

From Broken to Built Again

by Miodrag Zivanovic
President
South-East European Union Conference
Trans-European Division

More than two millennia ago, Mt. Carmel was a focal point of events in the history of Israel. What happened there would remain forever etched in the minds of God's people and provide a paradigm for revival and restoration. The Scripture says, "And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. Elijah took twelve stones . . . and built an altar" (1 Kings 18:30-32). God's servant Elijah took that which was broken and built it again. The altar of sacrifice foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. Elijah took the stones of this altar, which had fallen into disrepute, and erected them again. In this way He presented afresh God's plan of redemption.

Today, as in Israel of old, there is the need to lift up Christ again in our homes and marriages. God is calling modern Elijahs—in New York, Paris, Sydney and other towns and cities like Hermon and Leptokari—to attend to this important work. He is calling us to the work of Elijah in our homes to take that which is now broken and build it again in His name.

Family Brokenness

Despite the dire prognosis of global warming, the worries over food shortages and the horrifying reports of the AIDS epidemic, these are of less importance than the downward spiral of family brokenness reflected clearly in the reports and statistics about marriage and family life. Family has always been the bulwark of society that enabled people to cope with disasters around them—warming them against the chill winds of turbulent change, supplying love and support in times of famine, war and shortages of every kind.

Marriage relationships are shaking, crumbling, falling. Like the ancient broken altar on Carmel, marriages lie shattered, their rocks strewn about. In some cases, the very foundational elements have been ground into powder, incapable of being rebuilt. Divorce, hurting hearts, and damaged emotions for which there exists no surgical repair—this is the reality of family brokenness around us.

Young people fall into crime at younger and younger ages. Where once perhaps there were toy guns, now real weapons are in their hands with a growing number of shooting tragedies resulting from these weapons being used against family members, fellow students and teachers. After Columbine, Virginia Technical University and Finland, where will the next massacre occur?

Perhaps we should not be surprised with all of this. So often the first experiences children have are not with their families in worship or in relationship-building, but in watching the shooting, the criminal minds and the so-called heroes of the TV screen placed at the focal point in the home.

The lips of parents are used, not for forming kisses and speaking tender, encouraging words to their children, but for smoking cigarettes. Children will grow all too quickly to imitate these gestures, and many of them will go beyond tobacco to use hard drugs.

Where is the family heading? What is its future? Have the issues of globalization become such a priority that we neglect the nearer territory of the home and family? Do we really think we can have prosperity and happiness in the world while ignoring happiness and prosperity in families? The brokenness in families is of such severity it would seem that someone wants everything of divine origin to be rooted out and demolished totally, not just spread about like the altar-rocks on Mt. Caramel.

Family: A Heavenly Project

The great Creator's creation project not only included the creation and decoration of the earth as an integral part of the universe, but also the creation of the marriage relationship. Think of it—alongside majestic Himalayas, tumbling Niagaras and immense oceans, God put the crown of His creation, the family. Wonderful! Magnificent! Angels must have celebrated then, even as we in our individual families celebrate now with a newly married couple.

God took great delight in creating the human family and considers their communion with each other, their togetherness, as important as His own relationship with human beings. The marriage covenant between the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, was the very first covenant—earlier than the covenant on Mount Sinai—and it bears God's signature right beside that of Eve and Adam.

Oh, God, how incomprehensible are Your secrets, Your intentions and Your deeds! The families You created are to be small beehives from which You want honey to be spread to give sweetness to life!

Heaven on Earth

Your companionship in the marriage relation should be close and tender, holy and elevated, breathing a spiritual power into your lives, that you may be everything to each other that God's word requires. When you reach the condition that the Lord desires you to reach, you will find heaven below and God in your life. . . . Heart will be bound to heart in the golden bonds of a love that is enduring. (*Adventist Home*, pp. 112, 113).

As we read the biblical account of creation, we see that the Creator separated some things and other things He brought together. The light was divided from the darkness (Gen. 1:4, KJV) and the waters of the firmament above were divided from the waters beneath (Gen. 1:7, KJV). However, when God created the unique and holy relationship of marriage, His intention as shown in Gen. 2:24 was for the man and woman to be “united” (NIV), “joined” (NKJV). Four millennia after creation, Jesus described marriage this way:

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be

united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).

The importance of the marriage relationship to God can be discerned by the way God created the first couple. As we reflect on it, we cannot imagine a more sublime way that could have been used for this creation. In a manner different from that used to create male and female animals, God took a rib from the already created human being and created a partner. Thus we can see that He first "divided" the one, and then combined the two in marriage. He planned for them to always feel that they belong together.

God knows the eternal experience of togetherness—the togetherness of Father and Son (cf. John 17:21)—and He intends for marriage to be a reflection of this. As humans, we are surely not aware of all the secrets of the Divine relationship. However, through the experience of the marriage relationship, we can get a glimpse of the Divine relationship.

"Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth . . . (*Adventist Home*, p. 15).

I think of family as the only place on this earth that can be used as a picture of the togetherness known in heaven. An intimate family, where God's love reigns supremely, where the sun of happiness always rises on new mornings, where the unique petals of loving affection are sprinkled fragrantly about—this is truly celestial. Throughout Scripture, marriage is frequently used as the metaphor to help us understand God's connection to us. So that it can truly be a good metaphor, God wants human marriage to be saturated with the love which is divine.

Are the chords of heaven heard in our homes? Only the harmony of family togetherness can produce the melody of happiness God is hoping the world will hear. There is no violin, even the great Stradivarius, which can produce a tune as perfect and beautiful as the melody of a united family, a Christian home where Jesus dwells from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn. Who says that heaven is somewhere far above? Let us reach for an experience of togetherness as lofty as the togetherness known in the courts above and we will have a foretaste of heaven on earth right under our roofs.

Jacobs' Ladder

When Jacob followed the advice of his parents and went to Haran to take a wife, his mind and heart were no doubt occupied with all the thoughts and emotions of any man about to court an eligible, God-fearing young woman. Solomon once aptly described the feelings and actions of courtship as "the way of a man with a maiden" (Prov. 30:19). I like to think that, when Jacob had the dream of the ladder going into heaven, God was assuring him of His care in the matter of taking a wife, as well as protecting him from the wrath of Esau. Men today often dream beautiful dreams and think lofty, heavenly thoughts while they are courting or when they are first married, but then lose their heavenly vision once they are faced with the challenges of marriage and the management of a home.

Home will be what it was intended to be only when our faces are turned continually upwards toward heaven and while we are trying to have heaven under our roofs. No challenge to our

togetherness will be insurmountable, no blessing beyond our grasp if we have heaven in our hearts through Christ's presence there. Step by step, climbers have reached the highest spots on earth. Likewise, the spiritual goal of oneness in home and family is attainable if we sense that Jesus is the ladder that reaches from earth to heaven. By faith in Him, we with our spouses and families can journey there.

How many steps were on Jacob's ladder? In fact, I have no knowledge about that, but I want to mention some practical steps we can take—and every one of us can probably add others—to fulfill God's intention that our homes be little heavens on earth.

Take time. We routinely plan for time with friends and business associates. Are not our families at least as important as they? Some suggestions for planning time with family:

- Set aside some special time to spend with your spouse only.
- Plan for time with your children. Plan times when you do things all together; also plan some time alone with each of them.
- Cut back on work, or leisure time you spend in personal activities (e.g., Internet, video games), or time spent with personal friends, in order to free up enough time for your family.
- Schedule family time into your daily, weekly, monthly and yearly planning calendar.
- On certain occasions, you may be able to “double-up” on your time, i.e., fulfill more than one obligation at a time. You may, for example, take family with you to visit friends, or invite your friends to bring their families when they visit you, so that your two families have time together.

Learn from nature. Nature teaches us much about togetherness and the importance of connections. The individual heavenly bodies of the Milky Way all connect together to form a solid band stretching across the night sky. The floral petals glistening with dew in the morning sun join together to make the blossoms we love to smell and touch. Tiny snowflakes clump their soft shapes together to blanket the earth with whiteness, hiding the blemishes beneath. We can reflect on the Creator who connects and rejoice with our spouses and families that He who draws nature together to yield beautiful landscapes can make a lovely tapestry of our families too.

Work together. Some jobs in the family are best done by individuals. Where possible, though, consider cooperating on jobs. Working on tasks together, helping each other and feeling a sense of accomplishment at the end can build family ties.

Beautify each other's days. It takes more than sunshine to make a beautiful day. Thoughtful actions, words of appreciation, gestures of kindness can make a gloomy day sunny. Small surprises can turn dreariness into delight. Let us discover what brings pleasure to our dear ones and repeat these things.

Create changes for the better. We live in a world full of dynamic change. Changes that make life better are usually welcomed. When life changing events happen in your family, which are inevitable, look for ways to enhance the positive. Communicate together about the change and ways you can restore normalcy to life as soon as possible.

Develop together. Development on the job is usually necessary to maintain employment. Should we not develop the quality of our relationships as well? To do that, we must be open to evaluating and monitoring our relationships, confronting things that are inappropriate or ineffective, and eliminating things that disturb the family unity or keep the relationship from rising to a higher level. Schedule times to specifically talk about development. Discover each other's expectations, goals and aspirations.

Even when far away, stay close. Sometimes people are close, but very far away from each other emotionally. Others can be far away, but put real effort into maintaining emotional closeness. For those who love each other, there is no space that can separate them. Plan ways of bridging the distance between you when you must be separate from each other. Make separation times as brief and infrequent as possible. Budget financially for the expenses of communication and regular visits if the separation is extended.

The goals are uniting. Make a plan that incorporates goals for you, your spouse and yourselves as a married couple. Do the same to incorporate each individual's goals into a plan for the family. Plan for six months or a year at a time. Planning for goals and working together on goals bonds families together. Keep communication and listening lines open when differences of opinion and conflicts arise on the way to the goal. Let us commit ourselves to each other and to God to stay together not only in the time of success but in problems as well.

Be tolerant. Without the tolerance there is no unity. Do not only expect others to tolerate and understand you, exercise tolerance toward them too. As we are expecting others to make concessions for us, let us make concessions for them. Many enemies became allies only when they have learned to compromise and to collaborate together on solutions.

Discover what your spouse or your child likes. Do not forget, we are all different. Ask yourself, "What can I do for the one I love?" Your spouse and your children are the most important people in your life. Discover what they like. Love them as they would like to be loved, not as you would like to be loved.

Conclusion

Concluding his book and the Old Testament, prophet Malachi wrote: "...I will send you Elijah the prophet ... and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers . . ." (Mal. 4:5, 6, KJV). The time has come to close the last chapter on the broken down altar and to rebuild. God is sending Elijah, the message, the call. He is calling us to the work of Elijah in our homes to take that which is now broken and build it again in His name.

Perhaps we managed to function somewhat, even though old altars were broken and their rocks spread around. But the time has come for our families to acknowledge Jesus Christ as God's sacrifice in our behalf and to come together in Him to love, to serve, to be united as families. God wants to be present, close to us, and He will be when we unite around the rebuilt altar that celebrates the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of our family and of the world.

Reference

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