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**Case Study 2: Marriage and Family: Personal Assessment**

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**Marriage And Family: Personal Assessment**

Marriage

 My wife and I are the couple being assessed. We have been married since 1986. We have been Christians since 1979. We were both established Christians when we got married. We have been involved in different local churches ever since we got baptized. We moved from church to church basically because of two reasons: (1) we did not agree with the main teachings of the church; (2) we changed our residential address. We have moved to Portland of the United States since 1999. The churches we have attended have not offered us any specific help to become the husband/wife God wants us to be.

 The blessings of being married include: (1) It is good being less susceptible to the challenge of loneliness; (2) It is good to have someone to love and care for. We do not have to look for a goal or meaning of life. Most of time we know what we should do, e.g. working harder to make more money for a better house and a better summer vacation, etc. (3) Family is a real church. All members are committed Christians with the same faith. The commitment is life long. The ‘pastor’ is respected and is truly responsible for the well-being of all members. If we had not married, we would have lost the precious opportunities within the family setting to understand the essence of a church and practice loving each other in the Body of Christ; (4) If we had not married, we would have lost the chance to understand profoundly from our first-hand experience the experience of ‘two becoming one’ (perfectly illustrated in an offspring) which would help us understand our unity with the Lord Jesus; (5) Marriage pushes us out of the shells of ‘selfishness’ to learn how to love; (6) We used to think that marriage would definitely bring happiness but now we know that it would ‘eventually’ bring happiness as a result of our maturity in character (life or holiness whatever we call it); (7) Marriage has given us so many chances to practice ‘forgiveness’ because there are so many chances for us to offend each other either knowingly or unknowingly; (8) Marriage has given us a good way to practice ‘perseverance’ because there is no way out unless we think divorce is an option. We must hold on and find a way to get over the challenges.

 The challenges of being married include: (1) We cannot be ourselves any more. We did not want to change, to be honest. For a long time we had hoped that the other party would let us continue our own tastes, preferences of things, attitudes, … In the end we agreed that it was impossible to live together without the needs to change substantively. A good metaphor is: ‘we need to bear the cross and be crucified ‘daily’; (2) The hardest part is: Sometimes we are so tired after a whole day’s work at the offices. We want to be able to come home and rest a little bit. However, it is so cruel to find that there is an even harder ‘work’ waiting for us at home. There is no escape and we should not run away from it because it is even more important and eternal than the office tasks. Oftentimes I need to park the car along the curbside and pray for a few minutes for strength before entering the house; (3) As marriage is a life-long commitment, it does not only crucify one’s present life-styles but also the future dreams. It is like crucifying our whole lives. If the present life was all we have, it would not be worth it. It is a real test of one’s faith in eternity.

 If we had not had a good relationship with Christ, we do not think we would have made it that far. Honestly we oftentimes feel we have not been sufficiently loved by our spouses. Fortunately, the love of Christ satisfies our hunger for more love. We have been charged to love our spouses. It is hard because our spouses are with us 24/7. Fortunately Christ is with us 24/7 and He gives us strength when we need it.

 Our long term plan to improve our marriage relationship include: (1) we take yearly vacation in which we can spend time talking with each other and cherishing each other; (2) we put all our money in the house to symbolize that we are together for good. The most important thing is that we can stay together; (3) We have spent time scanning all photos into the computer so that we can go over our sweet memories as frequently as we want to; (4) I have written a book which retains the blessings of our marriage; (5) We have made real efforts in finding a church that can really work for both of us so that we can function together socially and spiritually.

Family

 We have a daughter who is doing her second year in a medical school and a son who is doing his second year in a college studying Computer Science. They are our biological children and they moved with us to the United States during their elementary school years.

 Our desired outcomes for our children when they leave home include: (1) They are able to take up a job that can contribute to the well-being of the world and support them financially; (2) They have the skills to manage their emotions; (3) They have the skills to think logically; (4) They have established the confidence that God may speak with us either directly or through the scripture; (5) They know the importance of connecting to God with prayers and connecting to family members through the internet; (6) They know how to be a responsible person over the issues of money and sexual needs; (7) They know what the dangers/temptations are out there; (8) They know their ultimate goal is to serve the Lord; (9) They know that next to serving the Lord they should work harder to love and respect their parents which is right and will make their lives prosperous.

 Our strategies for creating the environment that will contribute to our desired outcomes include: (1) we have had regular family meetings in which we can talk things through, sing songs together, pray together, read the scripture together and write down our prayers and then sign our names. (2) We will consciously live our lives as models for emotional management, reasonable thinking, respecting God’s Word, cherishing family relationships, good money management and serving the Lord. (3) In all our houses, we dedicated a corner in which we placed a Bible and a chair so that I could pray there reminding them the Lord was the Lord of our house. (4) We have made efforts in visiting our parents together and going back to Hong Kong together to visit relatives, hoping to strengthen their senses of the importance of family. (5) We have put many photos in different parts of our house so that we can talk more about our family history. (6) We share often with our kids how we use our money and what we are planning to do with our money. (7) We tried to talk about things before they happen. For example, we talked about sexual needs before they even turned an adolescent; we talked about getting a good job before they entered a college; and we prayed with them for a life partner before they started dating. (8) We went on many trips together and volunteered together in serving the community.

 Judging from the actual outcomes happening now, I think the strategies seemed pretty comprehensive. They now have a pretty stable career prospect, fair social relationships, and good relationships with their parents and grandparents and other relatives. They know how to handle their emotions, have a responsible manner in handling money, are not messing with sexual stuff, consult their parents and the Bible whenever necessary, and have their minds set on serving the Lord.

 One thing is not desirable though. They are not going to the same church as we are. Our experience tells us that our family as a church has been much more important than a local church. As a matter of fact, the churches we have attended have not offered us specifics to help us become the parents God wants us to be.