



FAMILY

The Heaven on Earth



Jessy Saju

FAMILY

The Heaven on Earth

Jessy Saju



SANCTUARY

Word Media Publishing Pvt. Ltd.

26/150A, Avees Building, Toll Jn., Edappally, Cochin - 682 024, Kerala, India.

Tel: +91-484 2557606, 94471 54450, E-mail: sanctuarywm@gmail.com

FAMILY

The Heaven on Earth

Author

Jessy Saju

April 2019

ISBN: 978-81-922403-1-2

First published

Kudumbam- Bhoomiyile Swargam (Malayalam)

March 2018

ISBN: 978-81-922403-1-2

Copyright @ 2018 Author

All rights reserved.

Published by

Sanctuary Word Media Publishing Pvt. Ltd.

26/150A, Avees Building, Toll Jn., Edappally,

Cochin - 682 024, Kerala, India.

Book Design

www.foggeneration.com

Printed in India at:

Anaswara Offset Pvt. Ltd, Elammakkara.

Price : Rs.50/-

Contents

Preface	i
Foreword	iii
1. Raising Children	11
2. The Right age to Repent	19
3. Mother, the Role Model	23
4. Education and Training	27
5. Make your Home Stress-free	31
6. Habits to be formed in Children	35
7. Give Jesus to Children	39
8. Daughter of Jephthah	43
9. Counsel to Youth	47
10. Wife, a Fruitful Vine	51
11. A Faithful Daughter in Law	55
Appendix	
Parents, Do this for our Kids	61
Homes Built by God	65
Builders of the House	71

PREFACE

“**D**o heaven and hell really exist?” asked a Sunday school teacher to her class. Most students could not answer the question.

However, one of them said, “Teacher, I am not sure if heaven exists; but, I know for sure that hell does.”

“How do you know that?” the teacher asked.

“Because I live in a hell,” the kid’s answered.

Countless families are like hell today. Many parents and kids who come to us for counseling, lament: “Our home is a hell.”

God envisaged the family to be the replica of heaven on earth. The families where God dwells and reigns are indeed heavens on earth. We can take our families to heavenly experiences only when we practically understand what the Bible envisions our families to be. My greatest blessing in life is that I got a person devoted to the Lord as my husband. Our three kids are dedicated for the Lord’s work and that is an added blessing.

This book aims to give some simple and practical suggestions on how to make our families God-centric. Most of the chapters in this book were published in a Malayalam magazine Uthama Sthree. The articles added as appendix were published in the magazine Sahodari. I am grateful for the inspiration of Sali Monayi, Chief Editor of Uthama Sthree and Lilly Reji, Chief Editor of Sahodari. For the publication of the book, I owe a great deal of gratitude to two of our close friends, Jojo and Joshy. My husband Saju Mathew is a constant source of support and motivation.

May God bless you all.

Jessy Saju

FOREWORD

Jessy Saju has been known to me for over three decades, initially as a sprightly student of CMS College, and later as the devoted wife of my beloved friend and Lord's servant Saju Mathew. Her new book 'Family - The Heaven on Earth' will undoubtedly be a very useful guide to both who are married and to those who are preparing to enter family life.

Adequate and appropriate training is considered vital and essential for almost any serious job. Regrettably, most of us enter the most important 'job' in human life – parenting – without any training or ample preparation. In the joint family system of yesteryears, we at least had the advice and guidance from experienced seniors, including parents and grand-parents. Those days are gone!

The shattering of family ties and values in Kerala in the last two decades is appalling, to say the least. The saddest part is that the district in Kerala which boasts of the highest number of Christians can also 'boast' of the highest divorce rate! Even in Pentecostal circles, a family break-up has ceased to be a 'news-worthy' subject, and this makes it an issue to be attended to very seriously.

Jessy here presents the essential biblical values for a Christian family. She outlines in very simple and lucid language, with appropriate examples from the bible, the responsibilities of a Christian mom, which begin with pregnancy, or even before, and continue till the end of her life. These thoughts will definitely help and encourage the women who are called to build 'Heaven on Earth'. And, their men too!

I pray that this book be a blessing for many

Prof. Sunny Mathews

1. RAISING CHILDREN

Those who have raised kids know that it is not an easy task.

“I had learned six rules to raise children. Now, I have six children, and all the rules have gone with the wind,” joked someone.

Parenting is the both greatest as well as the toughest job in the world! It is also an unpaid job!

This job becomes even more responsible when you are a Christian parent. Non-Christian parents can raise their kids according to their interests and dreams. But Christian parents should raise their children not according to their own whims and fancies, but according to the plan God has for them.

Bible says, “Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” (Psalm 127:3). In other words, we are not the owners of our children. God is. God has given them to us for a period of time. Even though they are with us, they belong to God. So, ultimately, children should grow up according to the plan God has for them.

For this to happen, we have to accept the ownership of God not with our head, but with our heart. We need to ask Him, “Lord, what is your plan for my child?” If we are not willing to do this, we will be losing the next generation.

It is not enough that we understand the divine plan and obligation of our children in our home, Church, and society. We need to make them understand the plan God has for them. We have to prepare them for the future ahead. They should be with us serving and seeking God at all points of their life.

We should nurture and build them as godly children in every phase of their growth. That responsibility begins not from infancy, but from the day they are formed in the womb. The teaching should begin from the womb.

We know a human being consists of ‘body’, ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’. The holistic growth of the child occurs only when these three elements grow together.

We are aware of what the ‘body’ is. However, the ‘soul’ is not visible to us like the ‘body’. ‘Soul’ is the seat of our intelligence, thoughts, will, and emotions. It consists of good qualities like love, compassion and kindness, as well as opposing undesirable qualities. ‘Spirit’ is God-related. A child should grow in all these areas simultaneously.

The Bible tells us about such a holistic growth in Jesus even when he was a child. “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:40)

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52).

Therefore, the growth of a child is not just in the physical or intellectual realms. A child should also develop in good thoughts and good deeds. He should mature in terms of his responses towards the

society. A child's soul should be the breeding ground not only of good thoughts, but also should have refined emotions. The spiritual growth of the child is as important as the growth of body and soul. The child should grow in faith and fear of God.

Some assume that kids will learn the spiritual lessons in Sunday school. Sunday school is good indeed, and it has an important role. However, kids get their spiritual lessons primarily not from Sunday school teachers, but from their parents – especially from their mother!

At what age should we begin the spiritual nurturing of a child?

Once a woman asked a counselor: “When should I start teaching spiritual lessons to my child? He is five years old now.”

The answer of the counselor was very meaningful: “Sorry madam, you are six years late!”

The child is only five; but, the teaching had to begin six years ago! He meant that the teaching had to begin as soon as the child was conceived in the womb!

Psychology have proven that the mental stature of the mother during pregnancy greatly influence the character formation of the child. If a mother is haunted by insecurity during her pregnancy period, the child in the womb will inherit this insecure feeling right from his/ her birth. If the mother is calm and happy during her pregnancy, the child also will be ‘cool’ when he/ she comes out to this world!

Let us for a moment set aside Psychology and Medical Science and examine what the Bible tells us in this regard. In the Old Testament, Nazirites were consecrated to God not from birth, but from the womb itself. God told the mother of Samson: “Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazirite unto God

from the womb...” (Judges 13: 3-5)

Though our children are not Nazirites of the Old Testament, they are consecrated, holy for the Lord! Parents are bound by God to raise them holy for the Lord from the womb.

Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, and Elizabeth and Zacharias, parents of John the Baptist, knew God’s will about their child, and hence consecrated them to God while they were in the wombs. We prayed, for each of our three kids when they were conceived, that “they may be the soldiers of the Kingdom of God.”

To an extent, this dedication is essential even before the child is born. Hannah, mother of Samuel prays: “...O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life...” (1 Samuel 1:11)

‘If YOU give me a child, I shall give him/ her back to YOU all the days of their life!’ We should remember this as we raise our children... “If YOU give me (the knowledge that children are God’s gift) I shall return it to you (God is the owner; Children are to be nurtured and given back to God) not for a short term, but for life!” “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the LORD.” (1 Samuel 1:27, 28)

We may ask what the parents will get for brining up the children in God’s ways and dedicating them to the Lord? In reality, parents will receive their true reward only from this. If we really love our children, we will be happy to see their lives being meaningful. This satisfaction is the reward for the parents!

Before the birth of John the Baptist - before he was formed in the womb of Elizabeth, Zacharias had a vision of the Angel telling him “...

for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness..." (Luke 1:13-14).

The arrival of a child brings joy and gladness! There should not be any discrimination whether it be a girl or boy.

These days we see many couples who do not want children. They think, "Why this trouble of raising children?" Remember, your children are given by God and you should rejoice in them.

Children brings joy and gladness not just for you, but for everyone. God speaks to Zacharias about John the Baptist, "... and many shall rejoice at his birth." (Luke 1: 14). See, your children are a gift from God, not only for you, but for all!

God tells Zacharias about John the Baptist that, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). We should have this hope and expectation about our children that they be great in the sight of the Lord!

Today, most parents try to make their children great in the world. Among priorities such as high scores, best education, best profession, enviable wealth and the fortunes of this world, many forget about the place of their children in the sight of God!

I am not saying that our children should not study or work. However, above all, our children should be great 'in the sight of the Lord' by pursuing the will of God in their lives. They should be spiritual. They should be representatives of God in the Church and the society. As apostle John says "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 1:4)

Next thing said about John the Baptist is that he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he "shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." (Luke 1:15) The most essential thing that the present generation requires is this infilling of the Holy Spirit! "That ye

may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” (Philippians 2, 15) they must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Only a mother with good thoughts, in the presence of God, can share the Holy Spirit filling experience to the child.

For the children to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we should desist from filling them with the ‘world’. What do we give them? A worldly environment or a spiritual environment?

Olden days, mothers used to sing spiritual hymns as they nursed their children. Today, both hands of the mother will be on the smart phone even when they breast feed. When we nurse our children, we are not only giving them milk but also love, care and attention. Unfortunately, children today see the back of the smart phones and the hands holding it. They don’t see the affectionate faces of their mothers. Mothers do not have time to turn to God, to sing a lullaby or to pray for their children. Instead, they play songs and videos on their smart phones to calm the child. By doing so, you are damaging not only their eye sight, but also their claim for eternity! Give them Jesus, not the world, right from their breast feeding days! Let them be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The angel adds about John: “He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.” (Luke 1:16)

Our children should follow the truth and should bring back many to the truth. We should pray that our children be given the ministry of restoration, to turn their friends and classmates to the Lord. We used to remind our children to do this during their schooldays. So, they never hesitated to testify about Jesus to their friends. God used our children to ‘turn’ many to the Lord.

The angel goes on to say that John will prepare the disobedient for the Lord (Luke 1:17). He will turn the hearts of the parents to their

children and make the disobedient ready to receive teaching, prepare the way for the Lord to reach them.

Our children should be peace makers (Matthew 5:9). They should be channels of divine peace to mankind!

The angel revealed to Zacharias God's plan for John the Baptist before he was formed in the womb of Elizabeth. In the case of Moses, his parents came to know about God's plan for him only when he was born. 'When he was born, the parents saw that the baby was beautiful; hence they hid him' (Exodus 2:2).

'Who doesn't see beauty in their child?' you might ask. But Stephen proclaims that Moses was beautiful in the sight of God. The parents of Moses understood that God has chosen their child to fulfil a divine plan on earth. They knew by their faith that it is to redeem the Hebrews. By faith, they hid him for three months, without fearing the King's commandment (Hebrews 11:23).

We should have the vision to see 'divine beauty' in our children. If we have this vision, we will strive to make them great in the 'sight of the Lord', not in the world. And our prayers will be, "God, help me to prepare my child for your plan about him".

2. THE RIGHT AGE TO REPENT

Discerning the ‘call’ of our children even before their birth was what we discussed in the previous chapter and in the study of John the Baptist.

No one can influence a child like a mother does. It’s for the mother to turn her child to God, or away from God.

‘Food and advice’ goes a saying as to what the child needs.

Some say: ‘Can a child understand spiritual matters? Why talk to a child about such serious stuff? They will understand it when they grow old.’ We cannot escape from our responsibility to teach children spiritual matters with such excuses.

Our eldest daughter Shruthi’s repentance at a very young age is proof of a child’s ability to understand spiritual matters.

Shruthi was just three and a half years old then. In one of our family prayers, as I was reading Colossians chapter 3, she was listening carefully. When I read verses 9 and 10, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its

Creator,” she asked me, “Mummy, what does it mean to put off the old self?” I thought for a while and replied:

“Darling, when you come back after playing you are all sweaty. Right?”

“Yes, I don’t like myself when I am sweaty and dirty. My dress too smells bad”

“What will you do then?”

“Mummy, you will give me a bath...”

“What will you do with the dress you have been wearing?”

“I will throw it in the laundry bin”

“How would you feel after the bath?”

“O... I really love it. I smell good.” She smelt herself as she said this.

“After the bath, will you put on the same clothes you have thrown into the bin?

“No, never! I won’t even like to see them again. Dirty!”

“Then...”

“You will give me clean, sweet smelling dress from the wardrobe, and I will wear them”

“The same happens in our lives too,” I told her.

“When we live in this world committing sins, we smell bad with the sweat of the sins. We need a purifying ‘bath’. No water in this world can do this. Even I cannot do it! Jesus, God’s son came to the world for this.”

“When we confess our sins to Jesus our Saviour, when we cry to him for forgiveness, He will come in our hearts. He died for us on the Cross. He cleanses us from all our sins with his blood. Then we put on Jesus like we put on clean dress after a bath.”

“We put off Satan, as we did with our dirty clothes. It is Satan who brings dirty habits to us. It is when we wear this old man that we do things like quarrelling with others and telling lies. We should put

him off ... that old clothes ... how bad it smells ... But the clothes that Jesus gives us... how beautiful it is! Smells good... When we put it on, everyone can see Jesus in us. When you wear good clothes, people will say ‘How beautiful you look... Good dress! Where did you get this?’ Similarly, when we wear Jesus people will say, ‘How good this child is. Such a good nature! The way she talks is very sweet. How beautiful she is...

When I finished explaining, Shruthi started to cry. She wept aloud. My mother, who was sleeping, thought that I had reprimanded her. She came and asked me what was wrong? Shruthi asked forgiveness from her grandmother and from me. I helped her say a prayer. Jesus gave her the new dress of His character. The life that Jesus gives flowed into her. Today, after graduating from the Bible Seminary, she lives with her husband in Delhi and is engaged in rural evangelism by training native missionaries.

I wanted to call my husband and tell him about this ‘repentance’, though I had my apprehensions about how he would respond to this news. I just told him: “Our daughter is saved,” and to my surprise, he was shouting out of joy. “Praise the Lord! Thank you Jesus!” I was amazed to see how seriously he took it. I was a fool to think that he would laugh off the repentance of a little child.

I started teaching Sunday school from my age of 18. For more than two decades I taught toddlers to grade II students. If we fill them with Jesus at this small age, there will be no place for the world in their heart even when they grow up.

3. MOTHER, THE ROLE MODEL

A man asked Spurgeon as he was coming back from an evangelistic meeting: “How many were saved today?” Spurgeon replied, “Two and a half people were saved.” “You mean, two adults and a kid?” the man asked.

“No. Two kids and an adult,” said Spurgeon. We have to understand that the little children have an entire life to live for Jesus, when an elderly person only has the rest of their life. However, we cannot overlook our child’s spiritual growth saying she is ‘saved already.’

“But women will be saved through childbearing” (1 Timothy 2:15). Here, the ‘childbearing’ is not something that happens in a moment. It is an ongoing process.

‘As the serpent beguiled Eve’, he is roaming around to deceive our children and to make them fall into sin. A mother should be on guard for her child always. Even though they received Jesus, they live in the world filled with sin and temptations. “And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” “But women will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in

faith, love and holiness with propriety.” (2 Timothy 2:14, 15)

A mother should be the role model for her children in three major things. Firstly, she should be their role model in faith. Paul says about Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5 “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

We can teach faith using words for a short period of time. After that, we should transfer it to them, by our deeds and actions.

What’s the difference between words and deeds?

For example, how forcefully we throw a rubber ball it will rebound with the same force. However, if we keep it down softly, it will just stay there.

Likewise, if we keep on advising and admonishing our children, they will react and fight back. But, if we live before them a life of faith, love and holiness, they will calmly follow us. If we teach them faith without living the faith (in deeds), they will retort using strong words and deeds.

Faith should be passed on to generations. To have faith simply means to turn to Jesus for anything and everything. At every stage of their lives, we should make them understand that all our trust is in Jesus. They should understand the truth, “...you cannot do anything without me” (John 15:5)

Secondly, we should be their role models in love. We can win them only with love. We should express love by channelizing God’s love in us to the children constantly and continually. Then they will not turn to any ‘other false’ love. As a child, their hearts should be filled with God’s love. Then this world or its fake love will not enter into them. Above all, we should examine constantly whether we are filled only with God’s love. We cannot give God’s love to our next generation if we are beguiled by internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, gaming, and such

things of the world. Save yourselves from illicit relationships, chatting, much usage of phone, TV, etc. Keep the 'world' away from your home completely and create a spiritual atmosphere.

The most precious ornament of a woman is her holiness. The beauty of holiness is unmatched. A woman's beauty is not her outward adornments. Her beauty is measured with the yardstick of holiness. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands" (1 Peter 3: 3-5).

Peter mentions "submission to husbands" in relation to holiness. Submission is the most important discipline of a wife. It is better for women who cannot submit themselves, not to marry. What a man expects most from a woman is her submissive attitude. No man likes to be overruled by a woman. The home ruled by a woman is hell. If a woman heads the family, it will soon be shattered. Man is the head of the family; especially the head of woman. Commands and advices come from the head, and the body has to obey it. If the body positively responds to the commands of the head, life will be beautiful. The children will grow seeing this 'holiness.' They will learn submission from their mother and will submit to their husbands when they get married. If we know the character of the mother, we can know that of the daughter. Like mother, like daughter!

Let us be the role models to the next generation in faith, love and holiness. Thus they will have a blessed and sanctified life!

4. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The word ‘education’ has its root in the Latin word ‘educare,’ which means ‘to bring out.’ Education is to bring out all that is good, the abilities, the skills, etc. in a person.

Today, the education sector is governed by ‘something’ that undermines this idea and is based on competition. Sacred values have disappeared from schools and colleges. Children are doomed to learn in a language that is ‘strange’ to them! No one is bothered if it is aligned to the child’s aptitude? They are made to bite more than they can chew! They are declared “brilliant” based on what they have memorised and reproduced on the answer sheets! This is where you see the dire need for value-based education.

What is the ultimate value? Love- Love human beings; love nature. It is love sustains life. Love prompts us to share the joy and sorrow of others. It urges us to extend our merciful hands to others.

Do children get ‘love’ from books? Never. So, the first thing we have to write on their hearts the alphabet of love.

My schooling was in Baker Memorial School, Kottayam, founded by British missionaries of the Church Mission Society (CMS). Even today, it continues to be an honoured institution. I was benefitted because CMS missionaries chose Meenachil Taluk in Kerala as their centre of activities in India. I continued my education in CMS College which was also established by those missionaries.

Those missionaries could have started an English Medium School. But, they believed that every kid should be taught in the mother tongue at least till the 4th standard. From 5th grade, they could be initiated into a foreign language. English was not taught till 4th grade as they insisted that the basics should be taught in mother tongue. Due importance was given to the teaching, preaching and meditation of the Word of God. Importance was given to leading a value-based life. Everyone had to bring the hymn book which contained hundreds of songs. When we went to the classes after singing the hymns, reading, listening and reflecting on the Word of God; we had a feeling of being filled with Jesus.

Let us observe Jesus, the ultimate teacher for a moment. John the Baptist introduces him as “...the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Jesus asked the disciples who flocked after him, “What do you seek?” They asked him respectfully, “Where do you live?”

“Come and see,” replied Jesus.

They spent the rest of the day with him. Then they said, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.” A day or a night’s stay with Jesus changed their lives. We see the picture of a true teacher here!

Gurukul way of schooling does not exist anymore. The disciples staying with the teacher; obeying him; imitating his life; and in turn being transformed like the teacher... and one day the disciple becoming like the teacher. That is the real meaning of education.

This method is not practical today. Times have changed. Parents are employed. They leave their kids with servants or in day-care centres. 'Busy' is buzzword! Even when they are free, they do not have time to spend with their kids. Children return from their schools with loads of stories to share with the parents. Mostly the parents shows no interest in listening to them. The lack of communication is the curse of the day. They become more close to their toys as the parents have no time to converse with them. Parents 'avoid' the kids with the help of technology; by giving them video games, smart phones, Ipad, and what not.

My friend Dr. Gita told me: "It is possible for us to earn millions and millions of rupees... but in the end, we will only have money, and not our children. So, when we had our children, we decided that we will work only till noon, even if we are tempted with huge sums of money to work the whole day. The afternoons will be devoted for our children, to spent time with them when they are back from school."

If we are there to comfort a crying child, we will not have to shed tears for them in later life.

Children today learn to use smart phones and tablets at a very young age. It has become their craze and they are glued to it. So, they do not know how to play in the yard. They have no outdoor life!

I am very fond of my nephew Adam. He is in Singapore. When he came on a vacation with his parents, he literally he became my world. When it was time for him to return, I kissed him with tears in my eyes and asked, "When will I see you again my dear boy?"

Pat came the reply, "Don't cry Jessy ammachi. Get on Skype, and we can chat any time, na?" He was just three then!

One day we got a phone call. "This call is to confirm your order for a bed." Bed? We were shocked. Then we realised that our three-year-old 'little naughty' was behind the order! He had entered a commercial website and went on clicking 'Next' until he ordered a bed successfully.

This is the world today!

Recently I watched a video presentation of a Muslim priest. He clearly taught the society about family life! A few lines from the video: 'A house is made up of just four walls. But a home is made with four people. Switch off your phones after 9 pm. Wi-Fi is the curse today! Turn it off too. Turn off TV, internet, and computers. Everyone in the family should share the day's happenings. Let there be warmth. Kiss the little ones and let them play sitting in your lap. Tell them how you missed them and how much you love them.' Thus went his message. How true!

This sharing should happen with children and between the spouses. Talk to each other. Talk to the elderly parents at home. Computer and phone have devoured human beings ability to talk, along with their time. The divine gift of conversation is lost. Family prayer has disappeared. We need these back. There should be the warmth of love and prayer in a family.

Once a team from Power Vision TV interviewed our family for their program named 'Kudumba Geetham.' Our kids were 17, 12 and 10 years old. When asked about their ambition in life, they all said they wanted to be in 'the Lord's ministry.' They knew that was the best occupation in this world. We did not answer their question about our family prayer; instead we asked them to join us for our prayer that day. We had our family prayer as usual; Bible reading, reflection and prayers. Every day, everyone prays on the basis of the revelation or counsel they received. This family prayer was the foundation of the spiritual growth and unity of our family. Many a time, the thoughts shared by our children have opened our eyes. They have corrected us many times. They have the freedom to do it. If they said, "Dad, that was wrong," or "Mom, you shouldn't have said that," we humbled ourselves to listen to them.

5. MAKE YOUR HOME STRESS-FREE

We live in a world where showing hospitality has hit rock bottom. What motivates the working couples most today? First and foremost, to earn the maximum, working even two shifts a day, if needed. Even if they wish to be hospitable and entertain guests, they are too tired after the day's work. The one thing they want after finishing their 'pending jobs' at home is to rest. So, they try to avoid guests from their busy lives.

It is a divine commandment to show "hospitality." Give the best part of your meal to the guests. Let the children grow up seeing this. Then, they will learn and be inspired to love and respect others.

If our homes are the replicas of heaven, our visitors will feel its warmth. How beautiful were the days of God's great servants like Moothampakkal Kochukunju Upadesi (a well-known preacher in Kerala in early twentieth century), who had a plaque on the wall that read, "There is food and accommodation ready for everyone who pass by!" We should be ready to offer at least a glass of water to those who come to us.

Involve our kids in household chores. Assign them jobs as they grow up. Teach them to wash their clothes. Train them to take care of their younger siblings from a young age.

Let them use their talents and skills to the best of their ability. The child's 'learning' should neither be for their parents nor for the teachers, but for God. "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Let God be glorified even when they study.

Whatever we do for God, should be done with complete devotion. Teach them this truth, and they will study well. They will do it with vigour, love, and devotion. We don't have to be always after them yelling "Go, study". Never spank your child to make them study. Physical punishment will incite fear and stress in them. 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.' (Ephesians 6:4). Do not put pressure on the children to study.

If you tell them lovingly, "Darling, go to bed now! You have been studying long hours!" how relaxed they will feel... They will sleep well. This will boost their brain function and memory!

Raise your kids in an stress-free environment. The timely intervention of parents will help the children to perform well. Here is the story of a girl that proves this.

This girl was the only child of her parents. Once she failed to score well in a very critical test. She could not live up to the expectations of the parents, and she attempted to commit suicide. Somehow, she survived. She took this extreme step only because of the pressure from the family.

Later, I asked her mother, "Were we 'rank-holders' in our student days? Were we not average students even after best efforts? It's our intelligence that our children inherit, right? We should not enforce our

children to achieve something that is beyond their ability.”

Let our children grow enjoying freedom and happiness. Let them feel the fresh air of independence. Let them be free to visit and be friends with our neighbours. Let them grow as social beings. Do not treat them like caged birds. They should grow up, loving and fighting, giving and taking, crying and laughing with their siblings and friends. They belong to the society. Above all, they are the assets and treasures of God. Leave them in the hands of God, rather than keeping them for ourselves.

6. HABITS TO BE FORMED IN CHILDREN

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)

Most of us will vouch that we do not have other gods. The fact is that, very often, we have other gods than Jehovah in our homes! Wealth, fame, education, children! When we love someone or something too much, that becomes our ‘god’. In a home where the admonition “Go and study” is what you hear all the time, ‘Education’ is the ‘god’. If money is all you talk about, then our ‘god’ is ‘Money’. If we brag about our work or business, then those are our ‘gods’. And, when the ‘well-being’ of our children dominates our thoughts and actions, children become our ‘gods’ and our idols. If we are spending most of our time with computers and mobile phones, we will have them as our ‘gods’.

We need to insist that our children learn bible verses by heart. Our words should promote spiritual growth in them. “Do not let any unpleasant and unholy words come out of your mouths.” Avoid insulting and hurting words. This does not mean that you should be a

boring or long-faced all the time.

The work of our hands should glorify God. Our hands are to be used not to hurt but to heal. They should be ready to show mercy and provide help. They should not block but lead others.

Jews wear a leather box, tefillin, on their foreheads with scrolls of scripture in it. God asks us to follow this practice not literally, but to keep the scriptures in our minds. To keep the scripture on our forehead really means to always meditate upon it and follow it. Our actions should be based on the scriptures. Our thoughts and deeds should remind others of the scriptures, like a sign that Jews wear on their hand.

Hanging a plaque that reads 'Jesus is the Leader of this Home' is not enough. One who enters our house should feel that the house is indeed devoted to The Lord. The time disciples shared with Jesus when he asked them to "Come and see," caused their transformation. Likewise, people who enter our house also should feel that our home is holy. They should realize that every member of the house inherits the traits of the Father – Jesus! Each family should become a member of the body of Jesus. Then, not only that family, but those who interact with them too will be blessed.

'Shema' is what Jesus learned when he was a boy and what he later taught his disciples. It is the daily prayer recited by Jews. We also should speak and recite the Word of God in our families.

If the atmosphere in the family is spiritual, it will beget a spiritual thirst in the children.

As noted earlier, children should be filled with Jesus at a very young age, even before they start school. There will be no selfishness in children who are filled with Jesus. They should learn from us to welcome the guests, treat them well, and to share what we have with them. They will then showcase caring, sharing and love in their

behaviour.

We should not let our children be ego-centric. They need encouragement; but that should not make them think that they are somehow 'Very Important Personalities'. Do not attempt to show off the talents of your kids in front of others. If we praise them too often for their ability to sing, dance, etc., they may develop an inflated sense of self-importance. It will do more harm than good. They might become arrogant. I am not talking about suppressing or killing their talents. The point here is to raise them as 'normal' kids. They should be treated just as any other person in the family. Often, we tend to give much more attention to our kids than the elderly. This will lead the kids to think that they are 'too special.'

When we share something, say chocolates or fruits, divide it equally among everyone in the family. We should eat our share in front of the children. We should not 'sacrifice' and give our share to the child who cries for more. Or else, we will send a wrong message to them. They will think of themselves as the 'king' in the family. 'I am privileged, and everyone loves me!' In turn, they will make it a habit to cry for anything and everything until they get it. We should not give in to their obstinacy. If we yield to all the demands of a crying child, they will try this trick every time. Nip it in the bud. They will not then try to get their way with a dagger!

Love your children abundantly, but when necessary, use the rod to discipline them. However, never spank a child as a means to vent your anger and frustration.

7. GIVE JESUS TO YOUR CHILDREN

We have already understood about filling Jesus in children and to create an stress-free atmosphere in our families.

Now we shall discuss about ‘Teenage,’ the age between 13 and 19. Teenage is the time of rapid physical and mental changes in children. They begin to take decisions on their own without depending on their parents. The world with all its good and bad gets opened to them at this age. An important issue of this age is the surge of emotions and thoughts.

Boys begin to react quickly, get angry, and turn rebels and retort to others. Girls become more of introverts and find more comfort in the company of their friends. Parents may find it difficult to understand these sudden changes in their children. They might get confused and wonder, “What is wrong with my poor child?”

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). This is to be done before they attain teenage. And we should encourage them to continue in God’s

path in their teenage.

The book of Proverbs has 31 chapters. Ask your teenage child to read a chapter a day, and learn a few verses by heart daily.

Psalm 127:4 says, “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth.”

God has given us the arrows. They will reach where we aim at and shoot. I repeat, ‘Fill them with Jesus in their childhood’. When the world sees Jesus through them, they cannot miss the target.

Do not lose heart if you see elements of teenage-related fickleness and rebellious nature in them. God assures us that they can return to him at any age. Age is not a barrier to return to God and establish a good relationship with him. Pray incessantly for their conversion and a personal encounter with Jesus.

We should discern and recognize the divine plan for our children. Our intention should be to make them great in the Kingdom of God. And so, we should pray and trust in God continuously till our arrows hit their mark!

The mother of the disciples John and James wanted her children to be seated at right and left of Jesus. Let us set aside its theological interpretations for the time being. That mother only wanted her children to be ‘great in the Kingdom of God,’ and not in this world.

God wants us to grow in patience, tolerance, and love as we raise our children. Children in their teenage, especially boys, tend to speak bluntly. Do not be shocked at this! Most often they speak openly about our flaws and weaknesses. What we need to do then is to calmly ponder over what they have said, admit our mistakes if they are there, repent humbly and return to God.

Children love to follow our actions rather than listen to our incessant advice. It is good to share the experiences we had at their age. It will breathe a new life and encouragement in them if they are

convinced that we are genuine.

Give them Jesus more than money or wealth. Then give ourselves and our time to them. These are the two most precious gifts we can give our children.

Once we visited a relative on his deathbed. He was a very rich planter honoured with Karshakasree award (A prestigious annual award for outstanding farmers). He called me and whispered in my ears: “Dear, do not make the mistake I made; do not amass wealth or leave a massive inheritance for your children. Only, give them Jesus.”

Those last words of a “successful” man still echo in my ears. And that’s what ‘materialism’ means.

Children expect their parents to maintain a holy familial relationship, loving each other, and to be proud role models to their children.

They want us to spare our time for them. Those who are physically away from their children should try to talk to them daily; enquire about their well-being, appreciate and encourage them continuously.

Interact with a teenager like a friend. Raise them giving maximum respect, motivation, and appreciation. Give them ourselves. Give them Jesus.

8. DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHAH

A lovely small house on the slopes of Mizpah. One is blessed to have been born in this exquisitely beautiful village. The place is untouched by the clamour of city life and war. Scenic and serene! She, the daughter of Jephthah, sat on the porch of the house, looking at the gorgeous dew-covered mountains, thinking:

“My father will come today. It has been a few days since he went to fight for Israel, against the Ammonites. How proud I was when I heard of his victory! People love and respect my father. He is the head and commander of the people.”

Her memories took her to the past. Her dad had grown up in disgrace. Her grandmother was not legally married! Her grandfather was married to another woman and had children in her. When those children grew up, they said to Jephthah, “You are not going to get any inheritance in our family; because you are the son of another woman.” (Judges 11:2)

Dad did not quarrel with anyone. He was taught by his mother

to trust only in the Lord. So, he fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob. Worthless men were his companions. (Judges 11:3). However, God was with him. When I was born, he only had the holy scriptures to teach me. He always told me to please God, and not men. God helped me to grow up in holiness.

Everything changed suddenly when Ammonites came to war against Israel. Israel knew they could not defeat the strong Ammonites. They told the elders of Gilead, "Jehovah is with Jephthah whom you have expelled as the 'son of a strange woman.' Only he is capable to lead us from the front, now."

So, the elders of Gilead came to my dad and pleaded with him to be their commander in the war against the Ammonites. He agreed.

The hand of Jehovah was with my father. He gave victory to Israel in the war, through the hands of my father. All glory to Jehovah!

Now, she was yearning to meet her father... She was like this from her childhood! A doting daughter, she was. She yearned to run to him, to hug him and kiss him, as she always did.

But, unlike on other days, he will not be alone today... He has won a war; many people will be with him. Can I hug him and kiss him in front of others? Besides, I am not a little girl anymore. I am a grown-up woman now. She looked at herself. She blushed and smiled, and told herself, "I am a young woman now. Beautiful enough to turn heads! No. How can a big beautiful woman run to receive her father like a little girl?" "But..." she said to herself, "... however big I am, I will always be a 'little girl' to my dad". "Yes! When he comes, I will surely run to him, fall in his arms and kiss him..." She began to dance playing timbrels. She could not contain her excitement.

Did she hear the footsteps of her father? His footstep is so familiar to her. Yes, her father returns victoriously. She danced with timbrels. She was happy that her father's family had accepted him finally. She

was happy about his victory! He is the pride of the clan and the nation!

Her outcast father has become everything to everyone!

She ran to him dancing and playing timbrels.

But to her utter surprise, she heard him crying out loud. She was shocked to see him tearing his clothes. The clever girl soon realized that she was going to die.

Jephthah had vowed to God that if he wins the war “...whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.” (Judges 11:31)

Never in his wildest dream did Jephthah think that it would be his darling daughter that will meet him first at the doors of his house. When he made the vow, he had in his mind the herds of lambs, cattle and other animals he owned, which he thought would come out first. Besides her, he had neither son nor daughter (Judges 11:34)

The sight was more than what Jephthah could bear. “Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break.” (Judges 11:35)

She knew very well how deep his love for God was. His laments should not end up in breaking his vow to God. I should pay the cost. My father loves God more than me or my mother. He taught us the same. My father should not back off from his vow... even if I have to die for it.

She said, “Do to me just as you promised to God.”

Here is a daughter who understood well her father’s ardent relationship with God! He knew with a broken heart that he could not go back on his vows, even if he had to sacrifice his daughter. And for him, God was more precious than his only daughter.

And what followed is so touching and noteworthy.

“But, grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to

roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.” “You may go,” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. (Judges 11:37-39)

She wanted to convince her companions that she knew no man and she was a virgin, before she died. She realized her responsibility to teach her companions about holiness. That is why the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year. (Judges 11:40)

Youth is the time of desires and enticements. The story of Jephthah's daughter is recorded not just for passive reading, but to be a reminder for us to lead a holy life.

‘Knew no man’ is a reason for a girl to be proud; a great testimony! The concept is ever relevant!

It was God's plan and wish for a boy and girl to be virgins until they get married. They become one only when the minister joins their hands in matrimony. Till then, God wants man and woman to live as ‘two’.

Parents should teach their children to practice this strictly. Parents should watch the ‘going out’ of their children.

An unbridled life is not meant for us. We do not need ‘modern’ culture. When it comes to holiness and virginity, we need only the example of Jephthah's daughter. Be proud to announce, “I am old fashioned when it comes to relationships.” If so, take my word, God will give you a holy life partner.

9. COUNSEL TO YOUTH

Titus 2:5 exhorts young women “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

Through this scripture, Holy Spirit gives clear direction as to how young women should live in their family, church and society. We should learn how to raise our girl child from this portion of the scripture. The girls of today are meant to be wives tomorrow. They should be trained by parents as they grow up.

They should be trained to be disciplined, calm, quiet, and loyal to their families. A family is heaven, if the wife is obedient, respectful, and loyal to her husband. The children will grow up learning this from their mother. When the girls from such families are married off to other families, they will follow what they have learnt from their homes.

The scripture exhorts women to be obedient to their husbands, which means they should please their husbands in everything. But, how can girls of the new generation who do not even want to get married be husband-pleasing wives? So, parents should teach their

daughters to think about marriage as they grow up. Teach them to pray incessantly for a good husband and for a pious family life.

We should ponder on why many girls in the new generation are 'allergic' to marriage. Often, the bad examples of their parents and the resultant insecurity they feel in their homes are to be blamed. Home should be heaven-like for children. There should be harmony at home. Children should live in freedom and they should experience God at home. Then only will they have good family experience. Parents have a great role to play in this.

The bible also asks women to be loving mothers. The first blessing God gave the first family was to "Be fruitful, and increase in number." Children make a family a celebration! But today, many girls who get married say "No kids" or "Not now." This is negation of God's plan. Some abort children when they are formed in their wombs. It is homicide. Children, the gift of the Lord, are the blessing and wealth of the family.

For girls to be loving mothers, they should learn to love children before they get married. They should be trained for this by their parents. Parents should teach their elder children to play, feed and help their younger ones. Let children interact with other children as they grow up. Elder children should take care of younger children in the church and community. Such children will become loving mothers.

Sobriety is the essential quality of young women. We live in an era of 'friendship.' Social media rule the roost. The 'chatting and patting' cutting across gender lines should be controlled. The pattern of this world is not to be followed in this matter. If we do not discipline our girls in such things, they will continue with their 'chatting and patting' after marriage also, even if their husbands do not like it. Healthy friendship is good. But we have to be sober. Family is a unit that comprises husband and wife. There is no place for anyone else.

The third person in this unit should be Jesus - the uniting or building factor of the family. Paul reminds young women to be chaste. We have already seen the story of Jephthah's daughter in the previous chapter. The entire wealth that we have amassed and gifted to our children during their wedding will not match their real wealth – chastity. Chastity – purity - makes a woman a real woman!

A man expects his bride to be a virgin, and a wife to be chaste. Young women are like a garden enclosed, a spring shut up and a fountain sealed. No one should encroach upon the garden. Others should not drink from the fountain.

Paul wants the young woman to be keepers at home. She should be capable of running her husband's household, for which she should be trained at home. She has to be capable of handling things like cooking, house-keeping, washing, shopping, and banking. It is also better for her to learn at least the basics of driving and sewing. Parents should train them in gardening, and kitchen farming.

Children should grow in compassion. Most parents want their children to study well and score high grades. How about their interactions with others? Are they compassionate in their dealings with others? For instance, does your child understand the problems of his classmate who struggles hard to pay his school fee? If your compassionate child informs you about the plight of his poor classmate, be willing to help him in a discreet manner.

Children should learn to be compassionate to those around them. Such children will be smart women when they get married. As Proverbs says, “she opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.”

Let me repeat. Paul exhorts women to be obedient to their husbands. A disobedient wife divides and destroys the family. If a girl has to be obedient to her husband, she should have seen her mother

being obedient to her father. Again, 'Like mother, like daughter'. If it was her mother who ruled the household, she would duplicate it when she gets to her husband's house. If her mother was a loyal wife, she would be a loving, loyal, obedient and sober wife who takes good care of her family. And that family will be the heaven on earth.

10. WIFE, A FRUITFUL VINE

“Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord” (Psalm 128:4)

The verse prior to this clearly states what the ‘blessed’ state is. Psalm 128:3 says: “Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of your house: your children like olive plants round about your table.”

The blessing of a man (husband) is his wife and children, not his riches and positions!

A blessed wife is like a vine in the house. Like a vine, she brings happiness to her family and those who come to her family. A blessed wife is the light of the house. People would love to visit that house, because they can expect the warmth of hospitality from her.

The children of a blessed man also will be blessed. They will be like olive plants. Olive symbolises prosperity and peace, and its branches were used to make the crown of victory.

Blessed children are the wealth of a family. They are our crowns. And peace will reign in such homes.

In a blessed family, the siblings seldom quarrel. They will love and respect each other. However, the man of the family is responsible for building the family in God's way.

“Blessed is every one that fear the Lord; that walk in his ways.”
(Psalm 128:1)

The man should be God-fearing. All his steps should be governed by The Lord. Yes, the house of the one that fears the Lord is blessed. His wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of his house: his children like olive plants round about his table.

However, if we closely examine, we see a hierarchy in the relationship among the husband, wife, and children in that house.

‘Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.’

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Ephesians 5:21-25)

We have seen the need to fear the Lord in Psalm 128. But here, Paul asks us not only to fear God (Christ), but also to submit ourselves to one another in that fear.

In the verse preceding, we see that such submission is required in the church. As we read on, we understand, this submission (respect) should happen in our families too. But, we should fear only Christ.

Everyone in the family should fear Christ. Father, mother, and children in the house should live in the fear – alive to the presence – of Christ. Each moment, we should live being aware that Christ sees and knows everything.

Husband is the head of such a God-fearing family. His obedient

wife comes just below him in the hierarchy.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22)

Here we see how a wife should submit herself to her husband. Paul says, when you ‘submit yourself to your husband as unto the Lord’, actually you are ‘submitting yourself to the Lord.’

In fact, the familial relationship is compared here to the relationship between Christ and Church.

Note what Paul says in his letter to Corinthians:

“But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3)

In the letter to Ephesians, we see that ‘man is the head of woman.’ But here we see that the ‘head of man is Christ.’ By this, Paul means that man and woman should obey Jesus Christ in everything. Woman should learn to obey man by seeing his obedience to Christ.

But who is the role model for man in obedience? The answer is in the same verse; “... head of Christ is God.”

Man should submit to Christ as Christ submits himself to God. When man is perfected in his obedience to Christ, woman would obediently submit to him, seeing this. Thus, everything will be under the fear of Christ.

When we talk about the relation between the head and body, it should not only be limited to ‘submission’.

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourish and cherish it, even as the Lord the church:” (Ephesians 5:29). As submission is the duty of the body, the head has the duty to nourish it and protect it.

The head warns our hand when it senses the heat of fire and saves it. Head keeps giving directions to each part of the body. By obeying the directions, the body is protected from danger.

Christ gives directions to each member of the Church every moment. Obedience to the commands would save them; whereas, disobedience would lead to destruction. Likewise, a husband should give wise directions to his wife.

But how can a husband give temperate and wise directions to his family? He can do this only when his head is Christ. He receives and obeys commandments from Christ and transmits the commandments of Christ to his family. If this order is lost, everything goes wrong.

When the man (husband) obeys Christ in everything, and his wife submits herself to him in everything, the home becomes heaven on earth.

11. A FINE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

The story of Ruth and Naomi deserves our special attention. A book in the Bible itself is named after this woman. Ruth. Every story in the Bible is a guiding light to those who go through similar experiences in their lives.

The characters in the Bible are ordinary people like us. The Bible narrates their stories for us to learn lessons from them.

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.” (1 Cor. 10:11).

At the same time, the stories of the good people – or in other words, ‘successful people’ – in the Bible are given as examples for us to imitate.

We shall look at the passage starting from verse 14 to the first part of verse 19 of Chapter 1 in the Book of Ruth. The passage can be divided into three.

In the first part, verses 14 and 15, “At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people

and her gods. Go back with her.”

The second part, verses 16 to 18, “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, ‘she stopped urging her.’

In the third, the first part of verse 19, we read: “So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.”

We have been discussing different aspects of family life. We have deliberated the relationship between husband and wife at length. When a woman comes to her husband’s house, she enters there not only as a wife but also as a daughter-in-law. The relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law is also very important.

The failure in this area is a major reason for the chaos in many families. No one really likes to touch this subject or provide advice in this area.

When a girl gets married, she enters into a unit consisting of husband and wife. At the same time, she is also becoming part of a community that comprises her husband’s parents, siblings, their spouses, etc. It is a reality that we must admit. Indian culture always supported joint family system. But, when Indians started migrating to western countries, they did let go of their culture and roots. Under the influence of the foreign culture, they ‘ousted’ their parents; or their parents ‘ousted’ them.

The story of Ruth teaches us the Biblical culture and God’s plan about family. Naomi was born and brought up in Bethlehem. (For our discussion, let’s imagine she was born and brought up in India)

Naomi’s husband migrated to Moab, as he thought it would be

better than his own country. You may argue that he did this as there was a famine in Bethlehem. Yes! It is because of the lack of opportunity in our country, people go abroad!

In Moab, Naomi loses her husband and her two married sons. Her two daughters-in-law also become widows without children.

At this juncture, Naomi asks both of them to go back to their own homes and get married again, as she plans to go back to her own country. The first part of the passage we discussed narrates Orpah's response to this. She leaves her, though with a heavy heart.

Naomi tells her second daughter-in-law, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods."

When they lived together, Naomi might have told them about the living God and percolated the divine tradition to her daughters-in-law, as they were from gentile background. She had transmitted her spirituality to both of them alike. But when the opportunity came for them "to go back to their people and gods," one of them chose it. But Ruth clung to her mother-in-law and her god.

Ruth did not seek her own comfort. She did not choose to go back to her own country and god. She chose to be with her mother-in-law and the living God. There was no turning back for her as the living God of her mother-in-law had become her God too!

We hear much about the duties of husband and wife towards each other during wedding ceremonies. But, seldom do we hear about the relationship and duties towards other members of the husband's family. In fact, we need to teach our girls about the importance of her relationship with the parents and siblings of her husband – especially the mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law. Don't we?

To teach about the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, there is no better example than Naomi-Ruth relationship in the Bible. The Holy Spirit must have intended to teach

us the practical sides of this relationship by including this book in the Bible!

Take the case of Naomi! When she was mired in miseries and losses, and had reached the abyss of problems, with the loss of her husband and sons, she didn't want her daughters-in-law to suffer the same plight with her. Instead, she wanted to spare them the pain of misery. She was ready to suffer all alone. She asks them "... My daughters: why will you go with me?" (Ruth 1:11). What a great mother-in-law do we see in her! This mother-in-law, who sincerely desired a good future for her daughters-in-law, is a role model to all mothers-in-law! She loved her daughters-in-law like her own kids, if not more. This is divine attitude! All mothers-in-law should learn from her!

The words of Ruth – "Don't urge me to leave you" (Ruth 1:16) are normally exchanged between a wife and husband. Her decision to take care of her mother-in-law even after the death of her husband is not a favour to her mother-in-law, but an honour for herself. For her, mother-in-law is not a burden; to live with her is a life worth living!

In this day and age when daughters-in-law consider their mothers-in-law as liability, Ruth throws a challenge to the spiritually inclined!

We can easily appreciate a wife telling her husband: "Where you go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay." But, when Ruth tells her mother-in-law – an old, penniless widow – "Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried" (Ruth 1:17), it gives us the goose bumps!

By her actions, Ruth declares that her relationship was not to her husband alone. If it was just that, she could have easily gone back to her people. But, she knew, in marriage, she was bonded not only to her husband, but also to his family, god, and people.

She came to her husband's house severing all her emotional ties to her own people, family, and god. Moabites were no more her people. Gods of Moabites were no more her gods. Since she came to her

husband's house, his – and also her mother-in-law's – people became her people, their God, her God!

A married woman's emotional bonds should not be to her own family, people or country. For her, those are old stories! As a member of a new family, her emotional ties should now be to her husband's family, environment, and background!

Some may be skeptical if it is feasible in today's world. There is no doubt that this is the divine plan. The families that follow the divine plan will not perish. They will be blessed! They will build heaven on earth.

APPENDIX

Parents, Do this for Our Kids... .

“**P**astor does not even know me, though I see him every Sunday in the Church,” complained a college student in Coimbatore.

“More than a hundred students from different colleges attend this church. Active students get noticed by the pastor. But students like me are often ignored,” rues a nursing college student.

I do not want to share other similar stories, so as not to make this book larger.

The academic year has begun. Daughters like to hide themselves in the comfortable shadow of their mothers till they reach 10th Standard in school. They will be “holier” than others. Boys also do not make much of a problem till 10th standard. But, when they pass on to Standard 11 and beyond, they want to loosen their reins. The teenage passions accelerate it. They do not want others interfering in their lives. They look for freedom, unfettered freedom...! Freedom to fly around like a bird!

If the foundations are destroyed, what shall the righteous do? He

will do anything!

Family is the first school and parents are the first teachers for our children. Set their foundation right by teaching them the truth from scriptures. A faulty foundation will result in the collapse of any super structure. The lack of a strong foundation is the prime reason for the ruin of the new generation.

This foundation should be built before the children turn five. Read them bed-time Bible stories. Bible stories with pictures are better. We can thus start saving their lives from chaos and confusion. Also, let them start going to Sunday schools at this age.

We will be pushing them to the first stage of spiritual ruin if we are keener on them obtaining high scores in curricular and non-curricular activities, and are satisfied with them just memorising passages from textbooks and Bible verses in the Sunday school.

It is the responsibility of parents to enquire what they have learned in the Sunday school. We often forget that our actions make them 'competitive' at a very young age itself. They may be best performers in their school and Sunday school activities. But in real life, they may be heading to failure. Because by making them 'competitive', we are sowing the seed of poison in their young minds. It will begin to sprout and grow there. We are fostering their urge to keep everything under their feet and to hold their head high with jealousy, anger, and arrogance. We make them miss worship services and fellowship meetings for the sake of their studies. In reality, we are teaching them to be more and more competitive in all areas of life.

You may ask if it is wrong to perform well in studies. Of course they should do their best in studies. In whatever we do – in eating, drinking, cooking, cleaning, or learning - God the father should be glorified in us. For this to happen, everything we do, should be done for him and be devoted to him. Hence, for our learning to be perfect,

it should be done for God and for his glory. Our learning should be perfect; perfect to score 100%.

It should be better if we revise our Sunday school curriculum. How great a change would be there in the children of this generation if we fill them with Jesus, by teaching them about his life, teachings, growth, character, ministry and influence! The repentance of children from Christian family is the need of the hour.

Talk to them, teach the essential lessons, enquire about their friends, make them aware of the problems in life, salvation, baptism, and a holy life.

Changes are also required in the way we worship. When we sweat out of clapping, playing drums, dancing and jumping, we end up thinking we just had a wonderful worship! Often, we are satisfied with our 'performance.' In the cities we see another version of the same. Musical instruments play a major role in their worship. Everything - the music, rhythms, and even "tongues" - is fed in to the system, and posters are designed in different styles!

Is this worship? Is it for this we gather on Sundays? What does our spirit get from this? Through this we are nurturing only our soul and not the spirit. Spirit is pierced only by the word of God. Hence, pastors should be keen on prayer and meditation of the Word of God. If so, when they share the word of God, the Spirit will move in the hearts of listeners and they will repent. The church fellowship should become the places of teaching people how to live and what to proclaim in the coming week.

We should take good care of our college-going children. We should have an eye on their phones, computer etc. If they do not allow us to check these, know that they are moving away from us and God. Teach them that the phone and computer are holy to God, and there is nothing in them that should be hidden from Jesus. Parents should not

fear their children.

When the children move to hostels, the first thing we should ensure is that they have a church nearby for fellowship. Many of us think about it only after ensuring admission, after paying hefty sums as fees and donation. Some don't even bother about such things. Parents need to find a pastor and family who will give spiritual guidance, and check with them if their children are regular to church and are truly spiritual in their ways. Whenever possible, attend the church with your children and bless the pastor with your gifts. It is better to send your children to churches with less people than huge churches. In crowded churches, they may not get the pastor's attention. Don't forget that children like going to these crowded churches so as to evade attention and interference.

Let us leave our children in the hands of God, with care and trust!

Homes that God Build

I met a friend of mine at a wedding reception. During our conversation, I pointed out that the marriages that are arranged 'in haste' also collapse 'in haste!' It was in response to certain confidential information that she passed on to me.

There are eight divorced families in a Pentecostal church in a town in Central Travancore. The stories that I hear when I go to take classes on family life are shocking. Many of them cannot be recounted in public.

In most of these horror stories, the culprits are not the couple involved, but the parents and marriage 'brokers' who put it together.

In their desire to ensure a bright future for their children, many give first priority to money, which would include 'jobs' and family inheritance. Many believe that the future would be safe and secure if their daughter is married to a rich young man. 'I wouldn't have to worry about their future,' they think. No more 'agony'.

The second priority is education. True, for some, if the boy has a good job and plenty of wealth, education is not that important. Many

fail to realize that 'education' which is 'big business' these days, is in fact a trap. People manage to get admission to desirable courses paying huge sums as 'donation' and bribes. As their intellectual capacity is limited, many just manage to scrape through, and some do not complete the courses. These are the so called 'smart' ones in the market. If they have any integrity, they would be thinking how untrustworthy their parents are. A saying goes: 'If the dumb cheats the lame, then God would deal with the dumb.'

Let me repeat what I said in the beginning of this chapter: Marriages arranged 'in haste', break up 'in haste'.

How come marriages are arranged in haste? The children don't attain marriageable age all of a sudden. We can start praying for them from the time they are formed in our wombs. First the parents, and when the children become mature (say at age 14 or 15) they too, should pray for a suitable life partner. They should be encouraged to think about it the way the Lord thought about it. God brought a heavy slumber on Adam in the Garden of Eden, and when he woke up, he found Eve standing before him. When it's time for marriage, allow the Lord to make the selection of the mate. Quietly, leave the matter to God, and wait for His guidance.

For God to make the selection, He has to be given the complete freedom to do it. If He is to do it, we cannot make any special demands. We cannot make a list of our requirements and expect God to endorse it! It doesn't work that way. If God makes the selection, He would select an 'individual' for you to marry. What does that mean? You say: It has to be an 'individual', cannot be an 'animal'. In truth, if a person loses his or her individuality, he/she is no better than an animal!

Marriage today is kind of a business or trade. Some marry because of their familial nobility. Some others marry because of their wealth, or education, or a coveted job. Marriage based on individual compatibility

has become very rare.

God has given each one a special 'call'. It could be evangelism, or a call to follow a particular profession. The controlling power behind it all is God. His will has to prevail. We need to heed His call, and join hands with Him in the process of creation. We are to tend the garden, and our call is to perform that duty in the most faithful manner. When you are a student, study faithfully. It's not for the sake of your parents or teacher. Not even for yourself, that you doing it. To faithfully complete your education means to use the talents God has given you to the best of your ability, and give back to God. It's your offering to God. So are our jobs. When we put in our best efforts into anything we do, it becomes a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable unto the Lord.

You need to trust God to find a proper partner for you and wait on Him to do it for you.

The word 'partner' suggests that it is a person given to you to complete that task God has assigned to you; someone who constantly helps and encourages you to fulfill the divinely ordained mission.

A job gets done faster when you have the assistance of another person. That being the case, you need to be looking for someone who is suitable for your divine 'calling'. 'Can this person be of help in this 'mission' of mine?' should be the question when considering your life-partner. There has to be congruence of ideas, vision, and mission between you and the partner you are considering.

When there is a proposal, make serious inquiries about that person. In this age of selfishness, envy, and egotism, this has to be done by responsible and trusted people. If not, you will suffer the bitter consequences.

When looking for a partner, make sure you are considering someone who has been brought up in the fear of the Lord. It's a very tricky and deceptive world. Do not take things for granted because

the girl or boy is from a Pentecostal family. Times have changed. Children from Pentecostal families need not necessarily have the piety or devotion expected. Make sure they are genuinely 'born again'. Unless they have had a true repentance and rebirth, they are not even Christians, let alone being Pentecostals. Maybe, they got baptized at the age of 17 or 18 as a matter of routine. Any repentance that does not change a person to the image of Jesus Christ is not true repentance. The best way to determine if a person is truly 'born again' is to see if the nature of Christ is evident in him or her.

Only a marriage between two people who have attained this state of mind will be truly successful. Whatever other adjustments you make, unless it is Christ-centered, there will be issues in the family relationships.

A young evangelist who also has the gift of prophecy once visited us. During our conversation, he mentioned that he had interviewed thirty girls before he finally married the thirty-first one. I was aghast. Smart guy! He must have had several considerations and was probably looking for a 'Miss World' title holder! I was wrong. He continued to explain that half of the girls he met didn't want an evangelist as husband. The other half were like, 'We can manage with that. We will adjust to it'. The thirty-first girl was the first one who said that she only wanted to marry an evangelist!

'That was enough. I didn't consider anything else. I decided that she is the one for me to fulfill my divinely ordained mission,' he said.

I was truly inspired. I know many young missionaries who have this commitment. They only want a girl who is dedicated to mission work. They are prepared to wait till they find the right one. The problem is that there are not many girls who have the calling and dedication for mission work. Even if there are, their parents look for 'security' that I mentioned and dissuade them. We need a deliverance from this state

of affairs. There is no greater position or blessing than to be in the Lord's work. When will we ever realize that the Lord's servants are the most secure people on earth!

Parents need to understand that to be joined to a 'holy' person is the greatest security your child could hope to have, and be thankful that he/she didn't fall into the trap of a covetous drunkard or adulterer.

Money, that will come and go. It's the same with fame, power and positions. But, a home led by a holy man and a holy woman will be a pleasure for them, and provide them with joy, security, and stability.

Builders of the House

Once a friend asked me why I did not move to Africa with my husband Saju. I answered: “I visit him in Africa often; but I have not moved as our ‘home building’ is not complete.”

As he was a spiritual person, he grasped the exact meaning of what I said. If he were someone who did not understand spiritual language, he would have asked me, “Oh! You are building a new house. How does the construction work progress?”

Building a home does not mean constructing a building. Listen to the words of blessing of the elders of Israel at the wedding of Boaz and Ruth,

“... The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.” (Ruth 4:11)

The Book of Genesis narrates the story of Rachel and Leah. But it does not tell us much about them other than describing their lives as the wives of Jacob. However, the book of Ruth praises them as the

‘builders of the house of Israel’.

We may think that this praise rightly fits Jacob. This is endorsed by historical facts too! But here, the Holy Spirit says, it is Rachel and Leah, and not Jacob, that built the house of Israel.

We know Rachel and Leah were the mothers of the children of Jacob who became the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Their childhood was not in a spiritually sound environment. They were brought up in the house of their maternal grandfather, Laban. The spiritual environment in Laban’s house was different from the house of Abraham. Though Jacob, their father, knew God; his knowledge was half baked. He was very cunning, selfish, and always depended on himself. In such an environment, how hard might Rachel and Leah have struggled to rear their twelve smart young children!

You might ask, did not Jacob really repent in Peniel? Definitely, he did! God had to fight with him at the banks of Jabbok to cleanse him of his cunning, selfish and self-dependent nature. At the end of their wrestling, Jacob surrendered himself completely to God... It was the day he was ‘born again’. God gave him a new name, Israel. (One is given a name only when he is born.)

The conversion of Jacob must have helped Rachel and Leah very much in building the house. But their work was not started then. By the time Jacob had his ‘Peniel experience’, many of his children had crossed their teenage. That means, the building of the house had been begun much earlier. Building the house is mainly the responsibility of the women in the family. God has assigned mothers the task of building their children.

To build a house means to ‘build’ the children. How should we build our children? Today we see parents struggling to make their children engineers and doctors. Yes, let children study well and secure good jobs... nothing wrong with that. But, ‘to build a house’ does not

mean to make them educated and rich; it means to raise your children as per the plans of God.

“...He was seeking godly offspring...” (Malachi 2:15). What does God expect from your children?

The verse quoted above is a question to unfaithful couples. “Did He not make them one? And why did he make them one? He was seeking godly offspring. (Malachi 2:15)

God expects married couples to beget children, raise them as ‘Godly offspring’ and give them back to God.

Husband and wife have equal responsibility in this. But I believe, God entrusts the ‘work of the builder’ to mothers.

The head of woman is man... Let him take up the reins of the family. But it is the mother who interacts more with the children, spends more time with them and influences them. It’s for the mother to raise them up as God’s children.

Let us look at the passage 1 Timothy 2:9-15, where Paul exhorts women. First, about her appearance. Adorn yourself in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; Let woman learn in silence with all subjection. Above all is the great responsibility given to her... “She shall be saved in childbearing” (verse 15).

Here the focus is not on children as a blessing; but on childbearing. It is a process; the process of giving birth to children and raising them. Hence it is right to say that she will ‘be saved by raising children.’

The first duty of a mother is to bring up children. We have seen how to raise children in the book of Malachi. Raise them as Godly offspring. God had a plan in his mind when he united you and your spouse in marriage. He hoped that you would give him back a few Godly offspring (Malachi 2:15).

This cannot be done in a day. It is a process, the beginning of which is the relationship between the husband and wife. Everything

begins from there. Only a holy couple can build a holy family. Only the children who belong to a holy family can be a holy offspring. Hence, holiness starts from the husband and wife. Faithfulness is the foundation stone of the family.

Children learn not from your words, but deeds. Your actions and character impact and influence your children. So, Paul reminds us to be the best role models for our children.

If a mother is more focused on her outward adornments, she cannot raise her children in faith (1 Timothy 2:10). Let her adorn herself with good works and not with braided hair, gold, pearls, or costly array. Then, her children will grow up naturally in godliness.

If she continues in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety, she shall fulfill her mission in childbearing. A mother should teach her children, faith, charity holiness and sobriety.

A mother should be the shining example by silence and subjection in her relationship with her husband, and her faith, purity and love towards others in the family. There is another sphere for her relationship; it is towards her parents-in-law. Children keenly watch her interactions with them.

We have seen that the elders of Israel blessed Ruth that the Lord make her like Rachel and Leah who built the house of Israel. But what drew Boaz close to Ruth?

“Boaz replied, ‘I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.’” (Ruth 2:11)

Ruth made a covenant not only with a strong and handsome husband, but also with her mother-in-law, who was a widow, who had lost her children, who was an orphan and old. Her words, “till death would part you and me” was not told to her husband, but to her

mother-in-law (Ruth 1:17)

She kept her word. She stayed with her mother-in-law even after her husband's death. She did not forsake Naomi. When Ruth gave birth to her child Obed, Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and became a nurse to him (Ruth 4:16)

Obed was not the son of Naomi's son or daughter. But still, when he was born, her neighbours said, "There is a son born to Naomi;" (Ruth 4:17). That was the relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law!

How could Obed, who grew up seeing this wonderful relationship, not be a godly offspring? How could his son Jesse not be a godly offspring? How could David not be born in that family? Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:17). Our loving saviour Jesus is the son of David. Holiness is transferred from generation to generation.

If a woman continues in faith, charity and holiness with sobriety, she can give birth to children, raise them as godly offspring and give them back to God.

God has assigned women to build the house, the family. Let us build the house like Rachel and Leah. Sometimes, God may use us as Deborah to build his church and Tabitha to build the society. However, God has given all of us the responsibility to raise our children in holiness, and to build the house.

And these houses shall be heaven on earth for sure!!

Notes

Notes

Notes



Jessy Saju

FAMILY

The Heaven on Earth

“Family-The Heaven on Earth” by Jessy Saju, who is known to me for many years as Student of CMS College as well as the wife of my friend Saju Mathew, will undoubtedly be a very useful guide to both families and to those who are preparing to enter a family life.

Prof. Sunny Mathew

This book written by Jessy Saju discuss every aspects of Christian family life in detail. Written by the mother of three daughters and wife of a well known travelling evangelist, based on her real life experiences and experiments, makes the book more special. Most often we hear only the male point of view of the subject.

Dr. Paulson

God-fearing children are the precious gifts a family can give to the Kingdom of God and human race. Jessy Saju’s unique narratives rooted on the word of God will create ripple effects within our society for sure.

Dr. Sini Joice Mathew



SANCTUARY

Word Media Publishing Pvt. Ltd.

Rs. 50/-

26/150A, Avees Building, Toll Jn., Edappally, Cochin - 68 2024,
Kerala, India. Tel: +91-484 2557606, 94471 54450,
E-mail: sanctuarywm@gmail.com

