

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this meditation and memorisation series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will meditate on the meaning of a Bible verse about one characteristic of a believer in Jesus Christ and then memorise it together. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

In this seventh series, the Bible teaches five decisions a Christian couple must make in order to build up their marriage. The topic of today's meditation and memorisation is: **A CHRISTIAN COUPLE MUST REMAIN FAITHFUL**.

(S) **POINT 1. MEDITATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE**

The new Bible verse that we will meditate and memorise is: To remain faithful: Proverbs 3:3-4. We will meditate the truths in the Bible together. Let me read Proverbs 3:3-4. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.

(T) **First. The sanctity of the marriage covenant.**

The prophet Malachi prophesied about the year 435 B.C. between the first and second period in which Nehemiah was governor. Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi struggled against the practice of Israelite men marrying foreign wives and divorcing their wives. In Malachi 2:10-16 we read, "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, *by marrying the daughter of a foreign god*. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob - even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty. Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and *the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant*. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."

(S) **One. You are unfaithful if you marry a woman that does not believe in the God of the Bible.**

Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi were not against an Israelite man marrying a foreign woman *if she was a believer in the God of the Bible*, like for example the Moabite woman called Ruth. But they were against an Israelite man marrying a foreign woman *when such a woman was an idolater or unbeliever!* When the people of God marry idolaters or people who do not believe in the God of the Bible, they commit two sins: they break faith with one another and they profane the covenant. To break faith with one another means to break the unity of being God's people, of being bound to God the Father. To profane the covenant means to break their covenant with God, which requires them to be a separate and holy people for God (10). The God of the Bible regards his people as his *sanctuary* (temple) and by marrying wives that do not believe in the God of the Bible, they desecrate the sanctuary that God loves (11). Against such offenders, Malachi pronounces his prophetic curse, which means that the children of such men will have no right to participate in the civil and religious life of the people of God.

(T) **Two. You are unfaithful if you divorce your wife.**

Malachi also struggled against the practice of Israelite men divorcing their wives. Why does God hate divorce? God hates divorce, because marriage is God's idea and God's decree, which he instituted at the creation. God created the male and female sexes and *both their bodies and spirits belong to him*. Because he created them, he also has the right to command how the marriage relationship between the two sexes should be! God regards *marriage as a covenant*, which a man and a woman make in the presence of God and of God's people. In their marriage covenant they promise one another to love one another and to remain faithful to one another for their whole lives. The marriage of Christians is very important for God, because God is looking for *godly offspring*, that is, he desires that the children of Christians are raised in such a way that they too know, love and obey God.

(S) **Second. The marriage covenant is kept sacred by love, faithfulness and a behaviour that honours God.**

In Proverbs 3:3-4 is written, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man."

One. The meaning of love and faithfulness.

In the original language, the word *love* means loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is the kind of love that is required in every binding relationship, like that between God and his people, between a husband and a wife and between two friends. It means *solidarity, loyalty* and *alliance*. And *faithfulness* means *firmness, durability, reliability* or *trustworthiness*. In Exodus 34:6, these two words characterise God's relationship to his covenant people. In Exodus 20:6, it characterises the believer's relationship to God. Only because God first shows constant love and faithfulness to believers, can believers show constant love and faithfulness to God and to their neighbour.

(T) Two. Love and faithfulness keep the Ten Commandments.

You express love and faithfulness towards your marriage partner by never committing adultery. You express love and faithfulness by never telling a lie to your marriage partner. You express love and faithfulness by never desiring other people's wives or husbands.

(S) Three. Love and faithfulness must become your distinguishing characteristic.

The writer of Proverbs says that a person who believes in the God of the Bible must "bind love and faithfulness as an ornament around his neck". The Christian husband and Christian wife should make love and faithfulness the characteristic ornament of their marriage. Their love and faithfulness toward one another should attract other people to the beauty of the Christian marriage and attract them to Jesus Christ Himself. The Christian husband and Christian wife should write love and faithfulness on their hearts. It should not only be an outward attraction, but also an inward reality. Obeying the Ten Commandments should be a matter of their hearts. They prove that they have love and faithfulness by living it out in their relationship to God and in their marriage relationship.

(T) Four. A behaviour that honours God must be your goal.

Proverbs 3:4 literally says, "And *you must win* favour and a good name in the sight of God and man." This is first of all a command and then a result. The same command is repeated in Romans 12:17, "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." And it is also repeated in 2 Corinthians 8:21, "We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men." Christian behaviour should be governed by the commandments of God in the Bible. Christian behaviour should also be guided by the norms that even the unbelievers recognise as worthy of approval. When Christians violate the norms, which other people regard as important, they bring reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ, upon themselves and upon their ministry (1 Tim 3:7). Paul makes it his aim to behave in such a way that even unbelievers are attracted to Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:2 he says, "By setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Thus in summary, the Christian husband and Christian wife have the responsibility to love one another, that is, to have a durable relationship characterised by solidarity. They have the responsibility to be loyal and trustworthy toward one another. They have the responsibility to let their behaviour be governed by the norms of God's Word and even by the norms, which unbelievers recognise as worthy of approval.

(S) Third. Developing the marriage covenant.

One. A husband and wife should grow in their *spiritual* relationship.

A marriage will stay healthy and attractive when it grows. A Christian husband is responsible to lead his wife and his family, especially in spiritual matters. There are three possible areas in which the husband and wife can develop their spiritual relationship.

They could conduct family worship times in their home. Together with their children they should read a passage from the Bible, discuss it together and then pray together. Some Christian families also like to sing together.

They could participate actively in a Christian church or house fellowship. They should worship together with other Christians, read and study the Bible together with other Christians and pray and sing together with other Christians.

They could participate in Christian ministry to the non-Christians. They should share the gospel about Jesus Christ with their family members, friends, neighbours and people in their village or city. These are the things that develop the Christian marriage!

(T) Two. A husband and wife should grow in their *friendship* relationship.

There are four possible areas in which the husband and wife can develop their friendship relationship.

The first area of developing friendship is exercising to have the right kind of self-esteem. The right kind of self-esteem is to think of yourself as GOD thinks of you. The right kind of self-esteem does not think of yourself as *better* than the other person or as *less* than the other person. Marriage partners with the wrong kind of self-esteem cannot be good friends. For example, a husband with an inflated self-image may be unreasonable, harsh and an unloving leader. He may make it difficult for his wife to submit and may be unwilling to take any suggestions from his wife. A husband

with a poor self-image may think that he can't do anything right, that no one can like him, and that he cannot provide leadership and love in his marriage.

This is also true for wives. A wife with an inflated self-image may not want to submit to her husband's leadership, because she views submission as lowering herself. She may even think that she can do everything as well or even better than her husband. A wife with a poor self-image may lack a realistic understanding of her abilities and strengths. She may be unable to accept sincere compliments. When either the husband or wife has a weak self-concept, poor communication may be the result. They may be reluctant to express their thoughts because they think that their thoughts are not worthwhile to express. If this lack of communication continues for too long a time, they will drift apart. They will know one another less and less and will finally be unable to discern their marriage partner's needs. Thus, the right self-esteem is important to develop a good friendship with your marriage partner.

How does God view every Christian? In Isaiah 43:4, God says that everyone of his people are *precious* in his sight and that he loves and even honours the people he created and saved. In Jeremiah 29:11, God says that he has a plan for every one of his people, a plan that will not hurt them, but give them hope and a future! That is how God views every Christian!

(S) The second area of developing friendship is exercising to have good communication with one another. The first principle of communication is *listening*. It is especially very important to spend enough time *to listen* to one another; *to understand* not only one another's words, but also one another's intentions; and *to take one another serious* and *to accept* one another. The failure to listen, to understand and to take one another serious and the rejection of one another's thoughts, feelings or character all destroy the marriage relationship.

The second principle of communication is *speaking*. Ephesians 4:15 and 29 teach Christians how a husband and a wife should speak. They should speak the truth in love. Speaking the truth without love is harsh and hurts. Loving without speaking the truth is to masquerade or pretend just like the devil does (2 Cor 11:14). Therefore a Christian husband and wife should always speak the truth and always say it in love. They should not let any unwholesome talk come out of their mouths. Instead, they should say things to one another that is helpful, that builds the other up in their needs and that gives grace to their marriage partner.

There are different levels of communication. Sometimes it is good just to have a casual conversation about the daily activities. But marriage partners should learn to communicate their beliefs, convictions, ideas and judgements. They should even learn to talk about their disagreements without having to fight about it. They should learn to communicate their feelings and emotions. They should learn to accept their partner's different way of experiencing life and different ways of expressing him or herself. In a good marriage, the husband and wife should be willing to correct one another, to build one another's character and to help one another to become the very best they can become.

(T) The third area of developing friendship is exercising to resolve their conflicts in the biblical way.

And finally, the fourth area of developing friendship is exercising to have the 1 Corinthians kind of love toward one another. The last two areas have been discussed before. These four areas will help a husband and a wife to become very good friends!

(S) Three. A husband and wife should grow in their physical relationship.

In the privacy of their marriage, a husband and wife should develop their physical relationship. This includes hugging and sexual intimacy. Many people do not know God's purpose for creating people with sex. According to the Bible, there are three good purposes for sex. Genesis 2:24 teaches that God created sexual intimacy to make two people become one. Sexual intimacy binds the two partners into a very strong unity. The book Song of Songs in the Bible teaches that God created sexual intimacy for the enjoyment of the husband and the wife. And Genesis 1:27-28 teaches that God created sexual intimacy with a view to perpetuate the human race. Therefore, according to the Bible, the sexual relationship within marriage is not just for the purpose of having children, but also for the enjoyment of the marriage partners and for making the husband and the wife *one* (a unity) in their relationship.

(T) **POINT 2. MEMORISATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE**

Write the Bible verse on a card or in a notebook. The topic today is "To remain faithful" and the reference is Proverbs 3:3-4. Let us memorise the Bible verse together.

(T+S) To remain faithful: Proverbs 3:3-4. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man. Proverbs 3:3-4.

(S) To remain faithful: Proverbs 3:3-4. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man. Proverbs 3:3-4.

(T) **POINT 3. REVIEW OF THE LAST BIBLE VERSES YOU HAVE MEMORISED**

Let us review the last 5 Bible verses that we have memorised without looking at our notebooks. Series “Christian preparation for marriage”, verse 5 and series “Christian marriage”, verses 1-4.

(S) Right priorities: Matthew 6:33. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33.

(T) To leave and to cleave: Genesis 2:24. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24.

(S) To love and to lead: Ephesians 5:23,25. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:23,25.

(T) To love and to submit: Titus 2:4-5. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Titus 2:4-5.

(S) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24.

(T) **POINT 4. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Daily review the last five memorised Bible verses once every day for 5 weeks.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.