

Christianfamily

A bilingual magazine for Christian families

Volume 8, number 4
October - December 2023

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everyone! Here is the
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and more...



From the editors

As

we say goodbye to this year and welcome a new one, what about deciding to promote regular Bible reflection in our families? This is exactly what the feature article in this new issue seeks to accomplish with a 52-week discussion plan using mobile technology. Take a few minutes to read the article on pages 8-11 and encourage your family to follow this plan and grow more in the Lord during the next year. In this issue, you will also find advice to promote harmony in marriage, faithfulness in children, stability in Christianity, spirituality in life, and productivity in service.

We hope that you are enjoying our magazine and that it is blessing your life and family. We wish you happy holidays and ask you to continue to pray for our work.

Paul Holland & Moisés Pinedo

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Helping families become stronger in the Lord

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Family Memories Moisés Pinedo

“What Are We Going to Name the Baby?”

Ifeel that my wife and I have lived in “Rogerian¹ mode” since the time we decided to marry someone from a different country, culture, language, lifestyle, and way of thinking. It seems that every opinion/argument must be open to compromise to make our life work. However, we learned this early in our marriage...well, until children came into the picture.

“What are we going to name him or her?”

“Well, Baby Pinedo most likely will grow up in the U.S.”

“But ‘Bob’ doesn’t go with ‘Pinedo.’” [To be fair, she did not say “Bob.”] “His name must reflect his Hispanic heritage.”

“Raúl?! My parents cannot roll their r’s! And how are the Americans going to type the accent?”

“Ella?!” ‘Ella’ means ‘she’ in Spanish! What am I going to answer when Hispanics ask me ‘Cómo se llama,’²... ‘She?’ –‘Sí, ella.’³ –‘She’ is ‘She?’” [By the way, our second daughter is named “Ella.”]

Well, we finally found common ground; we knew that both of us wanted the best for our future children, so we compromised. We decided that my wife would name the girls and I would name the boys. Twenty years, four children, and seven pets later, I have named a rabbit: “Paco.”

Humans are complex beings; there are not two of us who think alike all the time. Therefore, starting a life together in marriage will bring its unavoidable disagreements in matters of opinion. Here are some questions that you may ask yourself to measure your willingness to compromise:

- Do I think on my spouse’s wishes more than mine (cf. Romans 12:10)?
 - Do I refrain from making significant decisions without talking to my spouse (cf. Ecclesiastes 4:13)?
 - Do I listen attentively to my spouse to understand him/her more than to respond (cf. Matthew 11:15)?
 - Do I communicate to my spouse my thoughts and desires clearly (cf. Matthew 5:37)?
 - Do I try to consider the issue from my spouse’s point of view (cf. Proverbs 18:17)?

Learning to compromise in matters of opinion will reduce conflict in marriage. Chances are, with the passing of time, the husband and wife will see eye to eye more frequently than in the first years of their marriage, and their relationship will enjoy a greater level of harmony. ■

Ella and Paco (2016)
Photo by Mettilly Photography



1. The term “Rogerian” is coined after psychologist Carl Rogers, whose approach to conflict resolution was based on finding common ground.

2. “Cómo se llama” means “what is her name.”

3. “Yes, she.”



RAISE THEM RIGHT

biblical wisdom for modern parenting
from Luke 15:11-24

Paul Holland

We have had a four-part series of studies on “Biblical Wisdom for Modern Parenting,” but we should also address the situation in which faithful Christians may have a prodigal child. What if **my** child is the “prodigal?”

I want to bring out a few points that are relevant to this particular lesson:

1. God has lost countless numbers of His own children. God lost Adam and Eve. The Bible states that, when the world turned wicked just before the flood of Noah’s day, “the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:6).
2. The biblical principles from God’s Word are universal to all families of all time, everywhere, but the application of those principles will (probably) look differently in your family than it did in my family.
3. **No one** is an “expert” in families. No one has all the answers to all the questions on how we need to handle specific situations in a family.
4. There is **no guarantee** that our children will grow up faithful. We can do everything possible, but our children still have the freedom to make their own choices. However, here are the things, in a nutshell, that we can do to provide the environment that is most conducive for them to stay faithful when they grow up:

- a. Dad should be a faithful, active Christian and a spiritual leader in the home.
- b. Mom should be a faithful, active Christian and a spiritual guide for her children.
- c. They should be “on the same page” when it comes to child-rearing.
- d. They should teach and model biblical principles and values every chance they get.
- e. They should expose their child, very early in life, to the fellowship of the church.
- f. They should encourage their child to marry someone who will help him/her go to heaven.

Let’s apply some principles from the story of the prodigal son.

1. Give them their “freedom”

As we have been saying all along, children need to learn that their choices have consequences. Mom and Dad have to let them go and experience those consequences. At the end of verse 12, the father “divided to them his livelihood.” The dad gave both sons their freedom.

2. Acknowledge your feelings

There is a sense of loss, even a sense of failure, when your child does not embrace the teachings and/or lifestyle you tried to teach him/her. You have to take

time to grieve the loss of your dream for your child. There might also be anger that comes to the surface. Acknowledge that and process it.

How many times have God's feelings been expressed throughout the Bible story? God knows how to handle His own feelings; you and I sometimes do not. So, we need to acknowledge those feelings or we'll be stuck in a rut.

3. Stay hopeful

There might be a sense of shame or failure on your part, but do not lose hope. Honestly evaluate your own words and behavior, and if there are things that you did wrong, acknowledge them. You might also need to ask your child for forgiveness. All of us as parents are inadequate in many ways; none of us did everything exactly right over the years, and once our child leaves the home, there's not much we can do to undo the wrongs we have done.

In verse 20, we observe that while the son "was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Don't you know that the father was looking down that road every single day? Every time his work brought him close to the road, don't you know that he glanced down the road to see if he might see his beloved son?

4. Allow your children to "fail"

The father did not keep bailing out his child. Sometimes we all have to be allowed to experience the poverty of our own decisions. Look at what the son experienced and what the father allowed him to experience. He allowed his son to

- walk away (vs. 13),
- go to a "far country" (vs. 13),
- waste his inheritance (the father's hard-earned money!) on "prodigal living" (vs. 13),
- spend everything he had (vs. 14),
- experience severe famine (vs. 14),
- become impoverished (vs. 14),
- become a slave of someone else (vs. 15),
- feed swine, a very unpleasant job for a Jew! (vs. 15),
- become hungry (vs. 16),
- and become lonely (vs. 16).

5. Remember the other children

The troublesome child can draw a lot of attention, emotional energy, and brainpower. In the parable, the older brother resented the father's attention lavished on the younger brother. Don't compare your other children to the prodigal child. Instead, love and appreciate the other children as individuals, for who they are.

All that time, the older brother in the parable had been at home, working, and doing what he was supposed to be doing. In verse 31, the father tells him: "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours." The father continued to love, support, and encourage the older brother; he did not neglect the one for the other.

6. Stay prayerful

Worrying doesn't do anything good or positive. Many parents stay up late at night, losing sleep, and wondering what news the next phone call might bring. But remember, while your child might be beyond your reach, he or she is not beyond God's reach. The father in the parable kept looking down the road. Keep looking down the road with prayer. Frequently in our decisions, all we can do is to pray: "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2).

7. Be gracious

The proof of your love will be in how you react to your child. Will he or she find you with open arms and forgiveness? The prodigal knew he had messed up; he did not need a lecture when he came home. Regardless of what he expected, what he found when he came home was the full extent of his father's love.

Make sure your words to your child are gracious words: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). Make sure your attitude is one of graciousness: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

There is still hope for the prodigal. Follow God's example; encourage, pray, and hope. ■



WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

Kerri Epling

As

we close out our studies together on “children’s stories” from the Bible, let us consider one last section of Scripture that is often relegated only to the classes for our young kids.

As a child, I spent many days at the edge of the ocean building sandcastles just out of reach of the waves. I can remember spending hours building fortresses of sand with walls, moats, bridges, and turrets. Those sandcastles seemed fit for a king and virtually indestructible. My dad would always warn us that the tide would steal our castles away, but we kept building them anyway. And yet, every evening the tide did just as my dad said; it came in and washed those castles away, and the next morning we would be forced to start again in the bare place where our structures had been. Likewise, at times we would stand at the edge of the water on firm, packed sand, only to be knocked off our feet when the roaring waves would sweep the sand out from under us. It did not matter how durable our sand structure seemed to be or how firmly our feet seemed to be planted at the shoreline, the water won over the sand every single time. The sand was just no place to build something we wanted to last and endure.



The wise man built his house upon the rock, and the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down, and the floods came up, and the house on the rock stood firm!

The foolish man built his house upon the sand, and the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down, and the floods came up, and the house on the sand went **splat!**



Matthew 7:24-27 teaches us the same thing my dad kept trying to teach me when I was young. In these verses, Jesus compares two types of people: those who hear His sayings, and those who do not. As a child, I did not “hear” what my dad was telling me, and I kept building my castles on the unstable sand. Likewise, those who do not hear what Jesus is saying to them and obey it can never have a firm and stable foundation.

Questions to Consider

- What kind of builder did Jesus say would build a house upon the sand?
- Is this a compliment to the builder? Look up this description in a lexicon.
- Look up other places God describes people as “fools” or “foolish.”
- What does it mean to “hear” the words of Jesus? Does it just mean to listen? What else does Jesus connect with hearing His words?
- What threat came to the house on the sand?
- What was the result?
- What did Jesus say about the one who would build his house on the rock?
- Define “wise.” Look up other attributes God says the “wise” have.
- Would threats still come to this house?
- What would be the result?

Jesus was not speaking literally of physical homes built on sand or actual dwellings constructed on rock. Instead, He was speaking of where our own spiritual foundation lies. Threats will come to our lives no matter what; the difference in the result of those threats comes from where we have placed our trust.

- What things in our lives could be considered the “sand” upon which we build?
- Upon which rock should we build? What does it look like when we “build” on the rock?

Let us resolve today to avoid building castles on the sand and to build instead on the rock so that we can one day go to the eternal home Jesus is preparing for those who love and obey Him (John 14:2).



Questions for Children

- What were the builders building?
- What does “foolish” mean?
- Where did the foolish man build?
- What does “wise” mean?
- Where did the wise man build?
- What happened to the houses when it rained?
- Where should we build?

Suggestions for Interaction with Children

- Sing the song about the wise and foolish men.
- For visual learners, build a clay or playdough house and put it on top of some sand in a box or dish. Flood the box/dish with water and watch the house be “washed away.” Attach the clay house to some rocks and repeat the experiment. Discuss why the house on the rock was more stable.
- Brainstorm some ways they can “build” on Jesus’ teaching as their rock/foundation. Choose one way to focus on each week for a month. ■

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Kerri at editorial@ebglobal.org with email subject of “Christian Family Study.”



Using technology to engage your family in BIBLE DISCUSSION for a WHOLE YEAR

Moisés Pinedo

Whether we like it or not, computers, cell phones, and tablets are here to stay. As parents, we should be mindful of the potential dangers of this technology and should make every effort to protect the integrity of our families. But we can also use this technology to promote family Bible discussion and reflection. In this featured article, we include a 52-week plan for family Bible discussion using mobile technology.

How to use this discussion?

The idea for this family Bible discussion plan came from a friend,¹ college discussion threads, and study tools. This plan follows the list in Caleb Colley's biblical character studies, *That We May Have Hope* (see the information about this tool on page 11), that we have been using in our daily family devotional time. Since our older daughter is attending college in a different state, we decided to do something for her to continue to engage in "family discussion." Here is what we did:

We created a phone family group and called it "Bible Character Discussion." Each Sunday morning, I

send a message to all members in our group with the question for the week. From the time I post the question until Wednesday night, all members must answer it, usually with 3–5 sentences. (They may need to read a passage or do a little research if they do not know how to answer.) From Thursday to Saturday, they must comment on another person's answer (this forces all members to read each other's answers). The next Sunday I post a new question and the process begins all over again. (You can adjust this idea to what works best for your family.) Our family still does Bible devotional time each night, but, on Saturday night, we reflect on the discussion answers that were given during the week.

Who should be included in this discussion?

Both parents and all children who are Christians, and any teenagers in the family, especially those who already use cell phones. Teenagers who do not have a cell phone may apply for a free number and text from their tablets, or they may use a parent's phone to participate in the discussion thread. Include all boyfriends and girlfriends in the discussion.

What are some benefits of this discussion?

This discussion promotes

1. **constant biblical reflection (cf. Psalm 119:97).** It gives the entire family an additional biblical topic to think about during the week. It allows us to make the Bible practical in our lives. Each answer has the potential to prick the mind and heart.
2. **family interaction (cf. Hebrews 13:1).** It is an additional opportunity to connect as a family (even with those who are far from us) and show that we care for each other (when an answer or comment is appreciated). It is also a way to welcome boyfriends (we only have daughters) to the family.

We not only discuss the Bible, but we also make jokes, like posts, send funny emojis, etc.

3. **deeper Bible thinking (cf. Acts 17:11).** A few days ago, I told my wife, "Have you realized that there was a whole 'Bible commentary' in this week's discussion thread?" She answered, "Every week." (She usually gets it before I do). This discussion allows us to see what is in the minds of our children concerning the Bible, and help them, if needed, to arrive at a better understanding. ■

1. Kerri Epling mentioned a similar idea to my wife, and we decided to develop it.
2. Some of these questions are adapted (with permission) from Caleb Colley's curriculum.

Discussion Questions²

Week 1, on Adam and Eve: Adam and Eve were created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). Mention one thing that would be part of the image of God in them and that would distinguish them from animals.

Week 2, on Cain and Abel: The Bible does not record Adam and Eve's response to Abel's murder at the hand of Cain (Genesis 4:8), but what kind of thoughts/feelings do you think could have come to their minds/hearts?

Week 3, on Noah: The Hebrews writer tells us that Noah "condemned the world" by building the ark (11:7). How was the construction of the ark (the demonstration of his faith) a condemnation of the world?

Week 4, on Job: Throughout the book, Job wants to know why he is suffering, but even though God talked to him at the end (Job 38-41) and blessed him (Job 42), He never answered that question. What can we learn from this fact?

Week 5, on Abraham: Was it immoral on God's part to ask Abraham to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22)? Give one reason and explain.

Week 6, on Sarah: Sarah had to wait a long time for the promised child (Genesis 21:1-7). How can we develop patience to wait for God's promises?

Week 7, on Isaac: It can be said that Isaac is a type of Christ. Mention one way in which both are similar.

Week 8, on Jacob: Jacob faced many problems due to his polygamist marriage arrangement (Genesis 29). Mention one negative result of ignoring God's plan for marriage.

Week 9, on Esau: The Hebrews writer calls Esau "profane" (12:16); that is someone who shows disrespect for sacred things (in the case of Esau, his birthright). How may we be showing disrespect for sacred things today?

Week 10, on Joseph: Joseph was Jacob's favorite child (Genesis 37:3). We know that it turned out well for Joseph in the end, but why is parental favoritism wrong?

Week 11, on Moses: Moses tried to excuse himself from doing what God had commanded him (Exodus 3:11; 4:10). How can we avoid making excuses when we need to do something for God?

Week 12, on Joshua: What can we learn from Joshua's statement in Joshua 24:15: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord?"

Week 13, on Caleb: Caleb and Joshua had to wander for 40 years in the wilderness due to no fault of their own (Numbers 14), and, yet, we never read that they complained. What does this teach us?

Week 14, on Balaam: Why was God angry at Balaam and tried to kill him by an angel if it seems that Ba-

laam had only told the truth about God and blessed the people of God (Numbers 22-24)?

Week 15, on Rahab: Rahab lied to save the lives of the spies (Joshua 2), and her lie benefited God's plan for His people to conquer the land. She is commended in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31). Did God approve of Rahab's lie? Explain.

Week 16, on Deborah: After Deborah and Barak were victorious over Sisera and his army, they sang a song of praise to the Lord (Judges 5). What can we learn from this?

Week 17, on Gideon: God gave Gideon miraculous evidence to trust His promised word (Judges 6:36-40). What evidence has God given us to trust His written Word?

Week 18, on Ruth: God prohibited the Israelites from marrying people from other nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-5) and specifically said not to seek peace or prosperity for the Moabites (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Did Boaz sin by helping and marrying Ruth, a Moabite? Explain.

Week 19, on Jephthah: What can we learn from Jephthah's promise to the Lord in Judges 11:29-40?

Week 20, on Samson: Samson's choice about whom to marry was based on what criterion (Judges 14:1-3)? What criteria should we use to decide whom to marry?

Week 21, on Samuel: Samuel was a great servant of God, but his sons turned out to be wicked (1 Samuel 8:1-3). Mention one lesson we may learn from it.

Week 22, on Saul: Saul consulted a medium to communicate with Samuel, who was dead at that time (1 Samuel 28). Can mediums (witches, spiritists, sorcerers) communicate with the dead? Explain.

Week 23, on David: If David was not perfect and sinned gravely by taking Bathsheba and killing Uriah, why does the Bible say that he was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14)?

Week 24, on Solomon: God told Solomon to ask whatever he wanted Him to give to him (1 Kings 3). If God would tell you the same, what would you ask from Him? Why?

Week 25, on Jeroboam: Jeroboam would lead Israel deep into sin. However, even when God knew this beforehand, He promised to be with Jeroboam if he

would listen to His commandments (1 Kings 11:26-40). What can we learn from it?

Week 26, on Elijah: In 1 Kings 19, Elijah became deeply discouraged. How can we avoid discouragement in our lives?

Week 27, on Elisha: An invisible army of spiritual beings was with Elisha at Dothan (2 Kings 6:8-22). Was this a miracle, and can spiritual beings be around us today?

Week 28, on Ahab: In 1 Kings 21:25, the inspired writer gives one main reason for Ahab's wickedness. What can we learn from it?

Week 29, on Isaiah: In Isaiah 6, the prophet saw a vision of the Lord. What can we learn about God or man from this vision?

Week 30, on Hezekiah: Hezekiah was one of the greatest and most pious kings of Judah—even when he had an extremely wicked father (2 Kings 16). What can we learn from it?

Week 31, on Manasseh: On the other hand, Manasseh was one of the wickedest kings of Judah (2 Kings 21)—even when he had a pious father (Hezekiah). What can we learn from it?

Week 32, on Josiah: Josiah sought God while he was young (2 Chronicles 34). Why is seeking the Lord in our youth so important?

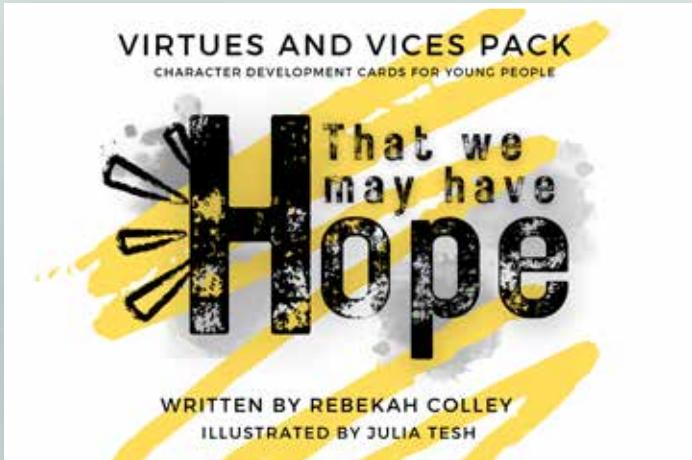
Week 33, on Jeremiah: Jeremiah said that God's words were like a fire in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). If God's Word is like a "fire in our bones," how will we act? Extra question for personal meditation: Is that how you feel about God's Word?

Week 34, on Nebuchadnezzar: God punished Nebuchadnezzar for his proud spirit (Daniel 4). How can we avoid pride in our lives?

Week 35, on Daniel: Daniel was faithful to God in a Babylonian pagan environment. What were those habits that allowed Daniel to remain faithful even in that environment?

Week 36, on Esther: God's name is never mentioned in the book of Esther, but we know that He was acting through His providence. What is "providence," and does God still work today through His providence?

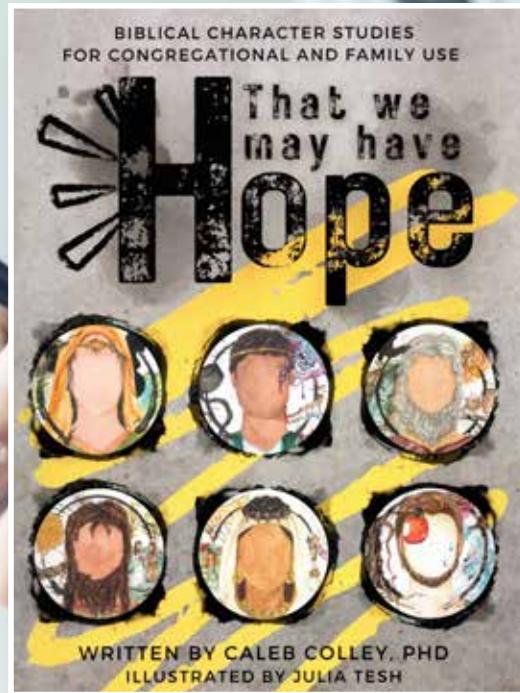
Week 37, on Ezra: Ezra prepared his heart to seek, practice, and teach the Law of the Lord (Ezra 7:10). How can we prepare our hearts to do the same?



That We May Have Hope

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thecolleyhouse.org/store



Week 38, on Nehemiah: What can we learn about prayer from Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1?

Week 39, on Herod the Great: Herod killed the innocent babies in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18). How does God feel about today's murder of innocent babies in the womb (abortion)?

Week 40, on Mary: Mention and discuss one main characteristic in Mary that God may have considered in choosing her to bring the Messiah into the world.

Week 41, on John the Baptist: John said of Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). How can we let Jesus "increase" in our lives?

Week 42, on James: James was the physical half-brother of the Lord and, yet, he introduced himself in his epistle as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). What can we learn from it?

Week 43, on Peter: Peter was not perfect, but he was faithful. Read some accounts about Peter or look up his name in a Bible dictionary and discuss one positive trait that allowed Peter to be faithful to the Lord.

Week 44, on John the apostle: John is known as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20-24). How can we enjoy the greatest measure of Jesus' love?

Week 45, on Judas Iscariot: It was prophesied that the Messiah would be betrayed by a "friend" (Psalm

41:9). In the New Testament, we learn that the betrayer was Judas (Luke 22:48). Did Judas have a choice in betraying Jesus? Explain.

Week 46, on Mary Magdalene: Seven demons were cast out of Mary (Mark 16:9). Can people still be demon-possessed? Explain.

Week 47, on Pilate: Pilate performed the ritual of washing his hands to express that he was "innocent" of the blood of Jesus (Matthew 27:24) and then proceeded to crucify Him. Was he really "innocent"? Explain.

Week 48, on Phillip the evangelist: Read Acts 8:26-40. What can we learn from Phillip about reaching others for Christ?

Week 49, on Paul: Paul was an amazing servant of God. Discuss one trait we should emulate from Paul.

Week 50, on Barnabas: Barnabas was named "Son of Encouragement" by the apostles (Acts 4:36). Mention a way we can encourage others.

Week 51, on Luke: Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14) who used his medical training to glorify God. How can we use our (future) profession or present abilities to glorify God?

Week 52, on Timothy: Let's finish strong! Read 1 and 2 Timothy and mention one special lesson you have learned from the reading. ■

Are we GOOD SERVANTS of CHRIST JESUS?

A letter from a Christian woman to all her young sisters

Rachel Holland

Are your mom and grandmother Christians? If so, you have something in common with Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5). But if not, you still have something in common: you have someone who cares for your soul like Paul did for Timothy's. Even though I may not know your name and spiritual condition, please know that I truly care for your soul. God does, too! God's Word contains all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness daily (Matthew 5:6)? Our lives on this earth are a testament to God to show Him our love. It's important to allow God's Word to renew us (Romans 12:1-2).

Let's look at areas of our lives in which we can make choices each day to be living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to God. First and Second Timothy were written to a young man of faith, but we'll apply the principles to us as women of faith. The word "**faith**" and its different forms ("faithful, faithless") are used 33 times in the two books written to Timothy. Take time to read these two books in one sitting. It should only take you about 30 minutes. Make a priority of building up your faith with daily reading of God's Word. Deeper study is also important. As you dig into the meat of the Word, you may be inspired to write an article (even for this publication). I want to encourage you to use your skills and talents for the Lord and the growth of His kingdom. From 1 Timothy 4:6 we see we are to be "nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine" that is found in the Bible. It is to be our firm foundation, which keeps us grounded in a world of instability. We can then have God's guidance as to how to live here and secure a home in heaven with Him one day.

In 1 Timothy 4:12 we also find we are to set an example to other believers in **purity** of life. How can we be pure? "Holiness," "sanctification," and "renovation" are all synonyms for "purity." Of course, we are initially cleansed by the blood of Christ when we put Him on in baptism (Galatians 3:25-27), but we must also keep ourselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). This is an inner compass we must calibrate with God's guidance. How would we know envy is sinful if we didn't read it in God's Word (Galatians 5:21; James 3:16; 1 Peter 2:1)? Did you know angry outbursts displease God, too (see Galatians 5:20)? We are constantly learning how our Creator wants us to live. To keep our lives pure is inner work, but God is also concerned with outward appearances (see 1 Timothy 2:9-15)—how we dress, how we treat others, how we worship, and how we can be saved through childbearing, if we continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. Keeping our lives pure is a constant work.

God is concerned with our **conduct** (1 Timothy 4:12); how we live our lives before God and other peo-



ple matters. Notice the emphasis Paul puts on godliness in 1 Timothy 4:7-8: “exercise yourself toward godliness” and “godliness is profitable for all things” direct our attention to the quality of being like God. We are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), but we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) in every way possible. Sometimes I feel so inadequate in living up to the standard of my Lord, but I know He is gracious and merciful (Psalm 145:8-9). We know He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Seeking to be more like Christ must be our earnest desire (see Matthew 7:7-11). Jesus gave us so many practical ways to implement our faith, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Put the words of Christ to memory and you’ll be blessed beyond measure. His Word is meant to give us direction, motivation, and correction so we can become who He wants us to be. I love to remind myself of these words from a child’s song: “God’s still working on me, to make me what I ought to be. It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth, and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be, ‘cause He’s still working on me.”

Along with our conduct, we can also consider our **speech** (1 Timothy 4:12). We can gauge a person’s character by their speech. Does he/she curse and use by-words that show a lack of respect for others and for God, Who sees and hears everything (Proverbs 15:3)? Proverbs 15 aptly gives us instruction on how to use our tongues, our mouth, and our speech for the betterment of others; we also see it contrasted with what is displeasing to God. Read this chapter and analyze your speech. How do you measure up to God’s standards? This is a lifelong goal for us to strive toward perfection/completion (Philippians 3:12-14).

Everything is perfected when done in **love**. “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). This chapter in 1 Corinthians emphasizes the importance of love as the motivation for all we do. Jesus taught us over and over about love in John 13:34 through chapter 15. He showed us the ultimate love by giving Himself on the cross. How we show love in our lives will be different for each of us, but our love for Christ must motivate everything we do as His children. To sum it all up, “[t]ake heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16). ■

The Parable of the Talents

Kimberley Pinedo



In

Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable (a story) about a man who was traveling to a far country. He called his servants and gave them talents. A “talent” here means a measure of money that could be valued at about 20 years of wages (or work). That is a lot of money! The master gave five talents to one servant, two to another, and one to another. Verses 16-17 tell us that the man with the five talents went out and traded or used the talents and was able to make five more! The man with the two talents did likewise and was able to make two more! However, in verse 18, we see that the man who had one talent went and hid his one talent in the earth.

After a long time passed, the master came back to see the servants. The servant who had received the five talents explained that he was able to trade and receive five more talents. The master told him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (vs. 21). The

second servant answered similarly and told his master that he had received two talents and with those he was able to gain two more. The master answered him with the same words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (vs. 23). However, the one who had received one talent came and said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours” (vss. 24-25). His master answered to this man, “You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest” (vss. 26-27).

What is the significance of this parable? Well, we know that Jesus taught in parables so that the lessons can be understood. We can compare the master to Jesus, and the children of God to the servants. The master gave the servants money, but we must also use the “talents” (abilities) that God has entrusted to us to serve in His kingdom. We do not want to be like the servant who simply hid or buried his talent. We want to be like the servants who took what was given to them, tried to use them the best that they could, and then were recognized as “good and faithful” servants.

There are three words that can sum up the problem of the unprofitable servant. The Bible says that he answered, “I was afraid.” God does not want us to be scared or afraid to use our abilities for Him. He has not given us a “spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (vs. 29). That means that we are responsible for what has been given to us. Only God knows if we are using our talents for Him. We are not all given the same talents in life. But we need to be aware of what talents we do have and use them for His glory. In the end, we do not want Jesus to come back and find that we have been wicked and lazy or scared. On the contrary, we need to be profitable servants of God. We need to be looking for ways that we can be helpful to God in his kingdom. How can you be a helper in His kingdom? How can you let your light shine for others? God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6)! ■

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