

The Responsibility of Parents



God is a Matchmaker (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

In our contemporary culture, this word “matchmaker” has an antiquated sound. People don’t expect to see a matchmaker anywhere near a marriage today. Nevertheless, the concept of a matchmaker represents a need that is still very real.

There are two things that a matchmaker can contribute. First, maturity. Life looks very different when you’re past forty from what it looks before you’ve reached twenty and maturity does give a perspective that sometimes enables wiser judgments to be made. When I think what I was like around about twenty, I had all the answers to all life’s problems. There was just one problem: I’d never made them work. Twenty years later, I think I had a lot fewer answers, but the ones I had were working.

Secondly, a person who fulfills the role of a matchmaker can contribute objectivity. They’re not directly emotionally involved. When you become emotionally involved in a situation, it’s often very difficult to make a sound and rational judgment, even though you may wish to. So let me suggest to you whatever point of view you look at it from, that in making a decision about marriage, there are two things that are very helpful: maturity and objectivity.

In the culture of the Bible, parents accepted a great measure of responsibility for the marriage of their children. I’ll just give you two brief examples. In Genesis chapter 24 we have the beautiful story of how Abraham sought a bride for his son Isaac. We also have the response of the woman who was chosen, Rebekah. Abraham took the responsibility to find a bride for his son and it was Rebekah’s family that took the responsibility to commit her to Abraham’s representative when he came for her. So, on both sides, there was family responsibility for the marriage of the young people.

And then, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul counsels Christian parents on giving their daughter in marriage. So, that principle is still recognized in the New Testament.

Incidentally, in a marriage ceremony we still traditionally ask the question, “Who gives this woman to this man?” That implies that the father has something to do with it. Today, very often it’s just a formality. There’s very little reality. But in actual fact I believe the father, particularly, still has a very

serious responsibility for his daughter.

Now, to some of you who are listening, all this may sound oldfashioned. You may say, "Well, today we do things differently. We have other ways of coming into marriage." That is probably true, but let me add objectively that no society in human history has ever had a more terrible record of marriages that fail than contemporary American society. There isn't any other society I know of in history that's been nearly as grievous in the failure of it's marriages as contemporary American society. So, if we're to judge by results, America today does not have all the answers. I suggest that it could be helpful to turn back again to that old-fashioned book, the Bible.

So today I'm going to speak briefly about the responsibility of parents in connection with the marriage of their children.

Now let me just say a word of personal testimony. I am not speaking merely out of theory. In my first marriage I shared in the raising of nine daughters and my second marriage brought me an extra two daughters and a son, so I may not always have done the right thing. In fact, I very frankly acknowledge sometimes I did not do the right thing, but I have had experience and I think I've learned some of my lessons the hard way and I'd like to share these lessons with some of you so that you may not always have to learn the hard way.

Let me offer the following pieces of advice for parents in connection with the marriage of their children. First, acknowledge your responsibility. You have a major responsibility to see that your children make good marriages. Don't run away from that responsibility. Don't hide behind it in contemporary culture, because God will still hold you accountable.

Second, pray for the mates of your children from birth. This is one of the major keys to success. I have precious Christian friends who have prayed for the right mate for each of their children from the day that each child was born. And looking at what's happened in that family, I have to say that God has been marvelously answering those prayers. See, even if there are some areas in which your authority or responsibility has been limited in contemporary society, there's nothing that limits your prayers. So, make a point to pray for the mates of your children all through their lives.

Third, set an example that will give your children a standard. Live out your married life in such a way that your children will know what marriage really can mean and will not want to settle for something less. Most children have a pretty strong impression of what marriage will be like from the marriage of their own parents. And children that have seen a happy, successful, harmonious marriage are much less easily enticed into the wrong kind of marriage. They have a standard and they're not going to settle for something less. So, it's the responsibility of parents to demonstrate what a marriage should be like.

The fourth piece of advice: maintain close contact, ongoing contact with your children. Know what they're feeling, know what they're thinking and this means be willing to listen as well as to talk. Sometimes parents give lectures but never listen to their children. Most of the young people that one counsels today have this complaint about their parents: "They talk to me, but they never listen to me." If you want to know what's going on in your child's mind, as that child grows up you've got to cultivate listening as well as just lecturing.

Fifthly, be understanding but firm. Be sympathetic, listen, see the child's point of view, but don't give way on some basic principle. I remember one of my teenage daughters a few years ago was asking me about something that she wanted to do and I said, "I can't consent to it. It's wrong." So she argued with me for awhile and eventually she said to me, "You mean you don't want me to do it?" and I said, "That's right, I don't want you to do it." And I was amazed. She gave kind of a sigh of relief. She knew herself it was wrong, but she didn't have the strength to make the decision. She was just hoping I'd make the right decision for her. So, be understanding but be firm. Don't concede basic matters of principle. Your children may for a time be rebellious or fretful, but in the long run they'll respect you and they'll recognize that it was out of your love and your concern for them that you took your stand on basic matters of principle.

Finally, I just want to say a word to children about their attitude to their parents, especially in the matter of marriage. The Bible reveals that from the point of view of human relationships, there is scarcely anything more important and decisive in life than the blessing of parents on their children. This is what Paul says in Ephesians 6 verses 1–3:

> "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Do you want it to go well with you? Do you want to enjoy life and have a long life? Well, there's a principle: Honor your father and mother. Let me say from personal observation in many, many lives I have never met a person who dishonored father and mother and who knew what it was for it to go well with that person to have a long life. I've met Christians who

claim to be committed to Jesus Christ, use the language of salvation, even I would say at times sought to serve the Lord, but if they did not cultivate a right attitude in the relationship with their parents, the real choicest blessings of God were withheld from that life. Your attitude to your parents and their attitude to you is going to make a great difference to the whole course of your life. So covet the blessings of your parents. Do everything you can to gain their blessing.

Sometimes that will mean patience, it may mean submitting to things that you don't altogether agree with. And I agree that there are some situations in which a child who is a believer just cannot yield to some of the requirements of parents, but nevertheless, do everything in your power to cultivate the right attitude to your parents.

I went through this when I became a believer. My parents did not believe in the same sense that I did. For a time, I almost felt that I didn't owe them anything, but God dealt with me about that. And I thank God that later in life, I cultivated an attitude of honoring both my parents. I believe both of them ultimately came into faith. I believe also that that had been a major factor in God's blessing on my life.

Radio Program

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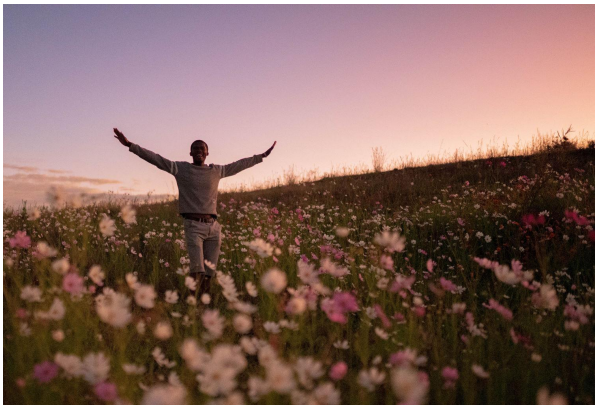


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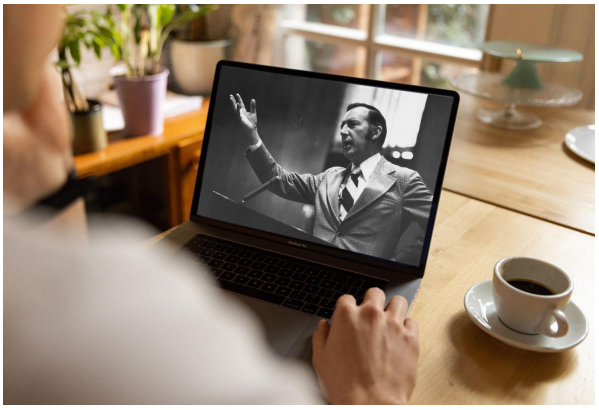
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