

A Path for Happiness

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This message today is going to be about family, marriage, children and our responsibilities as adults. My title is:

A Path For Happiness

I can probably make this very short and sweet by quoting a short saying my wife is fond of telling me. In some ways this may just sum it up. She tells me, "A happy wife makes a happy life". If she's happy, I can expect to be happy. When she is unhappy, I can expect to experience some pain. So, in conclusion...

I want to discuss the attack on the family and the attack on biblically based standards. These topics are discussed in the Bible and have a bearing on our health and the welfare of our families and above all else, our spiritual wellbeing. For those with children I intend to address the cultural challenges we face with our current woke agenda and culture. I also intend to encourage marriage and for married couples to have children.

As I discussed in my last message, God's purpose in creating humans is that we will marry and have children. As physical descendants of Adam and Eve, God's hope is that we will qualify to be born again as spirit children of God. In my last message I covered Genesis 1:26-31, where on the very day that Adam and Eve were created, God also created the holy institution of marriage. We read in Mark 10 where Jesus confirmed that marriage and children were the purpose of creating humans as male and female. In Malachi 2 we read where the purpose of Yehovah's holy institution of marriage was revealed. We saw that marriage was created for the purpose of Godly offspring. Godly offspring are those who will be born again into eternal life as God's children.

So at the outset, I want to be clear that there are many acceptable reasons why a person may never want to marry. There are also reasons why a couple may never be able to have children and may intentionally choose not to have children. If you turn to 1 Corinthians 7, one of the basic ground rules for sexual activity is that it can only be practiced within the confines of marriage. Within marriage, sexual activity is to be enjoyed and improves the emotional bonding between a husband and a wife. The opposite is true outside of marriage. Sexual activity outside of marriage eventually causes anger, hostility and disappointment. Those have repercussions that can at least extend way beyond the immediate couple. The negative impact can range over a lifetime and beyond. The cold reality is that negative consequences can cover generations. Notice Paul's instruction concerning the driving force for marriage, in 1 Corinthians 7:1.

1 Corinthians 7:1 *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

- 2) *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*
- 3) *Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*
- 4) *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*
- 5) *Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (NKJV)*

I had a good friend tell me one time to consider how often we are spending in prayer and fasting. The rest of the time, sexual activity should be with mutual consent, each serving and looking out for the wellbeing of the other. Withholding sexual activity that is due a spouse in marriage may, according to verse 5, open your spouse to temptation from the devil which could cause a spiritual destruction of your spouse. Apparently, the Apostle Paul was unmarried. In this chapter he gives encouragement to those who do not need to get married. If a person does not have a strong sex drive and does not have a desire to have children, he recommends that that person stays single. According to Paul, marriage divides our loyalties. In verse 32, breaking into the second sentence of the verse in 1 Corinthians 7:32.

- 32) *... He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.*
- 33) *But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. (NKJV)*

Adhering to this principle, he says in verse 40 that a widow should stay single. If you don't need to get married, stay single. Paul claims you can be of greater service to God as a single person than as a married person. Speaking of a widow, in 1 Corinthians 7:40.

- 40) *But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God. (NKJV)*

Part of my purpose is to point to strong families and friendships that are a bedrock for a healthy society. If you turn to Proverbs 18, marriage pleases God. God created marriage and all the dynamics involving the relationships of a married couple. The responsibility and relationships with children and surrounding society help mold all of us to successfully participate as part of God's spiritual family.

Proverbs 18:22 *He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor [which is God being pleased] from the LORD. (NKJV)*

A married person should be joyful in marriage. If a man is happy in his marriage, then that can be a fairly good indication that his wife is also happy. Usually there is nothing more frustrating for a man than to be living with an unhappy wife.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that*

is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.
(NKJV)

A large part of the reward in life is living joyfully in marriage and the satisfaction of being productive in work. The fact that marriage can often be difficult is also for our benefit. Our love for our spouse and our children is normally only surpassed by what our love for God should be growing toward. Love can motivate each of us to work hard to put down our own selfishness in favor of peace and tranquility within our family. I recently heard an interview with Arthur Brooks. According to the harvard.edu website, he is a Professor of the Practice of Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy school and a Professor of Management Practice at Harvard business school. According to Arthur Brooks' website, he is a PhD social scientist. The homepage introduction to his website states: "Live better, be happier". What they have to offer, quoting from their website is, "blending cutting edge research, behavioral science and neural science with philosophy and wisdom traditions. Dr. Arthur Brooks is teaching people from all walks of life how to live a better, happier life. In the interview he laid out four principles or strategies to be happier in our lives. His four bullet points were:

1. Faith
2. Family
3. Friendships
4. Work

Where we serve our brothers and sisters—serve others. As people fall away from their faith, happiness declines. We must maintain our faith in God and we must also reward God's faith in us through our own faithfulness within all of our relationships. Our relationships with others impact our relationship with God. Even singles need to nurture their family relationships. It often bothers me when people talk about getting together with their family for special occasions or holidays and think that it is acceptable to make mean-spirited, derogatory comments about certain members of their family who they don't seem to care much for or don't get along well with or just think are a little odd. Family is most important and when you mock your family, you are really to some extent, mocking yourself. Most of us would actually lay down our lives for our family.

I remember decades ago my brother came to visit and I think he spent several days at the house. One of my fondest memories of my brother is one of our conversations with him during his stay. For me there was a feeling of joy and peace at his being there. There is a bond of love among family that urges us to treat members of our family with tenderness and respect. In our current society, the culture has shifted to disdain and disrespect for God and family. There is a fascist ideology that has been promoted and is being accepted by many in leadership positions today. That ideology claims that our children belong to the state first and foremost over any rights or authority a parent may want to exercise over their children. These concepts became very popular in the last century during the 3rd Reich of Adolf Hitler. They were also promoted under the political theories of communism as practiced in Soviet Union and China. This line of thinking is a fundamental basis that allows children to be taught topics of sexual activity as a priority in life above family. In their opinion, the state is justified in allowing and promoting promiscuous sexual activity outside of

marriage. They feel justified in promoting queer, sexual activities and the permanent chemical or surgical neutering of our children through the promotion and acceptance of transgenderism. All of this is a rejection of God and His plans for humanity. Ultimately our children will have to make their own decisions. If we teach our children God's way of righteousness, we have a much better chance to serve God.

Friendship is also becoming a crisis in America. I recently read an article by Daniel De Vise, published on thehill.com website. The article was dated February 22, 2023 and title, Most Young Men Are Single, Most Young Women Are Not. He stated in his article that as of 2022, few research centers found 30% of U.S. adults are neither married, living with a partner nor engaged in a committed relationship. Nearly half of all young adults are single. 34% of women and a whopping 63% of men. He also stated only half of single men are actively seeking relationships or even casual dates. According to Pew Research Center, that figure is declining. You might be wondering about the gap of 34% to 63%. He asks the question, who are all the women dating? His answer is, some of them are dating each other. 1/5th of generation Z identifies as queer. Research suggests that bisexual women make up a large share of the young adult, queer community. That is 20% and that is huge. Daniel De Vise goes on to say:

Social circles have been shrinking for men and women, especially since the pandemic but men struggle more. 30 years ago, 55% of men reported having six or more close friends. By 2021 that share had slipped to 27%.

Once guys get older, they suddenly realize they have no friends.

Go back to Proverbs 18. By rejecting God's commandments concerning love and family, our society is reaping the consequences of pain. Part of that pain is the pain of loneliness. God's way produces love, joy and peace. There is a great satisfaction and comfort that we should experience with friends and family. Having friends takes effort and wisdom. I want to emphasize the first half of verse 24 in Proverbs 18.

Proverbs 18:24 *A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (NKJV)*

In order to have friends, we need to be friendly. We need to put effort into our friendships. The benefit can be a friend who is more loyal and helpful than a brother. A person must also take care in choosing a friend. Look at Proverbs 13. We need to take care that our friendships do not cause us harm. My wife and I attended a meeting this past week where we were able to visit with one of the police officers who was providing security for the event. We were discussing homelessness and his challenges in policing the challenges of homelessness. He said that in his opinion, drugs were the main cause of the problem of homeless. Many young people had the potential they had in their lives ruined or diminished by drugs, alcohol and other addictive behavior. Proverbs 12:26.

Proverbs 12:26 *The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray. (NKJV)*

Drugs and other addictive behavior reduce the normal drive most of us have to work and be productive. Many experts claim that cell phones, gaming, online chats, pornography, are all addictive behaviors that do damage to our social and mental health. Work produces the satisfaction and self-confidence of being productive and helpful to others. Finding a spouse also takes effort. To be successful in finding a spouse, you will likely have been successful in cultivating nondestructive friendships. Friendships can help a person develop relationship skills that are necessary to be a benefit to your spouse, children and others you may interact with. Another thing I think is important to being attractive to a potential spouse is to have skill sets that will benefit the family. For a man, you cannot expect to impress a potential wife if you do not have the skill sets to run a profitable business or successfully work for someone who will pay enough to financially support a family. I appreciate Dr. Arthur Brooks four principles.

Occasionally, I think we should assess if we are doing what we can to nurture our faith, our families, our friends and our work for ourselves and the benefit of others. Our happiness is not contingent on everything going well all the time. Just living life on a daily basis involves good times and times of stress. We must consciously decide to be content with the privilege of being able to meet the challenges of life on a daily basis. The Apostle Paul used his trials and suffering as an example for us. We should be content with the consequences of the events in our lives

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: (NKJV)*

This is Paul speaking, this is considering what he thinks.

12) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (NKJV)

Our faith grows as we do what God expects of us. If you turn to Genesis 18, God expects men to guide and instruct their children and others in their household in the way of righteousness and justice. We have the example of Abraham.

Genesis 18:17 *And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,*

18) since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

19) For I have known him ... (NKJV)

God had a close relationship with Abraham and there was a reason He nurtured that relationship. He nurtured the relationship with the expectation that Abraham would command and hold his children and others he was responsible for, accountable in the ways of righteousness and justice.

19 continued) ... in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, [the "why" God expected Abraham to teach his children and

household] *that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*" (NKJV)

What God had spoken to him were promises of greatness for him and his descendants. You can go back and read in the previous chapter, Genesis 17, what those promises were. They are amazing promises that were given to Abraham. God considers the responsibility for instructing a person's children and household as very important—a serious concern. As parents, we have responsibilities to both God and our children. As leaders under Christ, we all have the responsibility to live and teach righteousness and obedience to God to all of those under our influence and authority.

One thing that struck me in the interview with Arthur Brooks is that he works with people of all different religions. He is a counselor and a teacher. He said people of all religions want their children to grow up in their faith. The more important influence, regardless of the religion, is that the father of the household must be seen practicing the faith and doing what is expected. The father is the most important influence. Turn to Psalms 127; children are a blessing and reward from God. I want to start with verse 3.

Psalms 127:3 *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

4) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.

5) Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. (NKJV)

Two of my grandsons spent a weekend with us a couple weeks ago. When we took them to the airport for the trip back home, my 9-year-old grandson informed me that he was not going to have any children. I was a little surprised and concerned so I asked him why. He said his wife would be having his children. The joke was on me, he was right and I hope his wife has lots of children. Men always beget children through a woman. The begetter and conception of children requires a cooperation of both a man and a woman. For a man to enjoy the blessings of children requires a woman. From the very day humans were created, God established the institution of marriage and pronounced the blessing that they were to have children. If all goes well, the delight of the husband and wife will be their children. Let's continue in the next chapter, Psalms 128.

Psalms 128:1 *Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.*

2) When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.

3) Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table.

4) Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. (NKJV)

So, the blessing of children may even extend beyond our own children. For those of us fortunate enough to have children we may even be blessed to see and influence our grandchildren. For many, the joy of grandchildren may even be more satisfying than what was felt with our own offspring. Skipping down to verse 6.

6) *Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!* (NKJV)

Grandparents have a responsibility if they have the opportunity to help with their grandchildren. I met a man the other day who told me with what seemed like a great sense of pride, that he has 19 great grandchildren. The man told me how delightful it was to get together with the whole family. What a wonderful blessing. If you'll turn to Psalms 131, as men and women we need to do our best and then be content with ourselves, with the satisfaction that we are doing the best we can. Our goal must be to serve God through faith in Him and doing our best with what God has given us. As we saw in Philippians, we must be content with what we have been given.

Psalms 131:1 *LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.*

2) *Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me.* (NKJV)

I read in a Jewish Bible that this is actually speaking of a nursing child.

3) *O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.* (NKJV)

A nursing child is content in the security and protection of the nourishment and love of a mother. Both father and mother are needed for a child's balanced development. Please turn to Proverbs 31. Those of you with adult children can likely affirm that there is little that exceeds the satisfaction of a "Thank you" and a compliment from our adult children. Speaking of the joys of being a successful woman, Proverbs 31:28, speaking of the mother.

Proverbs 31:28 *Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her:* (NKJV)

Hopefully a wife and mother will enjoy the blessings of hearing her children praise her. Righteousness and fear of the Lord also produces happiness and mutual respect within the family between the husband and wife. God's plan for humanity revolves around family and relationships. Living this physical life prepares us to live life eternally within God's spiritual family. Fear and reverence towards God and respect for His family is designed by God to produce peace, happiness, and joy for each one of us. God has provided us this physical life as a path for happiness.