

# Intimacy, an Essential Model

## *Six Essentials for Families*

Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-15

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Rarely does a divorce precipitate a national or international incident; however, the divorce of a Cuban couple and the mother's drowning in her and her son's escape to the United States did just that. A six year old named Elian Gonzalez lived in Miami and became the highly politicized focus of two nations. Parades in Miami and Havana touted contrary perspectives, and officials from mayors to presidents spoke of the incident and of parents' and children's rights, yet only occasionally did a question surface: "What truly is best for the child?"

We know the answer. We know what is best for all children. We know that one of the most secure and comforting things parents can do at the end of each day is both say "Good night!" However, when one says "goodbye" and leaves for another home, immeasurable pain is felt by the child. There is a profound sadness and insecurity that haunts children when a mother doesn't love a child's father or when a father doesn't love that child's mother. Like it or not, no matter how much you care for the child, that absence of love for one's spouse afflicts the child and powerfully seeds in him or her gnawing fear.

In this age of rights, animal rights, workers' rights, women's rights, fathers' rights, children's rights, it is time to consider divine rights, for what is right by God is healthy for humanity. We are going to discuss what God deems best for us.

Let's turn to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 19. Jesus was east of the Jordan River. A large crowd had gathered with him in that remote location because of his healing ministry. With Christ's words, commands, prayers and acts, people were experiencing cures from all kinds of ailments. The people's devotion along with Jesus' power provoked some religious professionals. They were fearful and jealous, and wanted to expose and humiliate Christ. They chose to test Jesus' mettle with the thorny issue of divorce. They asked:

***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?***

These professionals were testing Jesus' knowledge of Scripture. They asked, "Is it lawful?"

Jesus helped them refocus their vision on God's design. He said,

***Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.***  
(Matt 19:4-6, NIV)

Jesus focused not on what was lawful, but on what was right or healthy. The real question wasn't whether divorce was permitted. It was what is right for a couple. A male and female are to become unified in an intimate companionship, where the two become one, where there is nakedness, complete knowledge of one another without shame. That's healthy love, love where you are intimately known and appreciated. That's the love that blesses and builds children. That's the love that blesses communities. That's the love that reveals the one true God.

More was said in this exchange between the religious professionals and Jesus; however, before Jesus left that location he spent time blessing and defending the value of children. Matthew did not include that accidentally. Marriages have tremendous impact on children for good and bad. Marriage is meant to be both the source of children and the greatest source of blessing for children. However, research is convincing. Stormy marriages wound children, and broken marriages cripple children.

Since 40% of America's weddings today include at least one adult from a previous marriage, it's obvious that we need to know how we can experience the gift of marriage as God designed it. How can we become a model that blesses our children whether they are little or grown?

**First, consider where you are at.** Are you married, divorced, widowed, remarried or single? The most critical choice anyone can make is to *develop a clean spirit* that is not weighed down with bitterness. Whatever the water that has passed under the bridge, don't hang on to it? Let it go. Be brutally honest. Face what has happened in your life. Forgive and receive forgiveness. Don't brood over what has been lost. Don't continue to mourn lost opportunities and dashed dreams. If you do that, you will miss the new thing God plans for you. Let God give you freedom so that you have a new start, today. Only when your spirit is clean and free of bitterness can you truly bless. Only then are you ready to walk a path that embraces God's blessings.

**Second, consider what Christ said. Marriage is a gift and work of God.** Don't fear it. Appreciate it. Marriage is your only opportunity in life to be fully known and loved by another human being. It is a precious gift. Don't wimp out and go for something less. Marriage

is the gift, not a house mate, not an occasional playmate, a committed-from-the-beginning life mate. That is the gift of marriage and the true gift of love.

**Third, consider all that Christ said. Marriage is a gift not a god.** Your life and your children's lives are not to be surrendered to a dangerous mate. Parents have a responsibility to protect as much as possible the lives of their children. Hagar, Abraham's concubine, fled from Sarah with Ishmael when she suffered abuse. God dealt kindly with her. God reassured her, guided her and provided for her. Marriage is a gift not a curse. Marriage is a unity of two, not a composite of three, four or more. Christ called no one to tolerate adultery. A mate must choose to live in that unity of two or forfeit it.

There is a lot of confusion about marriage in our culture. Most of this stems from our culture's rejection of the governance of God. Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke wrote:

*Until quite recently there was very little science in the social scientific study of religion. As a child of the "Enlightenment," social science began with the conviction that religion was not only false but wicked and best gotten rid of as soon as possible.*

With that attitude prevalent in the academy, it is not hard to understand the general hostility of the media, courts and culture toward any religiously informed view of marriage or family.

People don't want to believe that they as individuals and as nations are accountable to God; but an honest reading of the Bible allows no other conclusion. The history of civilization, recorded accurately in Scripture, reveals that all individuals and all peoples are accountable to God. That includes what we do with our sexuality and how we organize our families.

Arguments for alternative definitions of marriage, including polygamy and homosexual covenants ignore both our anatomical and physiological design and the intent of the designer, our creator. Again Jesus said,

*"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" (Jesus replied.) "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together." (Matthew 19:4-6, NLT)*

Jesus roots marriage in our design and identity as male and female people, not in the attractions we may feel. Remember, there is a tempter. Another word for tempter is "Attractor." Marriage is not a fulfillment of an attraction, but a gift from God that fits with our design.

**Fourth, choose to work and change for the benefit of your spouse.** That is commitment and the exercise of love. In every relationship feelings come and go. Commitment works and changes as need indicates. You do not love unless your commitment causes you to work and change. God demonstrated his love for us not in just stating he loves us, but in abandoning his son to death for us while we were still sinning against him (Romans 5:8). God did not act on transient feelings, but in loving commitment.

**Fifth, choose to work at communicating.** Intimacy requires communication. Intimacy is the character of a healthy marriage. I had a Bible verse that guided me early in my marriage:

*"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32, KJV).*

As I tried to live out this verse, I missed one important thing. Marriage isn't fulfilled through gentleness and forgiveness. Those dynamics may help heal a marriage, but they don't build a marriage. Intimacy requires self-disclosure. I need to learn to speak my heart without attacking. I also need to listen to my wife without defending myself. Intimacy doesn't come from forgiveness, it comes as a couple grows in their ability to share and constructively respond to what is on each other's hearts. We must learn to share our whole heart, the positive and negative. We must learn to listen to our mate's whole heart, the positive and negative. When we

do that, we grow intimate; and that blesses our children, our neighbors and world with a model to emulate.

Intimacy is an essential model. It begins with forgiveness and a spirit clean of guilt and bitterness. It grows as we appreciate the divine gift and design of marriage but refrain from worshiping it. It requires commitment to work and change our attitudes and actions. It calls us to know ourselves, disclose ourselves and give careful attention to another person. In that we model the love and constructive relationships that fulfill the deepest hungers of humanity.