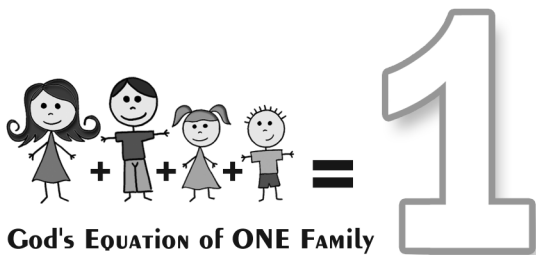


ENJOY *Living*

Together as

ONE



BISHOP YOUSSEF

Enjoy Living Together As ONE

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch
of the See of St. Mark

About The Diocese

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is the 116 Successor of St. Mark the Evangelist. His Holiness' era was marked by a remarkable growth in the number of Coptic Churches abroad. To address the needs of these churches, His Holiness felt the urgency to establish dioceses abroad. Thus, the first Coptic Orthodox Diocese to be established in the United States is the Diocese of the Southern United States. In 1993, H.H. Pope Shenouda III appointed His Grace Bishop Youssef to oversee this Diocese.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States is comprised of the following states:

* Alabama

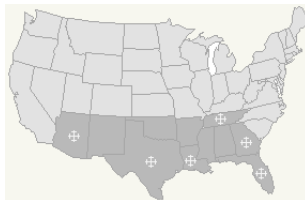
* Arkansas

* Georgia

* Mississippi

* Oklahoma

* Texas



* Arizona

* Florida

* Louisiana

* New Mexico

* Tennessee

There are currently 39 priests serving the 32 churches, and 26 Coptic communities located in the Diocese.

www.suscopts.org

Introduction

“Enjoy Living a Life As One” is a unique collection of lectures and articles stemming from questions, concerns, and interests of attendees at many annual SUS Diocese Family Conventions spanning over one decade. Family education which integrates practical and spiritual guidelines are the best practices and key to personal and familial success and fulfillment. The Christian individual and the Christian family unit demonstrate God’s benevolence in preserving the dignity and integrity of humanity. Learning how, where, and when to work on resolving potential or escalation conflicts is a much needed skill that helps in protecting a variety of relationships. Our Lord is a Lord of reconciliation, and it should be natural for His children to desire and be determined to follow His example. At each phase in life, whether as a child, youth, pre-marital, or in marriage, each person will discover strength and contentment in devoting his/her life to growing in the love and grace of God..

Chapter One

Why Can't We Just Get Along Together?

*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them,
I will liken him to a wise man who built his house
on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24).*

“**W**hy can't we just get along together?” Is a frequently asked question among members of the same family, noticeably or unnoticeably, verbally or silently. The answer to this question is not just an applied method but rather a practical life. In order for a family to “get along” and experience spiritual growth and success, they must do the things that the Lord Jesus Christ preached and taught by example.

For a family to grow and function well, there must be a designated time for prayer, reading the Holy Bible, and admonishing each other to do those things which are lawful, right, and obedient in the sight of God. Worship of the Lord Jesus Christ and attending the Divine Liturgy on an anticipated and consistent schedule as a family must be a priority. Such a willingness and gracious obedience to the Lord gives birth to a truly happy family.

Although prayer, reading the Holy Bible, and attending the Divine Liturgy make a significant difference in the spiritual life of a family, yet they are not the full measure of spiritual integrity. Salvation is not based on hearing alone, nor is it based on faith alone. Rather, our salvation is based on “Doing” the things spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. When the family unit puts its eternal destiny as its primary goal, everyone’s desires for the goodness of the family becomes primary and the standard of love and mutual respect will increase. This in turn will create a family environment in which its members will ultimately “get along”.

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”
(Matthew 5:19).

Think about these impersonal methods of communication, what if we were to do without them? No land line, No cell phone, No fax machine, No directional guidance, No computer, No texting services, No overnight delivery, No airmail, No email, and perhaps, even No telegraph. How would a family communicate without these devices or services often intrusively integrated into their family life? Would not family members have to directly communicate with each other? Would there be communication, dialogue, negotiation, and exchange of ideas?

Unfortunately, all the indifferent attitudes brought about by the preoccupation with devices and gadgets has had the same influence upon our spiritual lives.

The question that we need to stop and ask ourselves is: do we willingly accept the Lord Jesus Christ’s teachings as they suit our

schedules, work ethics, and in the fast pace of our family lives, between school, work, and worldly activities?

Perhaps we should examine the example of a father and a mother who created home family environments that are an inspiration to us all. Abraham, the father of a nation, and St. Mary, the Mother of God both of different Biblical eras, one old and one young, one with servants and one willing to become a servant, both promised “a son”, and both succeeded in making their families “get along”.

A Father of Faith

*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,
and He delights in his way” (Psalm 37:23).*

1. Abraham: A Father of Faith

Abraham's faith was DOING the will of God. Throughout the Holy Book of Genesis, chapters 12 through 22, we learn of God's call to Abraham to follow Him. When Abraham chose to follow God, he made an overt decision for his entire family and his servants. Abraham's faith was tested on numerous occasions, the promise of a son would be a long awaited one, the giving up of land, extended family members, inherited property, and accumulated privilege, and the poignant sacrifice of Isaac, his son of promise.

Abraham's faith was not impulsive, not-all-or-nothing in intensity, nor was it lukewarm. Abraham was the head of a household of faith in a continual growth process. He led that family's faith through his love for God and his willingness to

obey Him. It seems he discovered good works first, a type of justification by ongoing faith, and exemplified an active love of God. What family would not want to follow such a father?

Through Abraham's love for God, he further had a great capacity of love for his wife Sarah, and for his son Isaac. This love tied his family together in unison. Abraham put God first and foremost before himself and his family as evidenced in his willingness to sacrifice his only son, the son of promise by Sarah, who would carry his family's name throughout generations to come. Thus, Abraham was tested and tested again, but he persevered through his strong, active, and proactive faith, and so his family "got along". Abraham's son could look to him for guidance because Abraham looked to God for guidance. This father and son "got along".

"Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth?'" (Jeremiah 3:4).

"Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you, for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him" (Isaiah 51:1-2).

2. Abraham: A Loving Husband

"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

A home is created as its blessings come forth. As each blessing is fruitful, so should the binding of love and care. Children flourish when their parents love one another and model respectful

behavior one to the other by showing interests in each other's ideas and opinions. Accepting differences in ideas and opinions nourishes a family and encourages its diversity and strength.

A Mother of Love

1. St. Mary: the Servant

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

As a young girl, St. Mary, the Mother of God, showed herself to be of great faith. Her response to God was immediate and selfless. It was without doubt. It was simple. St. Mary loved God and was pleased to do His Will.

St. Mary did not hesitate to grant the angel his heaven-sent request knowing what people might think of her integrity and consequently gossip about her. She simply and without remorse chose to do God's will. St. Mary did not consult with relatives. Her love for God was absolute.

Many scholars believe that St. Mary's humanness may have blocked her understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings concerning the salvation of the human race. However, she kept those teachings in her heart until further insightful and meaningful observations and teachings were made available to her. We read about her simple faith and willing submission to the will of God. St. Mary took her place with others who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not read of her boasting as to her Son being the Savior of the world nor the subsequent glory of which she would be entitled.

2. St. Mary: the Wife

St. Mary was a faithful wife to her earthly husband, St. Joseph, and she was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, her only Son, and to His Holy Cross. St. Mary's faith made her goodness evident and her capacity of love strengthened her. Perhaps only after the death and glorious Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ did she realize and understand that the Son who had lived among them is the God Incarnate whom she had bore. Then, St. Mary loved St. Joseph. St. Joseph loved St. Mary. This is evident in the displaying of mutual respect and kindness they had for each other.

"Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table" (Psalm 128:3).

Godly Children

"So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78:72).

With the examples of Abraham and St. Mary before us, what can we learn from their only son (Abraham's only son by Sarah)?

1. Their children grew up living Godly lives, they did not have any regrets later.

"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

2. The Word of God was upheld in order to make right decisions within and outside the family unit.

“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15).

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

3. God took care of their good name when they were apart from their families, unto death, and from generation to generation.

“Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right” (Proverbs 20:11).

4. Efforts to teach their children were never in vain.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

How to Assess Today's Family Quarrels

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”

(Matthew 5:23-24).

1. Worship

Worship was a sacred responsibility in the time and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. For a Jew to be restored and forgiven of a wrong doing, the appropriate sacrifice to God had to be made.

The Lord Jesus Christ makes it plain that today reconciliation is still important before approaching the altar. In this Holy Bible verse, the Lord is not concerned with who started what first, who said what to whom, and what the majority of those listening have to say. The quarrel or disagreement is not what is to be embraced, but rather the reconnection with God, Who is the strength of the reconciliation. It is reconciliation to the Lord Jesus Christ and not conflict resolution that should be brought to the altar.

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God was pleading through us, we implore you on Christ’s behalf be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:18-21).

2. Faith

A family that lacks faith and works might be considering earthly pleasures as more important.

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3).

3. Meekness

A family that seeks to strengthen themselves by criticizing others is prideful.

“Do not speak evil of one another brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (James 4:11-12).

Ignoring one's faults while magnifying those of another is against the teachings of our Lord. In actuality, such people need to honestly look into their faults and weaknesses and try to correct and get rid of them. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself warned us against judging others. He plainly stated that we must first honestly and sincerely examine our own faults and when we do so, we will be able to “take care of our own log” before we worry so much about speaking to and pointing out the “speck” in someone else's eye.

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’, and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

4. Over Self Confidence

Overly confident of gifts and talents is a sure way to stumble.

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit’, whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now

you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:13-17).

5. Self-Discipline

A family that lacks the discipline to stop inappropriate behavior in children will *"never get along"*.

"For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (I Samuel 3:13).

"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).

"Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

In summary, the family looking to avoid *"not getting along"* needs to look at the examples of our father Abraham and St. Mary the Mother of God. The influences they exhorted upon their children is self-evident in families *"that got along"*. Quarrels in these families were reconciled, not self-serving for earthly pleasures, were not critical of others to elevate themselves, were not documented as being prideful or overly confident of their gifts and talents. They were faithful, loving, and obedient. They were actively believing and performing the commandments of God the Ultimate Father.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Chapter Two

Generational and Cultural Diversity

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Genealogy listings are endless in the Holy Bible. Who begat whom, who were common ancestors, the Davidic lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ are all recorded in the Holy Bible. Genealogy was important to the Holy Scripture writers, often so important genealogy, was listed at the beginning of a chapter rather than at the end. Why?

Recorded ancestry was important to a Biblical nation. Through a recorded ancestor, we learn of an ancestor’s promise, we learn not to imitate an ancestor’s sin, we learn to avoid hypocrisy gleaned from traits of certain ancestors, and we learn to be cautious of negative messages given to ancestors that impacted their lives and future generations.

In looking at recorded generations, one must also take into consideration the cultural diversity of each generation. Were they diverse or did Biblical generations pass down their “manner of living life” from one generation to another? Culture influenced people’s temperament, could bring down the wrath of God, was affected by intermarriage, and could be categorized as wise or foolish. Language and customs of a culture were important considerations in early evangelization and ministry to a culture.

Culture could build in protective mechanisms when used with discernment. It could warn against false teachings, assist those who believed in the One True God to avoid false gods, and help to avoid rejecting sound doctrine. Culture could help those within its confines to walk in the Truth and not wander from it, and to be careful of strange teachings.

1. Before the Creation, Generations were Established:

“We believe... in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father” (Nicene Creed extended discussion).

Alexander of Alexandria teaches, “He is not begotten in a physical manner, not by excision or division but in a certain unexplainable and unspeakable manner. In the words of the prophet ‘Who will declare His generation?’ Because of His subsistence, no begotten nature can investigate Him—just as no one can investigate the Father.

The nature of rational beings cannot comprehend the knowledge of His divine generation by the Father” (c. 324).

Bridging The Generation Gap: Father and Son were of One accord as it should also be the manner of life led today.

2. From Ancient Biblical Times, Generations Served a Function:

In the Old Testament’s Holy Book of Joel the prophet, the attack of the Babylonians and a plague of locusts were calamities he used to urge continual faithfulness and ongoing repentance. Generations learned of devastation, repentance, deliverance, judgment, and prosperity. These things would be taught for generations and their spiritual truths are the same for today’s generation.

“The word, of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (Joel 1:1-3).

Bridging The Generational Gap: Gladly learn from previous generations’ misfortunes and deliverances so that future generations do not share in the same pitfalls.

3. Godly Generations Today Are Productive:

All generations stem from God. Before all worlds, was God.

Hermas (c. 150) *states*, “The Son of God is older than all His creatures, so that He was a

Fellow-Counselor with the Father in His work of creation.”

The Prophet Micah teaches, “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2).

Bridging The Generational Gap: Do your children have family responsibilities that encourage belonging? Do they work in the home for the goodness of the home family dynamics? Do they have such responsibilities that should they forget to do them, bear the consequences? Or do they complain of boredom because they do not?

4. Where did the Generation Gap Originate?

We are all put on this earth as “children of promise”. God is our Heavenly Father. So, where is the gap in today’s generation? Is there actually a self-evident gap?

Irenaeus (c. 180) wrote, “The promise of God that He gave to Abraham remains steadfast... For his seed is the church, which received the adoption of God through the Lord, as John the Baptist said, ‘For God is able from the stones to raise up children to Abraham.’ Thus also the apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians, ‘But you, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.’”

Perhaps today’s “generational gap” is self-created as the Holy Bible does not speak to a gap in generations unless they deviated

from Biblical teachings and worship. Are we doing the same because...

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29)?

Bridging The Generational Gap: Has the generational gap been an illusion of media, self-promoted by TV, use of electronic information dissemination or perhaps drugs and alcohol availability which makes one think they are worldly? Is the manner of life more important than the Heavenly life for which and toward which to live?

What is actually the generational gap? A “no time” for family gap? Will history record this of our present generation?

5. Negative Adaptation of a Culture:

Israel intermarried with them (the enemy nations that remained in Canaan) and ultimately served their gods. They forgot the Lord. Without constant remembrances of the Lord within Israel’s thoughts, words, and deeds, man allowed himself to become most vulnerable to the deceptions and accusations of the enemy. Following the death of Joshua, Israel would follow false gods *and suffer and the generations following this also would suffer.*

“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10).

A negative adoption of a culture would be to join a cult, a sect, a denominational church. A cult can be comprised of individuals who join together with a common interest and strange belief or rituals. Examples include gambling, drinking, and/or experimenting with drugs. Others may join sects of a quasi-

religious affiliation of individuals who promote and follow the teachings of false prophets and not the true prophets mentioned in the Holy Bible.

You know that you are outside the Coptic Orthodox Church teachings when you begin to feel an internal sense of importance to the Coptic Church (i.e., without my money, the church is nothing) and an internal perception of distinctiveness (i.e., the church could not function without my family).

The True Compass

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

It has been brought to my attention that the movie, ***“The Golden Compass”*** will be released in theaters soon. It is taken from a trilogy written by English atheist Philip Pullman. It is about a 12 year old girl named Lyra who sets on a quest in search of answers after her best friend is kidnapped. In the story, a malevolent governing body called “the Church”, which answers to the “Vatican Council”, is known to kidnap children for experimentation. With the help of a golden compass that reveals a coded answer to any question asked by the user, Lyra, by the trilogy’s end, gets to the bottom of the missing children and kills a character called “God”.

Often theatrics produce pictures and images in direct conflict with Biblical teachings. These productions should be strictly avoided. Attending any type of earthly entertainment should be done with great discernment. Early church teachings recognized

this as a form of idol worship. The idol of sorts here is cloaking evil with good. Teaching a little evil is worth a lot of good.

St. Clement of Alexandria warns, "It is with a different kind of spell that deludes you... It leads you to pay religious honor and worship to images and pictures" (c. 195).

After having read many articles regarding this controversial film, I have come to the conclusion that Satan's presence and cleverness are quite evident. There are many arguments that the film is a mellowed version of the trilogy series. If we accept this argument, what prevents a person from reading the actual book, which directly fantasizes about nonbiblical concepts regarding the Creator? More importantly, this film is geared towards our children, the most vulnerable and innocent.

How can one even fathom of killing the Creator, our God, who created us in His image, *"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them"* (Genesis 1:27). He gave us life and when Adam and Eve's fall cursed us to death, He saved us through His blood.

Some may argue that this film is just a fantasy film and by no means is it real. Thus, our children would never think about killing God. If we accept this argument, let us define 'fantasy'. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary the adjective form of 'fantasy' means 'fantasize' which means 'to portray in the mind'. Our Lord commanded us *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment* (Mark 12:30). It is clearly stated that our minds should be filled with love for God. Since *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8), then our minds should be filled with God

not with thoughts displeasing to Him, but, rather with thoughts of love. *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome”* (1 John 5:3).

Our children are precious gifts, so why expose them to such films? Some may argue that it is just entertainment. Then why promote something offensive to God for mere entertainment? Acceptable standards must be set and we should protect the innocence of our children. Solomon the prophet tells us, *“Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse, he who guards his soul will be far from them”* (Proverbs 22:5). Child psychologists all agree that childhood affects a whole person’s life and has a great effect on one’s personality. *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Proverbs 22:6).

Are we training our children to carefully analyze what is beneficial and good or what is pleasing to their senses for entertainment?

St. Clement of Alexandria specifically asserts that “...When images are set up, we know well enough, too, who carry on their wicked work under these names. We know who exult in the homage rendered to the images... It is none other than the accursed spirits” (c. 197).

What are our children spiritually benefitting from sorcery, being exposed to watching trickery, killings, and kidnapping? What is beneficial about using God’s name in vain?

We are exposed to a variety means of communication. Be vigilant in discerning what is edifying. St. Paul tells us, *“All things are lawful for me but all things do not edify”* (1 Corinthians 10:23). Do not be misguided by Satan’s deception. St. Paul urges us, *“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them”* (Ephesians 5:6-7).

Satan’s treachery is even evident in the title of this film, “The Golden Compass”. According to the story line, it is this compass, a golden one that provides answers. The Webster Dictionary defines compass as ‘a device for determining directions by means of a magnetic needle or group of needles turning freely on a pivot and pointing to the magnetic north’ or as ‘direction (his moral compass) a guiding, governing, or motivating purpose’. What direction are we taking by supporting this film? What is our compass in life?

Our Lord Jesus Christ clearly told us *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). He is our compass, our direction. St. Paul tells us *“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:8-10). Through His love, He saved us out of darkness and brought us to light and is asking us to find out what is acceptable to Him. Let us fill our heart with His love and remember what St. Paul said, *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

6. Positive Adaptation of a Culture:

To many, cultural assimilation is the ability to speak excellent American English. Marital assimilation is further evidence of positive adaptation to a culture. Primary structural warm group interactions are essential at church, work place, and social groups which further demonstrate positive adaptations. Positive adaptation at all times primarily incorporate the Coptic Orthodox Church's teachings and beliefs.

Were prophets appointed to prophecy because they were well learned, had a silky tongue, and could easily convince people to follow God? Or were they called by God? They were indeed called by God to preach and teach in the language of the majority of the land for understanding and conformity to the teachings.

When examining the generational/cultural gap, one should consider the amount of time spent in family cohesiveness. Is your home overrun by company, are the rooms filled with distractions, is the business of life the priority of the family day, is the work ethic so strong that more is never enough?

Fathers do you spend minutes or hours in one-on-one conversations with your son? Do you instill in him the most important basics of the Holy Bible teachings leaving him with a desire to learn even more? Do you teach the faithfulness of our Father Abraham?

Mothers do you spend minutes or hours in one-on-one conversations with your daughter? Do you instill in her the love that consumed St. Mary? Do you instill in her the desire to love God as did St. Mary? Children, do you love your parents, honor

and cherish them as the Lord commanded? Do you entreat them to have a family hour of prayer and reading the Holy Bible at night to nourish your souls?

Doing the will of the Father in Heaven earmarks the golden standard of positive adaptation of a culture.

“Now, we believe that Christ did ever act in the name of God the Father... We believe that He was the Son of the Creator and that He was His Word. God made Him His Son by emitting from Him from Himself. He thereafter set the Son over every dispensation of His Will” (*Tertullian* c. 207).

The Lord Jesus Christ was among and within many cultures during His ministry. He positively adapted to His surroundings. How do we know? Multitudes believed and followed Him.

7. Influence of Culture Upon Religion:

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied the persecution and destruction of Jerusalem and the great Temple of Solomon. Jeremiah of the tribe of Benjamin begins his Holy Old Testament Book with generational introduction:

“The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jeboiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah,

king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month” (Jeremiah 1:1-3).

Fathers, sons, and lineage again is emphasized here as important. Tribes and ancestry was important. If it were not, it would have been said, ‘Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.’

Jeremiah warns the people of Israel to hold fast to their belief in God and to avoid the Gentiles. God put these words into Jeremiah’s mouth:

“Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: ‘Do not learn the way of the Gentiles, do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile, for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold, they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple.’”
(Jeremiah 10:1-4).

Jeremiah’s message is an important one... Israel was not told to avoid the Gentiles because they do not do things in the same manner as, the Israelites do. They were not instructed to avoid the Gentiles because their language was not the same. The Israelites are not told to avoid the Gentiles because their country of origin or ancestry was different. Rather the Israelites were specifically told to avoid the Gentiles because they do not believe in God.

We are specifically taught that the Prophet Joel from the tribe of Reuben proclaims we are to avoid all those who do not believe in God.

Brigding The Cultural Gap: A father must teach his son the Word of God, not tomorrow, but today, not in the available time, but at the designated time. Out of discerned, studied, Biblical teaching, respect grows and culture is understood in positive affirmation. If this is not done the son, maybe following the crowd of his peers will be in total confusion of who he is and should become.

Diverse generational and cultural groups blend to a common whole. A Coptic Church with diverse members is a spiritually sound church in its preaching and teachings. It comes together based on Apostolic teachings and embraces its generational and cultural differences in its diversity.

While the generational gap is the talk of the day, perhaps for our audiences' purposes, cultural gaps have plied us as Copts more than the preceding and present generations.

Culture is "the sum total of socially inherited characteristics of a human group that comprises everything which one generation can tell, convey, or hand down to the next, in other words, the non-physically inherited traits we possess" (Specter, Cultural Diversity and Health).

Culture is the baggage we carry around during our lifetime. It is our beliefs, practices, habits, likes, dislikes, norms, customs, rituals, and the learned behaviors we have learned from our families during our early years of socialization. We, in turn, transmit this cultural baggage to our children.

The society in which we live its political climate, economic forces, and social morals tends to alter the way in which some aspects of a particular culture are transmitted and maintained.

Most of the essential components of a culture will remain and be passed on from one generation to another. This is called cultural diversity. Much of what we believe, think, and do consciously and unconsciously is determined by our cultural background.

Cultural encompasses three important points of heritage: extended family, participation in folk and ways, and language. Shared geographic origin, migratory status, race, language, religious faith, shared values and symbols, music, food preferences are all aspects of culture.

“And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him. For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the Lord. Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made. And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years” (II Chronicles 11:13-17).

Those with the right worship were rejected by Jeroboam because they served and worshipped God according to the traditions established by God through their fathers.

“Therefore brethren stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (II Thessalonians 2:15).

We all are from the same generation of men...

“Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58).

We are all from the same origin of culture...

“The timeless and un-originated First Principle and Beginning of existences-the Son-from whom we are to learn the remoter Cause of the universe, the Father, the most ancient and the most beneficent of all” (*Clement of Alexandria*, c. 195).

There should be no gaps...

Yes, we believe in the holy spirit, the lord, the life giver, who proceeds from the father, who with the father and the son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke in the prophets.

Chapter Three

A Family of Submission

“Therefore submit to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

Submission to the Lord in the family life goes through three stages. First, the family members must attain the virtues preceding the life of submission. Second, they must lead a life that is characteristic of the life of submission. Such a family will receive the blessings of the life of submission as the third and final stage.

A family is the sum of its individual members. Individual members collectively make up the family as do their actions make up the actions of the family.

I. Virtues that Precede the Life of Submission:

1. Surrender to God vs. Surrender to Earthly Desires

“Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having

been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:7-9).

The Lord Jesus Christ learned obedience in His Human will, which He freely surrendered to the Divine will. Even within the agony and injustice of the world around our Lord Jesus, He submitted to the will of the Father, thereby denying Himself of His fleshly desires.

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, his is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things” (II Timothy 2:3-7).

Faithful family submission requires effort and disciplined behaviors. Discipline may include self-denial and struggle in order to surrender to God.

2. Humility vs. Arguments and Prideful Thoughts

It is not possible to live the life of submission without humility. A family must be sure of God, lean on God’s Word, and depend on the Lord in times of unrest. A puffed up family that lean on their own thinking, and on the truths they believe to be self-evident, cannot submit their lives to God in humility.

“But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

The Lord Jesus Christ's humbling death has exalted Him. The purpose of the Holy Cross was to bring about suffering and shame, but for the Lord Jesus Christ, it brought glory and honor.

“Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:9-10).

Feelings of the ego cannot take priority over feelings of humility.

Lactantius (c. 304) wrote, “There is need of humility, fear, and devotion in the greatest degree—lest anyone should put his confidence in his integrity and innocence. For in doing this, he may incur the charge of pride and arrogance.”

3. Faith vs. Doubt

If a person doubts God's love and care, such a person will not be able to submit his life to such a wavering trust. A family cannot be obedient to a lukewarm relationship with God.

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:5-6).

Obedience to the faith is acceptance of the Holy Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the virtue of obedience in action.

Cyprian (c. 250) said, “Abraham believed in God and it was accounted to him as righteousness.

Assuredly, then, when whoever believes in God and lives in faith is found righteous and is already blessed in faithful Abraham.”

II. Characteristics of the Life of Submission:

1. Submission of One’s Strong Will

When a family submits their will, it means that the family has no other will which differs from that of God’s.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore knowing all things that would come upon Him went forward and said to them, ‘Whom are you seeking.’ They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, ‘I am He.’”
(John 18:1-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ intentionally came to the place known to Judas. This shows the Lord Jesus was willing to go to His Passion and He voluntarily and humbly did so. The Lord Jesus Christ submitted to the will of His Father.

Saul of Tarsus asked God when He appeared to him near Damascus: *“Lord what do You want me to do?”* (Acts 9:6). From that point in time onward, Saul of Tarsus’ complete submission to God was the turning point in the life of this great apostle, then St. Paul.

2. Behavior Will Match the Will of God

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’”

(John 13:3-6).

The foot washing was an act of humility. This act of hospitality was normally performed in Biblical days by servants. St. Peter is shocked at the sight of seeing the Lord Jesus Christ performing such a menial task.

King David would exclaim, *“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart”* (Psalm 40:8). King David was willing to obey God.

“I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22).

3. God will Guide the Thoughts of the Submissive:

“Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Mark 14:36).

Although the Son asks the Father a heart wrenching request, the Son also submits to the will of the Father.

St. Paul who lived an active life of submission said, *“But we have the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16). God will guide the thoughts of those submissive to Him.

III. Blessings in the Life of Submission

What does a person gain from a life of submission? The answer is joy, peace, and no eternal condemnation.

1. True Joy

True joy means an absence of grief, anxiety, and fear. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

“But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You, let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them, let those also who love Your name be joyful in You” (Psalm 5:11).

Hermas (c. 150) states, “He will bestow on them the blessing which He has promised them, with much glory and joy, if only they will keep the commandments of God, which they have received in great faith.”

2. Peacefulness

A person who experiences total peace is someone who is sure that his life is in the very hands of God. He feels such peace in his heart that nothing and no one can take away. A person realizes that God loves Him and is able to take him from the midst of hard times and tribulations.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an entire army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear, though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident” (Psalm 27:1-3).

3. No Eternal Condemnation

Being sure of the final judgment is the end point on the pathway to the life of submission.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

If you strive to keep the Lord’s commandments, you can rest assured of the blessings of the life of submission.

“Not everyone who say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

The family unit is recognized throughout the Holy Bible. Biblical influence, care, and teachings are paramount in the family life. Submissiveness to God is essential.

Joshua said, *“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord”* (Joshua 24:15).

Moses of whom it was said, *“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin”* (Hebrews 11:24-25).

Clement of Rome (c. 96) advises, “Let your children be partakers of true Christian training. Let them learn that humility is of great avail with God.”

The submissive family is a successful family. To be submissive, a family must practice humility. Humility is being aware of your weaknesses and knowing your failings and your sins and treating yourself accordingly.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, teaches, “Humility and submissiveness lies in the fact that you should not feel that you are great and try to appear to be small or to hide your greatness. The mere feeling that you are great implies a kind of pride, and your feeling that you are hiding your greatness includes a feeling of greatness that you hide from people which is obvious to you.”

With one mind and one accord, a family must be submissive to the Lord.

St. Clement of Rome (c. 96) said, “Take heed, beloved, lest His many kindnesses lead to the condemnation of us all. For thus it must be unless we walk worthy of Him and with one mind do those things which are good and well-pleasing in His sight.”

Let it be according to Your mercy O Lord, and not according to our sins.

Chapter Four

Staying Positive in a Negative World

How does one stay positive in a negative, imperfect world? To do so, one must start by coming into reconciliation with negativism and imperfection. Peace is not an inherent quality of imperfection. That is why those who constantly try to make their life situation perfect live in unrest. The desire to live in peace and a state of positivism often conflicts with the need for absolute perfection particularly in an imperfect world of imperfect human beings.

For example, in our daily various endeavors more often than not, we face a lot of hindrances and oppositions and end up feeling like we have fought a lost battle. When such unsatisfactory situations overwhelm us, we lose contentment and gratefulness, and the result is discouragement and dissatisfactions.

Negativism is not meant to be part of our being. Instead we get allured to and ensnared by it through our thoughts and deeds. This happens when we get preoccupied with the affairs of others

and constantly compare ourselves to someone else, and thus, invite negativity in our life. If someone's looks, behavior, or how he/she lives their life is paramount in your thoughts, then you are being pulled away from kindness and gentleness and drawn towards negativism.

Negativism attacks us when we focus only on what is wrong with life and in life regardless of our attempts to accomplish. Noble goals just because something is not totally perfect does not mean that we cannot still enjoy them and live our lives to the fullest. Discovering the positive side of life helps to uncover the perfections that preexisted therein.

“As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes” (Psalm 103:15).

What is the remedy to get rid of negativism?

1. Develop Compassion

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’” (Exodus 34:6).

Compassion for others is something every Christian needs to feel and possess. It is acquired by putting yourself in someone else's shoes, taking the focus off of yourself, your family, your family's needs, and your personal thoughts. By taking the “you” out of the scenario, and instead of harboring negative thoughts about another person, you will be able to look at “their”

options in life and benefit from them. It will help us come to understand that they too have the same problems, life worries, and circumstances.

Mark Minucius Felix (c. 200) wrote,
“Know that all persons are born alike, with a
capacity and ability of reasoning and feeling-
without preference of age, sex, or class.”

Compassion is something you develop over time and with concentrated, conscious effort. It is a call to action and change in thinking. When practiced over time, other people will matter more. The value of what you can do lies not in its material price, but in the act of your doing it.

Mother Teresa, renowned for her philanthropic work and her great compassion, said, “We cannot do great things on this earth. We can only do small things with great love.”

With compassion, we will feel positive about our service and our worth as children of promise. We sow seeds of compassion that grow and beget more seeds of compassion.

“But yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump” (Isaiah 6:13).

2. Evaluate Things against Time

Ask yourself “will it matter a year from now?” In the Old Testament Holy Book of Ecclesiastes, the wise King Solomon

said “*And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh*” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Sacred history seems to agree with the text in question, inasmuch as none of the saints composed numerous overwhelming volumes of works, or set for his views in a number of voluminous books (Origen c. 228).

Life is not “*more is better*”. Life is not quantity unending, a constant emergency, nor a constant problem to be solved.

When approaching a negative situation, ask yourself whether it would matter a year from now, whether it is so earth shattering to require so much upheaval or whether I am making it more important than it really is.

Most of the time, candid answers to these questions will reveal the true, transient, trivial nature of things. After some time, the significance of all problems, be it an argument with a church member or a family member, a work-related conflict of interest, or a flat tire, will fade away. Therefore, why give any problem a negative connotation and make it outlast a rechargeable battery?

Ask yourself the question: “Am I adding to the potential problem or taking away from it?”

Chances are a year from now you are not going to care or even remember the details of the problematic situation. Laugh at yourself when you take things far too seriously. Instead of using that energy to be upset and hold angry grudges, drop that feeling of being overwhelmed, get past the obstacle of your unhappiness, and spend time in prayer and meditation. Such

practices will certainly make you feel nearer to the uplifting nature of the Heavenly life.

“Life is not fair”. This comment is an often heard cliché that is a well-known established fact that we need to accept. However, our interactions with each other should be fair although life itself is not, nor does it have to be, and nor will it ever be here on earth. Children often spontaneously repeat the expression, “it is not fair”. We should pick up from there and teach them that heaven, but not the world, is fair and perfect. If we accept that life is not fair and will never be, then we will not feel sorry for ourselves at every challenge presented to us. In facing challenges, we need to do our best, and while we do the best we can, we should allow a different hand, a heavenly perfect hand, to deal with what we cannot.

When life is not fair, we should be encouraged to do our best to improve our own lives or the world as a whole. But, to feel pity is wrong. Pity is a self-defeating emotion. Replace it with compassion. Compassion for others and for your situation will move you to action.

3. Praise and Blame: Are They the Same?

“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

This is an old and very true expression that says that praise and blame are two sides of the same coin. You will never be able to please all the people all the time. Most of us struggle with the fact that we cannot please others all the time. Everyone has

their own set of ideas, needs, and their own evaluation of what is good in life. So why does it surprise us that we are not pleasing to everyone?

The sooner we accept not being able to secure the approval of everyone we encounter, the happier we will become and the more positive our outlook on life will take hold.

One day a child thinks her mother is the very best mother for reading her a story, another day, she does not understand why she must keep her room clean. A father goes to work and wins the approval of his boss for his creativity but upsets a co-worker whose idea went unnoticed. The priest of your church asks you to teach Sunday school and someone says it is because they have no one else.

All these are unnecessary meaningless words which make no impact on anyone or anything. These are triggers to negativism. Ignore them and do not let your peace be taken by someone who is miserable and trying to spread misery.

4. Practice Humility

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:7-10).

However some will say, “Are there not among you some who are poor and others who are rich? Are not some servants and others masters? Is there not some difference between individuals?”

There is none. Nor is there any other cause why we mutually bestow upon each other the name, of brothers, except that we believe ourselves to be equal. We measure all human things by the spirit, not by the body. Although the condition of our bodies is different, yet we have no servants. For we both regard and speak of them as brothers in spirit and as fellow servants in religion. Therefore in lowliness of mind, we are equal: the free with the slaves and the rich with the poor.

“Nevertheless, in the sight of God we are distinguished only by virtue. The person who has conducted himself not only as an equal but even as an inferior he will plainly obtain a much higher rank of dignity in the judgment of God” (*Lactantius* c. 304).

Humility requires practice and concentration especially when confronting those who constantly seek to rob you of your positive attitude.

Athenagoras (c. 175) teaches, “What, then, are the teachings in which we Christians are brought up? ‘I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those that curse you. Pray for those who persecute you.’”

And do it with a smile!

Humility and inner peace go hand-in-hand. A humble person does not need to prove him/herself to others. Humility and

calmness impact the soul with peace. Trying all the time to convince others of our correct point of view takes a great deal of energy especially when we are always met with opposition. Sometimes it requires bragging about ourselves in order to convince people of our worth and to sway them to adopt our ways. Who wants to expend this amount of energy over matters that many times are trivial in themselves? Ask yourself “will it earn me a Heavenly reward?”

Have you ever noticed that the more you attempt to prove yourself to others, the more they avoid, but you? Those who always think they are right, have the best of everything, are never wrong encourage resentment.

People are drawn to those with a quiet inner confidence whose actions, not words, speak for them. Some think they will be taken advantage of if they do not stand up for their feelings. Most of the time it is not important who is right and who is not right. Neither is direly important.

“Are you elevated by nobility of birth? Do you praise your parents? Yet, we are all born with one lot, it is only by virtue that we are distinguished”
(*Mark Minucius Felix* c. 200).

5. Mind Your Own Business

“For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (I Corinthians 3:3).

When you concern yourself with other people’s trivial matters, it becomes impossible to pursue peace as a goal. Do you

frequently say, “If I were in their place, I would not have done that,” or “I can’t believe they actually did that,” or “What could she have been thinking when she did that?”

Ask yourself why do you want to be bothered with deeds that did not cause harm to another? Ask yourself why do you want to be bothered with trivial things that do not affect godliness? Minding your own business proves to be complex at times. It’s about knowing and understanding when to help and when to leave a matter alone. Are you the type of person that needs to jump in and rescue a daughter or a son when a lesson needs to be learned? Did your son spend his allowance for the month before the month was up and you say “that’s OK, here’s \$20” rather than remaining in silence and allowing the consequences to teach the lesson? What lesson did you teach your son by not minding your own business and allowing him to mind his?

Minding your own business and staying proactive are important in enhancing positivism. A Biblical example is Joseph the son of Jacob who refused to comply with the lust of his master’s wife, shunning her allurements and her threats. Other instances of such behavior include staying away from gossip, talking behind others’ backs, and trying to figure out other people. When a new member comes to your church, they are likely to be anxious, shy, and worried. As a result, they may fall into some mistakes. Do you try to help them when you see them in need of any help or do you immediately occupy yourself with their attitudes, analyzing every move they take, sizing them up or down according to your personal preferences, and finally determining their background?

6. Focus Your Attention Where It Is Relevant and Profitable

“For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God”
(Hebrews 3:3-4).

What is really important? Overwhelmed people are tempted to forget what's really important. Too many responsibilities and goals per day blur the clear vision to priorities. A person needs to spend energy in the most effective and important things. Reducing the momentum of hurry and speed and taking time to examine what is realistic and making a list of what needs to be done for the day may help. Certainly rushing out the door for work or school, getting everywhere late and later, losing your patience, and skipping meals conflict with the Godly day. It also creates a negative feeling about the work accomplished.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ‘Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors, when I said, ‘This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!’ ‘Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place’”
(Job 38:4-12).

Now that puts relevance into perspective...

7. Live This Day to Its Fullest

Tertullian C. 200 taught...

“The stars too will fall from Heaven... the mountains will melt like wax. Even the sea will be no more. Now if any person were to go so far as to suppose that all these passages should be figuratively interpreted, he will still be unable to deprive them of the true fulfillment of those issues that must come to pass, just as they have been written. For figurative speech necessarily arises out of realities.”

The Holy Bible does not tell us when we will depart, but it does tell us we will certainly die. Here are some questions that may serve as a check list. At the end of each day, ask yourself:

- Have you done those things today which would be considered important for your tomorrow’s salvation—positive things that really matter?
- Did you read the Holy Bible with your children?
- Do they know the story of Esau and Jacob?
- Do they understand how important it is to be fair, honest, accept the differences of each other, and love each other as siblings?
- Do your wife and children know the story of Leah the disfavored one? While, she was not the most beautiful, the

most loved nor the youngest, she was blessed by God with more sons than the most beautiful, most loved, and younger wife.

- Did you pray today as a family and ask God to guide you through your day?
- Did you give all honor and glory to God on this day for the positive things in your life?
- Did you do a kind act at work or school? Or did you follow the same routine like everybody else whether at work or fun? On what positive outcome will the sun set today?
- What distinguished you as a child of God on this day which God Himself has given you?

We are called alike as children of God and as children of promise. God does not judge us by our outward appearances or circumstances.

“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me, God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me” (Galatians 2:6).

How we chose to live, whether with a positive or negative attitude, is up to us.

“Although no one is able to speak with certainty of God the Father, it is nevertheless possible to gain some knowledge of Him by means of the visible creation and the natural feelings of the human mind, moreover, it is possible for such knowledge to be confirmed from the sacred Scripture” (*Origen c. 225*).

We must strive to gain peace and positivism regarding any and all situations in life. Negative feelings must not be allowed to control our thoughts:

“If we all derive our origin from one man whom God created, we are clearly of one blood. Therefore it must be considered the greatest wickedness to hate a man-even if he is guilty... For if we are all animated and enlivened by one God what else are we than brothers” (*Lactantius c. 304*).

Chapter Five

Christian Youth Are Not to “Fit In” But to “Stand Out”

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty, and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

Very often I see the youth concerned about “fitting in” with friends at school or in the society in which they live. Looking pretty, building strong muscular bodies, having popular friends, and wearing fashionable clothes are the attributes and preoccupations of most of modern time young generations. Yet, are such desires attainable? Are such desires worth all the anxiety and stress experienced to attain them? I think, given the earthly fleeting state of the human nature, transient outward appearances,

ephemeral situational friendships, and constantly changing fashion apparel (the price of which most often determines its popularity rather than its practicality), form an endless race with no finish line on the horizon.

Appearance is a constant changing phenomenon during our growth and development over which one has no control. Popularity is generally a matter of perception, and social friends are circumstantial, usually coming in and going out of our life through the years. So, where is the stability in these often unprofitably sought out attributes? If that is the nature of earthly things, why is it then so important to “fit in”, when one truly will never find the absolute and final match?

For a Christian youth, the focus of life should not be on the “fitting in” but rather on the “standing out”. That type of mindset makes a youth sensitive, wise, and resilient, capable of withstanding life’s wavering circumstances. “Standing out” produces character which assists in developing confidence. For those faithful Christian youth, character building, spiritual growth, and participating in fellowship with other Christians who share the same beliefs lay the foundation for long term eternal success.

“He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God” (Romans 2:28-29).

Who “Stood Out”

The best examples of those who chose to stand out rather than go with the flow are the twelve disciples. They had been ordinary men in their society following its cultural norms before they were asked to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some were fishermen, most of them were Galileans, interwoven with one another as friends from Capernaum, and many came from extended families. For example, before becoming a disciple privileged to write the Holy Word of God, St. Matthew was a tax collector and an unpopular publican. A Jewish tax collector was the lowest social order. Perhaps a Jewish tax collector can be likened to, on the same social spectrum, a harlot or outcast. Thus, we can assume he was definitely not respected, not of the right kind of associates, and certainly not allowed in the synagogue. Yet, we are told in the Holy Gospel he wrote with his own hand:

“As Jesus passed on from Capernaum, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him” (Matthew 9:9).

What Made Them “Stand Out”

The answer lies in their determination to follow Jesus. Fully committed in fulfilling their mission, the disciples knew no half measure of responsibility. Their discipleship to the Lord left no room for worldly popularity, nor were they ever concerned with what others possessed. Covetousness did not defile their hearts which they kept purely dedicated to serving their Master. As their faith grew stronger and their purpose clearer, “fitting in” was replaced with “standing out” for the faith with which

they had become indoctrinated. Because of their devotion and commitment, there was no plan 'B' "for if they should fail". On the contrary, they were determined to die for their cause or rather their Master's, aiming at one goal and one goal only, "*to enter into the joy of their Lord*" (Matthew 25: 21). That is why they were destined to succeed because they allowed the Holy Spirit to work in them to accomplish God's will. The world did not see the humble, the meek, the patient, or the quiet in their service, and they did not care because they were sure of the One who could see and reward not with fame, earthly richness, worldly pleasures, but with Divine joy and peace that they experienced both during their earthly life and will continue to experience in eternity. That unfathomable peace and joy made them welcome pain, need, hardships, and aspire for martyrdom in order to extend that joy in heaven.

Thus, by obeying and following the Lord Jesus Christ and "standing out", the twelve apostles were transformed into revered leaders and had great and respectable teaching authority in the early Church. From the ends of the earth, yesterday and today, men know the names of the twelve apostles and much about the historical missions of those men who sinned and repented, whose faith became stronger, that paid dearly for the price of commitment, and who until the day of Pentecost did not comprehend fully well the power of God. The apostles-inspired teachings were the rule in the early Church. Furthermore, the New Testament Holy Scriptures were written by the apostles or those close to them.

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

This power, God’s power, helped twelve simple, common men to spread the Holy Gospel, founded the Church, heal the sick, cast out demons, and see the Lord Jesus Christ in His Glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (witnessed by three of the apostles) before His crucifixion and death.

Certainly their origin was common, but through learning to pray, forgive, serve, and evangelize in a matter of perhaps a year and a few months, they were able to convert the world. No lengthy formal learning in the synagogue preceded the astounding accomplishments of those simple men who followed the Man from Nazareth. He called them with one simple command: “follow Me”, and the twelve apostles unquestioningly obeyed without even giving themselves time to think of any repercussions that might result from such a blind obedience to someone about whom they did not have much knowledge.

Who Enabled Them to “Stand Out”

We can then deduce that the Lord Himself did the shaping of His disciples in order for them to “stand out” and not blend into society. He took the lowly, common individuals, not from the temple, nor from among the learned, and renowned scholars of the day, nor those of extraordinary talents, or the wealthy upper class. Rather He chose the first followers from among those who were very simple, willing to follow Him, and put Him first in their lives.

Indeed, following the Lord Jesus Christ did not mean popularity or admiration, but was a series of obstacles, fears, and challenges.

Adversity rather than prosperity was the accepted norm for their lives. Following the Lord meant understanding through sacrifice, learning through patience, and developing a growing understanding through His teachings. Discipleship to Christ meant a relentless faith—the fruit of which was indescribable peace and hope for the better and the everlasting life. Thus, following the Lord meant “standing out”, influencing others not to worry about “fitting in” and blending with the rest.

“The things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2).

As St. Clement of Alexandria wrote,

“It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope,
nor the endurance of one day. Rather, ‘he that
endures to the end will be saved’ (c. 195).

May the Lord bless you as you “stand out” for Him.

Chapter Six

Setting Boundaries in Relationships

Living an exemplary life within the framework of oneness in marriage is the aim of every couple who strive toward a happy married life. An ideally holy life is the one recommended in the Holy Bible. However, such a life does not and should not mean one without boundaries set to our daily routines, and the Holy Bible should not be quoted in the wrong context or under wrong circumstances.

The first application of ‘boundaries’ resides in differentiating between what is and what is not within our responsibility. It is also the ability to say ‘No’ to people when they inconsiderably ask too much of us, thus, putting our life at the risk of chaos and confusion.

Setting boundaries seems to be the problem of many spiritual people because of their innate love and readiness for the service. They are unwilling to say ‘No’ for fear of hurting the others. However, setting limits defines and delineates the starting and finishing point of our services. How should I act when people want to exhaust my time, money, and energy and I feel I cannot give more?

The key answer to this question applies to the heart. The heart needs to be protected because life flows into it and from it. Boundaries act like a fence to a building protecting it against vandalism and spiritual and psychological looting.

God's Opinion Concerning Boundaries

One may ask whether God is for establishing limits to offering our services. The Holy Trinity shows us how God respects boundaries in that each of the Hypostasis carries His own duties without impinging on the other. For example,

1. Knowledge of the times belongs to the Father. *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"* (Acts 1:7).
2. Judgment is left to the Son. *"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son"* (John 5:22).
3. Counseling belongs to the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father only. *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you"* (John 14:26).

God himself is the best example for defining boundaries, for He in all His love for us will not do our part. He will only do the things we cannot do. For example, we could not save ourselves. In the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ would not perform the miracle before the stone was removed nor would He remove it, but He ordered the people to do so. God does not want us to be slack nor lazy but he does want us to set limits and boundaries and know how to say 'No' at the right time. Our Lord believes in the need for rest and

rejuvenation as prerequisites for continuing to serve effectively. In the Holy Gospel account according to St. Mark 1:35, we read about the Lord taking His disciples to a different place in order to move away from the pressing multitude. He was not escaping from them but rather after having served them, He wanted to be able to pray and His disciples to take some rest.

What is the Motive?

We ought to search within ourselves for the motive behind giving so much of our time, energy, health, and resources. If it is anything else other than love springing from within us, it will be futile and countless. St. Paul expressed this precept in 1 Corinthians 13. The exemplary case in point of perfectly genuine compliance is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who while offering Himself as a blameless Lamb of offering on our behalf on the cross willfully and sacrificially, did stand up before His opponents inquiring of them a legitimate reason for striking Him on His face.

People without Boundaries

Sociologists and psychologists typified those who have problems defining their territories and setting up their fences into five types:

1. The Compliant Person: A compliant person's gates are always open and he says 'Yes' to the right and the wrong, to the good and the bad. Such people do not have the ability to say 'No' to a task they cannot perform for one reason or the other. The reason is mainly conditioned behavior perhaps resulting from parental discipline of rejecting a 'No' from their children. Such screaming and yelling parents forget that in refusing a

legitimate 'No', they are intimidating and inhibiting their children and disarm them of the power to discriminate between what deserves acceptance and what deserves rejection. In so doing, they are conditioning them to accepting an open ended 'Yes' to all the evil the world offers them. If Joseph did not learn to say 'No', he would have fallen easily into sin.

2. The Guilt-Driven Person: These people are harsh on themselves and full of self-blame for things for which God does not convict them. St. Paul described these people as possessing "*weak conscience*" (1Corinthians 8:7).

3. The Fearful Person: Their deeds are prompted by fear of losing other people's acceptance, or arousing their anger, punishment, and/or devaluation or depreciation.

4. The Avoidance Person: This person's gates are closed to the good and bad. Such people, under the misconstrued concept of "independence", refuse help either out of feeling of unworthiness or haughtiness. Such behavior is described in the book of the Desert Fathers as lacking love when refusing to offer help and lacking humility when refusing to receive help. Independence does not annihilate interdependence. Life is a series of interchanging, give-and-take behaviors. On this basis, God created Eve for procreation and multiplication and intended for us to worship Him collectively in the Church, His body without the construction of high impenetrable walls. We enter Baptism as individuals and emerge as members.

5. The Controlling Person: These people cannot tolerate a 'No'. They do what they desire but deny others their right to say 'No' to a service they cannot perform. They use either of two techniques:

- a. Manipulation, a device commonly used by Satan and dominantly by women. Through manipulative lying, Satan convinced Eve to sin and she in turn, through the same technique, convinced her husband to eat from the forbidden fruit and disobeyed God, the source of their happiness and peace.
- b. Aggression, a device used mostly by men through which they appeal to violence in order to obtain what they want. Below is a chart showing the correlation between types of personalities and barriers.

	Inability to Hear	Inability to Say
Yes	Avoidant	Irresponsive
No	Controller	Compliant

The Holy Bible approves of the concept of ‘No’ as a protective weapon when applied at the right place and right time. *“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one”* (Matthew 5:37). Parents should train themselves to accept a ‘No’ from their children. Children should be trained to say ‘No’ to bad company and wrong choices. Husbands and wives should learn how to prioritize options and services before they push themselves to the limit and lose hold of the essentials which are God, their families, and their children. Setting boundaries and saying ‘No’ at the right place and the right time help us to conduct a peaceful and fruitful life.

Chapter Seven

Patterns of Marital Problems

Love, unity, and continuity are a few of God's benevolent intentions for and of a family. Why then do we not find this to be always the case in all families? The answer resides in the negligence of preserving these traits by allowing problems to go rampant without analysis or solutions to them.

Patterns of Marital Problems

What is a happy family? A happy family is not one with zero problems but a unit whose members know how to work out their conflicts with the help of God. Disagreements are bound to take place among people because of many variables and differences including gender, education, upbringing, level of maturity, understanding, and biological and psychological factors. Allowing these disagreements to develop into unhealthy problems will lead to dissensions, and eventually, some horrific outcomes. Problems in marriage seem to take one of four patterns.

1. Escalation

Escalating is responding to a negative attitude with another similar or more intensely negative one. Negativism is very powerfully destructive and unfortunately very common. There is

usually no creativity in negativity. It is fast and detrimental.

One negative response annuls one thousand positive ones that came prior to it. An explicit example of the awful effect of negativism is given in Ecclesiastes: *“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor, So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.”* (Ecclesiastes 10:1) *“It is honorable for a man to stop striving, Since any fool can start a quarrel”* (Proverbs 20:3) and *“A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back”* (Proverbs 29:11). These verses provide the advice and remedy.

Usually it is easier to depict others’ faults while minimizing or totally ignoring our own mistakes. All the law is summarized in “love your neighbor as yourself”. If we devour one another, we will destroy each other. Do not allow to others what you would not allow to yourself.

Emotional abuse is worse than physical abuse. Lack of self-control in such situations leads to a lot of hurt that may not be easily erased or forgotten. *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise”* (Proverb 12:15). Lack of self-control is manifested in the choice of the most hurting words.

Augmenting problems to the extent of threatening with divorce or separation robs the family, especially children, of the feeling of security. In his epistle, St. James lays the important foundation: *“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless”* (James 1:26). We may say things that we do not mean just to hurt others. Learn how to stop an escalating problem and develop conflict resolution skills from the Holy Bible: *“not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you*

were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (1Peter 3:9) and *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Proverbs 15:1).

Examples from the Holy Bible whereby escalating a problem was cut short and a hot situation was turned into a soothing balm is Abigail’s solution of the problem that escalated between her husband and King David (1Samuel 25).

2. Invalidation

Invalidation is the attitude of invalidating, putting down, or belittling the other, intentionally or unintentionally, or just for the sake of what we may consider as fun or funny. Invalidation can extend to include the belittling of another person’s opinion, personality, feelings, work, or thoughts. This process is well described in *“Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.”* (Proverbs 25:20).

St. Paul describes the antidote to invalidation, *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”* (Ephesians 4:29) Christ’s verdict on invalidation is clear, *“And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”* (Matthew 5:22). Christ was always positive with people and taught them to be so. This is clear in His response to the woman with the alabaster flask of fragrant oil at Simon’s house labeling her a woman with great love, praising her for doing what the others considered as waste, and also rewarding her with the long term reward of being memorialized for her deed throughout the ages (Matthew 26:6-13). With the sinful woman (John 8:2-12), He told her straight out that He was not about to condemn her.

With the Samaritan woman (John 4:17-18), He saw her as a candid truthful woman. On the cross, He saw His crucifiers as ignorant and not guilty of what they were doing. So, He asked forgiveness and judgment for them. Christ is described as “*A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory*” (Matthew 12:20).

3. Negative Interpretation

Negative interpretation takes place when the speaker's intention is twisted from what it originally meant to what the listeners' intends for it to mean.

An example is a wife's interpretation of her husband's gift to her as a bribe to have her do something for him or as a cover up for something he has done. People's claim that they can read and interpret people's thoughts and intentions is totally nonbiblical as it is written, “*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?*” (1Corinthians 2:11).

Wrong or negative interpretations lead to despair and giving up on each other. This process of interpreting things according to our beliefs and desires is a dangerous tool to use in educating youngsters. St. Paul admonishes against it saying “*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God*” (1Corinthians 4:5).

Positive and realistic thinking are both very important tools in interacting with people. Love “*rejoices in the truth,*” (1Corinthians 13:6). Love “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1Corinthians 13:7).

Doubting the intentions of the others hurts terribly. Also, trying to fish for mistakes, feeling satisfied by catching others at their faults, or doubting or negatively interpreting other people's intentions damages relationships. There is a big difference between objective facts and subjective opinions. For example, it is a fact if a husband is late coming home, but it is her opinion if the wife interprets this tardiness as negligence of her. Negative subjective interpretations may lead to destruction of the family oneness.

4. The "Hide & Seek" Pattern

This pattern is exhibited more by husbands who make an effort to avoid confrontation and any attempt to bring their issues to the light. This avoidance could either be overt or covert. Men avoid confrontation for three reasons:

- No intention to change: In trying to avoid commitment to change, some men avoid discussion.
- Feeling of insecurity: Unable to bear the consequences of humiliation and hurt as a result of losing in a discussion, some men avoid discussion and communication.
- Delusion: False intention of avoiding an escalating a problem which in reality is just mere avoidance of discussing it.

The Holy Bible teaches us to evade avoidance. St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, says, *"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another."* (Ephesians 4:25) St. Paul urges openness and expression of emotions without hurting each other. *"Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Prolonging the time of separation opens the door wide to Satan to increase the breach that started in the oneness of the family.

Four patterns within which family problems seem to fall exist and of which spouses should be aware in their attempt to analyze their conflicts and to find solutions and an end to them. A one thousand mile journey starts with a step. No change comes around without a start. Our Lord is a Lord of reconciliation.

Therefore, put your confidence in the Lord who has given the commandments along with the assistance to fulfill them. Starting with the self is the best place to start without waiting for the other to initiate change or reconciliation. Breaking negative patterns is the most practical method of change. Humility and love are the two surest roads to tolerance, reconciliation, and accommodation of one another bearing in mind that change will not happen with the blink of an eye, or overnight. David the psalmist used these strategies with Saul the king who wanted to kill him until he had him pronounce that David was better than him (1Samuel 24).

Chapter Eight

Oneness in Marriage

“That they may be one as We are”

The concept of Oneness is the heart of the Holy Trinity and the essence of Christianity. Our Lord Jesus Christ, before going to the cross, in His last prayer, communicated a number of things with the Father and prayed specifically for the establishment of Oneness among the disciples, *“that they may be one as We are”*, thus, confirming its existence in the Holy Trinity and the need for its establishment among His disciples and followers.

This Oneness, according to our Lord, has its source and is secured in the knowledge of God. *“Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are”* (John 17:11).

A few verses later, the Holy Spirit through St. John records, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and*

have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

Thus, we learn the importance of ‘Oneness’ in the eyes of God and the urgency of its presence amongst the disciples, all believers, and subsequently between spouses. Along with praying for oneness, He also prayed for sanctification and glorification, the three being interdependent and interrelated. This lecture will address oneness in marriage through the following points:

1. Oneness and Covenant.
 - a. Examples of Covenant-Based Oneness
 - i. The Holy Trinity
 - ii. The Incarnation of the Logos
 - iii. The Body of Christ
 - b. Conditions for the establishment of a Covenant
 - i. Before God
 - ii. Before witnesses
 - iii. Pondering its value
 - iv. Pondering its seriousness
2. Oneness and Permanence
3. Oneness and Identity
4. Oneness and Openness
5. Oneness and Barriers
 - a. Fear of Rejection
 - b. Selfishness
 - c. Ignorance

In the Holy Book of Genesis, chapters 1 & 2, after God had created everything, He found everything good except for one

thing which He saw needed. So, He created Eve, and only after that, God saw everything was “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31). From that moment following the creation of Eve, the human race was sealed in the mode of a relationship with God, with one another, and the importance of marriage was, thus, established. “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31). Just a like diamond which has many features, likewise, oneness in marriage carries many aspects such as physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and intellectual?

Oneness and the Covenant

Marriage is a covenant and not a contract. Signing an agreement contract before marriage annuls the essence of marriage because in material life, every signed agreement presupposes a disagreement and subsequently a guard against the breaching of such an agreement. Marriage, however, is a mystical and mysterious unity and covenant. In the Old Testament a covenant between any two people would be established, by blood, slaughtering an animal into two parts, and walking down the blood path between the two halves. Thus, such a covenant would not be broken except by the death of one of the partners. God used this method in establishing the covenant with Abraham, God being the One to walk down the blood path signifying the coming redemption through Jesus Christ and the sealed covenant between God and humanity.

The prayers of the Crowning Ceremony, specifically called so because of the essence of the ceremony revolving around

the process of crowning the bride and bridegroom as kings, prophets, and priests, depends largely on the scripture, “*And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’*” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Mentioning divorce at the onset of marriage cannot be found in any suitable choice of Holy Scripture. On a deeper level, this gospel emphasizes the oneness in marriage which is the work of God in a mystical and mysterious way, “*this mystery is great*” (Ephesians 5:32). “*Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate*” (Mark 10:9).

Examples of Covenant-Based Oneness

- a. *The Holy Trinity:*** No matter how we try to explain the Oneness in the Holy Trinity the pen and thoughts fall short of doing a adequate job. The questions of “how” and “why” remain unsatisfied and we have no choice but to receive the mystery by faith and in faith.
- b. *The Incarnation of the Logos:*** Christ’s humanity and divinity are perfectly united in a mystical and mysterious way without mingling or alteration.
- c. *The Holy Body of Christ:*** The Church, the body of Christ, is described by St. Paul in Ephesians 5:31 as unity in diversity and likened to the unity between the bride and her groom. This scripture is also read in the crowning ceremony. “*For this reason*

a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). Looking circumspectly into this interrelationship, we discover a unity among three persons: Christ, the bride, and the bridegroom legitimately giving this unity a supernatural, mystical strength, and power. *“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Conditions of Establishing a Covenant

1. ***Before God:*** Marriage has to take place in Church before God’s altar. The Crowning Ceremony opens with the prayer, “In the name of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Founder of the statute of perfection and the Author of the law of graces, we complete in this Orthodox assembly and before the altar of the Lord of hosts, the union of possession and the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son, the virgin (...) to his betrothed, the blessed Orthodox daughter, the virgin(...).” “Now since you have been present at this blessed time before the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts and His holy altar and this Orthodox gathering”. The Western tradition of receiving the bride from her father is not quite exact because the bridegroom in reality receives her from Christ. “Receive, O bridegroom, a bride who is yours, Jesus Christ has given her to you.”
2. ***Before witnesses:*** A marriage must be attended by people who are to be held accountable and responsible witnesses and not mere observers.
3. ***Pondering its value:*** In marriage, a change of the self is brought about by the Holy Spirit whereby mutual ownership

is given over to love and possession but not to manipulation and aggravation.

- 4. *Pondering its seriousness:*** Once the covenant of marriage is established, there is no going back but rather, going forward in unity and growth in love and understanding of each other. The type of love in marriage based on respect for one another at all times is the same type of unconditional love that Christ has for His Church. The priest recites: “According to this rite and this law, so also the rest of the fathers, the believers, took one wife in purity and cleanness for the sake of descendants and childbearing.” The concept of “Covenant” makes marriage unbreakable and divorce inapplicable in an environment of mystical and mysterious unity.

Oneness and Permanence

Permanence implies security in marriage. This security should be one that emerges out of love and reflects the wonderful mystery of oneness with joy, confidence, and growth in love. Permanence is not about having a secure position without enjoying the emotional warmth that exists in it. A marriage that lacks love is permanence of misery and unhappiness and a time bomb for considering divorce. However, God expressed His rejection of divorce overtly, “*For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’ Says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.*” (Malachi 2:16).

Oneness and Identity

It is written in the Holy Bible, “*And the two shall become one flesh’, so then they are no longer two, but one flesh*” (Mark 10:8). The question is:

“Which flesh, the male’s or the female’s?” Does this question presuppose loss of identity or melting of boundaries. Not at all, the mystery of oneness, by definition, is retention of identity whereby the couple will be “us” and not “you and me”, both complimenting each other (1Corinthians 12). In the mystery of the Holy Trinity, each hypostasis has its distinct identity. In the Incarnation, both the divinity and the humanity of Christ carried their identities without mingling or confusion. Therefore, it is only logical and acceptable to see this unity and identity together without any loss. Also, each hypostasis has its distinct role and boundary. Judgment has been given to the Father, Redemption to the Son, and Consolation to the Holy Spirit.

Creativity resides in the growth of this oneness in marriage and destruction in the lack therein. Attempts to negate the identity of any of the two, will result in resistance expressed in emotional divorce whereby a couple live under one roof but are totally emotionally detached. God intended unity between a man and a woman, otherwise He would have created two men or two women.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda expresses
this unique identity saying,

“It is not for a lion to chirp nor a bird to roar.”

Oneness and Openness

The concept of being naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25) represents vulnerability, acceptance, openness, accessibility, innocence, freedom, and excitement. It is the ability to uncover all of one’s thoughts and ideas without the fear of being rejected

or put to shame. This should be the grounds on which to stand when looking for a partner with whom to share your life. Searching for someone to change or turn into a serving slave will not lead to oneness nor subsequent success in marriage.

Oneness and Barriers

1. Fear of Rejection

After creating Adam and Eve, God's command to them was not to eat from the tree in the center of the Garden of Eden. That command was not so much a prohibition in itself, but an establishment of the concept of "boundaries". Satan, however, deceived and deluded them into thinking the opposite (Genesis 3:7). Exactly as he said, their eyes were opened, but to their nakedness and shame. They hastened to cover their loins. One would wonder why they did not seek to cover their eyes with which they saw the fruit, or their ears with which they listened to Satan, or even their mouth with which they ate. The loins signified their differences onto which their eyes were opened.

Those differences became a hazard and a potential to conflict. Thus, the need for protection emerged out of fear of rejection. In reply to God's calling of him, Adam replied that because he "was afraid", he hid himself. Adam's response emphasized the need for protection out of fear, not only from his wife, but also from God. The same thing happens in marriage when the oneness is threatened by fear of exposing thoughts, ideas, and the concealment of negative feelings. It is important to learn to deal with our differences, making them work for us and not

against us. This can only be achieved through love. Love covers an array of mistakes.

2. Selfishness

Selfishness becomes evident when the motives behind a marriage are imperfect, colored by personal benefits or egoistic precepts. An abusive person is someone who does not understand the perfect desires behind marriage. Therefore, such a person is always in search of what satisfies his ego. Once this ego is threatened, they appeal to physical or emotional abuse as an ego defense mechanism. St. James describes this clearly in his epistle. *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”* (James 4:1-6).

Wars, strife, and hatred, spring from one source which is selfish, imperfect motives. In Christ we are set free to love and serve without being afraid of being hurt (Galatians 5:13-15). St. Paul admonishes using freedom loosely and abusively. In 1 Corinthians 13, we see love in action. In the prayers of the Crowning Ceremony, the priest’s advice to the bridegroom is to

“Excel in doing all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and hasten to do that which will gladden her heart”. Christ’s belief is that the world will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another.

3. Ignorance

Not knowing what to do better is a very serious barrier to oneness and a threat to marriage. The remedy to this ailment is our Lord’s teaching, “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 7:12). Wanting to do what is right and actually doing it are two totally different things. To have a great, happy, and joyful marriage requires ability to forgive, understand differences, and clarify and define expectations. Practicing comes before acquiring. Practice virtue and then you will acquire it.

To experience the God-given gift of oneness in marriage, spouses need to know that oneness is an unbreakable covenant with God intended to be a permanent building of the foundation which is comprised of love, openness, tolerance, and understanding. The lack of such a strong foundation will inevitably lead to the formation of strong barriers resulting from fear, selfishness, and ignorance.

Chapter Nine

How to Protect Oneness in Marriage

*“And the Lord God said,
It is not good that man should be alone,
I will make him a helper comparable to him.”* (Genesis 2:18)

Oneness in marriage was God’s intention from the beginning. Eve was created specifically for companionship and intimacy with Adam. *“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him.’”* (Genesis 2:18). That is why she was born of Adam’s side. This intimacy is holistic and diverse in quality and quantity ranging from spiritual, physical, and emotional levels. In the Holy Book of Ecclesiastes, in four verses (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12), King Solomon defines a friendless, a lonely person, and displays the outcome of this loneliness.

“There is one alone, without companion: he has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, ‘For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?’ This also is vanity and a grave misfortune. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12).

Looking for a life partner should ideally be looking for someone to be friend and with whom to become intimate for a lifelong duration. Searching for a spouse to argue with or boss around is definitely not normal nor the right intention behind marriage. Intimacy mirrors a lot of positive, interrelated outcomes in marriage among which are:

- a. Companionship:* a noble human relation in which two people feel comfortable in the presence of each other, get support from one another, open up to each other and share everything together in a mutually edifying manner.
- b. Productivity:* the natural outcome of intimacy because productivity is a sign of life.
- c. Support:* an emotionally mutually required act that gives a sense of security and provides happiness.
- d. Warmth of feelings:* the offspring as well as the parent of companionship. Warm feelings cannot exist in the absence of companionship.
- e. Protection:* important for the continuity of the human race. Likewise within the family unit, protection preserves the family from extinction.
- f. Sharing:* the fountain that waters companionship between husband and wife and is proof of the existence of companionship. This means being able without inhibition

or reservation to share genuine and deep feelings of fear, aspirations, desires, dreams, pains, and aches in the prevalence of true love. Adam and Eve's experience of living "naked and unashamed" represent the concept of being able to share everything together unreservedly. Our Lord Jesus Christ, raising the status of His disciples from 'slaves' to 'friends', established the fundamental precept of sharing when He shared with His disciples and subsequently with all of us, all that He had heard from the Father. "*I have made known to you*" (John 15:15).

g. Challenge: a natural force springing from the normal life challenges. Occasionally, a true friend may act harshly on a friend and play the role of a corrector. This is biblically accepted and recommended, "*faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*" (Proverbs 27:6). Under the protective umbrella of true love, correction of a mistake will not threaten the oneness because, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4:18), and true love is retrievable and restorable.

These aspects are the by-products as well as the constituents of friendship. If friendship in marriage is initiated and preserved, all these attributes will be practiced and preserved too and oneness in marriage will be secured.

Obstacles in Friendship

- **Lack of quality time together.** Many forces compete over our daily schedule and draw people apart. Ten years ago, the main reason for divorce was infidelity. Nowadays it is

the preoccupation with the internet which, addictively takes people to another world different than theirs. Amidst all these forces, friendship takes a back seat showing what priority it takes in people's lives.

- ***Loss of warm feelings.*** This results from the loss of intimacy which is brought about by the neglect to spend quality time together. Warm feelings get replaced by boredom which might open the door to sinful thoughts and sinful acts.
- ***Loss of closeness.*** This takes place when sharing disappears from the life of a couple and gets replaced by barriers to reach each other in intimacy.
- ***Persistence of bruises and emotionally painful memories.*** This results when sharing gets abused and misused. In a moment of intimacy, when all the barriers are down and hearts feel at ease to open up and secrets are disclosed and old memories are retrieved, it so happens that those secrets turn into weapons of attack by partners. The innocence of “naked and unashamed” is lost. Adam and Eve symbolically covering themselves with fig leaves announced the loss of innocence and the inability to trust indefinitely. Example, a wife, in moments of vulnerability, shares with her husband painful childhood memories or information about her family background that otherwise she would not disclose to anybody else.

How to protect Intimacy in Marriage

Friendship in marriage, once established, needs to be protected and nurtured to ensure its safety and duration. There are lots of happy stories of successful marriages in which oneness has

been sustained and maintained. However, there are equally many sad cases of broken marriages just because intimacy and friendship started to fade away and was allowed to drift into the abyss of intolerance and ignorance of the nature of things and one another. The protection has to start by acquiring spiritual discernment that needs to underscore any practical protective measures. St. Peter draws the spiritual map saying:

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:2-7).

If we know that:

- We have God’s divine power to live a life of godliness.
- Jesus Himself has given us by His glory and virtue great promises.
- We are partakers of His divine nature.
- We need, with faith, to practice self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love.

Then, it becomes possible to protect oneness and friendship in marriage by taking into consideration some practices such as:

1. Provide the time for drawing nearer to each other. This means:

- a. Set apart specific time for being present for each other in warmth and love away from existing unsolved issues. During these times, you need to focus on each other with appreciation and intimacy. There is much less quality time when there is less quantity time. Do not allow your busy life to rob you of this specific time you need for each other. During this time, it is forbidden to discuss any problems or skirmishes. It is surprising to see how powerful it can be for a couple to regain their friendship during such set times.
- b. Let it be your goal to turn all your lifetime into a friendship mood and the exception is the time set for problem solving. Above all, do not let circumstances control your life but rise above all situations and control them.
- c. Listen like friends normally listen attentively and patiently, remembering that your spouse is not your enemy, and therefore, no need to utilize your defense mechanism.
- d. Listen with objectivity knowing that your spouse is seeking a listener and not a corrector or an admonisher, (someone with an immediate plan to change or improve him/her). Avoid giving unwanted advice.
- e. Avoid interrupting because interruptions to a troubled heart troubles the burdened heart even more. In addition, interrupting the speaker is a sign of a bad listener and defected communication.

2. Learn how to handle conflicts.

Do not spend all your time and energy on problems and conflicts because this will lead to hardening the heart and

feelings. Escalating fights result in bruises and hurts and lead to permanent damage to relations. Learn to forgive and move forward in a proactive way remembering that all human beings are prone to mistakes and have their shortcomings. Friendship flourishes in forgiveness. Never use shared secrets as weapons in a fight and means to belittle or degrade your partner.

Oneness is the heart and essence of marriage. It interprets God's goal and aim behind instituting the family unit. This oneness is defined as the dissolving of the two persons in the marriage covenant without loss of identity, personality, interests, intellects, or talents. This oneness gives birth to friendship and is born out of friendship. The two concepts are intertwined and intermingled inseparably and invisibly. Oneness can be subjected to nurturing and preserving factors or starving, stifling, and destroying factors depending on how wise the couple conduct their married life. Choose to nurture your married life and friendship or else, you will be like the man Solomon King described:

“There is one alone, without companion: he has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, ‘For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?’ This also is vanity and a grave misfortune. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12).

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