replied, "No, you will not make money because she is right across the street." The young girl was very disappointed and she watched that other girl make money for hours. This image never left her mind. Because of the limits placed on her, as a young lady, she doubted herself in almost every aspect. What a child learns as a child follows them into their teenage years and into adulthood. Teach your children what they can do versus what they cannot do. Above all teach them what God can do versus what they can do. (Nadine McCain)

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for my child/children. I ask that you would help them to excel and exceed any expectations we have of them. Let my words be uplifting and encouraging. Please allow me to release them and their dreams in your hands. In your name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Wipe your Feet

If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

Psalm 37:23-24

The children are running outside as the rain falls. They can't help but run through the muddiest places all to end up trailing inside your home. As we wipe the footprints it is hard not to think, what footprints we are leaving behind in our family. Footprints that perhaps our children or children's children will be walking. Families today are walking to different tunes and we are too busy for each other let alone God.

So how do we leave footprints that will lead to serving God? The answer to this question is quite simple. It begins with your walk, your steps. If we walk on dirty ground we leave dirty footprints but if we honor God in all we do to the best of our ability then we will leave footprints that our families will follow. Honoring God along the way.

David wrote "if the Lord delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm." The Lord is with you every step you take as it says in Matthew 28:20 "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Starting today, wipe your feet and start walking in the direction the Lord has called you and your family to walk. The more you leave footprints in praising, prayer and honoring God, your family will be right behind you leaving the same footprints for their children.

(Grace McKeown)

Prayer: *Dear Father, I pray that as we wipe our feet and start walking with you Lord that you meet us in every area where we will need your bridge to avoid the mud. Lord, keep us on track and keep us close to Your footprints. Keep our families walking to your tune, Lord, and not those that hinder them. We love You and bless your Holy name. Amen.*

Thursday, June 14, 2007

Oh, the Faith of a Child

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them."

Matthew 19:14

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

Matthew 21:22

There are times in our lives when we find ourselves in the lowest pit of the valley. Problems come in left and right. One thing I learned from being a mother is that the faith of a small child can be bigger than that of an experienced parent.

One night, this past winter, my daughter was suffering from a viral infection. Her fever shot up to a frightful 105 degrees F. With trembling hands, I quickly gave her a sponge bath to bring down the fever. I was more scared than she was. Then, she whispered to me, "Mom, why are you crying? Jesus will heal me. Please pray for me and please put that oil from the small bottle on my forehead. I'm sick, Mom and my head hurts." I got caught off guard. My brain was frantically trying to put together all the symptoms so I can research what kind of virus or bacteria may be causing all these. In my mind, I was debating whether to call the doctor again. I was so busy thinking of the situation and what should be done that I forgot to pray to God. My poor little angel was the one who reminded me that fervent prayer to God is as equally important and much more valuable than my earthly efforts. I took her hand and started praying for her. She fell sound asleep and I had peace in my spirit that I did not have minutes before. As a parent, that night became a turning point in my life. I realized that the little seeds of faith planted in our children do not fall on barren ground. Their faith can sometimes be greater because it is not tarnished by fears of reality and doubt.

(Sande Seldura)

Prayer: *Lord, please help us approach your throne with faith as that of a child, believing beyond what the situation may dictate to us. Help us to surrender to you completely everything that we do, knowing you are in complete control. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Friday, June 15, 2007

Love and Forgiveness

...neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:39

*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good;
His love endures forever.*

Psalm 118:1

It seems like just yesterday, when three guilty looking boys sat around our dining room table. Our sons looked like they were about to go in front of a firing squad when my husband Paul asked them, "Who broke mom's favorite Christmas tree ornament?" They each looked at each other without comment. It just wasn't cool to rat out a brother or to admit guilt.

It's moments like this when parents can be especially grateful for the Word of God. Paul opened the Bible and explained to the boys that everyone makes mistakes. But the one who admits his errors, and asks for forgiveness, is the one who pleases God. God's love cannot be taken away because we make an error in judgment. We can turn to our heavenly Father for forgiveness anytime.

It was one of those "teachable moments" when we could assure our children of God's never-ending love (and ours). After Paul was done speaking, a small quiet voice said, "I'm sorry, Daddy. It was me."

(Paul and Cara Rounds)

Prayer: Abba Father, we are so grateful for your continued love and mercy on us. Your Word says that You will never leave us nor forsake us and that we can know that we have forgiveness when we humbly come before you and ask. Lord, help us to make our children feel loved everyday – especially when they make a mistake. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, June 16, 2007

Instruct Thy Child

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6: 5-7

Private or public? Christian or Catholic? What school should my child attend? These were probably some of the toughest decisions that we as parents had to make. Like all parents we wanted the best for our daughters; the best neighborhood, the best upbringing, the best education. We wanted to shelter our daughters from all the contamination and evils of this world, but we quickly learn that no matter what, evil would always be lurking. So how could we prepare our daughters to resist and protect themselves from the "outside" world?

Although I came to know Christ as a young man, my defense against the negative influences around me during my adolescent years was the words of my father. My Dad would sit down with my sisters and me to teach us God's Word, even if we ignored him the majority of the time. Whenever I was face-to-face with temptation, I could hear my dad's words penetrating my soul: "Are you pleasing God? Remember, son, sin brings about consequences."

I have learned that as a parent, I must be a teacher to my daughters 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In doing so, the Word teaches us that we will "always prosper and be kept alive" (Deuteronomy 6:24). (Jose Rivera)

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, we know that You are the One True God. You are our God and our Shield. We thank You for trusting us with what is most precious in this world - life. We ask that you may guide us and teach us on how to instruct our children into a path of righteousness. May your Word be written in the hearts of our children. Give us the peace of mind to know that our children rest safely in Your hands. We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior. Amen.

Sunday, June 17, 2007
(Father's Day)

Abba Father

In this manner, therefore, pray, "Our Father..."
Matthew 6:9

Psychologists tell us that our entire view of God and spiritual life is based upon our view of our parents, and especially our father. As a father, this awes me, and puts fear into my heart! I am molding my children's view of God by my success and failures as a father. What a responsibility!

When I think of God the Father, I think of His love, provision, oversight, knowledge, and power. My own father reflected and built some of these insights into me. Some of the rest were missing, and have had to be supplied by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, and by other human models. Some are areas where I am still developing. (Pastor Ken Jasko)

Prayer: God, help me to be a good model of you as father to my children. Grow me as a parent, and in my experience of you as father. Help me to manifest Your fatherhood in the areas I am weak. Thanks for being my Father! Amen.