

GOD'S RENEWAL FOR HOUSEHOLDS

"Part XVIII: Renewing Household Marriages: Addressing Roadblocks - Overcoming The Unwanted Loss Of A Spouse"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) The Sunday before last, when Nadine's father and my parents were visiting us, as my mother was talking with Duane Doot in the Fellowship Hall, she experienced what my Dad later concluded as a minor stroke! All of the signs were there according to my Father's diagnosis from his days of training at the School of Missionary Medicine in Oklahoma!

It hadn't been too many years since Nadine's mother and my Grandmother had passed away, and now that my own mother's health may be significantly waning, the reality that life potentially could be coming to an end for her suddenly hit home! That's an awakening!

What started to concern me as I thought about this was **HOW my DAD would adjust if Mom suddenly passed on!**

Before the problems began, and am beginning to witness the chaotic devastation that associates such a trial with these I know!

In view of the REALITY of this life's BREVITY, and in view of the fact that most adults in Nepaug Church are married, HOW ARE HALF OF US ADULTS GOING TO ADJUST TO THE DEATH OF THE OTHER HALF OR THE TRAGIC UNWANTED DEPARTURE OF THE OTHER?!

Someone may say, "Why are you bringing THAT up, Pastor?! I'd like to concentrate on what life we have TOGETHER still!"

True, there may be years of life together, but one never knows that for SURE! HOW then are we preparing for the inevitable when the PARTNER in the marriage union DIES?! What if he or she LEAVES -- what THEN?!

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon . . .)

Need: "Though nobody wants to lose a spouse, the fact remains if Christ tarries His return that HALF of all of us spouses WILL go through widowhood OR even divorce! How can we handle that?!"

I. If one has JUST lost the spouse in death or unwanted divorce, there are steps Scripture and believers with experience advise!

A. On the *emotional* plane, the remaining spouse should realize his/her human limitations and give himself a **YEAR** to adjust!

1. The Jewish community waits to conduct graveside ceremonies for the loss of a spouse until a full year has elapsed. This gives the surviving spouse time to accept that passing to adjust to the future! One widower relates that it takes a full 18 months to adjust!
2. Similarly, Larry Burkett, Christian Financial Counselor proposes surviving mates make **no** significant financial decisions in that time:
 - a. Wives outlive their husbands about 85% of the time, Burkett, Investing for the Future Calendar, November 15th entry.
 - b. That being so, and since wives are often less knowledgeable on investing than husbands, he suggests their making **no** financial decisions of any import for one year. This causes them to get beyond emotional vulnerability to acting on bad advice and to educate themselves for better decisions, *Ibid.*, May 11th entry.
 - c. From observations with widowhood in our extended family, Nadine and I propose going slow on remarriage. Remarriage is complicated by the expectations of the first marriage, so be sure **God** is leading, 1 Cor. 7:39-40! Divorced people should either remain single or be reconciled to the former spouse, 1 Cor. 7:11.

B. On the *spiritual* plane, reorient to the future by focusing on God's will.

1. If one hopes only in this life, the loss of a spouse through death or unwanted divorce is nothing but tragedy and grief, 1 Cor. 15:19.
2. Conversely, doing the will of God invests this life so as to make such a loss manageable in terms of eternal values, Phil. 1:21-24.
3. Thus, to adjust well to the death of a spouse, (a) believe in Christ for salvation of the soul (Jn. 3:16), (b) fellowship with God for power to live above grief (1 Jn. 1:9; Gal. 5:16-23) and (c) handle grief by hoping in the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). (d) Then, we should get busy doing the will of God in disciplining others for blessing with what time we have left, 1 Jn. 2:17; Mtt. 28:19-20.

II. As time goes by, adjust to missing one's mate as follows:

- A. Having come to faith in Christ (cf. I, B, 3 above), let the Lord minister as your best intimate friend and security that you miss in your absent spouse: He's promised to fill that void in Dt. 10:18; 24:19; Ps. 27:10.
 - B. Let the Lord lead as to earthly life decisions of geographical relocation, employment, etc. following "singlehood", James 4:13-15.
 - C. As for concerns over the lost spouse's eternal destiny, realize that only **God** knows that one's destiny (Rev. 1:18b), that the **departed one alone** is responsible for where he (she) eternally goes (Mtt. 12:36-37; Rom. 14:12) and that there is **nothing anyone** can do about it **after death** (Heb. 9:27). Knowing these facts, be motivated more than ever to be involved in the discipling of the *remaining* associates for Christ.
- III. **As PREVENTATIVE measures, Scripture suggests how to anticipate experiencing a spouse's death BEFORE it occurs:**
- A. Step One - *With the spouse*, build your marital relationship upon *Christ* and *His coming Kingdom* for hope **beyond** death, 1 Thes. 4:13-18. That way, death is only an uncomfortable interruption to your continued fellowship that will be yours at Christ's coming!
 - B. Step Two - *With the spouse*, give yourself to a life of serving *God's will* so that your *works* follow you into eternity, 1 Jn. 2:17. Then death only puts a higher value on what the spouse has been doing all along (1 Cor. 15:54-58), creating a legacy of blessing for survivors, and anticipation of eternal rewards, Dan. 12:2-3; 2 Tim. 4:5, 6-8.
 - C. Step Three - If suffering from a terminal condition where one has the opportunity to know of his imminent death, one can plan the memorial service, even leaving a recorded testimony of the Gospel for the greatest impact on surviving associates for the cause of Jesus Christ!

Application: *To handle the unwanted loss of a spouse, (1) begin by overcoming ETERNAL death by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin and reception of God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16. (2) As a believer, fellowship with God and do his will as your life's work, 1 Jn. 1:9; Gal. 5:16-23; 1 Jn. 2:17. (3) Even BETTER, if BOTH are spiritually cooperative, BOTH spouses in a marriage should make these adjustments. (4) Regardless of the spiritual lot of the OTHER spouse, fellowship with God and involvement in His discipling program as the surviving or remaining spouse is the final and effective key to blessing in one's earthly and eternal future!*

Lesson: *Victory over the unwanted loss of a spouse comes by victory over SIN! Thus, whatever one can do in adjust to GOD'S victory over SIN will be the greatest blessing available to handle the unwanted loss of a spouse!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

About ten years ago, in a missionary conference we had here at Nepaug Church, someone on the missions committee picked out a missionary film and showed it on a Friday evening.

It came at a particularly needy time in our Church. Those in leadership were due for encouragement, myself included, and it had taken all the energy and motivation we had just to get the conference off the ground. That film that night met our need!

It was true documentary about a little known missionary who, with his wife, had gone to a backward area somewhere in South America to evangelize an unreached tribe. The young couple built their home and a little chapel with a few pews. When they started out in this ministry, the man would preach on Sundays to an empty church with nobody in the pews.

To top it off, his wife became ill and died on one of those Sundays. The film showed the man burying his wife in the yard out in front of the house.

Then, to my amazement and to that of one of the elders sitting near me, the man put down his shovel upon finishing his wife's burial, picked up his Bible, and went off on trek to find people and witness to them! I'll never forget the gasp that came from that elder that Friday night!

Finally, the film showed that same man, in his late seventies, decades later, leading a worship service in a meeting hall full of people of that tribe he and his deceased wife had first tried to reach! It was a very moving movie. I will never forget its message of this true biography!

The incredibly painful loss of his dear wife, his only companion of near culture in that faraway South American land, was handled by a commitment to the Lord and to the Lord's will that had brought this missionary couple to the area. It sustained this grieving missionary for many decades more until he could actually stand in front of a packed Church in his seventies!

GOD has the means to keep us going over the unwanted loss of a spouse! When we fall in love with Christ, and commit our lives to serving HIS will, HE keeps us going with blessing!