Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward

Relationships – Responsibilities - Resources

My Responsibilities at Home

Goal: That participants would understand and live out God's design for the home.

Introduction: Ask those participants who are willing to share to describe their home growing up with one word.

Background: Kolb and Arand write in *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, "Of the four orders of life in which people find themselves, Luther argued that the family had been the least appreciated and most disparaged in his day…Luther extolled marriage and family life as the foundational order that God established 'before all others as the first of all institutions.' He identified three purposes for marriage. First, God created man and woman 'to be true to each other.' In creating them 'differently (as is evident),' he 'implanted in each the desire and urge for the other.' And so in marriage, 'God brings us into relation with one who is different from us but who also reflects back to us something of the truth of our own nature.' It is not good to be alone and not have another person to call us out of ourselves to serve or to learn from. Here a person learns what it means to serve and love the good of another. Second God bound man and woman together in order 'to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God.' The God who calls us out of our 'isolation into union of mutual love ordains that it should turn outward in order that human life may be sustained and friendship increased.' For Luther, the home was 'no introspective, private sphere, unmindful of society, but the cradle of citizenship, extending its values and example into the world around it. The habits and character developed within families became the virtues that shaped entire lands.' Third, Luther noted that after the fall into sin, marriage serves another purpose for those who have not received the extraordinary gift of the single life (1 Cor. 7:7). Marriage helps to curtail the 'incessant ragings of secret passions, unchaste thoughts, and evil desires' that would proceed 'unrestrained and unimpeded (1 Cor. 7:2, 36).' It thus has a healing function whereby it guards against infidelity." Pages 59-60

We belong to Christ. We are His children. Robert Kolb writes in *Teaching God's Children His Teaching,* "Being a child of God entails carrying out the responsibilities which He has structured among us in the midst of His creation." These responsibilities are described as four estates or situations. They are: home, occupation, society and congregation. In each of these areas we have responsibilities. Martin Luther gives guidance in his Small Catechism in what he calls "The Table of Duties." Kolb writes, "These responsibilities consist of whatever actions are necessary for the proper care and the supporting, sustaining love and concern which is vital for human life, for the well-being of the whole creation." Page 8-3

The family is the basic unit and building block of society. In order for society to flourish as God intends it to flourish the family must be healthy. As Robert Kolb states, "The home bears the weight of the entire society." We are to steward life in the home according to God's design.

The following passages are taken from *Luther's Small Catechism* "Table of Duties" (2017, pages 36-37).

What do the following passages say to husbands?

- 1 Peter 3:7

Answer: Consideration and respect are to be hallmarks of the husband's relationship with his wife. Clinton J. Armstrong writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on the General Epistles*, "Peter's words for wives are matched by an appeal to husbands, who also have a unique vocation in the estate of marriage that God has established. They are to live 'according to knowledge' (Gk *gnosis*), that is, in an understanding way. Peter is not talking about 'tolerance' or 'gentleness,' but really understanding Gods will for marriage. This understanding begins by showing honor to his wife as a gift given by God, who is of one flesh with her husband (cf. Gn 2:24; Eph 5:28-29; 1 Co 7:3). This honor extends to the things we consider most precious…(When Peter uses the phrase 'weaker vessel' This is not a matter of disrespect, but a carefully chosen expression to get at the are that husbands are called to in regard to their partners who, vulnerable to abuse, typify the 'least, last, lost' of God's kingdom—those most precious to God. In a first-century Roman world in which *patria potestas* gave men the right of life and death over all family members, Peter's admonition to husbands not to exploit their size and strength in unkind ways could in fact be considered countercultural. This reinforces Peter's emphasis on Christians' identity as sojourners and aliens. They are all to inherit a heavenly crown. Peter calls Christian wives *heirs with you,* for all are saved in the same way: by grace. Rendering honor to wives in this way fulfills a holy calling of the husband and results in the great benefit that *your prayers may not be hindered….* A husband must bear in mind that his wife is a Christian too and is God's work or vessel. Both should conduct themselves in such a way that the wife holds her husband in honor and that the husband, in turn, gives his wife the honor that is her due. If this were observed, peace and love would reign. Otherwise, where this understanding is lacking, there is nothing but aversion in marriage." Pages 153-154

- Colossians 3:19

Answer: Paul notes that husbands are to lead the way in love. This love is self-sacrificing. It puts the wife first, before himself. Husbands are to love their wives the way Christ loved the Church—giving His life for her (Eph 5:25). Ask participants to share ways this is demonstrated in a godly marriage.

What do the following passages say to wives?

- Ephesians 5:22

Answer: This is a challenging passage given today's cultural situation. To be submissive is considered a negative concept for most people. The word in Greek means "to rank people under some specific pattern." It does not imply inferiority or lesser value. Armin J. Panning explains this in his commentary, *Galatians and Ephesians: The People's Bible*, "All comparisons limp, but a situation from the sports world can perhaps bring us a step closer to grasping the meaning of 'submit.' Take the case of a pitcher and catcher on a baseball team. Both are on the same side and have the same objective; both want to make their contribution to winning the game. But the things they do are

quite different! Usually it's the catcher who decides what pitch should be thrown. The pitcher 'submits' to that decision. That doesn't mean he can't ever 'shake off' a pitch or that there might not be an occasional conference at the mound, but in general, the catcher calls the pitches…Does that mean the catcher is better than the pitcher? Is the pitcher inferior because he submits to the catcher's selection of pitchers? Not at all! That's simply the way things work best. They both recognize that each can't be doing his own thing if they want to win the ball game. Somebody has to decide whether a fast ball or a change-up is more likely to strike Casey out. It's a matter of assigned roles, a designated order of things. That's the essence of team play…Marriage is certainly a team project. The God of order who instituted it has designated the manner in which it will be most harmonious and function with the greatest blessing. In his wisdom he has delegated headship, or the leadership role, to the husband. 'Submission' on the wife's part is simply acknowledging that God-given role relationship…By nature all of us are inclined to inject our notions of equality and our ideas of 'fairness' and conclude God is imposing an unfair arrangement on women. But Paul is not talking to natural man or unregenerate people here. He is confident that his readers are filled with the Spirit and are people who understand when he urges them to submit 'out of reverence for Christ.' He is confident the feeling of unfairness will flee when he brings Christ into the picture…Christ is the head of the church, and as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands…The church's submitting to Christ is not a demeaning thing but something that brings great blessing. Such is the case also in a marriage where the wife accepts the headship of her husband." Page 202-204

- 1 Peter 3:5-6

Answer: Here Peter also uses the word submissive and gives an example of that in Sarah, Abraham's wife. Armstrong writes in his *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on the General Epistles*, "The key to this example (of submission) is the faith of the OT figures. Peter offers the example of Sarah and other holy women who hoped in God to give authority to his point. Submission and a quiet spirit are not the key to a woman's place in the Christian community, but the fact that they 'hope in God.' God's Gospel people of the OT all the way to today are identified solely by this chief virtue: faith in Christ. Sarah's relationship with Abraham was one of faithful response as she *obeyed Abraham*. The Greek word translated *obeyed* is the same word used of Abraham 'obeying' the Lord at Heb 11:8. Sarah becomes a special example for all women. Sarah called Abraham *lord*, that is, 'master' or 'sir': the word is a title of respect, again confessing the holy order, the estate God has established. Those who live according to their callings in the estates God has established have no reason to fear, even in spite of unjust persecution (cf. 2:20); in the same way Peter exhorts wives (who may not have believing husbands): do not fear, for God will be their hope." Page 152-153

What does the following passage say to parents?

- Ephesians 6:4

Answer: Parents, especially Christian parents, are to use appropriate and measured approaches when disciplining their children. Jerald C. Joersz writes in *the Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, "In Paul's day Greco-/roman fathers had absolute power and control over their children. Children's education often included excessively harsh discipline. Training and discipline of children that is distinctively Christian requires parental

self-control and restraint (especially of one's temper). Parents must realize that they represent the Lord. Parental vindictiveness, unfair demands, incessant nagging, arbitrariness, cruel outbursts of anger, sarcasm, and ridicule—and even fawning over-indulgence—are among the several ways that children become disheartened and filled with resentment. Raising children requires a proper mix of correction and godly training." Page 161

What does the following passage say to children?

- Ephesians 6:1-3

Answer: Paul instructs children to obey the fourth commandment. The Lord has given children this responsibility within the family. Children are to be obedient not only because it is the right thing to do and brings peace in the family, but also because it pleases the Lord. This, as Paul notes, is the first commandment with a promise. Martin Luther says in his Large Catechism, "Here, then, you have learned the fruit and the reward, that whoever keeps this commandment shall have happy days, fortune, and prosperity…For to have long life in the sense of the Scriptures is not only to become old, but to have everything that belongs to long life: health, wife, children, livelihood, peace, good government, and so on. Without these things this life can neither be enjoyed in cheerfulness nor long endure…Experience teaches that where there are honorable, old families who do well and have many children, they certainly owe their origin to the fact that some of them were brought up well and were full of regard for their parents." (LC I 134, 138)

Martin Luther argued that of the four orders the family was the least appreciated and most disparaged in his day. Is this still true today? Explain.

Answers will vary.

Luther also held that marriage and family life were the foundational order established by God. Marriage is the center of this estate. All the other orders—work, society, and church—flowed from this first and most important order. Do you agree? Explain.

Answers will vary

Luther believed that all authority derived and developed out of the authority of parents and not the other way around. Is that how most people in positions of authority view it today? Explain.

Answers will vary.

"Household," writes John Pless in *Praying Luther's Small Catechism*, "is inclusive of not only the nuclear family but also of all those who live and work under the same roof." Who are some others that might be included?

Answer: This might include extended family, those who serve the household, someone who rents a room, etc. We are stewards of all the relationships we have in the home.

Read Luther's summary of Titus on the left side of the participant's guide.

Read Titus 1:7. Paul notes that the pastor (overseer) must be above reproach. What does that mean?

Answer: It means, at least in part, that no one should be able to accuse the pastor of wrongdoing.

Read Titus 2: 2, 5, 6. What characteristic does Paul encourage that is necessary as we consider our stewardship responsibility in the home?

Answer: Self-control.

Close by reading the beautiful Gospel proclamation found in Titus 3:3-8.

©2023 by Wayne J. Knolhoff