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A Spiritual Blueprint

Luke 6: 47-49

The longer I preach, the more I become convinced that preaching is really coaching; the longer I coach, the more I realize that coaching is really teaching.

It occurs to me that we as a spiritual community must be about the task of teaching our members how to maintain spiritually viable, spiritually maturing relationships, creating spiritual stable households.

Yet we spend comparatively little time mentoring each other in developing

These spiritually-maturing relationships, though they are crucial to our well-being.

This point came to me some years ago when I officiated at a friend's wedding in Atlanta.

My friend was a good guy, and marrying a fine girl, but neither of them had much of a spiritual orientation, a fact patently evident in the concerns that dominated their wedding.

They were consumed with bridesmaids' dresses and tux rentals, caterers and flower arrangements.

Their focus was completely on the wedding, even though the wedding was only the doorway through which they were to walk toward a long adventure.

Most people simply assume that maintaining relationships and sustaining a spiritual household are child's play, when in truth, nurturing love is very hard work,

and keeping love alive and vibrant is a lifelong challenge.

So I offer this morning practical principles on employing a spiritual blueprint for building a successful and nurturing home.

To build a spiritual household we must start with a solid foundation;

our Lord identifies this foundation forthrightly: a shared belief in the trustworthiness of God.

A common foundation in the trustworthiness of God is the beginning point for a spiritual household.

Ah, Dr. Kremer, you might say, the true bedrock foundation of a healthy household is love.

My response is, no, any two people who love each other know that love is a gift, and if love is a gift, there must be a Giver.

Anyone who has a sense of what a blessing their love is knows that there must be a Blessor.

When both lovers sense that their love is not of their own making, but a divine blessing, then they have a shared point of reference.

That's the point our Lord makes when he says that a spiritual home begins when people dig deep together and lay a common foundation of trust that knows God's grace will be sufficient for them in every storm.

For, as our Lord candidly noted, storms will come. Any foundation may serve a household in easy times.

But every household today must weather stresses that come in a multitude of forms, financial, emotional, vocational, sexual, physical and psychological.

When you have a mutual confidence in the trustworthiness of God,

a couple has a common source of strength and confidence and power to carry them through any challenge.

Upon this spiritual foundation, the first room that you must build in this spiritual blueprint is a room for quiet, a room for meditation and prayer.

Our Lord speaks of going into the closet to pray, so perhaps the first room in our spiritual household might be a prayer closet – indeed, the women in our household are always clamoring for more closet space!

But we must start in our household with a quiet room where we can spend some time in quiet contemplation, prayer, Bible study and reflection – a place of calm.

We need this place spiritually – we need it physically.

You and I ascribe to a church covenant that says,

“We will take seriously the responsibility and privilege of personal Christian growth . . .”

We cannot be true to that ambition if we don’t find someplace -- and some time! – in our spiritual household for the discipline of quiet, for Bible reading, for studying our Sunday School lesson, for prayer. Just as no athlete can excel without the discipline of individual drills,

no Christian can succeed without the discipline of individual spiritual preparation.

You and I have vowed, *“We will establish and maintain a Christian atmosphere in our homes.”*

Yet we cannot establish an atmosphere permeated with the values of Christ

if we don’t take time to commune with the Spirit of Christ.

Admittedly, in my household, quiet and solitude are rare things to come by.

It will be a couple of years before Melissa and I will evict a couple of our rowdier, more ravenous, tenants, so presently to find a contemplative room I use three places for meditation and prayer:

the wooded trail behind our house, my office, and my back porch.

Any place can serve as a communion room, but use it you must, and use it regularly,

daily, if you aspire to build a spiritual household.

In your spiritual blueprint you must feature a room that is set aside for talking. That sounds so simple, even simplistic, but the truth of the matter is, relationships depend upon communication,

and the time we spend actually talking to the people we treasure most is embarrassingly scant.

So we need a talking room, some place where couples, where families, can sit and communicate.

I tell you bluntly: the first thing almost any troubled couple says to me when coming for counseling is,

“We don’t talk any more. We don’t communicate. He won’t open up to me. She won’t listen to me.”

What has happened is, two lovers have gone so long without truly communicating that they no longer have anything to talk about.

I’ve spent this weekend coaching AAU basketball – why?

Because my boys like playing basketball -- and if they’re going to do it, I want to be there with them.

If they loved tiddly-winks, I’d try to coach tiddly-winks.

Because if you are a parent of an adolescent, the clock is ticking: you might have five years or three or one, but the sands are running fast out of the hour glass, and all too soon they’ll be off to college,

and then it will be, *“Hey, mom, here’s the laundry I brought home; hey, Dad, where’s the car keys? –*

and do ya have a couple of extra twenties?” That’s the way it will be, the way it ought to be, I guess.

So spend time with your children while you can. Anyway, I’m coaching basketball,

and to improve my basketball coaching skills, I recently engaged in two humbling acts:

I bought a coaching DVD from Mike Krzyzewski of Duke and one from Paul Hewitt, from, of all places, Georgia Tech. Of course, they had to bleep every third word that Coach K said,

but, give the Blue Devil his due, he is a good teacher.

What I found most interesting is that both coaches began with the same theme: the necessity of talking.

Coach K said that an offense that doesn’t talk is not going to score. Coach Hewitt said that a defense that doesn’t talk is a selfish team, bound to lose. Everyone may want to win, but unless everyone is willing to humble themselves and talk and listen to each other, they won’t be successful.

I have found myself saying much the same thing over twenty-five years of counseling:

unless you are willing as a couple, willing as a family, to engage in the discipline of communicating,

unless communication is a cherished value in your home, your relationship will not successfully mature.

Strange and simplistic as it might seem, any spiritual blueprint must feature its talking room,

for talking is the lifeblood of a home.

Every spiritual household needs a series of rooms that have to do with smoothing ruffled family relationships.

Of course, if you are *never* going to have any conflict in your household you can eliminate these features from your blueprint – but I wouldn't advise it. The first room in this series is an anger room.

This anger room comes equipped with two rather expensive items, a treadmill and a punching bag. They are costly, I grant you, but not as costly as anger.

Think about the damage done to your marriage when you come home steaming mad and blow up at your spouse. Think about the damage done to a young life when you come home and snap at your child over some little matter, when the person you are really angry at is fifty miles away – or is yourself.

That's why we use an anger room where we can go and vent frustration until we are fit for human company. Punch on that bag, run on the treadmill until you have vented the destructive frustration steaming inside you.

If you will go into the anger room first you will say and do fewer things that you will regret.

Even on those occasions when your child or family member has done something that justifiably engenders your anger, spend some time in the anger room until you have gained sufficient perspective to be able to channel that anger in a positive and constructive manner.

Most people's anger alienates and estranges. Use your anger in a positive way to edify.

Because most of us are not spiritually disciplined enough to make use of the anger room, the rest of the family needs a room of sanctuary, where angry words and angry deeds are forbidden. Such a notion may sound strange to you, but I took the idea straight from the Bible.

The ancient Hebrews designated cities of refuge where a person could go if pursued in anger.

True, eventually the person had to leave the city of sanctuary, but by then tempers had cooled, and enough time had passed for all facts to be known, and justice could be administered fairly.

Some of our snap decisions and accusations

might be avoided if we incorporated such a room of refuge into our own homes.

The spiritual blueprint also calls for a room of reconciliation,

the room where we voice our concerns, express our sorrow, then ask, give, and receive forgiveness.

Featured on the wall of this room are the words of Jesus that we pray together each Sunday:

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," reminding us, sinner and sinned against, that we stand under God's mercy – and are called to be merciful.

Once reconciliation has been achieved, a family must take the matter quickly to the trash disposal.

Every spiritual household must have a trash disposal! There is no peace in a household where old grievances are stashed in a corner as ammunition for the next argument.

Once the matter has been settled, take it to the trash disposal and be rid of it forever!

Now the center of a spiritual household has a very unique design: when you stand at the center of a spiritual household you see avenues leading to all other rooms in the house.

This architectural feature is meant to impress upon each family member that all of our lives are *interconnected*. Whatever one family member does -- every decision, every mood, every attitude, every behavior -- impacts the lives of everyone in the family.

Our Lord reminds us that in marriage two people become one flesh -- not simply a sexual image, but a psychological, emotional, historical fact. One person's mood becomes the other's mood; one person's selfishness scars the other; one person's joy exhilarates the other; one person's grace resurrects the other. If we will spend a little time each day at the household's center

thinking of how our actions affect and influence the lives of everyone else in the household,

I suspect that each of us will do and say a few things differently.

Every spiritual household needs another unique feature, a blessing room, quite an unusual room. The blessing room has one door, no lights or windows; its walls are painted completely black. When you first enter it, you can see nothing in the blessing room. But once your eyes adjust, you see that in this room are two posts connected by a wire, and on this wire are a hundred white beads. The longer you stay in the blessing room, the clearer those beads become. Every time you think of a blessing, move one of those beads from one side to the other. You may go into the blessing room focused on how burdened you are, how much easier others have it, but by the time you move that entire string of beads of blessing you will have gained a new perspective. There is a rather vital room in our spiritual blueprint that often goes under-utilized – the spiritual tool shed. This spiritual tool shed is used to effect routine maintenance on our relationships. We know that our houses sometimes need remodeling; we know that cars need periodic maintenance; we know that engineers check the structure of complex buildings for signs of stress and strain. But we assume that love, the most vital, dynamic and sometimes volatile reality in the world, will simply take care of itself. No! Relationships needs periodic tune-ups, too. The spiritual tool shed reminds us that our relationships from time to time must be restructured. We must pay attention to where there is wear and tear and see what needs to be oiled and mended. Remember the old Fram oil filter commercial? “Pay me now, or pay me later.” That’s certainly true in a spiritual household: if you don’t take the time of nurturing and re-structuring relationships periodically, how great is the cost of an investment of time after a break-up or betrayal! The spiritual tool shed and the act of restructuring a household are particularly needful in transitional periods, when children come into a home or when they leave it, when parents reach an age of dependency, when they are becoming like your children. The circumstances of family life are constantly in flux, necessitating reliance upon such tools as patience, forbearance, creativity and discipline in order to restructure loves and lives. Use your tool shed!

There’s one final feature to my spiritual household, one that anyone who has been to my house should be able to name, a communal fun room. When Melissa and I were house-hunting, which is to say, when Melissa was house-hunting, I made one demand: find me a great room. I said find me a house with a big room where our family and large groups of people can gather in a great open space. It took her a lot of looking, but between Hal Harrill and her, they did it. I now look out upon a congregation where every young person who has grown up in this church has had fun in our great room; every Associate Deacon has broken bread in our great room; various and sundry groups from the church have had fun in our great room. Why? Because every family needs communal celebration as much as it needs individual contemplation. Every family needs a fun room in which they can gather to recreate together, to re-create together, to play together, to laugh together. It is part of what makes us whole and healthy.

A foundation of shared confidence in God; a meditation room; a talking room; an anger room, a sanctuary, a reconciliation room and a trash disposal; a center that leads to all rooms; a blessing room, a tool shed, and a fun room. All of these elements are needed in a spiritual household. That does not mean you need to go home and start making plans to build a new house. The truth is, you can enact this spiritual blueprint in your own home without physically rebuilding a thing. All you need to build this home is the intentional and collective investment of your spirit. As a family, we can create a spiritual blueprint together. And if we do so, our home of love will last a lifetime and serve as a very paradigm of heaven – and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

This is the promise we receive from our God.
Come, let us build together our homes upon God's solid rock.

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