

PARADISE IN EARTH

(A Discussion on Christian Family Life)

Fr Dr O Thomas

(Divyabodhanam Book Series: 20)

Statement

Dear All,

The first stage of 'Divyabodhanam' program has come out more successfully than we all expected. Ten books related to our faith have been written and published which in itself is a good achievement.

This program which commenced only in 1984 had 49 centers. There were 230 women and 210 men who studied this course. His Holiness the Catholicose gave away the certificates to those who had completed the course, on 9th August, 1986.

The second stage has now commenced. While accepting men and women for the new batch of the stage one of the program, the stage two of the course for those who have completed the first is also being started.

The aim of the second stage too is to deeply strengthen our people in the true faith. This will be useful equally to all our elders who have basic education as also for the young generation. This course happens to be basic requirement for Sunday School teachers.

We hope that tens of thousands of people would complete this course in the next few years and thus there would be a good progress in the faith of our members. Let these books be instrumental to realize the love of God revealed through the incarnation of Christ as a man and subjecting to that love, live a renewed life by the grace of Holy Spirit. Let the Lord Almighty shower his blessings on each of you!

Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso

President

Divyabodhanam

Kottayam

Dukhrono Feast of St Thomas,

July, 2, 1986

From the Desk of the Publisher

From the Author

It was during my short stay at London during 1985 – 86, I developed a desire to write a book on family life. But I could not do anything on this even after my return. However, I shared this with my close friend Fr CC Cherian with whom I maintain daily acquaintance and he expressed his interest in such a book being included in the Diploma course under Divyabodhanam program. In fact, this book saw light, albeit being a bit late, mainly because it was included in the Divyabodhanam syllabi. Let me express my most sincere thanks to Fr CC Cherian for his encouragement as also the strong insistence from his side for completing this book.

In this book, a humble attempt is made to dovetail the Christian faith related to family life with the current socio, economic and cultural environment and the Psychological principles. Occasional slips might have cropped up in this hard endeavor; yet, without looking into these three facets, one cannot effectively analyze Christian family life. Presently, family life has been influenced by the current socio, economic and cultural elements rather than Christian values; as a consequence to such an understanding being prevalent, many related issues have been subjected to a little bit of critical analysis. May be, there are some ill feelings to this at some levels. However, readers should understand that the intention is just to express the thought that Christian values are to be highlighted as best as possible.

It was respectable Fr TJ Joshua, the Director of Divyabodhanam Program who had read the manuscript diligently and suggested some changes and corrections. Respected father has wide experience in dealing with family issues and has written many articles on the subject as also he has taken a number of classes at various forums. Therefore, the fact that a person so rich in the subject knowledge has examined the manuscript enhances the authenticity of the contents of this book. I am extremely thankful to my respected Guru for this help.

It is true that those who claim that they know all about family life are really ignorant about many aspects. I pray to the Almighty that let them read this book so that at least a few of their misunderstandings are clarified and also let them realize more Christian values in family life. It would be a good gesture for those who read and understand the contents of this book to share them with others wherever possible.

I have a lot of thanks to offer to Mr. Achankunju, the Divyabodhanam Office Secretary for his assistance in the completion of this book.

Above all, I thank the Almighty for having blessed me with the necessary wisdom and strength through His abundant Grace. I praise him wholeheartedly with gratitude overflowing from my inner self. Let me present this humble offering to all those who desire to lead a family life based on Christian values.

Fr Dr O Thomas

Kottayam,

Feast of Pentecost, 22 – 05- 1988

Preface for the second Edition

The second edition of this book 'Paradise in Earth' is coming out after nearly 15 years. Being an era of increased problems within family life, planned programs are needed to ensure that this book finds a place in all houses of the faithful. Though there is a decision to make pre marital counseling mandatory, the arrangements are not quite satisfactory for its effective implementation.

Of late, MOC has published two books namely 'Kudumbavedyil' by respected Fr Joshua and 'Pratyashayode Orumikkan' by Pratyasha Counselling Center. Reading all these three books together can equip one desiring to enter family life with good inputs to commence a family life. The couples can tackle many of the issues themselves if they have pre knowledge on the theoretical aspects of a family along with fast changing social realities enabling them to gain a strong base related to Christian faith.

It is hoped that this second edition would be sold out faster than the first.

Let me seek the prayers of my readers to realize my wish to write a large volume on family life as early as possible.

In the Service of our Lord,

Fr Dr O Thomas.

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Unit 1

Family: the Christian Background

Lesson 1

Family: In the Narrations of Creation

Similarities and Differences # Principles Common to Both

The two Narrations in the Book of Genesis:

All theological thought processes commence with an accent on the story of creation by God we see in the Old Testament. As we think about the Christian family life, this accent has significance and therefore it would be helpful for us to have a look at the illustrations of man – woman relationships we see in the Book of Genesis.

There are two narrations on how man was created. Of this, what is illustrated in chapter 2 is the earlier of the two as scholars opine in general. The first story seems to have born out of the ‘Yahweistic’ tradition formulated by the 10th century BC.

‘The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” Then the Lord made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man..... For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife both were naked, and they felt no shame.’ (Genesis 2:18 – 25)

There may be objections to the process of creation explained here. There can be different arguments between those who accept this and reject this in line with the evolution theory, but for us there are certainly more important basic principles to be looked into.

What is pointed out here is the truth that man is not complete in himself although he is protected within the universe created by God as also he has with him the presence of other living beings. It is also made clear that there are no living being in the animal world that is equal to man and that none of them can keep a companionship with him. Whatever be the purity of other relationships, what we find here is that there is something far deeper in the relation between husband and wife. Though there is no mention about sexuality, the statement, “man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” has a hint on sexuality. The succeeding verses clearly point out that there are nothing unusual in such relations between husband and wife. And, they didn’t feel shy though both were nude.

The Second Narration:

'Priestly' traditions came up rather late; a few more important ideas seem to be added here:

'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea " So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and other every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1: 26 – 28)

A very crucial thought in this narration is that God's image and likeness have been given only to man and woman among all creations. Though male domination came up in the society later, there are no thoughts seen here justifying such domination. Not only that, by sharing God's likeness and image equally, the thoughts of a mutually complementing equality has the distinct priority. Later, St Paul in Galatians 3:28 has taught that there shall be no indiscrimination between man and woman in Christ. Children for sure are the unavoidable segment of family life and as this fact was not finding a place in the other illustration, it has been properly added up here. God was blessing them saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number". But one cannot find any justification to the theory of western churches that "Marriage is for procreation only". In the earlier narration on creation, this is not even mentioned. The importance there is that as being alone is not good there must be a suitable helper of equal status. Possibly, having understood practically the role of children in family life later, it would have been inferred that children are a gift of God. Whatever be that, based on the earlier illustrations of creation in the Book of Genesis, there can never be any conclusion that man woman relationship is exclusively for children.

When we analyze the life of man before his fall, both these narrations are significant in a theological angle. It has to be noted that this high value concept which is accepted as a basic principle in family life is not seen as a relevant factor after the fall and even later almost till the period of prophets in the history of Israel. The picture of family life during this period is filled with controversies and inequalities. These are being discussed in the next lesson.

Both the narrations on creation recorded in the Old Testament contain high values and basic principles, but they must not be accepted as totally complete. Indeed, what we observe here are certain plane truths only. One cannot analyze family relations or arrive at inferences by segregating it from social realities. The circumstances relating to cultural, social, political, economic, chronological and national realities certainly influence the concept of family life substantially. So to have a natural imagery on family lives, the bare realities need to be co related with the plane truths we observe. Yet, it would be advisable to understand the basics brought out through these two stories at least in an ideological manner.

General Inferences: (1) In the relation between man and woman its foundation is something really providential. There is something behind a veil in their persons that is mutually complementing each other. Man and woman cannot be totally wholesome within themselves.

(2) Though there is no mention of monogamy (one man – one woman) in both narrations on creation, the mutual relation between them can happen to be in that line only. “Male and female, He created them..... For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”. This is not an indication of physical relationship alone; only in a one man – one woman family relation, can there be that unique fusion of mind, body and spirit.

(3) While thinking about family, there are two commonly adopted stands namely, one, the most important facet in a family life is mutually complementing fellowship between man and woman without being serious about the children and, two, the mutual fellowship and relation between man and woman are exclusively for the sake of children; both these stands are wrong. The relationship between man and woman and their relationship with children have to be mutual togetherness without one causing hindrance to the other; there, you can see an ideal family. And, of course, let there be no misunderstanding that parents are not to take over troubles for the sake of children.

(4) The overriding message in all these explanations is being mutually complementary with each other and the status of equality between man and woman. There is not even a remote thought of male domination or that woman should remain submissive to man anywhere here. Male domination is a later development in history due to the many chronological, cultural and national influences. At the Eden, there was no question at all as to who was the superior.

(5) Many scholastic views have come up regarding the nature of sexuality between man and woman, before the fall. Without entering in to the technicality of this issue, a very general observation points out that there was a place for sexuality there; (.....and they will become one flesh; Genesis 2; 24). But it needs to be specifically noted that there were no explanations in these narrations on the character of social dimensions of relations prevailed there.

Questions:

1. Regarding family, what all inferences one can arrive at based on the different explanations about creation?
2. What revelations one get from these records (Y & P) on the equality between man and woman?
3. Is there any base for ‘monogamy’ in the Bible? If so, clarify that.

Lesson 2

Family: In the Jewish Background

#Providential Basis of a Family # the Setup # Male Domination – Position of Children # Sexuality # Divorce #

In the previous lesson, we had been discussing certain basics of family life those were prevalent before the fall. In the light of such basics, let us make a brief evaluation of Jewish family life.

Providential Basis of a Family:

We cannot say that the Jews were of the view from the very beginning that husband – wife relationship was really made by God. It was a later development that husband and wife had entered into an agreement similar to the agreement entered into between God and Israel. The Prophets, particularly, Prophet Hosea has highlighted this point (Hosea 2: 16, 18, 21). During the early stages, it was insisted that wives should be taken only from one's own tribe and relations (Genesis 24). At the same time, there were instances where wives were taken from among the gentiles also like Samson's marriage with a Philistine woman (Judges 14). Though there were no clear cut pointers in Jewish tradition that family life was made by God, religion had a crucial role in sustaining family members as a unit. We read in Genesis 17:27 that in the family of Abraham, all his servants and those slaves he had bought from others got circumcised together. Even, after the days of tribal fathers, they used terms like God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to understand their God; after the exodus, they realized God as the One who liberated them from the slavery of Egypt (Deuteronomy 26: 5 -9; Amos 2:9; Psalms 77: 1,2). It can be said without doubt that the Jews retained their unflinching faith in God in all their day to day affairs. As pointed out earlier, there were no hints for them to believe that husband and wife were joined by God during their early history; but gradually they came to accept that stand as history progressed.

Family Setup:

The family relations of Jews could not be said to have been designed on monogamy. The stand adopted by Jewish religion was not to be in line with Christian values which came up later in history. Abraham, the father of the faithful, had two maid servants Hagar and Keturah apart from his wife Sarah. Other than Isaac and Ismail, he had 6 more children from Keturah (Genesis 25:1). Even Isaac while accepting Rebecca as wife, took her nurse too (Genesis 24:49). Jacob, the father of Tribes married his uncle's daughters Leah and Rachel who were sisters. Jacob had bed relations with their maid servants too. When the 12 children of Jacob were listed, it had been specifically mentioned that they were from his wives and maid servants (Genesis 35:23 – 26). Later, the lives of Samson, David and Solomon also illustrated the prevalent system of having more than one woman as wife. Neither the system of one woman for one man was accepted as a value based concept nor there was anything found wrong in allowing any number of wives for one man. But, nowhere was it seen that women were allowed to take more than one husband.

Male Domination:

One could not ascertain for sure whether anyone was allowed superiority in the Garden of Eden. Those who followed the creation story in a literal sense might argue that man was made first and then woman, but there was no chance to substantiate that man was permitted any sort of domination over woman. On the other hand, man and woman together were given the authority of control over other beings (Genesis 1:29). But, might be due to the influence from the surrounding cultures, male domination gradually got evidenced in Jewish tradition. The head of family had the right of ownership and authority over his wife, children and the family of married sons (Genesis 22:1, 38:24). The religious education and protection to the family were always provided by the father (Deuteronomy 1:31, Job 1:5, Hosea 11:3). Here, father meant the family head. This father always represented the patriarch of the joint family system. Though, there was male domination, there was no chance to believe that woman was ill treated as a slave. The reason for this was not just the presence of other slaves in the set up, but the law had insisted that father and mother were to be respected (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16). Moreover, anyone who assaulted or cursed his father or mother was condemned to the punishment of death (Exodus 21:15, 17). There was no dispute that the mother had an honorable position within a family. Indeed, the historical fact that there was a woman among the judges (Deborah, Judges 4, 5) showed that the status women were not at all pitiable. Again, the incident of Sarah having advised Abraham to send off Hagar from their family setup and Rebecca working out ways and means for Jacob to be blessed by Isaac were illustrations of the freedom possessed by women to have control over other members of the family. As it was already pointed out, men had been enjoying the freedom to keep maids in addition to their wives.

Position of Children in the family:

“Marriage was for procreation only”. Whether there existed a theoretical concept that marriage was just a means for procreation alone was not sure; but the relation was, no doubt, considered for giving birth to children rather than for a mutual fellowship between man and woman. “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). This was a command from God. God had given similar blessings to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Might be that this command was taken up very seriously; those who were not having children were viewed by the community with contempt (Genesis 16:5, 30:1, 1 Samuel 1:20). In a family, the male children had better position than females and the first born enjoyed special privileges (Genesis 49:3, Exodus 22:29). The incident relating to Esau taught us that this privilege was saleable. The family lineage was worked out through male children only (Genesis 5, 10, 46). The patriarchal property was inherited by male children. The law had it that in cases where there were no male children, female children had the right to ancestral property, and after them, next in line were relatives who stand as brothers or else to other related male members. “If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance over to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the Lord commanded Moses” (Numbers 27: 8-11).

Sex in family life:

The modern Psychology of the West holds sexuality on a high pedestal. There are people who say that this is the biggest facet of man woman relationship and that this is the basic need for a family life. This shall be discussed a little later. The Holy Bible mainly concentrates on a relation of man with God and its development through the course of history. As such, one should not insist that the Bible should have answers to all issues within the social sciences. There is not much of a mention of sex in the Bible, but it surely has its place in all man woman relationships. Though adultery is taken as breaking the command, there is no bar to keep maids in addition to more than one wife. When David was at the prime of his old age, a spinster was searched for and arranged to be with him, but David did not have any intimate relationship with her (1Kings 1:4). Solomon accepted wives from gentiles, but this was not treated as a sin; instead, in order to please them, he started worshipping gentile gods and this annoyed God (1 Kings 11:33). The lives of Judah, Samson, David, Amnon, Absalom and Solomon depict their weaknesses in sexuality. But there are no means to evaluate whether these weaknesses had been a source of any disruption to their normal family lives. Yet, one aspect has to be taken note here. The enjoyment of sexuality is only for men. Women had understood sexuality just as means to take care of their husbands, arrange to satisfy what he needed and to rear his children. However, it has been stipulated that this must be a reason for her happiness too. "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or any other duty laid on him. For one year, he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married." (Deuteronomy 24:5). But it is not clear as to what sort of happiness is indicated here.

Divorce:

Divorce is the biggest challenge faced by the Western community. It is clear that this was something that existed among the Jews much earlier in history. From the early narrations on creation, it is not quite possible to ascertain what was taught about divorce. But our Lord has advised, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19: 8, 6). Based on this, what the Jews had been following was a sharp deviation from what was the true model intended originally. Not only that, the right to divorce was allowed only for man and it could also have been made effective very easily (Deuteronomy 24: 1 – 4). There were differences even among the Jews on the interpretation of these verses. Those who were with Rabbi Shammai held a view that divorce could be allowed only under offences of a very serious nature like committing adultery whereas those with Rabbi Hillel were of the stand that divorce can be allowed for smaller offences too. In both these, there existed a clear discrimination against women. In short, considering the Christian values which developed at much later a stage, one could not comment that the concepts of Jewish family life were of any great value. One could see certain of their models worth emulating and some others were totally unacceptable. What we can learn from them is to accept those acceptable and reject the rest.

Questions:

1. Briefly explain the attitude of Jews towards the concept of family life.
2. What were the thoughts of Jews about divorce?

Lesson 3

Family: In the Jewish Background (Continuation)

Days of the Prophets # Marriage as a Covenant # Family in Gnostics Literature

Days of the Prophets:

The last lesson made us understand that family had a high status in the social life of Israelites. They accepted family life as a means to grow big as a community, commanded by God and to give birth to children generations to generations. The history of Israel commenced with the tribal fathers, got liberated from slavery, passed on through the eras of judges and kings to reach the days of prophets by which time they had undergone lots of transformations. Their concept about family too got changed over this period of time. This change had become sharply personified in Prophet Hosea. Other prophets too had justified these thoughts through likewise ideologies.

Marriages as a Covenant:

Prophet Hosea had been picturing marriage akin to a covenant between Jehovah and Israel. By this time, a feeling was ripe in them quite strongly that the people of Israel were a chosen community of God bound by a special covenant relation between them and God. As and when they used to drift away from God, the prophets exhorted that they were turning away from this covenant. Hosea indeed extended these basics to man woman relationship also.

Hosea had a broken family life. Bible scholars were skeptic whether God would advice Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute (1:2). Might be, Gomer was a spinster. Might be, after her marriage, she wavered to the evil life style of the then gentiles and turned a prostitute. But Hosea expressing love and compassion called upon her to repent and return that he would take her back. The message Hosea gave to Israelites too happened to be the very same. He had told them that they had moved away from true God by serving Baal idols, thereby committing acts of adultery, yet they would be accepted on their repenting and returning; and said this about how rejoiced were they on their return:

“Therefore I am going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor, a door of hope..... In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master’..... I will betroth you to me forever..... I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord” (Hosea 2: 14-20).

Hosea took back his wife and entered to a fresh relation with her. The importance of this incident was not just confined to a worldly relation, but there were high spiritual dimensions imbedded like those between Israel and God. Further, a very crucial lesson of morality also got underlined here that

whatever would be the circumstances, even if adultery was committed, divorce should not be sought if the person came back repenting. Our Lord had not prescribed any terms for divorce. Later, St Paul had interpreted and taught these prophetic revelations on a wider canvas with far reaching meaningful terminologies. St Paul had written that the relation between man and woman in marriage was to be viewed as the relation between our Lord and the Church. (Ephesians 5: 22-32). We would discuss this later.

Similar to those of Hosea, other prophets too had conveyed providential message. "Return, faithless people, declares the Lord, for I am your husband" (Jeremiah 3:14). "Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns" (Jeremiah 31:21).

It was not quite evident in the early history of Israel that there was any emotional depth of love in man woman relationships. But these quotes from the books of prophets showed expressions of love in its real depth. More expanded versions of this could be seen in Song of Songs and also in Gnostic literature.

"The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit – a wife married young only to be deserted" says the Lord. "For a brief moment, I abandoned you, but with deep compassion, I will bring you back" (Isaiah 54: 6, 7) Also refer Ezekiel chapter 16.

Family in Gnostics Literature:

In all different cultures of this world, certain principles have been formulated to exercise a check on social life. In short, wisdom can be said to be "the knowledge about those moral laws which control the basic social tie ups" (Prof Dr. Carl A Keller, Gnostic Literature -ART- Biblical Version, CLS, Thiruvalla, 1979, p. 135). Pieces of wise thoughts are seen scattered in many Old Testament books, but the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs known in the name of King Solomon are more important in this context. Here and there, the tie ups in social life styles and the values of morality to be practiced by everybody are illustrated in these books. Book of Proverbs 31: 10 – 31 contain pieces of advice conveyed by Lemuel's mother to him on the qualities of a good woman.

The responsibilities and tasks women are expected to undertake are very clearly illustrated here which are not found to be recorded elsewhere. We observe here an elevated scenario, be it related to cultural values or associated with social realities.

- (a) High position within the family: Verse 10 says who can find a wife of noble character? She is worth far more than rubies. Verse 28 says, her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.
- (b) Tasks within: Here, we do not see a housewife who is content with house chores and confined to rearing her children, but she is enthusiastic in matters relating to the finance of the family as well as in taking care of the servants (verses 12 – 16)
- (c) External responsibilities: Not only within the family, a good house wife takes interest in social life too. She takes care of the poor and destitutes, and because of her, her husband too is honored in the town; thus we do not see her as a suffering woman. (verses 20,23)

- (d) The glory of a woman does not lie with beauty, but in fear of the Lord: The physical beauty of a woman might have been considered important in certain gentile religions practicing devadasi customs. But as far as children of God were concerned, there was a specific glory for fear of God that personified as the core of everything. 'Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting' (verse 30). The words from the wise of Israel may not be found easy to gain acceptance in today's fashionable world. All these facts pinpoint the authority and rights the women enjoyed during those days and underline that they were independent.

However, certain scholars hold a view that this good position were enjoyed by the women only during the days of exile and afterwards. Psalm 127 has been considered as one composed during or after the exile. Psalms 127 and 128 picture high values about family life. Even these days, we accept a good husband wife relation, abundance of goodness and children of ideal virtues as basic characteristics of an ideal family life. The above two Psalms proclaim that all these are gifts of God. But even those who appear in the community as true believers are seen to place their own intelligence and calculative planning in life above God. May be planning is a need in one's life. But once each of us submit our intelligence, strength and talents before God, and then plan out things, success would be forthcoming there. The picture of a happy family life revealed in Psalms 127 and 128 has a great relevance even today. However, we are not probing into those details in this book now.

Conclusion:

In the last two chapters, we were trying to understand the concepts and understandings of family life among the Israelites. We cannot say that Israel stood with a firm rooting in one ideal stand from the beginning of their history as it progressed down the line. Their approach to Theology had undergone changes over a period of time and likewise, approach to family life too. To have a wholesome picture, we may have to put together what were the varying concepts during different stages of their history.

Questions:

1. How far were the views of prophets different from those existed earlier?
2. What do we learn about family life from Gnostic literature?

Lesson 4

Family: In the Christian View Point

The significance of our Lord taking part in the wedding at Cana # Public Teaching of Christ about marriage # Interpretation of St Matthew 19: 3 – 12

The center point of the teachings of Jesus Christ has always been Kingdom of God. He has presented to people many topics related to this during the Sermon on the Mount and on other occasions. It may look

a bit strange that there wasn't much he spoke about family life in his discourses. How come that we do not have a message of guidance from Christ on this topic looks rather unusual, particularly because family life is the most pure among human relationships and this forms the basis of all social relations. Could it be that Christ has not given much importance to family life? Possibly, some have this sort of confusion and hence before getting into detailed studies, let this be clarified first. Christ himself has clarified that he has come not to discard the prevailing laws of Israel, but to complete them. For example, Christ has not discoursed anything about the faith in God because the Israelites were following a life of undoubted faith in God for generations. But he has taught them areas where they have to change or correct their practices. The Jews are not aware of Holy Trinity; they have no concept like Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christ has been revealing these to them. Just like that, accepting the good signs within the Jewish family culture, Christ has been adding fresh inputs.

The significance of our Lord taking part in the wedding at Cana (John 2: 1 – 11):

The very fact of Christ taking part in the wedding at Cana itself teaches us many things. As complete God and as complete man, his personal presence there reveals two things.

1. Christ never sees the rituals related to a wedding ceremony and the associated programs having social dimensions as unworthy. Not only that, he has helped them to carry out such programs without any lacunae. (Water gets transformed as wine and is handed over to the host of the ceremonies to make good the shortage they had)
2. Had wedding been a totally materialistic ritual without the presence of God in the midst of it, Christ would not have been there to participate. Possibly, those who have been present there have not been aware of the Godly nature of Christ then but according to the Jewish tradition and their faith, they would have had a feel of God's presence. By that point of time, the proceedings would have reached the stage prescribed in law that man and woman are joined together by God. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vein" (Psalm 127:1). This verse would not have been meaning a house construction because the succeeding verses are directly presenting thoughts on family life. In short, what all value based concepts have been developed in Jewish tradition on family life has been mostly accepted by Christ. In fact, his presence itself is an indication to this. Now, let us try to think about those points added up by Christ.

Public Teaching of Christ about marriage (Matthew 19: 3 – 12):

It has been mentioned earlier that about family set up, there are no lengthy discourses from Christ recorded in gospels. Whatever is specifically taught is seen in Matthew 19: 3 – 12. This has been recorded by Mark too with some variations. (See Mark 10: 1 – 12 and Luke 16:18). We will look into the variations later. Though Mark's record is the earlier one, what is being used for gospel reading during the wedding service is from Matthew, which is also a lengthier narration. As such, let us examine the thoughts coming up with Matthew. In fact, Christ has come out with these teachings on wedding while answering certain queries raised by Pharisees on divorces.

- (a) Christ affirms that the relation through marriage between a man and a woman is one that is joined together by God. A marriage takes place in the earth; it has quite a lot of social dimensions; but a believer realizes its spiritual foundation. No doubt, family is an establishment of God.
- (b) As verse 6 says, they are not two, but one in flesh; this clearly proclaims that there is no malice in the man woman relations through marriage. The stress is not in their oneness in mind or spirit, but in their oneness in flesh. This certainly highlights the importance of physical relation in marriage.
- (c) Further, Christ gives fresh basics for leading a life without entering into marriage. He says, entering into marriage is a call from God. Likewise, being a celibate is also a call from God. This advice we read in verse 12 is quite often pinpointed as the basic principle of monasteries. Matthew 22:30 too underlines the same: "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven". Yet, we do not find anything in these readings to indicate that a situation of celibacy is more glorified than the other.
- (d) When Christ says here, "but it was not this way from the beginning", the message has far wider inherent meanings. "Beginning" has to be understood as the commencement of creation because Christ has taught very clearly that certain laws being followed by the Jews have not been ideal ones. Those who interpret the scriptures in a purely literal sense may interpret this as before the fall and after the fall. Differences associated with such thinking have been pointed out in our lessons 1 and 2. Here, Christ is seen to admonish the divorces among Jews which are far from being ideal. Christ clarifies beyond doubt that the plan of God in its essence has always been the sustenance of marriage till the end with no scope for separation. Christ further exhorts that Moses has given permission for divorce only due to hardness of their heart.

However, this crucial statement Matthew has pointed out is not seen in other gospels. Though Christ does not recognize divorces, he is seen to have expressed some leniency under situations of adultery (Matthew 19:9, 5:32). But Mark (10:1-12) and Luke (16:18) do not stand in line with Matthew on this. There are scholars who opine that Mark should be taken as more reliable and original simply because his happens to be the first document. Such scholars take the view that under no circumstances, Christ would have allowed divorces. Moreover, Christ who has taught to forgive seven, seventy times would certainly have advised to forgive a woman and take her back if she comes forward repenting even after acts of adultery. There is no chance that he would advise to divorce her. Indeed, the teachings of Christ, if we view them in a wholesome concept, justify this stand of forgiveness.

However is it not justifiable to divorce a woman who continues in adultery without repenting? Before arriving at an answer to this question, let us see the approach Matthew holds on this. It shall be noted that Matthew's gospel is basically targeted towards Jews. Therefore, it could be possible that Matthew has allowed a sort of leeway to them that there is a reconciled approach towards their pattern of married life. The then Jewish community has been initiating divorces even on very petty reasons and therefore, introducing a system which prohibits divorce totally would have been practically difficult for them to accept; may be on this background, Matthew would have written so in the gospel. Whether we agree to that or not, there is some practical relevance for it coming up here. Don't we allow divorces in

some cases, may be in the rarest of rare cases? Is not this a pertinent issue now? Couldn't it be possible that there are other reasons too, perhaps more genuine than adultery? It shall also be understood that adultery should never be seen as an error from the woman's side alone. During those days, it was habitual that man used to give up his woman on charges of adultery and only in this background, it was discussed as something related to women alone. If adultery can be a reason for divorce, it should be applicable to both man and woman. Even Christ has taught about those born as eunuchs (Matthew 19:11) agreeing that they are not good for married life. In case a woman happens to get married to such a person without knowing it, shouldn't we liberate her from this relation because she has every right to lead a normal married life? Therefore, those who argue that even adultery could not be a reason good enough for allowing divorce should accept that there are other reasons where divorces cannot be discouraged. Though rarely, our Church too allows divorces. In short, even if there are some additional inputs in the narration of Matthew on this subject, they are in principle relevant in the present day context. Therefore, it is true that divorces have become necessary albeit under very rare circumstances. And this issue has been growing very alarmingly in our community.

Questions:

1. Briefly explain the teachings of our Lord on marriage.
2. Can we find any theological base for divorces? Formulate your views on this.
3. What is the biblical foundation for monastic life? Ascertain other such biblical references not being pointed out here.

Lesson 5

Family: Teachings of St Paul in the Christian View Point

New meaning to Sexuality given in New Testament # Teachings of St Paul # A Study based on 1 Corinthians chapter 7

New meaning and scope to sexuality:

We have been studying the teachings of our Lord on family life in the last chapter. We have seen that he has added up certain aspects those were left out from Jewish Law. Among them, a very important one was the place our Lord has been giving to sexuality.

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery'. But I tell you that anyone who looks at woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart". (Matthew 5:27)

Literally interpreting this statement may create some confusion. Firstly, it may mean that sexual desire is something occurs exclusively for men. This is one reason why, woman was not treated equal with man during early days. The Jewish community did not accept that even woman has sexual desires like man. Secondly, the statement may cause creation of an excessive guilty complex about sexuality. Moreover, enjoying or appreciating one's beauty even without any unusual relationships or emotional feelings, amounts to sin on the basis of this. In fact, we must try to understand the inherent meanings of any statement rather than following literal interpretations thereof. It is ascertained here that any sexual relation outside the bond of marriage is not permissible and that such a relation is a certain evil. This leads one to pin point two basic facts.

1. Man or woman should never view his or her partner as an object to satisfy sexual desires. It was here the western community erred drastically. They detached sex from person. One can understand this concept very clearly on studying the patterns of the life styles in the West. In a capitalist system, any object that can bring in profit turns out to be a commodity. They treated sexuality too in a similar manner thereby causing its deterioration in value.
2. Those who enter into physical relationship must have created among themselves a bond of love that is founded in mutual sacrifice strong enough to give one's life for the other. This is the reason why physical relationship within marriage has been considered pure and other sort of relations evil. The physical relationship between married couple is an expression of mutual fusion of body, mind and soul coming from the deepest of love. On the basis of this pure love, it is written, therefore, they are not two, but one in flesh. It is based on this teaching of Christ that all man woman relationship before marriage and outside marriage are considered sin. This shall be discussed later in detail.

Teachings of St Paul:

The epistles of St Paul contain more about family life than what are provided in the gospels. May be, the teachings of St Paul have turned a bit controversial on certain aspects particularly those relating to his thoughts about family as also about the position of women in the society. There are contravening ideologies on the face of it; yet, though he says, "It is good for a man not to marry" (1Cor 7:1), he adds, "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourself to prayer" (1Cor 7:5). On another occasion, he says, "Marriages should be honored by all, and the marriage bed be kept pure" (Hebrews 13:4). Thus, what are taught by St Paul should be understood in the light of circumstances. (The tradition that the epistle to Hebrews is written by St Paul is accepted here).

1 Corinthians chapter 7:

It is in this chapter we read a lengthy but controversial looking statement about family life. There is a hint here that celibate life is better than family life. The ideas contained here are such that one can argue according to the thoughts what one holds about this subject. During the days our monastic movement was in a position to take control over all the ways and means of the functioning of the Church, the verses 1Cor 7:8 and 7: 32 – 34 found greater authenticity than the teachings of even our Lord. It seems to be quite right that the teachings of St Paul were utilized by certain groups to justify

their stands on issues which in fact led to more problems coming up. There are chances here to assume that St Paul viewed celibacy more glorified than a married life. But we must understand that there are specific reasons for St Paul to think in that line.

1. St Paul was a great missionary in all senses: It was St Paul who travelled more than Christ to spread Christian faith in far off places. It was because of this fact he was called the second founder of Christianity. It is no wonder that he found family and family relations too insignificant in a life totally devoted and committed to expand Christian faith not bothered with sleeping or eating or not concerned about day or night. Thus, it has to be seen that the views expressed by him are exclusively related to his personal life. For example, he states, “An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife” (1Cor 7: 32 – 34). Once we leave aside his personal feelings from here, what is the reality in this verse? A person like St Paul, maintaining celibacy, can certainly please the Lord and act in that manner; there is no doubt. But he has also commented about those who cannot control themselves; would they be thinking about the Lord or something else? He says, “... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (7:9). In short, what we can infer is that St Paul viewed celibacy a glorified way of life, based on his personal life and one cannot come to any conclusion that celibacy is good for all.
2. St Paul was holding on to the second coming of Christ soon: “What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short” (7:29). It is not difficult to understand that this advice is made on the basis of his thought that since Christ is coming soon, there is no need to spend time to give to or being given to marriage. While we understand the teachings of St Paul, these basics should be kept in mind. If we approach these verses in a straight manner, it becomes obvious that St Paul conveys quite a lot valuable inputs those are practical when a person’s internal conflicts are taken into account. Let us look into these briefly.

(a) *The obligations husband and wife possess in a married relation*: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise, the wife to her husband. The wife’s body doesn’t belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body doesn’t belong to him alone, but also to his wife” (1Cor 7: 3, 4). It may sound controversial that St Paul who has told high about celibacy explains different facets about bodily relationship between husband and wife so minutely. There is no other Biblical passage that illustrates that man woman bodily relation is not an evil act, but something essential in mar Even though this is written at time of male domination prevalent in society, the rights of wife is shown in no way inferior to that of husband. On the other hand, rights of both man and woman are shown equal. It is proclaimed strongly that woman cannot be seen as a subject for man to satisfy his sexual desire.

It is also stated here that husband and wife can stay away from physical relation only with mutual consent. Even that too is allowed only for prayers or such good deeds. Being

separate for a long period is not seen as allowed here; just for short periods only. All these teachings are relevant not only in the present context, always and forever.

- (b) *The Apostle provides practical inputs here:* There are people who quite often place a 'spiritual' veil over sexuality without bothering about its real role in married life of people. But St Paul is not choosing that route. "But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1Cor 7: 9). We find here the Apostle's concurrence that sexuality is a feeling strong enough to make one burn with passion. Each one among us is expected to accept this emotional feeling within individual variations and keep it in control according to the moral standards prevailing in our society as well as within the Church. On the other hand, it is just a blunt lie if one holds a view that sexuality is a sin and this is not there in him.
- (c) *Marriages are not to be broken:* This has been prioritized in the teachings of St Paul in the discussions on the subject of married life. During the early days of Christian Church, there were situations where all members of a family might not have accepted Christianity. From among the gentiles, either the husband or the wife would have joined the Christian Church, but in such cases, their relationship in marriage should be kept intact as taught by the Apostle (verses 12, 13). St Paul, having strong and undiluted commitment towards Christianity has allowed this sort of a concession as he has been accepting the purity within a married life in its practical sense. Possibly, he would have thought that the non believer partner would have got transformed by seeing the way of life shown by the believer partner (verse 14).

There is yet another truth inherent in this stand taken by St Paul. He is agreeing here that a relation of marriage can never be sustained by detaching it from the social life. He is advocating a practical approach where social life and family life are mutually accommodative without any adverse impacts on faith and family relations. There may be differences of opinion on the pros and cons of this, but family life is seen to be formulated based on these two aspects be it among the Christians in India or anywhere else. Even if the basic belief regarding the concept of family life and the services in the church as also the rituals are different, the family set up has been developed by us as well as our ancestral fathers in tune with the cultural patterns of this land. These matters are being discussed in more details in later chapters

In short, the stand taken by St Paul on the topic of married life is really of a high level. He might have expressed a preference to celibacy on the basis in his personal life; but he agrees that family is basic requirement for man. Even if the husband and wife follow different faith, there is no need for a separation between them; he has also taught that husband and wife are mutually indebted in their physical relation. All these highlight the glory of family relationships. Had he been too particular towards the aspect of faith, he would not have advised continuation of relationship between husband and wife following different faith. So, his stand that it would be better not to get married should be considered as simply a feeling based on purely his personal will. He has never thought celibacy as something to suit all. It should be because of this, he has even permitted marriages of widows.

Questions:

1. Explain the new dimension and its meaning found by our Lord on sexuality.
2. "St Paul has found celibacy more virtuous than married life". Examine whether this statement is true or false.
3. Clarify the practical inputs provided by St Paul on the relation of marriage.

Lesson 6

Views of St Paul (Continued)

[Start this lesson by reading Ephesians 5: 22 – 32]

Thoughts based on Ephesians 5: 22 – 32 # Family in Church Tradition # Marriage as Sacrament # Basic Dogmas of the Church

Thoughts based on Ephesians 5: 22 – 32:

While examining the views St Paul has about family, it is essential to study Ephesians 5: 22 – 32 studiously. The spiritual foundation of man woman relation, which does not find a place in 1Cor 7, is explained here. As we have seen in the previous lesson, there are difficulties in interpreting certain ideas the Apostle has brought in here. Christ, as Redeemer, is the head of the Church; likewise, husband stands as head to wife (verse 23). May be some could find here a tendency to establish male domination. In the literal sense, such a tendency cannot be ruled out, but once we read the entire portion wholly, no such inference can be found. He is relying on this symbolism to present the relation between our Lord and the Church. We have seen in lesson 3 that there is a covenant type relation when man and woman joining together as taught by Prophet Hosea and his contemporaries in Old Testament quite similar to the relation between Jehovah and Israel. St Paul would have made a change to this Jehovah – Israel concept fully understanding its meaning in the Jewish background to express it as a relation between Christ and the Church so that the concept is more meaningful and easy to assimilate by the believers. Now, couldn't it be that the Apostle has chosen man woman relation to illustrate the depth of love between Christ and the Church as he valued husband wife relation really a most virtuous one within the humans? Moreover, he has stated 'as our Lord loved the Church'; this means that husband wife relation should be considered in a manner as similar to how deeply Christ has loved the Church. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The meaning here is that similar to Christ who has no sin in him has died for us sinners as a sacrifice undergoing tribulations, husbands should love their wives to an extent that they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for them. In verse 21, the Apostle exhorts: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". Reading this verse, it is obvious that the wife alone shall not be under submission to her husband as a one way dictum. St Paul has already taught earlier, "....."

neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:8). Based on these explanations, the ideas developed here can be summed up as under:

1. Man – woman relation is really a virtuous one: In the narration of creation, in the teachings of Christ and in the exhortations of St Paul, there is one common proclamation. That is: “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). We have already discussed the meaning of this statement in its deepest perspectives and hence there is no need to go all over again. St Paul too has confirmed that.
2. Love of Christ is the foundation of husband – wife relation: This thought is something that provides very valuable insights. Just like our Lord loves the Church, husband should love his wife and in response, the wife should be submissive to her husband. ‘Being submissive’ may be something difficult to accept just like that at least for some among us, but even within a literal interpretation, there is nothing wrong to understand the true sense behind it. Because, to anyone who is ready to give his life as a sacrifice for us, we would not feel like dominating, but would rather be submissive. The term submissive shall be viewed in this manner only. Once the love of Christ happens to be the foundation, there is no question of any sort of domination from anybody. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1Cor 13: 4 – 8). In a relation where this love is its core, there is no theological reason for a male domination. In case there has been a male domination for centuries, the reason could be the socio cultural circumstances prevalent in the community which was male oriented. The Churches have failed in their responsibility here to point out the negatives in such circumstances in as much as that there were no concerted efforts to enlighten the believers about the love of Christ which was based on gender equality. And in many other socio cultural issues too, Churches have been moving in tandem with the general stand of the community at large rather than evolving its own stand based on what is taught by Christ. Even today, this is not different. In short, there is no way to establish any sort of theological base to male supremacy in any situation related to family life.

The woman liberation activists who do not have any peculiar commitment to the Christian faith have often raised their voice against male domination in family life. Sometimes, one may feel their voice as something totally giving rise to a contradiction of views that seems to favor female domination as what should be the order in family. There is no need here to enter into a discussion that may necessitate lengthy explanations on such arguments and counter arguments. We shall rest assured on one particular point that in a husband wife relationship that is founded on the sacrificial love of Christ or ‘agape’, the question as to who is big or who is small is simply irrelevant. The husband and wife have to sacrifice for the good and progress of the partner and it is here, both husband and wife experience the abundance of life. A family life which lacks this sort of sharing of love certainly cannot be called a Christian family. This mutual love is the base of a Christian family life. Yet, the Church has a commitment to fight against

unjust discriminations rising out of cultural traditions that has been leaning towards male supremacy quite often. We have to set our goal on gender equality that is based in love and nothing else. It should be taken note that the role of husband and wife in a family are different which has not been socially or culturally imposed; retaining the realities of these differences, a Christian family should carry on forward within a mutually complementing, unselfish, sacrificial and mutually filling scenario where one does not attempt to overshadow the other. However, to achieve this goal within the community as also within among the believers, the functioning of the administration of the Church has to be freed from discrimination against women. The Church cannot enlighten the community to change unless the Church itself changes as a model to be emulated. Let us leave this topic here.

3. Children within the family: St Paul takes up the relationship between parents and children after the husband wife scenario (Ephesians 6: 1 - 4). Both parents and children have to honor their commitments to each other in unison with Christ. Children should grow in obedience and discipline. Parents should rear up their children encouraging them but within good disciplinary norms; they should take care not to discourage or disappoint their children.

Family in Church Tradition:

There are no written records seen in the history of Malankara Church regarding any accepted definition on family set up or the origin of its sacramental base. But the Church in the west has been formulating laws and clarifications thereof periodically. In their Trend council of 1565, marriage has been made one among the seven Holy sacraments. This decision was taken at Trend as a response to an argument put forward by reformists such as Luther and Calvin. What has been decided at this, in short is:

“Whoever says marriage is not one among the seven sacraments established by our Lord truly and properly or else says it has been established by man where there is no flow of God’s Grace, stands cursed”. [Quoted in: Marriage, Faith and Love by Jack Dominion, Collins Fount, paperback, 1984, p. 21]

The thought was prevalent since early days that marriage was a sacrament, but the Church in the west (Roman Catholic Church) officially proclaimed it in the Trend Council. It needs a deeper and wider study in the Eastern Churches, particularly in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, to ascertain how the theology behind marriage as a sacrament was developed and established over the years.

Further, there have been more directives in the form of bulls in the western Church over a period of time. In their canons, the one numbered 1013 teaches about marriages. The first purpose of marriage is taught to be procreation and rearing of children. The relation between husband and wife can be utilized as a means to avoid uncontrollable lust for sex which is counted as the second purpose. But the ARCANUM DIVINAE of Pope Leo XIII in 1880 has diluted this stand and pinpoints equal importance to procreation and physical relation between man and woman.

The changes are more obvious when we come to the Vatican Council II. Here, it is affirmed that the husband and wife as desired by God must recognize each other and sustain their love throughout their

life without ever being separated. The children gifted by God to them are the realization of their perfect love and mutual recognition.

Other western Churches have also come up with similar proclamations on marriage in line with the Roman Catholic Church. But as far as our Church is concerned, there are no such official proclamations, but our view points on marriages can be formulated in tune with our orders of worship. Those who are holding responsibilities in the Church hierarchy can work on this and arrive at a sort of acceptable uniform code on marriages, which would be appreciated by all so that individuals may not reach their own inferences contradicting the general perspective. Based on the order of worship we follow in our sacrament of marriage, a few inferences as discussed below can be arrived at.

Basic Dogmas of the Orthodox Church:

1. Marriage is a Sacrament. The man and woman receive mysterious Graces from the unseen God through tangible media.
2. The first part of the service indicates clearly that even the betrothal is performed and blessed by God. As a sign of betrothal, the Church consecrates the rings and hands over them to the man and woman.
3. Reformist churches or fellowships teach that marriage is not a sacrament. They interpret marriage as a mutual covenant entered into by the man and woman which God witnesses. But as far as we are concerned, marriage is a Sacrament and therefore, man and woman are joined together by God Himself. The covenant between man and woman is insignificant when we accept it as a covenant with God. In short, the overwhelming understanding that man and woman are joined together by God in Sacrament, favors the argument that marriage is not to be broken, carries weight. Quite possibly, the thinking that marriage is not a sacrament would have been one of the main reasons for the high rate of divorces in the west.
4. The prayers and hymns we use in the order of worship for marriage are rich in thoughts that the husband and wife relationship is bound together as strong as the relation between Christ and the Church. The emotional feelings we see in these hymns indicate the recognition for such emotional feelings between the husband and wife. For example, look at the hymn, 'most beautiful among all beauties ' Or 'Oh Lord, move not far
5. We have already discussed the meanings of the scripture readings namely the Gospel reading from Matthew 19:3-12 and the epistle of St Paul to Ephesians 5:22-32. As such, they are not being repeated here, but these ideas should be borne in mind while the sacramental value of marriage and related topic are studied.
6. In line with the traditional orders, prayers for children in good fortune are included in the worship at many parts. Thus, the need to have children in the family set up gets highlighted.
7. In the marriage service, the husband and wife are ordained as king and queen and as a sign, crowns are placed on their heads; these crowns are crosses now, though they used to be crowns earlier. Crosses are placed on their heads to make them understand that the foundation of a married life is sacrificial love.
8. Towards the end, we pray for all the blessings in the material world and do the benediction. This hints at the necessity of material comforts and wealth to some extent for the welfare of family

life. These prayers and benediction may well please the rich, but how far this would be appreciated by the poor who very often are forced to dispose of part or the whole of their assets to get a daughter married off, needs to be thought over.

On scrutinizing our worship order, certainly, more and more ideas and dogmas can be formulated. However there are certain clues in these which need to be studied by the theological scholars of the Church to see whether they need modification or continuation as such. For example, the entire order of worship carries more of the Old Testament events rather New Testament events; Tamar, who acted as a prostitute is glorified; symbol of sacrificial love or the cross is placed on their heads as crown and at the same time, the benediction is rich with prayers seeking material comforts. Surely, these contain points to be seriously thought over. Also, don't we have to exhort the newlywed couple to stay away from a family base that is self oriented, that their primary responsibility includes taking care and looking after their parents in old age or sickness, that they should not shy away from their tasks towards their society and they have to take care to maintain virtues taught by Christ? These are crucial issues needed to be looked into on priority.

Questions:

1. 'St Paul has seen male supremacy as the acceptable norm in a family life'. Express your response clearly.
2. Explain briefly the advice of the Catholic Church about family.
3. Discuss the view being held by the Orthodox Church on family.

Unit 2

Family: In the Practical Social Life

Lesson 1

Change from Joint Family System to Nuclear Family System

Early Days # Joint Family # Positives and Negatives Thereof # Nuclear Family # Good and Bad Thereof

We have been having the theological background of family set up in the Old and New Testament days as our subject of study so far. But on analyzing sharply, we can see that our family relations are not at all founded on these absolute truths. The contemporary socio, economic and cultural developments have clearly influenced family relations among us to a significant extent. Very often, it turns out that more than the dogmas of the Church, the other realities pointed out above have greater and more of a controlling impact. This is the reason why this unit is titled, 'Family: In the Practical Social Life'. Now let us try to examine the true picture of family life that has been in existence here in the past as also what we have as the current scenario.

Early Days:

The History of Christian Church in India has commenced in the 1st century itself. We do not have any authentic records to learn what used to be the dogmas or rituals in practice among Syrian Christians during those early centuries. Quite possibly, early Christians would have been following a life style in line with the social system prevailed then. Religion has not been having an organized structure then and therefore the practice of marriages getting solemnized at residences would have been followed. It can be considered that marriages with non Christians were not encouraged as also with near relatives. But child marriages would have been quite the order of the day then. Not only during the end of 19th century, but even during the earlier part of 20th century also, child marriages were common. The dowry system which got systematized later would have been in existence in some form or other. As a community, the early Christians would have been very close to the cultural practices of those days and thus, except for certain dogmas of faith, they would have been by and large following the rituals those were commonly practiced then.

Joint Family:

Among the family relationships those were in practice, a concept that was specifically developed and existed was the joint family system. Of late, a further system has come up called nuclear family that has earned wide recognition in society. In joint family, the father and mother with their sons and their wives and children used to stay together. This system followed by Christians was in tune with the cultural scenario prevailing here, but they did not emulate the matriarchal system of succession prevailed among the Hindus. Why the matriarchal system was not followed among Christians then is required to be taken up as a specific subject for study.

Characteristics of a joint family: In this system, the eldest father in the family controls all aspects related to that family. Subsequent positions within the set up go to the sons according to their age. In each such family, there used to be large number of members and therefore, it was not possible to take care of the specific needs of each one. Maintaining privacy between husbands and wives were not quite possible and they could not maintain the needed closeness in their relationships. The women folk were engaged in carrying out household chores and rearing of children and thus used to get confined to within the four walls of the house. In the affairs of the family, male supremacy was prevalent. The tradition was that the decisions regarding marriages in the family used to be worked out and finalized by the elders. The boy or girl who was to be got married did not have any voice or freedom in choosing their spouses. Consequently, the couples were generally ignorant in most things. Often, relations used to be bondages and there were no divorces. Seeing that there were no divorces in those days, there is no way for us to infer that the married lives of our ancestors were filled with happiness and content. Girls were given dowry in relation with the family status. Likewise, dowry was insisted for boys in marriage. It shall not be forgotten that these things are very much rampant even in our present days, may be at a still stronger level. Because of the system of dowry, families with poor financial position were finding it a great ordeal to see their daughters married off. Naturally, parents looked forward to male children being born rather than females. The quarrels between mothers – in - law and daughters - in - law as also among sisters – in - law were always causing disturbances in the family. Though there could be variations in the above in relation with the educational and cultural background of families, the experience of Christian love being made practical was found to be very rare whatever the background of families be.

It can be said that the parents wanted their children to grow up in the fear of God. However, fear of God as well as a meaningful prayer life was viewed as means for the welfare of the family or for material gains. There was a feeling in general that no harm shall be done to anyone, but the young generation was not normally taught to lead a virtuous life performing good deeds to all. There might be a few solitary incidents here and there where importance was given to such qualities in life. Even spirituality was seen in a narrow sense that people were not concerned about accepting the meaning of Christ's gospel of salvation and carry out one's commitments to the community. Yet, a joint family system definitely had certain positives.

Positives of Joint Family System:

1. The elders of the family were properly cared of.
2. Everyone enjoyed the benefits of the family property that was kept together.
3. When one came across any difficulty, there were others always to support him.
4. Being a large family, stresses and strains were common and therefore, all learnt to live facing such problems.
5. Marriages used to survive for life.
6. Though to a limited sense, a feeling of reliance to God was there in all families.

Negatives of Joint Family System:

1. Children were normally not properly cared for; their personality development did not have circumstances to be systematically nurtured.
2. A boy or girl did not enjoy the freedom to choose his or her life partner; very often, spouses were thrust upon.
3. Women had a tough ordeal usually; it was difficult to maintain privacy in husband – wife relationship.
4. Members of family used to have clashes often while expressing one's idea or giving one's opinion; this used to be very common between mother in law and daughter in law as well as between sisters in law.
5. Male supremacy was seen everywhere; many husbands were behaving as if they had been possessing rights even to physically assault their wives.

Recently, the joint family system has undergone lots of changes. The changes would have been influenced by the re orientation of the economic structure of the society and not on account of the ill effects prevailed in the system.

Nuclear Family:

The social life has been agro based for long which gradually gave way for industrial development and people started migrating to industrial centers individually to begin with and later with family. This was the starting point of nuclear family structure consisting of father, mother and children. Compared to the previous family set up, this system had provided certain advantages which prompted even those who were at their home villages to stay separately from parents. Thus, sometimes, due to necessity and

sometimes, for other reasons like protection of personal interests, people began moving away from their mother family. Whatever be that, these changes have come up not because of any Christian values or other creeds based on faith or otherwise. On the other hand, this was a result of the socio, economic and cultural vibrations within the community. The family system will keep on altering in line with the variations coming across the society. But shouldn't we find some place for the Christian values when we think of a Christian family? Or, are we to dance to the tune of such values those keep on varying with the whims and fancies of the society? Should we include these values within the overall Christian perspective? We will think more on this later.

The Positives of a Nuclear Family:

1. The husband wife relation becomes stronger and their privacy becomes more intimate.
2. The personality of children earns recognition and parents take better care in their growth.
3. Women have more freedom here. Apart from home keeping and rearing children, they have proven their capacity to earn for the welfare of the family along with men.
4. The men and women get more freedom in choosing their spouses.
5. As mother in law is not normally staying with daughter in law, clashes between them do not occur.

The Negatives of a Nuclear Family:

1. Elders are by and large side tracked or neglected. The situation is that there is no one to take care of the elders in their old age.
2. There are difficulties to arrange dwelling place and such necessary infrastructure for those who are weak financially.
3. The biggest blow has been to the closeness between family members. 'Selfishness' turned out as a 'virtue' with the approval of society. This has been quite evident in the personality development of children.
4. The real consequence of this is that during the hard times in life, particularly at unexpected tribulations, one wish for another to share problems. There could be an emotional closeness during privacy, but it is painful when it comes that there is nobody close by to lean on in a difficulty.
5. When grandparents and grandchildren stay separately, there comes up a gap between generations. This gap grows too wide to form the foundation of a new culture where the good values of the glorious heritage of the past have no place. (The pros and cons of this can be realized only in the days to come)

With the shift from joint family culture to nuclear family system, some of the traditional basics have turned weak. Though not in large numbers, love marriages do take place. Among the Syrian Christians, dowry system is strengthening day by day. The Supreme Court's ruling that replaces dowry system with equal rights for boys and girls to parental assets, though in place now, lack in clarity at implementation level with consequences thereof yet to be analyzed deeply. Wherever the girl's family is rich enough owning substantial assets, boys have ways to demand higher shares for their spouses. The poor families

do not benefit from this ruling; not only that, their plight is all the more pathetic. But this court ruling has made it possible to accept equality among men and women, at least as a matter of principle. The dowry system has always been a tough nut to crack in our community. The issues persisting at lower levels remain unsolved even now with all these developments.

Conclusion:

What has been pictured above is a general view of the social systemization influencing the family set up among us. There may be differences of opinion when one says that Christian faith and moral values are always sustained as factors too superficial. Yet, we are committed to work out ways and means to uphold Christian values within the twists and turns presented by the society.

Questions:

1. Describe briefly the positives and negatives of joint family system.
2. Ascertain the reasons behind the change from joint family concept.
3. What are the positives and negatives of nuclear family system?

Lesson 2

Preparations to Get Married or Matured Personality Development

Signs of Maturity # Living Self Dependent # Behavior Pattern While Growing in Age # Balanced Manner of Addressing Good and Bad # Preparedness to Suffer and Sacrifice # Maturity to Address Opposing Views with Respect # Control Emotions # Taking Care of Oneself # Responsibility to Handle Money and Time

Signs of Maturity:

The title shown here, 'Preparations to Get Married' shall not be taken as something that is a sudden process. What is generally accepted as the starting point of one's readiness to get married is indeed, one's development to a matured personality. What is maturity? Normally, the reason for differences coming up between life partners is seen to be the immaturity of one or both partners. Therefore, let us try to understand the term maturity in detail rather than confining it to just one word.

When we look at any species, be it of the animal world or of natural vegetation, the term 'ripe' has normally one meaning only. For the animals, it means readiness for procreation whereas for plants, it indicates time for planting seeds. But for humans, this interpretation is not complete in itself. The following factors are to be examined to see whether one is ready to step into family life.

1. **Living Self Dependent:** Biological maturity of a man or woman for procreation is never an indication that he or she is capable to live independently. They should be able to find out means of income to live on their own without leaning to parents or family, that they are financially and otherwise self sufficient. But it is not possible to fix a standard norm for income or other needs so that one's eligibility to enter family life can be standardized. Those who are from a low income background should be capable to manage their affairs within their limited resources. Till very recently, the responsibility to look after the family needs was confined to men alone and as such women were not required to be equipped on this count. Instead, women were judged based on their ability to take care of the personal comforts and such other needs of their husbands and in laws. However, on account of the changes those have come up in the socio economic structure these days, both men and women are equally needed to be well aware of the realities around them for being self sufficient.
2. **Behavior Pattern While Growing in Age:** This too is an indication of a matured personality. One cannot list out patterns of behavior matching different age groups, but the criterion here comes from the cultural status of each community. Yet, keeping certain general standards would definitely be useful in family relations. One can understand and perhaps acknowledge the tendency among the youth to appear attractive and appealing in public, but retaining this trait even after reaching an age and exhibiting such behavior patterns to being attractive to others would indicate immaturity. There was a person known to this writer who was imitating Prem Nazir, the erstwhile ever green hero of Malayalam Films, in every facet of his life. But, problems surfaced shortly after he got married. Once married, it was not possible for him to appear before others as he used to do earlier and hence, started his 'Prem Nazir' style before his wife and her family members. This did not earn any sort of appreciation either from his wife or from her family. Highly dissatisfied, this young man resorted to show uneasiness in everything and got into petty quarrels. However, a casual dialogue with him transformed into counseling and he realized the immaturities in his personality and started to change. Thus, the issue did not blow up into serious consequences. So it shall always be understood that one should re align behavior styles while growing up, which is certainly a sign of maturity.
3. **Balanced Manner of Addressing Good and Bad:** This mature approach is something quite essential for family life. There may be steeps and dips in good and bad, but nowhere can there be a life where these two are not intermingled. Getting highly excited during good days and totally disappointed during bad days is not a matured approach. One who looks forward only to happiness and success in life will find it a tough ordeal to face negatives. Our strong reliance in God and our unflinching faith in Him, who takes care of us in our good days and bad days, help us to address whatever happen in life in a balanced way.
4. **Preparedness to suffer and Sacrifice Now to Achieve High Goals in Future:** Think of a student who spends his college time active in politics, art and cultural activities and 'enjoyable' friendships. He doesn't have much of a chance to reach a good position in life through his education. But another student who utilizes his college time in hard work, sleepless nights and hardships possibly has a bright future through education. This principle is relevant in all facets of life. Anyone who is totally immersed in quick enjoyments cannot look forward to a good future. The husband and wife are expected to go through hard realities in earning money, rearing

children and such chores of life. For a good tomorrow, one should possess a quality to work hard today with a positive mind. We can never emulate the western life style where the couples are not bothered to sacrifice even for their own children, but are engaged only in their daily enjoyments.

5. **Maturity to Address opposing Views with Respect and go ahead in Unison with Them:** This too is a very important sign of maturity. Being a social being, man has to move with many persons at a particular point of time. May be there is close contacts with some, but not so close with others. The behavior of those who are not close with us may not cause any embarrassment to us. But relationship between husband and wife, relationship with parents or children or brothers and sisters or friends or colleagues are not to be taken casually. It is possible that certain behavior of those who are keeping close relation with us or their points of view may not be acceptable to us on occasions. On such situations, it would not be good to force others to toe in line with us as also it is not necessary to surrender our stand to please others. We have to retain the good relations with them while keeping a hold on our specific views on the subject. We have to respect them albeit their views being different with ours. It may not be possible for a husband to always agree to the stands taken by his wife and vice versa. Differences of opinion shall not be treated as symbols of personal likes and dislikes or of status, but it would be far better to get along acknowledging opposing views with respect. The dictum 'agree to disagree' is a mature policy. One's views shall never be imposed on the other; instead, the stand taken by the other person shall be recognized and encouraged, which happens to be a success formula in married life.
6. **The Mindset and Maturity to Accept a Wrong as Wrong:** To err is human; if so, accepting one's mistake and getting ready to rectify is divine. This too is a very important aspect as far as personality development is concerned. There is no one who is so perfect not to make errors. But there are people who cover up such errors which can never be appreciated. The husband and wife coming from different circumstances may possess a tendency to point out mistakes of the other which could end up in petty quarrels. Again, very often, one among the two may do some wrong and try to cover up that, but the other one, if works hard to expose it, the result would be damaging. On the other hand, it far better that an error made by one accept it before the partner and make a commitment that the same would not be repeated. This will enhance the depth of love mutual trust between the two. This dictum shall be applicable equally to both husband and wife. There are chances to interpret this in favor of the husband considering the higher status given to man in the cultural background of our society. That is not correct. Whoever makes an error, he or she should own up with a broad mind which for sure is a sign of maturity.
7. **Control Emotions:** Knowledge and experience may not go hand in hand; likewise, it has to be accepted that there is an unavoidable difference between logic and emotion. Yet, those who are grown up and matured shall have to be strong enough to overcome emotions rather than succumb to it. There are people who react very sharply to issues bluntly discarding the feelings of others causing problems not only in family life, but also in their social relations. If there are frequent emotional clashes between husband and wife, the consequent disturbances coming up in the family life would be quite disastrous. All sorts of negative emotional feelings such as

hatred, anger, fear, revenge, jealousy, pride and the like should be controlled and refined. The sexual relations between husband and wife are not an evil in itself, but there needs an amicable control based on the existing social, cultural and spiritual values.

8. **A Matured Self Reliance midway between Selfishness and Over Dependence:** As a person grows up he gets gradually freed from his dependence on parents to a totally self reliant individual. If one grows up to a state of selfishness denying and admonishing everything in his path, his growth is certainly not of a healthy nature. At the same time, resorting to a parasite style of life by surrendering his independent thinking process and leaning on to someone for each and everything is also not good. Again, for too petty matters like giving alms to a needy person, if the wife has to consult her husband or vice versa, can cause ripples within family life. Usually, these sorts of situations are the starting point of a mental set up where the wife becomes a 'slave like being' to her husband or even the other way round. A couple should always be capable to discuss things mutually and take joint decisions on matters of importance and should be good enough to decide independently on those issues which are too personal. These are possible only if both of them have attained a standard level of maturity. May be, one of them is mature enough in this line whereas the other one is lagging, then the matured partner has a responsibility to encourage the other one to get strengthened in maturity.
9. **Sense of Responsibility to spend Time and Money:** His office schedule ends up by 5:00 pm, but the husband returns home very late after his time at the club and cards playing sessions, to find his wife and children fast asleep. The husband gets his salary on the 1st of the month which he hands over to his wife for housekeeping, but by the 10th, cash is totally exhausted by her luxurious style of spending. If we have a husband and wife like this, no doubt, their family instead of being a Paradise on Earth would certainly be a Hell on earth. How one spends time and money is a very important factor that reveals one's personality. May be one would have been not so disciplined on his expenditures before marriage, but that should not be repeated after marriage. The couple should own up joint responsibility on this count. There are limits for time and money. A couple has to jointly work out ways and means to manage things within such limitations. All these factors should better be acquired during the early stages of personality development. At any cost, these things are to be specifically assimilated in life before entering into family life.

As indicated above, there are many factors related to maturity those are crucial to a successful family life. With these, let us wind up this discussion quoting a definition on maturity. **"Maturity is the art of living in peace with oneself with what we cannot change and courage to change that which should be changed and wisdom to know the difference"**.

Questions:

1. What is maturity? What are the signs of maturity?
2. By illustrating live examples, explain problems coming up in family life due to immaturity.

Lesson 3

Christian Family Life

Definitions # Family as Divine Plan # Criterion to Choose Partner # Biblical Background # Self Realization

Christian Family Life, a Definition:

It is not easy to form definitions to words those are too familiar. Family is a word that belongs to such category. However, it is necessary that we find a definition for the term 'Christian Family'. Many families inscribe "Christ is the Head of this House" on their walls of the drawing room or veranda, and if the message of this inscription gets witnessed in the private and public lives of the members of such families, a Christian family could be understood in that sense. Another phrase "Christian home is a miniature heaven on earth" too contains a suitable definition. Our belief in the Holy Trinity makes us realize easily that in its essence, love of God is omnipresent. Like 'Persons' in Holy Trinity share love mutually, the love of selfless purity shared between father, mother and children is the core of Christian family.

As indicated in a previous chapter, western Church has attempted to define a Christian family. They say, "Christian family is a supernatural unit created by its origin in the Sacrament of marriage, having as it's the primary end the proclamation and nurture of children..... family is the fundamental condition for the physical, moral, social and economic existence of human society". {A Dictionary of Christian Ethics, Ed: by John Macquarie (Art ;) Family, p. 127}.

One thing is clear from this definition. The system of family is not an end in itself. Its survival is related to other factors of the society as well as designed to achieve certain ultimate goals. Procreation cannot be said to be an ultimate goal as that could be a conceptualized one by material sciences. This places us with a need to study Christian family system more deeply.

Family as Divine Plan:

As indicated above, survival of human race can be said to be the goal for all material sciences. But Christian Theology has something basically different to contribute here. That is, there is a Divine purpose behind the creation of human race and its ultimate aim is to transform man to Godliness and lead him to a wholesome and eternal fellowship with the Almighty God. We can illustrate this experience in different words such as Kingdom of God or Eternal Life or Salvation. Thus, to take man to the wholesome experience of salvation, God has designed this very important institution of family. A Psychologist or a Social scientist, while attempting to analyze family from varying pedestals, may be ignorant of this Divine plan. However, a believer has to look at family based on a concept linked with his faith in its fullest depth. While we view a Christian family in such a background, it surfaces that a Christian family has two important roles to perform.

One: Rear a child to live according to the call of God and bring him up to perform according to that call. Two: Participate in God's plan of leading the universe to a wholesome experience of salvation and thus transform the society for which family system has to play its crucial role.

Just that a husband and wife have lived up to the end bearing children and having never separated for even a day and have been enjoying financial prosperity does not mean that such a family can be qualified as a Christian family. Members of a Christian family are those who do the Will of God. Our Lord says, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does that God wants him to do is my mother, my sister, my brother" (Mark 3: 34, 35). Thus, along with the inferences of Psychologists and Social scientists on family relations, Christian values need to be combined and then only, we can see a Christian family life. Based on this, let us see those areas where Christian values are to be looked into within family relations. Some of the important factors are summed up below.

Choosing a partner /husband – wife relationship/ place for children in a Christian family/ obligation of married couple to their parents/the commitment to the Church and the society.

There may be other aspects too which may not have been mentioned here, but we will explain all those found necessary as our discussion progresses. For the sake convenience to explain, let us see some of these aspects one by one.

Choosing a partner: Whatever be the theology behind it, there is no doubt, the most crucial factor in choosing a partner happens to be financial stability. Based on wealth, if we divide the society into three levels like the rich, the middle and the poor, we can understand one thing that most marriages take place within their respective financial levels. As such, when we want to say that all marriages are taking place based on Divine plans, it has to be established that the social divide indicated above too has a providential base. Will a boy hailing from a rich family be prepared to accept a girl from a poor family as his spouse just because she is God fearing, well matured and possessing a noble character? To ensure that everything is providentially systemized, one has to arrive at a solution to the above issue. The dowry system too is something standing very close to this. However, we will have a separate discussion on these later as these are too sensitive when a marriage proposal is thought over. So let us leave it for the moment.

Normally, all among us clamor for a girl or a boy, who is God fearing but when it comes to the practicalities the theological elements take a backstage. The practical life is worked out on the basis of Economic factors and Psychological factors. Any relation established between a rich family and a poor family through marriage based on ideologies or even spirituality, it is not that easy for the relation to sustain till the end. On the other hand, relations between families of equal status are rather easy for survival. Here, there is a pertinent question: can't we overcome the disparities in social structure through spiritual life in Christ? Equally thought provoking question that comes up is which type of marriages are advisable? Love marriages or arranged marriages? This issue is being taken up in one of the later chapters.

Now we will look into other aspects we have to be careful while choosing a partner leaving aside what has been discussed above.

Biblical background: The Holy Bible is silent on the criterion for choosing life partners. We read Abraham sending a servant to choose a spouse for Isaac from his own family clan, in chapter 24 of the Book of Genesis. The criterion was 'own family clan'. This incident clearly indicates a father's responsibility to choose spouses for his children. Though St Paul has not been pressing for a divorce on the basis of differences in faith where marriages have already taken place, he is putting in place a bar in entering into marriages with non believers (1 Cor. 7:39). The Bible doesn't have any more references on choosing partners beyond these. In general, we can say that everything should have a providential blessing. "Each one should go on living according to the Lord's gift to him, and as he was when God called him" (1 Cor. 7:17). This gift of God is not something that comes up at the time of marriage, but it is there right from one's very young age, in all matters, big and small; had there been reliance in God in everything, at all crucial points of time the gift of God would be very much there with us. No external criterion can be imposed here.

First Step in Self Examination: Before choosing a partner, each one has to deeply introspect on one's personality. But this very important aspect is often neglected by most people. Once there is a clear assessment on one's own personality, choosing a partner becomes an easy task. In general, one has to develop a personally conceptualized stand on various facets like the Christian faith and values, commitment to the traditions and rituals of the Church, importance attached to wealth, specific interest towards urban life or rural life, emotional mannerisms, importance attached to the external appearance of the partner, educational standards, cultural status of family and so on by the time one attains marriageable age. But it must be born in mind that whatever has been conceptualized through imaginations need not be realized in any partner. The criterion that one possesses in mind shall be prioritized so as to arrive at a balance by reconciling with certain elements applying own discretion. For example, think of a person who attaches most importance to wealth but finds a connection where beauty, family status, education, excellent family relations and the like are all on a very high level, reconciles with his interest in wealth. With this marriage, if that person brings in changes in his value system, possibly it would turn out into a successful relationship. On the other hand, if he continues to nurture his affinity towards wealth in his subconscious mind as his most cherished value in life, there could be damaging effects on the relation. Rather than taking efforts to discard the value concepts cherished from younger days, it would be practically better to attempt adjustments after ascertaining those traits which are adjustable and non adjustable. Sigmund Freud, the great Psychologist had suggested to expose the emotional realities stored in the subconscious mind and then look into the qualities of the partner for making a choice. It is very much needed that a husband and wife should carry on their family life as mutually substantiating personalities. As such, mismatching traits should be identified earlier and better avoid them.

Questions:

1. In what all ways a Christian family can be defined?
2. Briefly explain the Divine plan of a family.
3. What is your opinion about wealth being an important criterion to choose a partner?

Lesson 4

Choosing a Partner (Continued)

Criteria # Be Normal # Have Unity in Faith # Matching Financial Status # Knowledge about Gender peculiarities

As we say 'prevention is better than cure', taking advance care to avoid any sort of uneasiness would be helpful to a large extent for the smoothness in a family life. The initial step towards this has been already discussed in the previous lesson.

Capability to Being Normal Physically and Mentally: It is not easy to define what is being normal. But we know what is meant by this from our experience in life. To look after the family responsibilities, one should be reasonably healthy and sufficiently balanced mentally. Though anyone can get sick at any moment seriously or otherwise, a person who is not strong enough to take up a family life would not usually venture it. Before fixing up a marriage, Hindus have the habit of looking into astrological matching of the boy and girl. On the other hand, Westerners usually examine the blood group, potency, blood pressure and such parameters. As far as Christians are concerned, astrological examination doesn't carry any sense. Detailed pathological examination is also not required for us, which in fact entered the western culture on account of the wide and fast spreading of HIV. However, it is not out place to ensure that the partner is reasonably healthy and if needed, medical tests can be resorted to in specific cases. It is always better to openly disclose any physical or mental abnormality so that proper precautions can be taken at the earliest stages as also enter into family life with mutual consent of being aware of the problems. Otherwise, things may turn out for the worst later. This writer personally knows a case where an educated boy has been married to an educated girl suffering from certain ailment to the heart, though marriage is not barred for her. The couple is leading a happy family life with a child. They had openly disclosed all the issues in advance and could look into its pros and cons before finalizing their decision for marriage. Like this, any health issues either the boy or the girl has must be openly shared before the marriage. This shall be equally applicable for both physical and mental disorders.

Faith shall be matching: In the previous lesson, it was pointed out that the Bible has mentioned just one criterion while choosing a partner and that is both shall have the same faith. During the time of St Paul,

the basic divide was believers and non believers; but today, while thinking about choosing partners, the division is far sharper even among believers as they stand divided among themselves. There may be justification for the stands taken by different segments, but this has been causing difficulties for believers at large at the practical level. When people find choosing a proper partner a tough task on various counts, it becomes tougher that a choice cannot be made from another church with the total approval from both churches. Though ecumenism is propagated globally and preachers of different church vie each other to preach many things to the extent of honoring even the nature and its resources, the members of churches are facing ordeals for good match for their children. It is a need of the hour that a Christian criterion is put in place to arrange matches from other churches, but without diluting the basic faith of either. It may not be easy to modify the rules and regulations of a church all on a sudden. So believers are to concentrate their efforts to choose partners in tune with the spirituality and traditions they have been following. For example, a person who observes all the Lents and fasts and prayer rituals and feasts may find it difficult to adjust with a partner coming from a reformed background not observing these and perhaps even look at them with contempt. This could be the other way also. One has to decide to what extent he has been following the church worships, rituals and traditions and to what level he can continue them with a partner from a different church; one has to decide this independently and then take a decision. In case, possibilities of differences in such matters are likely to come up, things are to be carefully analyzed and then only a final stand can be taken.

Comparable financial status: It is already indicated earlier that notwithstanding spirituality and ideologies, wealth has been a very important factor in marriage connections. One's family background of wealth is something that is having an impact on one's personality development. Based on the financial status, life style has its own sophistications. We can never find ordinary or poor men in a Lions Club or Rotary Club or in Jaycees. The social relations of rich, middle class and poor people would carry with it peculiarities related to their respective wealth status. Those who are of comparable life styles can move together more amicably. There are situations where one of the partners may be too low financially which can cause a sort of embarrassment to the spouse; also a sort of inferiority complex can develop with the other. In either way, family relations can get disturbed.

This doesn't mean that wealth is considered as the base for a blessed family life. Many among the western communities used to place wealth above human relations consequent to their clamor of consumerism. The result of this life style has been too disastrous to comprehend. In our country too, knowingly or unknowingly, the tendency to emulate that consumerist life style is fast catching up. Transformation of a society may move its own way to an extent without any control, but the young generation should possess an optimum wisdom to realize that such a transformation is devoid of any Christian foundations. What is being suggested here is that comparable financial background among the partners may create a favorable environment in a family relation. However, this shall never be seen as a hard and fast ruling. Consider one of the partners has been steadily moving up in wealth. If the other partner is well equipped with high educational qualifications or attractive employment status, chances are not there for any disharmony. Further, one who holds a high spiritual standard, ups and downs in wealth will have no impact at all. Unfortunately, that much of a quality spiritual life is very rare to come across.

Basic Knowledge about sex: While choosing a partner, this issue may not come up for a discussion, but people are to necessarily acquire basic knowledge on this subject. Unfortunately, our society lacks a system for providing healthy inputs to youngsters on these without crossing the limits of propriety. It is also necessary that our priests should acquire adequate knowledge to impart pre marital counseling. As far as our tradition is concerned, parents or elder siblings may not be ready to give such counseling. The element of keeping a veil over sexuality to a certain extent is always good. But this doesn't mean that one should be ignorant on this. Side by side with the intellectual inputs on the subject, supplementing it with emotional variations too is necessary. The young generation must be aware of these. But the discussions cannot be in a style similar to imparting other areas of knowledge. May be parents or teachers can provide valuable inputs to youngsters in their very young age where they are not grown up enough to feel sexual feelings or emotions. Once these emotions enter the youngsters, they have a tendency to get into it more than what he or she knows. Many businessmen in this field exploit this mental state of youngsters and lead them the wrong way through yellow journalism and blue films. These are all the issues we face in reality. In this matter, all our spiritual organizations namely OSSAE, MOMS, MGOCSM and OCYM should work out strategies to address this crucial subject maintaining a Christian criterion throughout. In their respective classes and discussions, matters can be put through keeping the age level of participants.

Though a deep knowledge about the sex organs of men and women may not be necessary as in an Anatomy class, certain basic information is essential. If a man is not aware of the periodic menstruation of women or a woman is not aware of the semen discharge of men, it has to be inferred that such a man or woman is not matured to enter into family life. Yet, if two such people are getting joined in matrimony, under the cultural values they may live as husband and wife externally and may even bear children and live in family; but due to reasons even not known to them, they cannot lead a life as expected in matrimony. There was an occasion to give counseling to a couple who were married for a few years and also having two children. After detailed discussions about their misunderstandings, it came out ultimately that the reasons for their problems were due to ignorance on sexuality. The husband had absolutely no idea about the sexual emotions a woman would have been having; naturally, she didn't have any sort of satisfaction in their relation. Consequently, she came to a conclusion that the man – woman union had only one purpose behind it and that was procreation. She therefore was not prepared to move beyond that and was not at all bothered about her husband's sexual desires. The husband attributed this behavior of his wife to her interest in some other man and slowly, mutual clashes turned to be a regular order in their life. However, the counseling led them to understand things in a proper perspective and they learnt about the true meaning of sexuality. Naturally, they had their problems sorted out and returned to a happy family life. Even now, the extent of disharmony among our families on account of ignorance in matters related to gender peculiarities are causing too much of problems volume thereof being not even assessable at all. Statistics highlight the number of men and women ignorant on sexuality even in western countries despite the so called sexual revolution they have undergone. That being the case in the west, things would be far worse in our country. This book is not vast enough to narrate inputs on sexuality in its fullness and as such an attempt is not being made in that direction here. However, before entering into matrimony, men and women necessarily have to have basic knowledge in the following aspects.

1. The gender organs of men and women and their respective functions.
2. Basic knowledge on menstruation, safe period and fertile period
3. Intercourse and how man and woman should prepare themselves for that
4. Knowledge about the emotional status of the partner
5. St Paul has taught that woman has authority over the body of man and man has authority over the body of woman; so physical relation in itself is not an evil; husband and wife should develop this attitude within themselves
6. The precautions or care to be taken up during the period of pregnancy as also during the days of breast feeding.
7. Means of family planning.

(There cannot be a systematic rule or procedure as to how many time a week the husband and wife can have intercourse. That solely depends on the physical and mental faculties of each individual. It varies from person to person. As such, each couple should understand this mutually and act accordingly. There is no need to scan books or internet for an answer to this. However, these do not mean that a matrimonial relation is set up for physical intercourses without any control.)

Questions:

1. What are those points to be looked into on top priority while choosing a partner?
2. Could ignorance in sexuality create problems in married life? Evaluate this in its fullness based on age and knowledge.

Lesson 5

Married Life

Entry into Matrimony # Holy Confession related to Marriage # Pre marital counseling # The Wedding service # Married Life # the first Stage which is Emotionally Vital

Entry into Matrimony:

Before we discuss married life, it would be better that we think a little bit about the entry into matrimony. We have already seen that Orthodox and Catholic Churches consider marriage as a Sacrament. Though the reformists do not treat marriage as a Sacrament, they too give certain importance to the wedding service. The essence of what is meant by Sacraments has been already briefed earlier. Therefore, what we are now going to discuss is with more of a practical value.

The Holy Confession before Marriage or Pre marital Counseling:

The Holy Confession before a marriage is a Sacrament with great utility and this can be made use to one's benefit in a practical sense. Among western Churches, pre marital counseling is quite common

with believers, but the unfortunate fact is that many in the West are non believers. At the same time, the Holy Confession that is prescribed as a normal course related to marriages in our Church, perhaps, many are not carrying out with its true spirit. And it is difficult to envisage such people willingly coming forward to a pre marital counseling session. Therefore, it is really a need of the hour that the parish priests take an initiative to organize specific classes for those youngsters reaching marriageable age. Yet, it may be good and proper that such initiatives shall not come from bachelor priests as also from those priests who are not confident enough to present matters of sexuality in a natural manner. Placing incorrect inputs by a priest may do damages to those of our believers who has strong acceptance on the authenticity of whatever is conveyed by a priest. Now let us look into how we can make Holy Confession more effective to those who are making their entry into matrimony.

Believers used to see the ultimate goal of Holy Confession as forgiveness of sins, without understanding its in-depth meaning and therefore, we have the tradition to postpone it till the end. Similarly, there is thinking among many that Holy Confession has to be one thing to be done very close to the date of marriage. Since marriages are solemnized on Sunday or Monday, most of the youngsters do their Holy Confession only on that Sunday. This practice may not be useful for true preparation to start a married life. It is quite unfortunate that many youngsters now possess a feeling that they know everything about matrimony. But a true Holy Confession certainly equips one at least on these facets: deep analysis of personalities, maintaining harmony with partner, effectively addressing prospective changes in family relationships, responsible utilization of time and money and establishing family life in Christian values relying on God. The incorrect concepts on sexuality, pre determined and wrong concepts about in law's family and such feelings are expected to be shared during the Holy Confession so that a realistic understanding can be developed. Those who hold a fear complex about the prospective family life can certainly be corrected in a true Holy Confession. Above all, the Grace of God that flows in through the Sacraments of Holy Confession and Holy Qurbana strengthens the bride and groom to face the new challenges and face the new circumstances. May be, those who are coming up for the Holy Confession are not much aware of these advantages they can have through this sacrament, but the Confession father shall be able to enlighten them on such aspects and transform them to face these realities and prepare them to take up the new responsibilities in God's Grace. It would also be a good gesture that the parish priest visits the bride / groom before the arrangements for the conduct of the marriage takes a final shape and have a sort of informal discussion that they are made at home to face their new life. On the other hand, the bride / groom or their parents can meet the priest as well to discuss matters.

The Service of Wedding:

The present day wedding service brings to light the wide difference between faith and practice. It is not uncommon that the wedding services performed in churches go awkward without the feeling of presence of God. The social side of a marriage quite often underplays its spiritual truth. Barring rich or poor, opportunities of solemnizing marriages are getting deteriorated to showing off luxury and pomp as much as possible. Some may doubt whether this be taken up as a topic to be discussed in a book like this. When we look at the fact that families have moved away from Christian values, it can be understood without much of a research that such value deterioration has its beginning in the luxurious conduct of marriages. Therefore, it is quite in order to discuss them in this type of books. The marriage

rituals should be organized more in tune with Christian values. It is not practical to re align the varied financial status of individuals or families in a society. This will certainly make conduct of marriages at different financial pedestals varying from family to family. Yet, there shall be a minimum requirement that the bride, groom and their kith and kin prepare for the marriage prayerfully and let the service of wedding in the solemn atmosphere of a church be arranged in a pious manner that one experiences the feeling of presence of God there. One must think over how could a church or Sacrament is a forum or occasion for exhibition of the power of wealth for the followers of Christ who indeed was born in a manger. "If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless; (Psalms 127:1). The faith that it is our God who builds a family, has to be got reflected in setting our criterion to choose a partner as also for all the arrangements for conducting the marriage; unfortunately, it not so now.

First Stage of Married Life:

There is no specific time table as to how long this first stage would last commencing with their first night. However, there is a general criterion for this. This criterion is related to their priorities towards emotional feelings leading to physical relations. Such levels of emotion vary from person to person or from couple to couple. Again, this is also related to conceiving a child in the very first year of marriage, practical issues related to official assignments, other issues within the family, health conditions of the wife or husband and things like that. As such, there is no need to get worried about the time schedule for this first stage. What the couple is expected to do is to make suitable adjustment based on the changes in life they are confronting. Whatever be the circumstances in favor, normally the depth in emotion reduces within one to two years. But this should not be construed as the closeness between the couple gets diluted. On the other hand, couples who are leading value based ideal family lives would certainly experience enhanced richness in their emotional togetherness. We will discuss this later.

First night would always be curiosity linked expectancy for any couple. Often, girls being brought up within our culture and tradition would have fear complexes or unnecessary anxieties on this occasion. Many would have read stories exaggerated with unrealistic and imaginary experiences far from realities. Moreover, each one would have one's own feelings and experiences incomparable with those of others in general. There cannot be any common feature in these sorts of matters and there cannot be standardization too. Even for a very simple thing as one prepares to commence college education, people would 'enlighten' the new entrant with many fascinating stories and would find later that these stories are nothing more than fiction and the real college education is far different an experience bearing no semblance to what have been dished out to them by their so called friends. The experiences within a married life too would be more or less similar. But there are certain values that have to be dovetailed into one's conscience if one wishes to lead a Christian family life. This has to be intermingled with their way of life and the daily personal prayer of the couple is very important for this.

There must be regular prayers in Christian homes at least in the evening and in the morning. But husband and wives shall not be content just with these general prayers held with all family members assembled together. Before getting to bed, they should thank the Almighty and glorify Him for all the graces and mercy that have been sustaining them that day; they should confess before the Almighty whatever wrongs they have committed that day knowingly or unknowingly and seek His pardon; they

should pray before Him for a peaceful night and sound sleep that they get up next morning with renewed vigor. Apart from our Kauma and other laid down prayers, it would always be better that they learn to pray orally of their own to be done turn by turn by husband and wife which would be a source of blessings. Once, they submit themselves totally before the Almighty, they would, though once totally strange to each other, come close together and all their otherwise overriding tension or fear or such strangeness would simply disappear like melting of ice. The believers in Christ shall always remember that there is no other source from where one can experience the freedom and joy of mutually acquainting with each other so naturally. Those couples who place God as the center point within their private and public life shall always enjoy a blessed and content family life. Only such people can create a paradise on this earth.

True, there may be a few who would find it not so easy to pray on an occasion like this where emotional feelings are at its climax. There may be some others who feel it a sort of sin to enjoy sex after having immersed in spiritual thoughts through prayers. These types of thoughts are born out of one's total ignorance or one's wrong understanding of the spiritual aspects of sex and the consequent anxieties accompanying such thoughts. There are many among us who are spreading feelings that it is a sin to enjoy sex among those man and woman who are joined in matrimony by none other than God. These sorts of feelings or thoughts have never enhanced the moral values among our community. Moreover, as a result of these senseless feelings being spread in the community, it has made many to accept that sexuality need not be confined to within matrimony and that neither God nor spirituality has any role in these matters. There is practical Psychology playing here that when legitimate rights are denied, no one feels it wrong to resort to illegitimate actions. Many studies have revealed that the forced celibacy among clergy in the western Church has given rise to these sorts of situations. Be in a monastery or in a convent, those who feel that their genuine sexual rights are denied, they may be prompted to act in wrong manners without any guilty conscience. Here, each one would be judged individually by their own conscience. On account of these, Psychologists have in general opined that most of those issues in one's privacy would be linked to his desire for sex. In those communities where the suppressions in sexuality are higher, this tendency too will be on the higher side. Let us leave it there and come back to the life of new couples.

It is an absolute necessity to very strongly impress upon our generation that pre marital and extra marital relations are unacceptable by any standards and that body and spirit are to be kept the holiest always (This has been briefed in lesson 3). But, those who are united by God in matrimony shall thank and glorify God for this great blessing and accept sexual happiness as a gift of God to enjoy; then one can see and feel spirituality in sex too. A Christian married life is just not possible for those who fail to experience the spiritual dimensions of matrimony.

Questions:

1. How can the Holy Confession before marriage be made more effective and purposeful?
2. Examine whether pre marital counseling can be practically implemented at parish level.
3. What all initiatives can there be from each one of us to transform our present wedding service to one where presence of God is being experienced abundantly by all assembled there?

Lesson 6

Married Life Stage One (Continuation)

Spiritual Stands on Sexuality # Misrepresented Values # Controls in Married Life # Culture of Consumerism # Healthy Approach to Sexuality

Spiritual Stands on Sexuality:

The first stage of married life, as we have seen earlier, has its emotional significance. The previous lesson has covered such aspects quite elaborately. Possibly, someone may raise a question here as to whether marriage is a license to sex without control. A one word and simple answer to this question is 'no'. However, to establish that marriage is not a license for sex without control, Church as well as the society has imposed certain restrictions which are by and large impractical and not in tune with Christian values. Before we go on to have a discussion on such restrictions, better we look into what the Church and the society say about this issue in general.

Misrepresented Values:

There is no doubt, we play hide and seek regarding our stand on values to a large extent, particularly regarding sexuality. This has been affecting even our spirituality to a substantial level. In other words, assume that an evaluation is being made on values based on sexuality. For example, there are only two sins advocated most heinous by those who work among our young generation, particularly those being brought up in average or middle class Christian families. These two sins are murder and adultery. Now can we call one's action of looking at a woman a most heinous sin whereas greed, selfishness, pride, self esteem, jealousy, hatred, vengeance, corruption, injustice, undue favors are all judged as minor sins; doesn't this look like a dilution of values? When Christian values are neglected in the above aspects and sexuality alone is pinpointed to impose restrictions, how far such restrictions would sustain? Again, if a person is quite aloof from sex, but possess all the negative characteristics listed above, can he be branded pure? What we need is a redefinition of value interpretation. Among all varying activities of man, isolating sexuality and imposing exclusive restrictions on it cannot be accepted as a symbol of spiritual growth. On the other hand, we are expected to love our fellow creations, be humble, be selfless, do sacrifice for others, lead a life in prayer and live in justice. If we consider spirituality in a broad sense like this, it would always be possible to maintain necessary control in sexual life too. Again, if one desires to bind spirituality in any one of the above factors, it ends up as too much of a narrow minded thought.

Sex related Controls in Married Life:

We have already stated that marriage is not for sex without control. But it is doubtful whether this theoretical concept is being practiced in a fool proof manner. The bar in having sex during period of Lents including Wednesdays and Fridays is something causing a feeling of guilt among young couples.

Apart from these issues having come up during private talks, no authentic researches have been conducted yet on this matter to throw more light on the subject. But there is no doubt that this is a matter of concern for many couples. If some of the young couples are successful to restrain themselves that they can stay away from physical relations on such days totally right from their very early days of marriage, it is really good. But there are couples who are not able to gain that much of restraint; shouldn't it be that a feeling of guilt be created in their conscience? The following facts compel to say that such guilty feelings are not to be created among couples.

- (a) The Holy Bible has not placed any restrictions on the physical relations between couples. St Paul has said, ".....for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor.7:10). He has said with authority that husband and wife have right of possession over the body of their spouse. "Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way, you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self control" (1 Co. 7: 5). Is it not better to provide free will to couples who are living a life relying in God so that they can act with responsibility and take their own decision? Or else, just on the basis of St Paul's advice that they can be separate for prayers, half the days a year they should be ordered to remain separated?
- (b) Again, considering that the directives to remain separated on Lent days are formulated not by those of our early fathers who have undergone a family life in all its comforts and stresses, should we give authenticity to the evaluations suggested by them? May be, there can be a consensus that a person who desires to grow in its wholesome fullness of spirituality, these restrictions and regulations are necessary; yet, doubts remain. As we have discussed earlier, the principles of morality of the highest level taught by Christ through his Sermon on the Mount are broken as and when one finds it convenient without any sort of guilt feelings, should there be guilt feeling in normal family life and the physical relations between man and woman within it? Does this meet the ends of natural justice? Look at those valuable lessons of morality taught by Christ; Love your neighbor as you love yourself, give one to the needy if you have two, do not attempt to remove the speck from other man's eye keeping a log in your eye, do not call your brother 'good for nothing' and such other virtues are broken at will; aren't such offences sins? Is sharing the love of God through physical relation between a man and woman joined together by God a bigger sin? These are important points to be thought over.
- (c) The knowledge we have from the Anatomy and Psychology about sex doesn't justify restrictions in matrimony as discussed above. Sexuality is an emotion; it is something that excites body and mind. Even if the mind is put under check, it may not be so easy to stop the preparedness of the body. The physical closeness between the husband and wife excites and energizes the body. This energy would be at higher levels during the early days of marriage but gradually slows down as years go on. Whatever happens and whether there are any restrictions imposed or not, the frequency of physical relation also reduces over a period of time till such time it is close to nil. Even if the physical relation has reached such minimal level, the truth is that their mental togetherness would be far higher than it was during the initial days of marriage. The sexual desire cannot be wound up on the imposition of restrictions; it does not get rekindled as soon as

the restrictions are withdrawn. Even when there are no restrictions, there are occasions when a husband and wife may not feel interested to have physical relation on certain days. There are couples who can't even think of having such relations on account of various problems they are traversing with; may be unemployment, may be financial crunch, may be problems at work place and such umpteen issues staring at them. Under such situations, they earn strength from the mutual unconditional love and care and sharing burdens between themselves as also from their committed dependence on God.

- (d) Now, if we look at the reasons behind the enhanced sexual immorality in our society, nobody can establish the reasons behind this as the unrestricted physical relation between husbands and wives. Not only that, the erosion of moral values has been affecting individuals, society as well as all factors related to the society. This is an undeniable historical truth. Nowhere in History, has one come across immorality in sex alone and high moral values in all other parameters. The opposite is also not true. Thus, we Christians have a call and responsibility to take up a fight as individuals, as families and as a community against the grievousness of immorality that is prevailing in all facets of the social life.

Culture of Consumerism:

One of the main reasons for the deterioration of morality is prompted by the western culture of consumerism to a very large extent. Making higher profits through enhanced production being a hot subject among businessmen, possibilities created by sexuality are also exploited to achieve their goal. There being no limit to personal wealth and earning profit, the social culture has been allowing all sorts of freedom to entrepreneurs. This has paved way for publication and sale of yellow journals and blue films and they have been sold out like hot cakes. Advertisements and media have gained control over cultural values and whatever caught public attention has been finding acceptance within the society. Even those who have been claiming to be monopolies in holding on to values in morality started publishing novels and stories causing emotional thrills; such third rate publications and weeklies found prime places in houses of all categories of people including Syrian Christians; these weeklies have been having overriding impacts on Holy Bible and other spiritual publications. Those among us who cherish upholding of morality and values should be prepared to lock horns against this business culture and its activities. Parents should take care that their children, boy or girl, are not made exhibits before others; they should be made to grow in discipline and simplicity as well as in the fear of God. Those children who grow in the fear of God and in love for the Church will learn to take care of others; they will be good enough to take proper stands as also impose their own control in married life as needed. The present restrictions put in place by the society or the Church shall be seen as some basic guideline at its best. It can never be appreciated that the God given mutual freedom of young boys and girls in marriage is tied up with non scientific strictures of illegitimate controls.

Healthy Approach to Sexuality:

During the early stages of married life, emotions are more significant and this has made it necessary to discuss things related to those issues rather elaborately. It is very common that couples having reared up in our cultural scenario are by and large showing ignorance on sexuality or are holding wrong notions

about sex. Unfortunately, we do not have any accurate statistics on these. The case diaries of some Psychologists have recorded situations where husbands falling on their wives in the first night as a wild animal overcoming its prey; similarly, there are wives who are afraid like a hapless deer crying aloud out of fear. These may be little bit exaggerated versions, but the couple must be prepared to behave in a mature manner; for this, they should have earned healthy information on married life and sexuality. Though, male sexuality is not that alien to many, the emotions of woman, perhaps, have not attained that much of acceptability. May not for everybody, but some husbands have been showing a sort of indifference towards his behavior to parents after marriage. This is mainly on account of his inherent desire to please his wife and satisfy her needs. What is the reason for this? On examining at its depth, it comes out that the reason is nothing but related to sexuality. The husband is obliged to return to his wife whatever sexual pleasure he has enjoyed from her. Those who are well aware of the sexual emotions of a woman would always return it in the very same manner. Thus, husband and wife by mutually complementing each other share their body, mind and spirit to their wholesome satisfaction. But if this process ends up just satisfying only the husband, he would initiate means to please his wife through other ways like attending to all her needs whatever they are without question. There are wives who find their husbands emotionally far ahead of them; it is found that they are very tactful to exploit them so that the husbands never leave them physically or mentally. This may even result in the husband staying away from his relations like his parents or kith and kin. Very often, what we find is that such wives are quite successful in these attempts during the early days. But as years progress, husbands become less excited emotionally and naturally the wives might not get the peculiar preference they used to enjoy hitherto. This may even give rise to clashes within their married life. The wife would think that the husband does not love her as he used to in the past; also the husband might not understand the real reasons behind this change in her behavior pattern. This can cause stresses and strains in life.

It is really a danger to view marriage only as a means to satisfy one's sexual desires. The purpose of God while designing a family has to be clearly understood; for those who fail to realize this purpose just by seeking only physical pleasure, marriage turns out to be a mechanism to enjoy momentary comforts having no sustainable value; they are total failure when it comes to be part and parcel of Christian joy of family life. The net result of such desires is akin to what happened to most families of the West. In short, in a Christian family, the position given to sex has to be understood in these manners:

1. The sexual emotions God has provided to humans are to be satisfied through means opened by God. For this, God has designed the family system with one woman for one man.
2. Man and woman, while satisfying their sexual desires in family life, are taking part in God's call of procreation.
3. In a Christian family, sexual enjoyment has to be the climax of their mutually complementing love of God and the mutual sharing of the body, mind and spirit. This alone is the reason why they are more in unison and joy during those days their sexual emotions and desires are substantially cooled down as years have moved far ahead.
4. Sex is helpful for enhancing the necessity of their mutual fellowship.

5. Though the husband and wife are brought up in different circumstances and they have been having varying patterns of behavior, they are overcoming these differences and variations through their healthy sexual relations.

Thus, every married couple has to glorify and express heartfelt thanks to the Almighty God while they immerse within their fellowship and mutual confidence in its climax.

Questions:

1. Can spiritual dimensions be seen in sexuality? Or, is sexuality merely a worldly phenomenon? Arrive at a solution after a discussion.
2. What do we understand by a consumerist culture? How is this related to deterioration of moral values?
3. To uphold the moral values in sexuality, there are certain restrictions imposed in an ideal family life; yet, there are schools of thought that what we need for this are something else. How do you respond to this? Explain.

Unit 3

Transition Stages in Married Life

Lesson 1

Strains in Stage One

Reasons for Early Days' Strains # Marriageable Age # Premarital Relations # Own Dwelling Place # Financial Environment

We have lot of information about studies conducted in US, Britain and other European countries about the issue of fast increasing number of divorces. A divorce can take place at any stage of a married life, but the above referred studies show that 40% of such incidents happen during the first five years of married life. During the last ten years, divorces among couples above the age of 25 has increased two fold in England and Wales whereas it was three fold among couples aged below 25. What is the inference? The strains in a married life would be at its maximum during the very early period. Once a couple gets through these early years successfully, they would be able to carry on with a content life normally. Another issue we have to address is how happy are married life among us; maybe there are no divorces as much as what we see in western countries; but does this infer that lives are really happy

here? If this is looked upon with rather a critical mind, a pertinent question is whether the number of divorces is low because of our value based system linked with our faith and practices or the reason behind this has to be attributed to the peculiarities of the patristic culture we are holding. Possibly, the latter of these are more influential. It is fact that number of divorces is on the increase among Christians in India who are trying to emulate western culture more than any other community. A statistical survey conducted on the divorce cases filed in the High Court of Kerala indicate that Christians are topping the list as reported in a contemporary publication. Let us leave it there. Based on experience, whether there is a divorce or not, roughly the first five years are days of stresses and strains, emotional clashes, ideological mismatches and other differences of opinions or views. These sorts of strains can cause varying responses among different couples. Those who lead a Christian life in its true perspective make efforts to understand mutually closer to identify areas of concurrence and try to carry on happily. Christian values like their prayer life, their mutually complementing love, their sincere approach to each other, their preparedness to sacrifice for the other and their faithfulness strengthen them to address adverse situations positively. On the other hand, those lacking in wisdom or insight or Christian value base would get fed up with a casual outlook on these issues and go on assuming that nothing can be bettered here; viewing from outside, one may not see any clashes or quarrels between the couple. But even if physically close, they are mentally far apart. There is yet another segment carrying on forward, but with daily quarrels and clashes mentally and physically. Since divorces are not that common in our society, they have just not proceeded that way. Though married, we cannot say that they lead a family life. Those who show off that they do live a content family life also live in darkness.

Reasons for Early Days' Strains:

We have seen regarding westerners that the first five years of married life is associated with more strains and stresses causing possibilities of more divorces. Whatever reasons they have identified may not be applicable in our scenario as they are. Still, there are certain aspects among these which have relevance even among our circumstances as well. Let us look into them.

Marriageable Age:

Statistics from the west indicate that marriages conducted in the age group 20 to 25 have landed up in divorces quicker than those in elder age groups. If we look around, we can observe stresses and strains coming up within those relations where body may be ready, but mind is not matured enough. The influence of our cultural peculiarities has been according silent concurrence to girls entering matrimony earlier than boys in age. Even the government has made statutory bench marks as 18 years for a woman and 21 for a man. A family life makes the young couple to take up added and not too light responsibilities. This involves financial issues, likely changes in the relations within families as well as fear complex involved in having relations with a person who is totally alien till then which are all situations needed to be addressed with maturity. This has been already discussed in one of the earlier chapters in detail. In short, it may not be advisable for girls below the age group 20 to 22 and boys below 25 to 27 to enter matrimony in our cultural scenario. However, this need be taken as a general suggestion only. The basic criterion to be considered is emotional maturity.

Premarital Relations:

The western culture used to be having pre marital sex among most of the youngsters as regular order of the day which deteriorated their cultural and moral values to such an extent that the attack of a plague was necessary to curtail them; we can say, the AIDS indeed has been serving a purpose persuading people to stay away from pre marital or extramarital sex. Once such pleasures are already experienced, and then entering married life never makes early days of married life exciting as it would have been otherwise; this leads the couple to get involved in clashes between them because they are curious on mismatches within them rather than curious about matching identities within them; the emotional feelings have more or less vanished which could have pepped them up in such discouraging scenario. Even those involved in love marriages lack that fragrance of freshness in acquaintance as well as even in physical relations because of their previous closeness albeit no pre marital sex between them; but here their mutual attraction that would have been a feeling to cherish on the first night is usually lost. This too can cause dissatisfaction leading to strains and stresses. Our culture may not be as bad as that of the west, but there may be men and women entering a married life without having maintained their purity of life. We cannot have any true picture in these because there can't be any reliable statistical data anywhere. In case some mishap has occurred earlier, it should have been possible to do a confession in its true spirit and get mentally and spiritually renewed to be ready for marriage. There may not be anyone to punish them seeing such mishaps from outside, but a conscience filled with feeling of guilt can create problems later in life. The issues coming up from these are not just related to Christian values alone, but they can lead to reduce the love, affection and sincere relationship with the spouse, mentally as also physically; this can even cast doubts about the past life of one's spouse too. May be during those early days when emotion pushed back wisdom prompting wrongs which were never found to be errors then, could subside in sub conscious mind to live up later when Christian values have got matured enough in one's elderly days; this can make the guilty feelings haunting forever. Also, those who suspect the past dealings of their spouses are later found to have been suffering from ill feelings within themselves those have been suppressed in their sub conscious mind. To overcome these difficulties, anything that is causing stresses and strains have to be addressed then and there and remedial measures sought so that family life gets along as a pleasant experience right from the very early days.

Own Dwelling Place and Financial Environment:

Again, looking into statistics we have from the west, these are also sound reasons for divorces. In other words, those youngsters who are not keen to remain with parents after marriage look forward to set up an independent dwelling place for them. They do not appreciate others' entry into their privacy even to its bare minimum level. In case their efforts to locate a suitable dwelling place, even though not that comfortable, do not meet with success, they are disappointed and there could develop mutual dissatisfaction paving way for even separation. Some studies reveal that this category of separatist tendencies is seen more among those who are at the very low level of the society. These people who are said to belong to class V are not much educated; their livelihood would be based on labor works with daily wages needing no technical knowhow. When financial burdens and lack of education combine together, disharmony surfaces too fast and the family life gets engulfed with strains.

In our society too, these situations are quite relevant though may not lead to a divorce. Those who are living in the lower strata of the society, particularly women among them would have been dreaming a better tomorrow at least through marriage. But very often, their experience would be a change from bad to worse. It would a tough ordeal for them to align themselves to such unexpected and unforeseen situations. Even if one is a matured personality, it would be very difficult. If we closely observe families in our society which are financially weak and educationally backward, we can see that many such families are surviving with different sorts of strains and stresses. To top it, being part of the society, they cannot totally ignore certain systems and rituals formulated by the rich; certain social rituals like seeing the kitchen after marriage, calling the pregnant daughter for delivery, visiting the new born, tying the note on the 28th day, returning the new mother and child to her in laws and such things are all causing monetary burdens. For the rich, these are occasions of exhibiting joy and there are mutual exchanges of gifts of very costly nature like beginning with the richest of sweets and similar food items to costly dress materials and even gold ornaments. The poor stare at these occasions with fear out of their inability to match the rich imposed customized rituals. Their failure to match these can cause relations getting strained and their plight dipping further. In fact, they experience once again how badly placed they are in the society. Even our Behavior Scientists or Psychologists or Social Activists who are all on the one side close associates of the rich do not bother to highlight these discrepancies to ensure a social equality to prevail. Most of the articles appearing in various magazines highlighting family issues are never bothered about the issues faced by the poor. They are always picturing issues relating to the rich or middle class. The Church which is expected to take care of the working class and those who take heavy loads on them must come down and address their problems with compassion and love. Meaningful exhortations are the need at this stage to enlighten people of all categories that the upper class becomes more conscious about the lower class. The poor on the other hand should not be keen to follow the rituals brought by the rich to satisfy their selfish motives; instead, they should accept the realities of their financials and exclusively based on such realities, manage their affairs; these are essentially the responsibilities of Christians to practice in their life. If we are prepared to enter the family lives of the poor in our parish, these facts could be very easily understood. The causes for many disputes are centered on dowry that the other party has not been handing it properly. Very often, the daughter in law is forced by her mother in law to stay away from her husband just because the new born was not gifted a golden chain by her parents; even the husband too supports his mother in many of these situations. What Christian values can one see in these families where love and mutual care has been totally thrown away? We have to come down from our high level thinking to point out realities and preach how Christian values are to be reflected in life. To address the problems staring down the ordinary members of the Church, a Psychologist has no role, by but the clergy should come forward to share their pain and sorrow; good friends in Christ too can do wonders here.

Questions:

1. Ascertain the sources of stresses and strains during the early days of marriage.
2. Evaluate the mental tension usually faced by the poor in relation to the social customs being practiced by the rich, based on personal experiences.

Lesson 2

Means of Reconciliation

Place for Spirituality # Distancing from Parents # means to avoid Issues

We have been so far thinking about the clashes likely to happen in the first stage of married life as also the issues common with western culture and relevance thereof related to our situations. Now let us turn our attention back to our own scenario, but not before making a mention of yet another fact coming to light from the west.

Role of Spirituality in Sustaining Family Relations:

Since long, neither spirituality nor religion has any worthy role or influence to play in the social life of the west. Most of their weddings take place in locations suited to their individual preferences; just a few only have them in a church. But statistics show considerable differences in the number of divorces between these two. Those couples having no interest in religion or spirituality do not find any difficulties in taking decisions on divorces and proceeding with. However, those couples who are in the habit of attending church services as also those marriages having got solemnized in a church do not go for divorces that fast. If any problems come up during their early days, they make attempts to present them before their priests with whom they have regular contacts and seek remedial counsel. This may take place only among those few church goers, but studies show that they are indeed benefitted. Most of the couples are not viewing things in a spiritual line, but presume that by psychologically guided adjustments, issues can be sorted out. Now, if the thinking that all sorts of family disputes can be tackled through psychological guidance, there cannot be any family disintegration in the West as we see now, simply because they are well equipped with Psychologists with many varying specializations. For a family life that is blessed with all sorts of fortunes, spiritual and material, psychological approaches have to be complimented with a spiritual life. Mutual love, sacrificial mind set, compassion, helping mentality, empathy, sincerity, faithfulness, righteousness are all qualities one has to have and only a spirit centered living can have all these virtues imbedded in life. This is something a married couple should always remember. It is relevant everywhere that the spiritual togetherness between husband and wife is always helpful in overcoming their problems.

Distancing from Parents:

In our cultural scenario, this is one crucial area where young couple faces many vital problems. Some parents have a feeling that their son leaves them forever with marriage. This very often causes heartburn for the mother. The variations of this heartburn among mothers are related to their individual past. A mother who has been living with her husband happily since her early days of marriage may be able to contain the present detachment from her son quite normally. But a mother who has been part and parcel of a joint family system would not have had a close association with her husband as much as she has been looking forward to; she would probably be a bit jealous about the freedom her daughter in

law is enjoying; this could prompt her to place checks on the daughter in law. Even a widowed mother could possess these sorts of possessive feelings. After the husband, her son would have been the one closest to her and if she gets a feeling that he is moving away from her, maybe there could be a deep disappointment, leading even to withdrawal symptoms. Some others may react in a different manner with a sort of vengeance. They may even place their son and daughter in law in separate levels and create situations that they always remain so. Such a mother usually takes excellent care of her son and supports him in all matters but irritates her daughter in law openly as well as privately. But the son being not aware of that peculiar mental condition of his mother plays role supportive to his mother making his wife aloof in the family; within a short period of time, her life would turn horrible. In this cold war, the turn of events can move exactly the opposite way also. The daughter in law may not realize the peculiar mental feelings of her mother in law; perhaps, she may understand, but would not bother or react in the right way and she would try to exploit the situation tactfully to her advantage. If the husband is one who looks at all these logically, she may work out ways and means to convince him about his mother's 'evil' designs and make him turn against his mother. If the husband is prone to be too emotional, the wife may even present her points in highly emotional ways. If she succeeds to toe her husband totally in her line, the poor mother has to face the music for the rest of her life. The same mother, who just a few days or weeks ago has been very enthusiastic making all sorts of arrangements for the smooth conduct of her son's wedding and has been dreaming joyous days ahead is now totally upset. Her mental strains would gradually affect her body also and may turn sick. The sick mother becomes a burden for her son and daughter in law. Sometimes, the husband's brothers and sisters all contribute by adding fuel to the fire and the whole scene become too volatile. The husband in his dilemma would like to please his mother on one side and his wife on the other and would land up between the devil and deep sea. But there are husbands who admonish their wives in front of their mothers during day time and be close with wives in the night. However, this veil of such husbands may get exposed one day. Not only that, such actions would not bring forth a lasting solution to the real issues. To have a pleasant family atmosphere, the mother in law and the daughter in law have to deal with each other with mutual love and affection and understanding. For this there has to be a give and take policy from all involved and should be prepared to sacrifice a bit here and there. The following suggestions would be found useful in this regard.

- a. *Family Prayer*: The dictum "a family that prays together stays together" has not been coined just for the sake of couples, but for all. Here, what is being suggested is a prayer session where all members including parents, other kith and kin and the young couple join together to pray. Maybe there are petty quarrels or difference of opinion once in a while in families, but there shall not be any exemption for anybody to stay away from this joint prayer. All Christian families should follow this without any dilution on any occasion. If one comes to accept that there is nothing impossible for God, the scenario in families would be one of reconciliation or problems being melted away. The Holy Spirit would descent on everyone and shower blessings that there is the feel of sacrificing for the other with increased experience of mutual love and mood of conciliation. In short the priority shall always be for God to intervene.
- b. *The son (the husband) shall take initiative to address the problems*: It is always practical that the one who is close both to the mother and the wife shall be the intercessor. There are husbands

who stay away from this responsibility with a sort of lack of interest ruling them that let the daughter in law and mother in law fight each other and sort out issues themselves. But this is far from the right approach. Those who are mentally not aligned can aggravate problems by further engagement of talks leading to avoidable arguments. The fire shall have to be put out before it gets spread. The son (the husband) has the prime responsibility here.

- c. *Dialogues shall be based on Christian Values:* This is very important. Be it his mother or be it his wife, both would turn against him if he takes a stand not in tune with that of his mother or with his wife. This type of a situation shall not be allowed to come up. If the dialogue is directed to the right and wrong of the issue, the intercessor would be forced to take decisions like making a ruling. If he concludes that one side is wrong, the other side would be increasingly worried or upset. Thus, care has to be taken to see that the discussions never deviate to such a course. One has to resort to talk purely based on Christian values. Maybe his wife or it would be his mother who has been alleged to have done or said something damaging the feelings or emotions of the other; better, the intercessor brings out the point of being reconciled in the name of Jesus Christ. It should be supplemented by one more poser; can't we justify the words used or the act committed while we stand before God? In short, it would always be advisable to have discussions leaning on mutual love, forgiveness, sacrificial mind, taking care of the other, spirit to forget and forgive and such virtues rather than entering in to arguments.
- d. *Clear overstepping from any side should be admonished in a serious tone, but peacefully:* This may not be that easy to address. But, this is really crucial for a successful family life. Just for the very simple reason that the girl's share from her family has not been brought in full as agreed earlier, if a mother advises her son to leave his wife with her parents is not something a son should obey in a Christian family. He should possess a moral uprightness to tell his mother in all its seriousness, but coolly not to force him to do something against the will of God. Likewise, if his wife, out of her selfish interest may suggest staying separately leaving her mother in law all alone; the husband has to take strong stand to tell her and convince her otherwise. Normally, in their day to day life, if the husband succeeds in following Christian criteria in all affairs without any dilution which can be emulated by others also, both his mother and wife will carry on with mutual consideration and accommodation quite happily. On the other hand, if he takes a stand to appease one among them, despite a temporary happiness at the beginning will find that such happiness would not last.
- e. *Be compassionate to the weaker among the two:* Whatever is the truth or otherwise, this is a principle that needs to be taken care in all personal relationships. We have examples from the Holy Bible; look at the tax collector, the Samaritan woman, the prostitute and the sinner woman; Christ did never justify their sins, but seeing their helpless plight in the society, dealt them with compassion. We have many parents who are educationally not well off, suffering from health problems particularly due to ageing and having no source of income of their own; it is the responsibility of the young generation to treat them with compassion and mercy rather than pinpointing distortions in their behavior pattern. Maybe their weakness, physical or otherwise, would be the cause behind abnormal or distorted pattern of behavior. We also have parents in some families who are better equipped and hence on a stronger footing. They would be having their own sources of good income, they would be healthy, they would be well off educationally

and they would be having good and high family connections. If the daughter in law is from a family not such high level, there are possibilities that she may be treated a bit badly. If she doesn't have any income of her own or she doesn't get any financial help from her parents, she is in a state that for each and every petty need, she has to depend on her husband. In a situation like this, the husband as also other relatives should see to it that she is taken care with more compassion that she is always at home. Yet, there are girls who exploit this compassion or empathy and try to make gains out of that which needs to be tactfully controlled. If fear of God and true morality accompanied by good virtues are combined, these types of problems would never show off.

- f. *Engaging in activities to the interest of all members of the family:* This is something that helps reduce mental tension if any, among the members of the family. Having regular outings with wife and children alone can create ill feelings among parents however broad minded they are. It would always be good that an outdoor program is planned out involving parents also once in a while so that they are having a chance to come out of the routine way being followed and be a bit different; this would make them really happy. This can also sort out the differences among members of the family which would have been there, if at all, to melt out. The ordinary among our society are yet to organize holiday programs like those in the west, and for the sake of modernism or fashion, the elders need not be pushed into such programs all on a sudden. But it would be good that the elders be taken for a trip to the relatives' houses near and far as also to pilgrim centers or other places interest. A journey together with all the elders in the family and the juniors would be a fruitful exercise in many respects. Provision for own vehicle need not be seen as a requisite for such outings; one can resort to the usual mode of transportation one is accustomed to which would be quite sufficient.
- g. *In case any help from others is needed, it has to be utilized without hesitation:* Very often, the young husband alone cannot sort out the issues within the family, particularly those between the daughter in law and the mother in law. In such cases, a matured relative or a close family friend can be relied upon as an intercessor provided he is not in the habit of spreading these inside stories to the outside world for his enjoyment. Such persons should surly be good enough to choose between good and bad as well as possessing the call to address issues with fear of God, selfless love and true empathy. As far as we are concerned, the parish priests can be made to involve in such problems. Whatever we have been discussing so far in this chapter has been directed to the early days of married life, but they need not be confined to such early days. All these discussed aspects are found useful as guiding points at all stages of life.

Questions:

1. In between the clashes between mother in law and daughter in law, the young husband falls between the devil and deep sea. Illustrate the husband's mental struggle.
2. Can we hold tight the principle of being merciful to the weaker side in family disputes? Explain.
3. How can one respond based on Christian principles when there are differences of opinion?

Lesson 3

Dreams Unrealized

#Imagination and Reality # what is dreamt and what is in store # Unconditional Love # Deep Love at all Levels #

Imagination and Reality:

There is a saying in English 'imagination is better than reality'. This is a truth that lives with us throughout our life. But the dreams woven by many of us through day dreams and imaginations turn out widely different from the realities. As far youngsters are concerned, without any exception, all would have been living in such a world of imagination at some stage of their life. Not only that, those few who are carrying out an intellectually superior way of life without leaning on such dreams or imaginations would find their family lives not that comfortable. Therefore, imagination is needed to a certain extent which would, perhaps, be helpful to create new and renewed feelings of emotions in family life. At the same time those who continuously entertain imaginations far wide off realities would surely be instrumental to cause hick ups in family life. To establish this fact, let us look into the following real life stories.

What is dreamt and what is in store:

Keeping the characters and location anonymous, a true story is narrated below. One girl well educated and possessing good reading habit, wanted her husband to be one based in the States. Many a proposal that has been coming up locally, albeit being quite good looking on the educational background, family as also personal appearance were all rejected on one pretext or another. At the end, a case was located in a matrimonial column; a youth here on vacation, but based in the States, were looking forward to a girl willing to accompany him to the States. This matrimonial advertisement was brought to the notice of her parents by the girl herself. Having aware of the girl's likings, the parents started necessary initiatives; there were mutual visits as it was customary and in due course, the wedding was solemnized quite luxuriously befitting the status of the groom from the States. As our girl and her parents were dreaming on an alliance from a US based connection did not bother to make enquiries on his educational background or the nature of his employment there. She too joined him in the States after about a year after complying with the travel, VISA formalities. There, to the shock of her life, she found her husband leaving for his job in too casual a dress whereas she was looking forward to him leaving in a well dressed and executive style; he was moving to the supermarket where he worked as a salesman. Shortly, she came to another shocking realization. She found out her husband's educational background in the form of his SSLC book, not one but two. She, a Post Graduate, felt her helplessness in its climax and just could shed a few drops of tears; nothing more she could do at this stage.

There are others who cherish dreams about their partners' external appearance. Once the reality comes up, they feel too bad about their plight. There was one young man who was holding a high position by virtue of his good employment; but was lacking a confidence in life as he was rather dark

in appearance. He was dreaming that he should have been a little more whitish in color. The nature of his job and his responsibilities were such that he had to appear before the public on occasions along with his wife. He, therefore, wanted to have a girl of good color complexion as his wife. Shortly, there came up a proposal and whatever he was dreaming seemed to be getting realized even more than he was looking forward to. The girl was well educated, was from a good family, had a decent family share, had good connections and was well employed. But she was not as beautiful as he was expecting and her color too was more or less darkish. However, considering all aspects, he made up his mind reconcile on those points and the wedding was done quite happily. Their life went on smoothly but in his purely private thoughts, it frequently was coming up that she should have been a bit more beautiful. However, such feelings were not strong enough to insinuate any discordant note in their life. In due course, she became pregnant and he was looking forward to the new born who would not be as dark as him. He even had been praying vehemently for a baby white in complexion and even made offerings in churches. But, unfortunately, when the child was born, he found his offspring darker than him. The child was not that good looking too. This was something he could not withstand. It was just impossible for him to love his wife and child as a father is normally expected to. Ultimately, he decided to meet a Psychologist; once his sub conscious mind was opened up, he realized the differences between imaginations and realities and was prepared to reconcile with the reality; he was relieved of his internal disturbances.

All married couples have to address these sorts of issues of varied magnitudes. It is just natural that the behavior styles or approaches to various situations of husband and wife, father in law and mother in law are all not that harmonious as would like to have. But the circumstances prevailing in different families influence these styles and there shall be no reason to worry over that. One shall never look forward to experience in life what was being seen through imagination. Those who keep on cherishing imaginations rather than addressing the realities are in for troubles. Let us discuss a few points as to how the newly married couples can overcome these practical problems.

1. While we have been discussing the preparations for getting married, a solution to these sorts of issues has been suggested. Here the suggestion is to arrive at an insight regarding the thing with which there can't be any consensus as also ensures well ahead of the solemnization of the wedding that the realization thereof can be achieved through this relation. For example, a girl has been dreaming to be living in a foreign country after marriage; she would do well by realizing that her dream would normally be not realized if she marries a pre primary teacher. Likewise, it is necessary to think in advance how far the imaginations can be made true in a marriage alliance.
2. However carefully we calculate and do meticulous planning, there are limitations to man's logical thought processes and intelligence. Maybe accidental, maybe due to errors in our calculations, things can take turns against our wishes. At the end, we have to learn to accept those realities and move ahead hand in hand with those developments, relying on God. Considering the Sacramental base and the purity of faith, moving to divorce on petty reasons can never be appreciated. Maybe, in rarest of the rarest situations, that course of action has to be looked into, not otherwise normally. In case it is found that the partner is mentally retarded

or mentally ill and this was not disclosed early, there may be some justification in resorting to a divorce. Again there are occasions when the couple moves to faraway places in India or abroad and it is then found there that the husband has been having other live relations, people have moved for divorces. Apart from such very rare situations, there shall not be any move towards divorces. It is always to learn to reconcile with situations that cannot be changed. But there must be a methodology to help the couple in such a scenario.

Unconditional Love:

Indeed, unconditional love will help one to improve all sorts of relations with others, personal or otherwise. The source of such unconditional love is none other than our Lord. We love others usually when we see certain qualities in others which are to our liking. This type of love is the worldly love or conditional love. "But God has shown us how much He loves us- it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Christ never has an approach to love sinners after they are transformed. He loves us while we continue in our sins. But, he tells us not to sin again. He dealt with the woman caught in the act of prostitution and the Samaritan woman in this manner as narrated in the gospels. If this attitude gets reflected in family relations, there are no problems those can't be solved.

The couple after wedding has to think like this. Among those umpteen numbers of young men, this has been the one chosen by God as my husband. Similarly, among all those beautiful girls around, God has handpicked this one for me. Whatever be the drawbacks in him / her in my judgment, I don't bother; I will love him / her, as also his / her parents as well as accept their whole family situations without looking into the good or bad thereof. If the young husband and wife can develop a mindset like this, God will be among their midst to make their family life one of blessings in its wholesome fullness. Yet, it has to be born in mind that this is easier said than done, but determination and continuous hard work interwoven with a true prayer life will lead the couple to such a high level.

The main reasons why human relations are not getting better come up from the simple truth that we are not bothered to love one with all the drawbacks in him / her. The educated and sophisticated young daughter in law may find it rather unacceptable to get tuned to the patterns of the aged father in law and mother in law immediately after marriage. The father in law and mother in law could find it difficult to cherish the mannerisms of their daughter law if she mixes with them with a sort of artificiality in her behavior. Here, an unconditional acceptance either way alone can create a cordial atmosphere. This doesn't mean that all those bad traits, if any, should be tolerated for a smooth family life. We have discussed earlier the ways and means to point out such characteristics and how to correct them. But to correct one from their error prone patterns itself has its first step to accept and love one with all the associated weakness. This tolerance can never be construed as a move of reconciliation with bad habits.

This will also help the couple to forget those feelings of the past which would have been haunting some youngsters even after marriage. There could be something in the past lives of the husband or

wife or both causing hindrances, a few of which may look like bad relations. During the young days, there would have been some love affairs just for the sake of fun; sometimes too silly and sometimes not so silly. Even sexual contacts would have been there in certain cases which would be staring from the past. Understand that all these memoirs are now in the waste basket and one has to boldly burn them out before his / her marriage. Let us not go back to those memoirs hereafter. The partner should always be matured enough not to probe into the other one's past which is unwanted for a happy wedded life. But occasionally, these sorts of relations are seen even among married couples. Some among the newly wedded man or woman in their anxiety to impress upon the spouse that they were highly accepted and valued in their society will simply dish out truths and half truths which ends up in deep troubles in due course. This is just like buying a biting dog paying good money. Look at this newly wedded boy's interesting story. He wanted to convince his wife that he was very strong in resisting temptations however strong they are. He created a story that one day his parents has to go to a far away relation to attend a funeral which made him stay alone at his house but their servant girl was also there who was in her prime youth. He boasted that despite the encouraging moves from the servant girl, he resisted with his strong will power. Listening to the story, his wife didn't feel like appreciating him and on the contrary, felt that he would have possibly done something unwanted. The great dramatist Shakespeare has defined woman as 'frailty, thy name is woman'; and perhaps, this young husband's wife would have been reminiscent of this well known definition. At the end the husband had hell of a difficulty to convince his wife about his purity and innocence for which he has to call upon all those saints of the Church right from St Mary to all those whom he knew by name. The incident has been narrated by that person himself and which cannot be a solitary incident; similar incidents would have been there in the lives of many. Here again, what was lacking was the absence of unconditional love.

Nobody should endeavor to probe the past life of married couple beyond limits of decency. Even if something is circulated by friends for the sake of fun or by gossip mongers, ensure that no importance is attached to such stories. Even if something reaches one with all sorts of accompaniments making it looks like truth in its absoluteness, what is expected is to accept one's partner with all the weaknesses he / she possesses. If one takes a stand like this with conviction, no external force can spoil their unity.

Deep Love at all Levels:

There are situations where the husband loves his wife and the wife loves her husband in all its intensity, but treats other members of the family with contempt. The wife loves her husband more than her life, but she hates his relations and his family. This can happen the other way round too. However, such way of loving one's spouse can't be seen as a reflection of Christian love, but a love intermingled with that feeling of hatred towards the family in its larger perspective. There is a tendency in such show off before the society to exhibit that they are managing all affairs as systematically as expected. Here, the 'unity' between the husband and wife is not related to any facet of a Christian love or value. The Christian love should be evident in all walks of life. There shall be no attempt to contain it in a single direction. In other words, the flow of this unconditional love shall not be confined between husband and wife, but shall be open to all family members making everybody happy like the fragrance of that costly

perfume anointed on Christ. The family where this unconditional love is shared by all without exception happens to be the Paradise on Earth.

Questions:

1. With the help of examples, clarify how the differences between imaginations and realities affect the fortunes of family life.
2. In what all ways, unconditional love supplements blessed family lives?
3. What are the problems in sharing the past experiences of the couple?

Lesson 4

Getting Ready to Receive the Newborn

Family becomes Complete # When do we have the first Baby # The Invited Guest # Equality among Genders to commence with Women # Care during Pregnancy

Most of the issues leading to stresses and strains in a married life particularly during the early stages have been analyzed more or less totally in the previous lessons. Apart from those, there are other problems also in a married life some of which we would be discussing later. During the very early stage of marriage, another very important development takes place; the coming of a baby.

Family Becomes Complete:

It need not be explained that the family life is complete only when a baby is born. Husband and wife make up a couple; when a baby is added to them, a family is formed. Scholarly thoughts are that the emotion we call love has three angles as if in a triangle. As far as Christian believers are concerned, fullness of love is seen in Holy Trinity. A family is assumed to be a parallel to Trinity highlighting the role of love. The husband and wife who love each other love together when they have a baby.

What should be the position of children in a family has been discussed earlier. Children are the gift of God. The Husband and wife have to be thankful to God as they have been blessed to be partakers in God's plan of procreation.

When does one have the first Baby?

The routine that was being followed since long was to have a baby in the very first year of the marriage without trying to arrive at an answer to this question. This does happen even now. But the western social culture is totally different. They follow the system of 'childless marriage'. This means a married life where children are not needed. The western wayward culture assumes children as a hindrance and they should not stand in the way of the parents' enjoyment of their privacy. They are able to plan out like this because there is no place for God or spirituality in their way of life; it is only natural that they do this or even things worse than this. These people enter matrimony after signing an agreement that there shall be no compulsion to have children in marriage.

By God's grace this social deterioration has not taken roots in our society but of late, there are incidents suggestive of such influences slowly affecting us. To enjoy their privacy, we too have couples postponing conception. This approach cannot be appreciated for children of God. The lust for enjoyment without any commitment to God has to be eradicated from Christian believers. What is meant here is not postponing conception for six months or one year, but a long postponement extending up to four or five years. There may be genuine reasons for postponing the first conception depending on the individual's personal or health issues. Based on such basic conveniences or otherwise, the couple can decide postponements. Reasons such as health of wife, financial problems, employment issues and incomplete education are good enough to consider postponements. It is also a pertinent question that when a couple decides to postpone the first conception for genuine reasons, which family planning methodology they are going to adopt. We shall explain this later.

The Invited Guest:

In our social life, we have experienced the differences in the reception we accord to an invited guest and an uninvited one. Likewise, there are differences in our approach during the stages of pregnancy; this difference is evident while the baby is in mother's womb as also during the infancy and stages of growth. The way we conduct ourselves in such situations are influenced by whether the baby is an invited one or not. All Psychologists subscribe to this point of view without any deviations. Because of these, it is said that conceiving a child shall not be accidental; it has to be planned and this planning shall be followed by all couples. Yet, it shall be born in mind that due to various reasons beyond control, a conception may not take place when looked forward to. In some other cases, due to anatomical reasons or erroneous calculations, a conception can take place at a time they were not all prepared for that. Whatever be the circumstances, the couple should be realistic and be prepared to welcome the baby from the moment they come to know of the conception.

We can see many couples around us feeling sad that they are carrying an unexpected pregnancy; they are usually getting worried on two counts.

1. The girls who come from a conservative background suffer from an unwanted guilty conscience that it is a shame to deliver a child in the tenth month of marriage. How the parents, brothers and sisters can be faced in such a situation? They keep worrying with these thoughts. Their unmarried friends may pass comments laughing at them for this quick pregnancy. With this, the girls become more anxious and worried. In case their mental composure gets upset, which is not uncommon either, the one who has been hating abortion and has been deadly against it would feel like resorting to that option. Some such girls find it reluctant to share their anxiety even with their husbands. Things may turn worse if they do not talk these with other matured women like their mothers or elder sisters. On the top of it, if usual symptoms like vomiting and so on are not evident, other members of the family may not come to know about this pregnancy and thereby they would not have the care they would have otherwise got during the early days of conception. To save from these sorts of difficulties, they should never feel it reluctant to share

their emotions and feelings with mothers and husbands. Mothers should be strong enough to make them understand that they should glorify God for having got an offspring from their husbands who were chosen for them by God and handed over to them by the Church in presence of the society. It can be noted that these girls are carrying a senseless guilty feeling and such tendencies should be discouraged once for all.

2. The social customs and practices introduced by the rich to suit their fancies have been causing difficulties among those falling in the low income group. There was a brief discussion on this in one of the earlier chapters. Normally, those in the low income group are reluctant to become pregnant soon after the marriage due to their financial strains. In our society, there is a system in force that the first delivery of a woman is the responsibility of her parents. There is good reason behind this that being the first pregnancy, her mother's care and the homely atmosphere she gets at the house where she was born and brought up would make her feel quite relaxed. However, this being an expensive exercise, those poor families find this a tough ordeal. In most of our areas, particularly among Syrian Christians, there is a custom to gift a gold chain to the son in law at the time the daughter is being taken to her house for delivery by her parents. One doesn't know the logical reason behind this custom as also how this custom found a place in our community. May be, the parents of the girl are congratulating their son in law that their daughter is now entering motherhood. This custom as well as the delivery being taken in hospitals is all costly affairs which make those from poor families to welcome the new born perhaps rather reluctantly. In matters of these sorts, the husband's family should be able to deal with the wife's relations with some consideration and also with Christian love guiding them. But the truth is that Christian values are always pushed to the back stage. There must come up a system that let those who are well off give as much they like, but those who are not well off, let them be excused. Everyone should contribute that the pregnant woman has a peaceful mental composure to give birth to a healthy baby. We should view the baby in womb on priority and not those social customs. Very often it is found that these customs are taken by women in the family with more seriousness and pride than men. This makes us to have a short discussion on a topic that needs an analysis in a general perspective.

Equality among Genders to commence with Women:

It is not difficult to understand that our society is favoring male domination. But Christian believers should be able to see their family life founded on Christian love as one where there is neither male nor female domination. The feminist groups have been active in our society too. But they have so far been a failure to address the issues of women belonging to the low income segment; they confine themselves to be associated with the upper class where women enjoy freedom at par with men or sometimes, even more. It may look an irony that women stand in the forefront where women are persecuted. But it is a fact. Look at our Syrian Christian families; very often, there are cases where the newlywed girl would not have brought in her family share in full; there are situations where the social customs narrated earlier in this chapter are not fully complied with by the girl's family; it can be seen that in all such circumstances, it is the mother in law who takes the lead to teach a lesson to her daughter in law which ends up in mental torture and sometimes, even physical. On the other

hand, in any family situation where a mother in law is being ill treated, the one behind it would always be her daughter in law. Let us leave the feminists their way. From our side, we have to look into how we can refine the atmosphere in the families of our parishes. Probably, our MOMS can take initiatives in this direction.

We had been analyzing the main reasons behind the reluctance to welcome the newly conceived baby by some couples. Apart from what were discussed above, there could be other reasons as well. Maybe the time to appear in some examinations, inability of husband to be present at the time of delivery, the season of heavy monsoon rains for those who are staying in small hut like structure and similar big and small issues may prompt conceiving a baby to be postponed. Whatever could have been pre planned should have been pre planned, but once the baby is conceived, all should without any sort of hesitation get prepared to receive the first baby in the happiest frames of mind. Under any circumstances an abortion is inevitable, make it a point that it never happens in the case of a first born; this is not to mean that abortion is permitted during other occasions. Medical science too is discouraging this. Even in the west where immorality is ruling the roost, women are very reluctant to abort a first born even if that happens before marriage; such first born are given birth and reared up carefully that the child grows up. Such mothers are called teen age mothers and studies on them have revealed certain vital information. Whatever be the moral standards of a woman, she possesses a special affinity to the child born out of her for the first time; and we here are certainly better as far as moral standards are concerned. So remember that without any hesitation or reluctance, accept and welcome the first conception in all happiness.

Care during Pregnancy:

It may not be desirable to have a detailed discussion on this here. Moreover, whatever inputs are there in books and magazines, things get worked out in relation to the educational, financial, and cultural circumstances of a couple. Generally, the pregnant woman should be comfortable mentally and physically. She should remain in a happy mindset with unnecessary fear or worry or negative thoughts not bothering her; the husband and other family members should make it a point to take care of these from their part. There is no need to compare the comforts of others and the shortages here. It shall be worked out that within one's limitations one has to get along with optimum comfort in a practical sense. The advice from doctors should be taken care which would be based on the individual's physical conditions. Many things can be tackled using commonsense. It would be better that the presence of husbands is there at the time delivery wherever possible. The mental faculty of pregnant woman should always be centered on positive factors, good virtues and spiritual thoughts.

Questions:

1. How shall a couple get ready to welcome the first born?
2. What are that factors to be looked into in taking care of a pregnant woman?
3. What do you think about the statement that the argument for gender equality should start from women?

Lesson 5

A Baby is Born

Birth # First Born be a Boy # Baptism # Arrangements within Family Relations # Selfishness Causing Hatred # Baby Needing Mother's Presence

Birth:

These days, deliveries take place normally at hospitals. Despite the advancement of medical science, most women possess a fear complex when it comes to delivery. But this much fear and tension were not there during those days when medical science was not advanced this much; could it mean that there are some deep rooted emotional complexes these days causing increased sense of fear despite advancement of medical science? Though explorations at depth alone can throw light into these, the possibilities indicate strategies of the hospitals introducing newly styled methodologies aiming at their increased revenue or the women avoiding most of the household works seeking a more comfortable living system or the present innovative food habits deviating from the traditional patterns or the ever increasing mental stresses and strains or the basic detachment from nature as also from God. Whatever be that, a natural process that has to take place in the body of a woman is now turning more and more complex. Leaving these issues there, let us see how the new guest to the family is welcomed.

First Born be a Boy:

Just because the delivery is done smoothly with the mother and baby quite safe and in good spirits, most Christian believers are not content; with that they are not in their fullness of joy to glorify God. They want to ascertain that the baby is a boy. If a boy, the faces of parents and other close relations would shine and a thanking hymn will come out of their heart to be sung at least in mind. If a girl, their joy wouldn't be this much expressive. Of course, there are considerable exceptions to this though the majority looks forward to a boy as the first born. Once the gender of the baby is known, the immediate step would be to find out the star in which the baby is born. Though on the decrease, still there are people who approach an astrologist to get a horoscope of the baby. This makes one feel that even now there are people among us who serve God and mammon simultaneously. Leave aside the justification or otherwise of astrology; why should a Christian believer go after such proceedings? It is our God who created the fetus in the womb of the mother and has been taking care of the new life. Since our loving God makes the embryo grow from the moment it is in the womb, are we not expected to submit totally to His plans? Where do we find safety? In our God's lap or with the astrologer, the stars and his ancient records coupled with the rituals he suggests for the welfare of the baby? It should be possible for a Christian believer to thank and glorify our God despite the gender of the baby and the star in which the baby is born. Recalling what was told by

Rabindranath Tagore, 'the message that God still loves this universe is evidenced in the gentle smile of a new born'. The believers should be able to come out of the bondages of traditional thoughts and rituals. Those who cherish Christian values in their life have to raise objections to these senseless rituals and blind practices.

Baptism:

There is a social custom in certain areas tying a string on the waist of the baby on the 28th day of birth; this doesn't have any spiritual sense associated with it. For a Christian family, the most important stage in the life of a new born is its baptism. This is the most crucial occasion in as much as that the child is being eligible for being called the son / daughter of God by virtue of being born again. Here, we are not entering into the theological interpretations as they are covered in other books. Baptism is the occasion where a baby born in a Christian family is being spiritually reared to grow up in Christian faith through the Church as truly desired by its parents and the godfather takes an oath to ensure such growth owning up the responsibility thereof. However, though indicated in one of the earlier lessons, it needs to be repeated that the value erosion in Christian families commences with the manner in which wedding services are conducted. Like wedding service, even in a Baptism service, the spiritual dimension is pushed back by many giving priority to the social elements. Baptism has become an occasion for celebration for the rich whereas for the poor, this is just a ritual. Spirituality doesn't have any place in either. There is yet another tendency becoming increasingly popular among our people these days; there is a rush to one or another pilgrimage center for conducting the Sacrament of Baptism. This cannot be considered as a thirst for spiritual growth, but a sequel to the offerings committed by some member of the family very often without being seriously concerned about it; also, there may be a feeling that spiritual blessings can be managed very easily from known pilgrimage centers. It needs to be doubted very seriously that people are resorting to such pilgrimage routes because leading a spirit centered life by praying regularly, by observing Lents and by participating in Sacramental services are not that easy to be carried out regularly. If so, the Church leadership should step in and exhort the believers to practice a spiritual life with responsibility and be partakers in all Sacraments with truthfulness; methods of shortcuts should be discouraged. Pilgrimage has become really popular among many believers and therefore proper guidelines are needed to be issued in that line too. We have been having a discussion on Baptism here. Baptism has its prime place in rearing a child in true spirituality that the parents should not take it lightly; the new born being born again, being blessed with the anointment of Holy Spirit and being called a son / daughter of God has its own significance that the child is entering into a new life.

Arrangements within Family Relations:

Once we have a guest, we make some arrangements within our house that the guest is facilitated properly in all respects including his comfortable stay at night if needed. Likewise, the husband and wife have to do a bit of planning, mentally in particular, to welcome the baby. Western Psychologists have treated this stage as one of highly stress filled. Even some of the Psychological papers published here too indicate similar scenarios because the couple may turn dissatisfied and

discontent that they cannot enjoy their privacy as they used to earlier. The father is likely to take the brunt of this as the mother would turn her entire attention to the child as needed by it. Certain Psychologists have gone to the extent that the father feels neglected by his wife and therefore he would even develop a sort of hatred towards the newborn. These inferences appearing in their papers certainly carry an element of exaggeration. We need not accept in full whatever is dished out by the westerners, but it should be noted that they give prime importance to the privacy of parents. Please recall their system of childless marriage discussed in a previous lesson. Under such circumstances, they may consider their child as a nuisance. Once a person in London, getting fed up with the screaming of his child, locked it up inside a table and he was sentenced for life imprisonment. It was the child's mother who found the dead body when she opened the table drawer. Thus, it can be understood that the western culture does not give much importance to children or their welfare. But our cultural values are different. We do not give much weight to the privacy of husband and wife which may be a shortcoming, but we attach greater importance to children in the family. We do not even have the slightest imagination of a family setup where there are no children. As such, unlike the westerners, we do not consider our children as a hindrance to our privacy or as nuisance. On the other hand the manner in which we react to the intervention of a child to our privacy is by enjoying the child's innocent smile and planting a sweet kiss on its cheeks, by both husband and wife, and maybe, they among themselves too if others are not in the vicinity.

Selfishness Causing Hatred:

Whatever is discussed above doesn't mean that the presence of a child can never cause inconveniences. There are husbands, though rare, having change of face when he feels like being placed second in priority, particularly that type who depends on his wife for each everything. He may be lazy, may be too selfish caring only for his own comforts, may be too lusty and the like. Naturally, when he feels he is not getting the care he used to get earlier, can feel irritated. A husband who is a true Christian believer has to understand the changes in circumstances and try to overcome his inherent weakness relying totally on the grace of God. Such corrections in personal life would take care of likely problems at later stages too. Always, remember that for a Christian, giving is happier than receiving. It is not good to enjoy comforts alone, but selfless sacrifice is better where one finds success in life. If a couple takes up this as a basic principle, temporary problems would not turn permanent botherations.

Mother's Presence Essential for the Baby in its First Year:

Among all living organisms, a human baby has the lengthiest period of infancy. God has given powers to man to rule over everything, but he is totally helpless during his days of infancy. Maybe this lengthy infancy is to remind man that though he is powerful, his sustenance is dependent on his surroundings. The baby overcomes this helpless infancy with parents' help, particularly, its mother's. Psychologists have opined that the baby's mother should be with it during the first year which would be helpful in the personality development of the baby. But this genuine right of the baby and mother is getting diluted by the socio economic changes our society has been undergoing. It is a truth that a baby doesn't get proper care from its mother during this early period of infancy on

account of its mother being employed not only at far away centers, but even in nearby locations. The baby needs a physical closeness with its mother during the first year. The baby enjoys unexplainable emotional satisfaction by staying close to its mother physically whereby it experiences the heartbeats of its mother and also by sucking milk from its mother's breast. This provides physical nurturing as also mental refreshments. Experts in this field have opined that this type of closeness between a baby and mother provides a feeling of security and immunity to the baby. There are no other drinks or food supplements that can substitute breast milk. There was a period when many mothers stayed away from breast feeding for fear of losing their body shape. But concerted efforts through media made mothers change from their senseless feelings of beauty. Such feelings have influenced some mothers as they were trying to emulate the west for each and everything; they were leaning towards more privacy in their life as the westerners were inclined to. Our patristic tradition of rearing up children through breast feeding is undoubtedly the most appropriate one.

Those women employed at far away locations and even those who are employed locally, but with higher and responsible positions would look forward to a solution for this; a one word answer is just not possible here. Those mothers who leave for their official assignments in the morning shall make it a point to be with the child invariably for the rest of their time as soon as they return in the evening as also on holidays. Those who are employed at far away locations should plan out their maternity leave in such a way that they get maximum time at home after delivery. Again, instead of entrusting the baby's care with a servant, a more responsible elderly lady who may be a relative or if possible, the baby's grandmother should take up the responsibility. Grandmother would certainly be the best option. In case the family is reasonably well off and the husband is very decently employed, quitting the job too is not a bad choice. The temporary financial loss would be returned later as she would be having children of goodness personified.

Wrong Notions about Unclean status:

It is necessary that one more aspect is covered here. There are many kinds of misunderstandings prevailing among our women regarding attending church worship after delivery as also during the period on menstruation. Once we come to know about the sources of these, we will realize the senselessness in them. Our ancestors were not at all familiar with the Holy Bible, even the New Testament. They would have had absolutely no idea of the commands contained in the Book of Leviticus. Malayalam translations of the Holy Bible are all rather recent development. Even today, most of us do not know much about those commands in the Book of Leviticus unless we are taking pain to study it deeply. This indicates that the assumptions regarding the cleanliness or otherwise of women after or before pregnancy has born out of the Hindu myths on what is clean and what is not clean. These have no Biblical base. Menstruation and Pregnancy are all gifts of God to women to prepare her for partaking in the Heavenly designs of procreation. Nobody can cast aspersions of cleanliness with these prudential interventions. In short, nobody can prohibit a woman from attending church worship during menstruation periods or after delivery. This is something our womenfolk must understand. Yes, these are days when a woman may feel physical weakness or such issues and looking into the individual problems, each one can take appropriate decisions to

their personal status. For accepting Holy Qurbana, what is important is the spiritual readiness. Those who are taking bribe, adding adulterants to food items, exploiters and engaging in social crimes must feel that they lack the purity to attend worship. A mother or a spinster who live as part and parcel of God's design in this universe need not bother about these matters or entertain any feeling that they lack in purity.

Questions:

1. Explain what all rituals are not Christian among those practiced by society along with the birth of a child.
2. What are the differences discussed in this lesson related to western culture and our culture? From your own life experiences, evaluate whether these differences are correct
3. What are the reasons why proximity to its mother is essential for a baby?

Lesson 6

Father and Son, the Same Time

Impropriety in Morality # Time for the next baby # Age difference of 3 to 4 years advisable # Notable Changes in the couple # Commitment towards Elders # Relevance of Old Age Homes

Impropriety in Morality:

Some of the husbands fail to accept the fact that a baby is born to him. But once the first child grows up and the couple gets ready for the next one, the matrimony has crossed its infancy and is entering into adolescence. In this context, it seems that some impropriety has developed into the social customs we are following. The care and nurturing that was there for the first baby is not so much there for the second one. Certain rituals are exclusively for the first baby only. There were lots of visitors for the first baby and there were many gifts also. Based on financial capacity, rituals would have been conducted as best as possible. The first baby's baptism and its first birthday would have been quite exhilarating. Special care and interest would have been there for each and every stage of growth of the first child. There is nothing wrong in these, but the couple should be prepared for the next conception mentally as well as materially.

Time for the next baby:

A clear cut advice in this regard is not practical. Even if some guidelines are provided, for various reasons beyond control, the couple may not adhere to it. The life experiences of those who are employed in the Gulf regions are examples for this. Their peculiar pattern of life which does not have any systematization regarding the safety of job or availability of leave cannot be confined easily to the guidelines of Psychologists. Indeed, now we have something called a Gulf culture formed here. It is through this Gulf opening that many lower middle class and lower class families succeeded in having a financial resurrection to earn better living comforts. While this financial resurrection can be accepted as good omen, the other side of it presents not so happy a scenario, as the family system has turned almost upside down. There is no one to look after the aged parents;

the husband and wife are forced to stay separated for longer periods; children are not getting parental care as they deserve; all these signs are not well auguring. There are many who opine that these sudden and unfamiliar changes in family atmosphere are breeding ground for illicit relations, drug abuse, habit of drinking and similar wayward ways of life. It should be possible for the Church to undertake in-depth studies on such matters and provide adequate guidelines to the couple. In the absence of timely spiritual pieces of advice from the Church, Christian believers are of late relying on the inputs from secular psychological and social experts, many of them self styled too, and reconcile to what they dish out. But formulating Christian value based responses are the need of the hour where the Church cannot remain passive. Yet, we will come to such a response later. But the readers are free to raise objections if any.

Age difference of 3 to 4 years advisable:

Based on the above analysis, it has been clear and obvious that conceiving the next child depends on various factors surrounding the couple. Still, what the psychological principles point out and the inferences we have from practical living experiences are suggestive of a difference of 3 to 4 years between the first child and the second. It may be taken into consideration that even if an age limit as above was there in the scheme of things of the husband and wife, there would be unexpected conceptions in the second or third year; such incidents should not lead them to disappointment or guilty feeling. There may be some difficulties while rearing up two children both needing special care; the couple should accept this as a truth they have to go through and that they would go through these with full of joy. Once they have such a mindset, things would turn out easy for them in as much that they will not feel it a burden at all. On the other hand, the feelings that 'this would not have happened' rule over the husband and wife, they would find it difficult to get along with the added responsibility and end up with unnecessary worries in life that can damage the wellness of the baby in mother's womb also.

As suggested above, a difference of 3 to 4 years is ideal. By this time, the elder one would have learnt to take care of itself to carry out primary needs without seeking intervention from elders. The elder child would feel comfortable in the company of other elders in the family as also with close neighbors; there would not be too much of a leaning to parents. Even if he or she doesn't have a matching companion, most children would create a world of their own with their toys and other articles to which there is access. It would always be a good thing to encourage the elder child to move outside or travel with other family members. If this child impresses that there is no need for a personal care from its mother, it would be easy for the mother to spare her time for the new baby. If such an atmosphere is created in advance so much the better. Yet the elder one may not very easily surrender his status to the new born as far as the love and affection due to him is concerned. It is here we realize the significance of the rituals conducted exclusively for the elder one; the next one may complain that he is not honored with such rituals. Not only that, due to a special care he was enjoying with lots of gifts from others on various occasions like birthdays and all, is cherished by him so specially that he would give himself a VIP status. It is not common in our culture to celebrate birthdays of elders in the family and the child can feel that his birthday alone is being celebrated because of his specialty in the family. Under such circumstances, the elder child can feel a little

uneasiness in the affection and care given to the younger one. This is not an unnatural mental state of the elder one. In fact, even before the delivery of the second one the mother should show her expanded belly and suggest the affection the baby inside need from its elder one; the elder one will develop a liking to the baby inside his mother's womb. He should be made to understand whatever care was given to him when he was a small baby, all such care is needed for the new baby also. For example, the elder one may try to attack the new born when the new born is breast fed; this reaction would be out of his love for his mother. Moreover, he may have a possessive feeling to his mother's breasts. But he can certainly be made to understand that the new born too would need it as much as he needed it earlier. This should be patiently explained to him. He should be made to understand that with the new born, his position has not come down; and on the contrary, he has been honored with a new status that there is someone to call him brother with love and respect. It should not be difficult to convince the elder one that the younger one needs him totally. He can thus understand that the new born is in no way a rival to him. With this he would be prepared to take up the role to protect his sibling. Taking care of these issues would not be difficult for parents who are capable to address issues with basic common sense. They can even provide certain opportunities to the elder one which would certainly make him happy and he would be quite normal in his mindset. The elder one can be taken to church worship, for feast days, for conventions, for visiting relatives or even for some short holiday trips if possible where the infant baby cannot be taken. This will make him feel that he is quite important a person in the household. He will have no issues in receiving his sibling happily.

Notable Changes in the couple:

Very often, the son who is now father of two children, under compulsion to stay with his parents, starts raising a question: "I am now getting burdened, and have two children; shouldn't I take care of myself now?" Maybe, some others like him raise this very question even earlier. Many wives put this before their husbands shortly after the first delivery. The husband, who may not be very serious initially, turns serious after the second delivery as if suddenly inspired from some source. Trying to find answers to these questions, shifting to a new dwelling place would have taken place peacefully in many families. These issues may also cause heartburns within the family particularly with other elders. This can also result in the aged parents being pushed to a state of solitude. These issues come up in various families in different manners; the ending too would be in different ways.

Commitment towards Elders:

When it was stated during our discussions a little earlier that responses to contemporary issues have to be formulated based on Christian values, this topic was also in mind. There is a changed attitude that is quite evident in dealing with aged parents these days. One needs to introspect whether this change is in tune with Christian values. The different problems being faced by the elders due to old age, illness, physical weakness and other mental disturbances are not being properly looked after.

And the justifications for this neglect are attributed to the employment of wife, shopping conveniences in the town, educational facilities for children and such other meaningless reasons. It is really pathetic that the present day society silently approves such senselessness of the youngsters. The primary needs for one's sustenance are food, clothing, shelter and education; while struggling to meet these primary needs and in that process, the elders are neglected a bit, there would have been some justification in that. But what happens today is that the elders are getting neglected not with the struggle for primary needs, but on account of the mad rush towards enhanced luxuries and comforts of life. The principle 'survival of the fittest' is barbarian not carrying any cultural values. The Church and the believers have a responsibility to fight against this value erosion within the family and within the society. While handling a family issue recently, the impact of this deterioration was understood in its full depth. The husband is a heart patient; the son staying with him has a job, though not very lucrative. Wife has already lost sight in one eye and to save the other, a surgery is needed at a hospital little far away. There was no one to accompany her to the hospital. Their daughter who was married away was expected to come for this, but did not. The excuse was that her three year old son was to be sent to LKG class. Ultimately, the husband, despite his heart problems, made himself ready to go, but fortunately, another son who was employed at a far away location came on leave and the issue was managed. The elders are struggling with their life for survival and then if priority goes to sending a boy to LKG classes not bothering about their welfare, what sort of Christian values they are expected to cherish? It shall never be ignored that the real spirituality lies in our caring for the elders and depressed and the sick as well as the poor.

Relevance of Old Age Homes:

We have to find out some solution to address the issue of elders being neglected. As we see in the west, the solution is not setting up Old Age Homes. In fact, these Homes are not really meant to take care of destitute or widows. There is saying in Malayalam meaning "the entrance is larger than the house". Likewise, the second generation has grown up much in education, career and wealth compared to their parents and the reward they give to their parents is the 'comfort' of air-conditioned old age shelters. This is nothing but just blindly following the western system; there is no Christian value behind this. Even when we think of westerners, it must be noted that those from noble families or princely families or royal families never think of accommodating their elders in old age homes. The western cultural values take shape based on what these royal or noble families respond to situations. A Christian community is not expected to emulate those who are immersed in the Epicurean theory of eat, drink and rejoice. The west considers individual freedom at its prime. It is this culture that nurtured capitalist way of life where for the sake of individual's temporary enjoyment, there is no reluctance to discard all other relations that stand in the way. This has resulted in abortion, lesbianism, gay marriages and childless marriages which are all becoming acceptable and has been moving towards a situation where a partner can be replaced by a mechanically activated doll. The setting up of Old Age Homes also have these ideologies behind it; if so, how can Christian believers fall in line with such systems? In fact, the logic behind the youngsters being eager to accommodate parents and other elders with such old age homes relate to a truth that their personal comforts and merrymaking and enjoyment in life are not facing a hindrance with

the presence of elders. Never ever has an elder would have requested an accommodation in such homes out of his eagerness to be comfortable. The commandment “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land I am giving you” (Exodus 20:12) has not been relaxed by any one. St Paul has said, “Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do” (Ephesians 6:1). Even our Lord, while on the cross, is seen to hand over his mother to John. How can a believer send his parents to old age homes? What is meant here is that it not a correct thing to make once parents sacrificial lambs, particularly their life span may extend up to say, some 80 years only and this is for the sake of the sons’ or daughters’ personal convenience or career prospects. There is no easy way here; to maintain some high values in life, may be a little bit of losses here and there wouldn’t be that damaging. Old age homes are never a solution here. There are regular family get together these days, which instead being forums to show off, must address these issues and arrive at acceptable solutions at micro level. Wherever due to absolutely genuine circumstances, if own children cannot spare much time to look after their parents in old age, other good minded and able close relations should step in. This is something we can do instead of driving them to shelters elsewhere. However, only those who value Christian principles and leading a prayer life having the influence of Christian faith riding over them can think and act in these lines. We have even people who entrust their assets to those outside the family rather than trusting family members to manage them. Such selfish oriented people are never willing to come down even a bit and even family organizations would turn helpless before them. But such patterns can never be considered Christian.

Questions:

1. To receive the second baby, in what all ways we can prepare the elder one?
2. Ascertain the Christian values in honoring the commitments to elders.
3. There is a school of thought prevailing now as: ‘Establishing Old Age Homes is the solution to ensure that elders are not neglected’; How do you respond to this? Arrive at a consensus through a joint discussion.

Unit 4

Christianization of the Family

Lesson 1

The Worthy Means for a Fortunate Married Life

Communication Gap # Hopes and Aspirations Shared # Contrasts in Family Relations # Differing Tastes # Christian Stewardship # Knowing the Changes Caused by Growing in Age

A rather lengthy discussion was conducted earlier about the initial clashes those are likely to take place in married life. However, it is not being attempted to look into causes and solutions for such clashes as life progresses further. Yet, in general, there are certain problems of common nature that could come up throughout married life and a brief narration thereof is intended here which would always be useful for married couple at any stage.

Communication Gap:

Communication gap is something that cause ditches in all sorts of personal relations. This can have its impact in married life too. However, once it is understood, problems can be tackled without any difficulty. What do we understand by a gap in communication? It can be said to be our thinking that what we have in our mind has been understood by our friends or partner without it being directly disclosed by us and we deal with them being under such a wrong impression they have understood it and thus ending up with all sorts of problems. This would not happen with those who are distantly associated with us because they are not considered so accustomed to get through what we have in mind. Thus these types of issues are normally between closer ones only. Look at this example. One morning, the husband told his wife that they would go for a movie in the evening. In the evening, he leaves office a little early and on the way his scooter gets damaged. He had hell of a time to get it rectified and was terribly angry with himself particularly because he had even lied at the office to leave early. May be a punishment for that lie, he thought. These feelings made him too moody. On the other hand, not knowing what happened to her husband and having no information from him either, she too got a bit upset or moody and grew impatient. At the end, the husband reaches home too late to go for the movie and the impatient wife was in no mood to ask him the reasons for the delay. The husband too was not at all sensible to tell her why he got late even without her queering. As a consequence, without any communication between the two, the wife retired to kitchen and the husband to news paper reading; thus both confined themselves to their own worlds. Assume that these sorts of incidents are a regular feature in their life; the end of all these would be mutual misunderstandings, casting aspersions, pre judgment all added up to make smooth going of their relation very tough. Many raise this question: why don't these guys understand my problems? The answer to this is another question: why don't you share what you have in your mind? The ill effect of one's feeling that the other should understand his inner feelings can cause serious damages because what the other comprehends would be far from actual fact. The above story can have other leads as well; the wife may out of her imaginations, see things those were absolutely false. She may think that he had gone to see some relations on the way without telling her or he had spent his time with friends elsewhere playing cards or he had a drop in at the bar or even worse things in that line. All these can lead their life to further negatives. In other words, whatever is happening and the resultant impact be good or bad, if shared openly between the two, many problems would get automatically solved. How much time they do take for mutual discussion of issues is a measure of their closeness.

Hopes and Aspirations Being Shared:

This is closely related to the above with a little bit of difference. What we have discussed above was sharing of what has already happened; likewise, it is always better to share the hopes and aspirations for the future as well. The husband informs his wife that he is buying a sari for her birthday; she is very happy at her husband's love and concern. He buys one of excellent quality and brings it home while returning from office. With great expectance, wife opens the packet and the husband waits eagerly to see the fascinations of her heart expressive on her face. But what transpires on her face is a mixed feeling of not so much of joyous excitement. She was looking forward to her favorite maroon colored sari, but what was bought was green, a color of her least preference. Had she told him of her color choice earlier, the whole scenario would have been so different. Her not disclosing her choice when it should have been disclosed has changed a happy moment into one of dullness. Always remember that certain things we consider silly would be very valuable for others. This makes it all the more important to share the feelings what one has inside without hesitation. Right from the dishes being cooked in the kitchen to the educational and career prospects of children are all to be shared between husband and wife. May be all expectations are not going to be realized, but such sharing will help husband and wife to understand each other more closely.

Contrasts in Family Relations:

In certain families, the job status, educational levels and the way of behavior of both husband and wife would all be harmonious that would help their new life get along smoothly. But sometimes the husband cannot love his in laws as he loves his parents or his siblings; similarly, for the wife too. Those who stay in towns as nuclear families or those who live all alone detached from a large family may not find this a big problem. Still, when the husband employed abroad sends a greetings and a cheque to his parents, may send only a greetings to his in laws; this would hurt his wife though she may not openly express it. Though she keeps silent to avoid an argument, her inner self would be disturbed. She may open out at some opportunity. This too is a specialty associated with our peculiar culture. We view marriage as a relation between two families and not just between two individuals. When the wife takes pain to receive her in-laws as best as she can, she gets attached to her husband's heart without knowing that. Likewise, the care taken by the husband to welcome his in-laws makes him closer to his wife in her heart of hearts. Dealing with members of both families without any sort of imbalance is an indication of the couple's high spirituality and cultural status. However, if they keep relations with in-laws in varying dimensions, there can be disturbances in the relation between the husband and wife in due course of time if not in the near future. In one live case, the husband and wife were very close emotionally, but this closeness was tactfully exploited by the wife presenting occasional false stories to her husband about his relatives resulting in his contacts with his family drastically getting reduced. His mindset reached such a level that he lost interest to visit even his mother. However, the couple continued to live more or less happily. After a few years, the news of the sudden death of his mother reached him. He did not feel very sad either. He went and paid his last respects to the dead body and took part in the funeral service. But as soon as the funeral was over, a sudden feeling of guilt pricked his inner conscience. He felt a deep pain inside. He could not bear his failure to take care of his mother who gave him birth, fed him and

grew him up; the feeling that his wife was the one solely responsible for this situation gripped him. He felt uncontrollable hatred and anger to his wife. In the end, only after he met the entire expenses of all obsequies including those on the 40th day that he felt a bit relieved. Whatever be the pros and cons, it is always needed to maintain similar affection and closeness to both families. While taking all crucial decisions, elders of both the families should be made to get involved.

Differing Tastes Causing Feelings of Awkwardness:

Two individuals coming from two different circumstances join in matrimony but there may be certain pressures arising out of their peculiar situations. Say, the girl hails from an agrarian background; her rituals, tastes and all such characteristics would be in line with that background. These may be evident in her behavior pattern, her food habits and her dressing styles. But a city life would expect something totally different from her. Here, the husband should look forward to a change in her not too fast. Similarly, the girl too should be prepared to change whatever she has been practicing all these years in her life. If so, things would be quite normal at the earliest. There are areas of individual tastes which can cause differences of opinion between husbands and wives in many family situations. For example, when the husband is interested in business, wife would be interested in agriculture; husband in politics and the wife in movies; the husband in reading science and technology books whereas the wife reads short stories and novels; the husband may be vegetarian and the wife non vegetarian. Thus there could be lots of differences in taste between the two. Here what can they do is to mutually respect the tastes and interests of the other so that both have their own freedom to a good extent; mutual recognition is perhaps the only way to address this without causing hindrances to either. Care should be taken that relations should not transpire into bindings.

Christian Stewardship:

In an earlier lesson, the need for a mature approach in spending time and money was highlighted with a clear advice that one should develop a proper discipline on this before entering matrimony. But the inherent characteristics within the boy and the girl can cause differences between them when it comes to the real life situation. If money is earned by the husband or by the wife or by both, excessive spending can never be appreciated. The husband and wife together should plan out a budget giving priority to Christian values and the spending must be in strict compliance with that budget. A specific amount should be earmarked for helping those in need. Paying tithe is a very good habit. "You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward" (Matthew 10:42). Whatever our Lord has said so affirmatively has to be obeyed by us; if we are not able to practice this in our family life, such a family cannot be called a Christian family. There may be differences of opinion between husband and wife in prioritizing the spending pattern; those wives who do not have their own income may misunderstand their husbands when some of their suggestions are not considered. If they entertain feelings that the husbands are ill-treating them, their dissatisfaction will surface as other issues within the family life. So husband should be very careful in situations like this that his wife's feelings are never hurt.

Our society is always pro male when it comes to gender issues. So once the wife is employed having her own source of income, the husband may possess a peculiar mindset; may be the mother in law would turn out a subordinate to the daughter in law. In other words, the husband may have the feeling that the wife who has her own income will not obey him and that she would be having a head weight and all. Mostly, these are certain misunderstandings only. It is with this reason, many husbands insist that she should hand over her entire pay packet to him on the salary day itself. This is to test whether the wife would remain in his control totally. If the husband is like this and the wife fails to understand the weakness of the husband, their life can cause uneasiness and a happy married life would not be a reality for them. There may be wives who do not bother about their husbands just because they have their own income. They may be showing a big face with their in laws too. These types of people create unnecessary issues within the family and play spoilsport. Those husbands and wives concentrating only on making money without thinking about the Christian stewardship can never enjoy a happy wedded life. What our Lord has taught about Shabbat is quite true for wealth too. Wealth should be for man and life of man not for making wealth.

Knowing the Changes Caused by Growing in Age:

The emotional warmth of the early days of married life may not sustain like that always. But the signs of good married relations are attributed to the increased mental closeness between husband and wife even when the physical relations and emotional excitements are on the decline. There may be exceptions to these; the age difference between the two as well as individual interests, even if age difference is not notable, will make them move differently without their coming to about it.

In their psychological analysis, the west has developed a thought like this about women; accordingly, the cycle of roles played by a woman would be wife – mother – again wife. Or she will come back as a wife once her role as mother is accomplished. She would carry on her responsibilities as a wife during the initial days of marriage and then withdraw to take up her tasks as a mother; her main concentration now would be the welfare of children. She would not have any sort of distancing from her husband, but children would be the priority. The husband retires totally to his career tasks, business matters and his own personal entertainments with his class of friends circle. He would not have any sort of ill feelings to his wife during this period. Once the wife turns 40 or 45, children would be matured to look after themselves and there is no need for any motherly care for them. At this stage, she has the inherent desire to return to her role as a wife; but her husband would be far from her mentally and if so she feels sad; this situation of the wife's mental state is called 'Empty Nest Syndrome'. This has been found relevant in women as not so uncommon a feature.

Again, the stage of menopause in women causes lot of mental stress among them as stated in many journals, mainly those following western experiences. This may be true for even some of our women also who have been very conscious of their beauty and body shape. But another section of women, may be the majority, would be relieved that they are saved from the inconvenience of menstruation cycles which they would have been finding a difficult and disturbing process; it is not being

presumed that women view these as a burden. The majority of women in our culture on account of these reasons are likely to welcome the stage of menopause. Whatever be that, apart from inferences we have through scientific research processes, it is not advisable to accept whatever is seen in other cultures with which we have no relation at all basically; such blind acceptances of things would not be intellectually fine for us. Even those of our money oriented magazines and tabloids present things from other social cultures so attractively that many of our youngsters go after them thinking that they are the realities; but their strategy is just to make profit for them at the cost of poisoning our youngsters very often leading to psychic imbalances too. Our Church and spiritual organizations are having a responsibility to cleanse our coming up generation from this misinformation.

Many such incidents other than those mentioned above also take place in the lives of married couples. We have discussed only a few examples which are more problem oriented. One point worth noting here seriously is that the husband should be vigilant that his wife doesn't have any feelings of solitude or disinterest to normal schedules; the wife too should look after husband in this way. There shall be no chances leading towards a state of depression. In case of any slightest of symptoms, they should sit together and sort out matters.

Questions:

1. What are the matters the married couple should take care that family life remains happy always?
2. Evaluate the likely problems in a realistic manner when a wife develops ill feelings towards her in laws or the husband to his in laws.
3. Explain your views on the issues coming up in married life consequent to the changes brought in by the couple growing in age based on the western inferences.

Lesson 2

Rearing of Children in Christian Families

Spiritual Discipline # Status Now # Training within the Family # Expressing Spirituality # Dialogues of Parents # Care from the Start # Encouragement is better than Criticism # Systems Applicable to All # Psychological Base

Spiritual Discipline Now:

St Paul has said: "Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry; instead, bring them up with Christian discipline and instruction" (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). Those married couple who desire to lead their children spiritually upward has to seriously work out ways and means to put this into practice, if they are firm in their Christian faith. A main issue faced by Christian parents who desire to grow up their children in true faith is how to implant fear of God and

good character in them. We are all happy that our Sunday school movement has developed systematically and this has been reasonably successful in passing on spiritual inputs to our children. But there is scope for innovations there too. Now we are providing intellectual inputs about God, Church, faith, history and similar aspects followed by evaluations as to ascertain how far they have assimilated them; the co curricular activities and competitions are found quite attractive to children. However, we have to have a rethinking whether this is the best option we have for our children. Fear of God, truthfulness, righteousness, activities enlightening spirituality such as prayer, observance of Lent, fasting, Holy Confession, Holy Qurbana concern for the society and the like are the need of the day, but whether our Sunday school is good enough to provide such thoughts and feelings to the children in such a way that there is a lasting impression inculcated in them that never get erased whatever be their trials ahead. Are we able to create a Christian culture that can accommodate all these virtues in the growing generation? Here we have scope for introspection. A great danger is that be rich or be poor, many of our children are not part of the Sunday school scheme. The rich treat all these too silly that they consider themselves over and above all these. They are judging them as if they have ascended all the steps of spirituality that their task has been zeroed in on administering the parish affairs as also that of the Church. The other sect believes that whether they call God or not, they are destined to survive in their slum like huts with no scope for any redemption from there. They stare at their future with total disappointment. The organized spiritual endeavor of the Church has failed so far to enter into these segments effectively. In short, it is those middle class people who are sparing some of their time for spiritual activities. But how serious even they are is a matter of doubt. A child commences secular education at the age of three joining the LKG, but joins Sunday school when aged say five or six. When the secular school examinations are nearing as also to accommodate tuition classes, Sunday school is the one that is being skipped as well as the Sunday worship. This laxity shown by the parents work against the spiritual growth of young generation and the ill effects thereof surfaces at later stages of life when very often it is beyond repair. Those our parents who are concerned about the spiritual growth of their children should, apart from making them involved with spiritual organizations, take serious care of these factors also.

1. **Practice spiritual acts at home:** The parents and elders of the family have to have a routine of practicing spiritual acts at home that the children would follow from their infancy, which can develop a lasting impression of such acts within them. As this issue has already been discussed, there is no need of further elaboration.
2. **The spiritual atmosphere at home as also the talking mannerisms of parents:** The way in which elders talk in the house and their comments about others , their disagreements with others, their ill feelings and the expressions they use to convey these, are all reflections of the spiritual life prevailing at that home. Interestingly, these talks take place in rooms with frames picturing Christ as the silent listener to all the conversations or as the unseen guest on the dining table. In presence of this unseen guest or silent listener, many Christian believers pass unworthy comments about their parish priest, their parish members, their friends and believers, their neighbors and other men and women holding prominent and leadership roles in the society. On the other hand, if the talks are centered on fear of God,

virtues born out of that, comments on the positive traits of others, other small discussions related to love, faith, hope and such Christian qualities, the children who hear them in full or in part are inspired to get these embedded in them too. On the other hand, if the elders are talking in a manner to highlight darkness by indulging in unclean topics and language, the children would think of their own ways how to hide in darkness; similarly talks where others are degraded and self is upgraded will create bad influence among children creating damages in their psyche as they grow up. It is the parents' style of talk that creates feelings of goodness and feelings of hatred among children about neighbors or relations or Church or parish or society.

3. **Caring true discipline from the start:** The priest Eli is an unfortunate parent in the Old Testament. Jehovah told Samuel about Eli's sons: "I have already told him that I am going to punish his family for ever because his sons have spoken evil things against me" (1 Samuel 3:13). We may feel compassionate about the manner of Eli's and his sons' death, but there is a lesson for the faithful to learn hear that Eli did not discipline his sons at the right time. Even these days, this tendency is on the rise that many parents out of their immense love for their children fail to discipline them for even serious mistakes taking it quite casually that everything would be fine as they grow up; but this attitude would give rooms for more problems. The wisest among all wise, King Solomon has given us a very strong warning: "If you don't punish your son, you don't love him. If you do love him, you will correct him" (Proverbs 13:24). What is intended here is not to beat your toddler with a stick always; but, appropriate discipline should be there as the children grow up matching their physical and mental growth and development. Or, just for the sake of your affection, there should be no laxity or postponement in disciplining them as needed. Yet, this shall not be understood as giving senseless and cruel punishment which would be more harmful than being good. Also, see that a child is never punished just to release one's emotional feelings of tension or disturbances within or plane anger. Such outbursts can give rise to issues which would turn out almost impossible to get solved. Later, the parents out of their feeling of guilt would shower more and more affection as a penance and the child though enjoys these excessive affection initially move towards a state where the it would behave naughtily to gain bodily pain initially followed by mental pleasure, as opined by Psychologists. Whatever be that, senseless punishments and cruel reactions will damage the child physically and mentally which are to be avoided totally.
4. **Encouragements better than criticism:** The wrongs being done by a child may deserve punishments, but a proper encouragement would be better for the child's growth. But we have parents who being not much aware of this principle keep on criticizing them expecting their talents would blossom like that. It is very common that a child who is not that good at studies are often pictured in a low esteem before neighbor and friends commenting that he / she is lazy, poor in studies or good for nothing. In fact, the parents do not appreciate a situation like this to sustain with their child, but would like their child to shed off the negatives and come good; but frequent utterances of these nature from parents make the child to feel content with the current status. On the other hand, the parents would better polish the inherent talents in the child and encourage him / her highlighting what all

positives are there in him / her; the child would certainly grow up better. To ensure a normal personality development in a child, the following theological aspects too would be helpful.

- a.** Most of the men and women possess average IQ barring a few genius ones and a few mentally retarded ones. Any one of those possessing average IQ can never be called below average.
- b.** Some of those who are possessing average IQ are practically seen to occupy high positions and some others comparatively lower positions. The reason for this is nothing but the opportunities they have before them and how they utilize them. Looking at a very practical and familiar example, we can see many of our people who are rich enough to pay huge amount as capitation fees for their children and manage admissions in good professional colleges and come out as engineers and doctors occupying prime positions in the society. This is true with those who have reservations for admissions. People who do not fall in these two segments, despite having better marks fail to get admissions. So more than the inherent talents and hard work put in, there is something else too, like peculiar circumstances to earn professional qualifications.
- c.** In examinations, those who are scoring above a bench mark are treated by the system as brilliant while those who finish below that bench mark are not treated that brilliant. This classification has absolutely no scientific base.
- d.** It is not a correct system to compare individuals based on their talents or capacity of execution. Individuals have varying interests and tastes. The one who is excellent in delivering speeches may have no interest in singing. One who is good in studies may be far inferior in sports and games and vice versa. Some may be keen on science subjects whereas some others would be after humanistic topics. It is a requirement for the nature that the social equilibrium is not upset for which there would be an equitable spreading of talents and interests among the creations in this universe. However, some of these assume more importance while some others seen less important, which is resulting from the improper economic structures and value formulations. There may not be anything wrong in wishing that ours should be the most crucial, but insisting for that is not a Christian approach. It is simply because in the various bifurcations within the society, we are scared that our children may fall into the less important segment and we picture them as good for nothing before others. Is this correct? Is this Christian?
- e.** The dealings of certain parents with their children prompt one to doubt that the children are like guinea pigs in a laboratory subjected to different experiments to study or analyze various theories and hypothesis. They use their children as a medium to enhance their reputation in the society or to settle scores with those who had belittled them earlier through their children now. These efforts which are nothing but expression of selfish motives should not make children just sacrificial lambs. The talents or interests of children would be different and independent. Their world too is different. In such world, children of God should identify the will of God and act. The responsibility of Christian parents is to equip their children for that. If parents want their children to be like that, children not should be seen within parents' self centeredness, but should be seen in factual realities and their God given talents are to be nurtured and encouraged. The real stress has to be not on what they can achieve materially, but has to be on their assimilation of Christian values.

Rules within the family should be applicable to all uniformly: In some family set up, there is no uniform pattern for anything. Things are done in one way by the elders, in another way by the husband and in yet another way by the wife. Children of such a family would not develop Christian values in a consistent manner. Even otherwise, values are interpreted by secularist scholars in relation to varying time and culture and areas. Our families too view values rather supportive to these interpretations. There are many families where evening prayers are simply confined to the children alone. Children who grow up under such circumstances would decide in their young days itself that there is no need to pray while they are grown up as elders. On the other hand, if all members of the family join together to pray, the children develop the feeling that praying together is necessary for all at all stages in life. It is said that children should be trained to walk the way he / she has to and even as an elder, he / she would hold on to that. As a child one should not engage in smoking or drinking is a message many parents and elders convey to the youngsters and mostly, these children are seen to resort to smoking and drinking the moment, they are no more children. Is this not encouraging to smoke and drink after they are out of adolescence? What is therefore expected is that there should be a discipline in Christian families to accept and honor Christian values by all irrespective of any age criteria so that the youngsters can learn from their elders how to cultivate values in their life.

A Psychological Base for Theological Truths:

Let there be no misunderstanding from this sub title that Psychology is being placed at a level higher to Theology. But now, we are discussing a totally different truth here. An infant who is born on this earth and learning to place each of its steps ahead should necessarily have a central point that is experienced by its own senses on which the child can rely upon for formulating its wisdom and feelings. Like all things, its spiritual growth too is acquired by the child relying on that central point. Before coming to know of the concept of the feeling of safety, the child has already experienced how it has been safe, through its mother's breasts. A child learns love, care, faith, being safe and many such things through its experience from parents. This is equally applicable for spirituality too. A child unfortunate not to have experienced parents' love, in the course of time, may come across means to learn about God's love, but the negative experience the child has been having during those of its young days would have already created negative traits in it. This should be linked to the western experience where those nations known as Christian nations now have an abundance of a generation not bothered about God. If one does not experience unqualified love direct from parents, one will simply lose the feel of experiencing love of God also. This is a truth that should open the inner eyes of parents in our families.

Questions:

1. What are main points to be taken care by Christian parents in rearing up a child?
2. How the spiritual atmosphere in a family is related to the day to day talking mannerisms of parents?
3. Why do we say that encouragement is better than criticism for the personality development of children?

Lesson 3

The Unchangeable Dowry System in a Changing World

No Theological Base # Back door Encouragement by Christian Churches # Creation of the Current Economic Order # Refining Values Through Christian Faith # The Role of Church in Refining Values

Preface: We have certain systems unchangeable in this ever changing world. Despite exhortations that they should be changed, they survive safely without change. Not only that, such systems are deep rooted in our society as a paradox. Dowry system is one among them. As pointed out on many occasions the present concept of family is influenced more by social, cultural and financial circumstances than Christian values and within that, the financial factor stands at the top. The dowry system happens to be the most crucial example of this. However God fearing a family is, wealth is looked upon as the most important criterion in finalizing a marriage alliance; if nobody finds anything wrong here, is it not a clear indication that the role of Christian faith and values is too minimal? We will discuss this issue that is interwoven with the current economic order and cultural values but are attempting a peripheral analysis rather than entering an in-depth study. It shall also be kept in mind that there may people among us who do not cherish using the term dowry here. And the reason is a ban imposed by the government from taking or giving dowry, making it legally wrong either way. Just as calling a spade a spade, it would always be better to use the term that makes communication easy; some of the aspects related to this evil system is discussed below.

There is no Biblical or Theological Base for Dowry system: Neither the vast and wide interpretations on Biblical narrations and illustrations nor the theological analysis carry any mention about the dowry system, however painstakingly we scan them. Even in the male dominated Jewish culture too, what we see is that the groom do something in favor of the bride to settle a marriage proposal. A messenger of Abraham had gone to their ancestral village searching for a bride for Isaac and Rebecca was gifted an expensive gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets for her arms (Genesis 24:22,30). Later, when Jacob married Leah and Rachel, we read that the same procedure was followed in addition to his working for Laban shepherding his sheep, seven years for Leah and another seven years for Rachel. When Moses married Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, procedure was no different. Thus the Old Testament tradition is quite clear that to earn a bride, the groom do something in favor of her family. The New Testament is totally silent on any sort of give and take system for a marriage. The Church traditions too are not suggestive of any base prompting a system like that. Strangely, our Church advocates the need to hold on to traditions, but there are no strong exhortations against holding on to non Christian traditions as also to discard them. The rationalist movements in

India as also in Kerala has come out very strongly against the practice of dowry system, but the Churches in Kerala have neither addressed this issue with the seriousness it deserves nor discouraged it. Once we probe into reasons thereof, we are led to another reality which we are perhaps reluctant to address.

Though not in the open, Christian Churches used to encourage Dowry system: We may not declare it in the open, but the fact remains that one of the main sources of income for our parishes is the fee we extract forcibly from parents of children on their marriage. Is this not justifying the dowry system though not openly? If we consider it a sin to accept a portion of stolen money, then how can we justify accepting donations from resources raised out of a system that has no legal sanctity? However, there is one problem here; how do we conclude that this system breeds injustice? The only clue we have to prove the injustice behind dowry system is that there is no base for this either in the biblical thoughts or in the thoughts formulated from traditions of the Church on family lives. If so, how has this got developed in our culture and took deep roots? Let us look into an answer for this.

Dowry System is a bye product of the current financial order: Our society has been passing through a feudal and capitalist economic order where a woman is always having a secondary role. In such a society, a woman has been the personal property of her man and a 'commodity' to be protected by him. The compensation he owes to protect his woman has transformed later into a system we now call dowry. At the end, this system too would undergo changes as we move forward in time and the varying trends within the society cause damages to the influence this economic order has been having on our cultural equations. A total reconstruction of our financial order alone can provide a lasting solution to this. May be, there are people who disagree with this thinking. But what they have to do is to apply their mind coolly and analyze why this dowry system survive and remain active despite banned by law; then we can see the truth emerging out. In our country, the constitution assures the right to retain personal assets and accumulate wealth without limits and therefore, except that dowry would just take the shape of inheritance of wealth, there may not be any positives as we learn from the social realities. Daughters of wealthy families may have advantages that equal rights for all children have been established by law. Also, we can have a relief that equality among men and women has been legally confirmed. But as the popular Malayalam saying goes, the poor still remain poor; those poor and middleclass segments who were the true victims of dowry system do not have any advantages from these legal proprieties. The evil behind this system can be effectively addressed to the society's welfare only with changes in the economic orders and the coming up of a high value cultural order where man and woman are accepted equals in all respects. There may be some who advocate that this system can be cleansed once women gain economic independence. Those women who are well employed possess high status in the marriage market even now. But here too, the high status of such women is linked with the wealth that can be cornered through their earnings which indicates no basic change in social or cultural values, as is understood very clearly. Compared to a lump sum being received at the time of marriage, there would be more advantages to a regular monthly inflow with periodic increments

and the like as also the pension on retirement. May be people treat this more profitable. In other words, the system of deal has changed in its nature; basically, the approach and attitude remain the same. Under such circumstances, what is to be prioritized is that man and woman have to be evaluated based not on the wealth they have acquired, but on the cultural values linked with their personalities.

What we have been discussing so far has relevance in many ways. We are part and parcel of a social culture where wealth is a very crucial factor in marriage alliances. The evil effects of this affect not the women alone. Those men who are not rich enough to possess adequate wealth under these situations too face the music of this evil system. As the social background favors male domination, his plight is not considered at par with that of women. We have many in our society who are reluctant to give a daughter in marriage to an unemployed man or to man whose income is not regular or steady. If wealth is exclusively the reason for our problems, then a man and woman both lacking in wealth should be grouped together among those facing the ill effects of the system. But normally, the woman alone is considered so; we have seen the answer to this above. The plight of a woman is made more pathetic by the unjust economic order as also the cultural values showing indiscrimination against her; the situation thus is all the more worst for a woman. Those who advocate equal status to all do not subscribe to this. They argue that cultural values are also creations of economic order. According to Carl Marx, all facets of a society are regulated by wealth. This thought is developed from the literal acceptance of a theory called Economic Determination Society. But World History and the variations in the growth of Marxism do not accept this fact. Experiences we learn from countries like Russia and China where Marxism was seriously experimented show that it is not at all simple to discard those social values interwoven within the culture of a community easily with the ever changing economic structures. Gods and religions, considered creations of capitalism, have been expected to get annihilated as the order of life changes but that has not happened. There are many more means to show that even under a changing economic order, the cultural values within a community would sustain without any wavering. Let us not enter those at this stage.

The Christian Faith should refine Existing Values: There is a specific reason to insist that the economic structure and cultural values are having different influences on our society. A large scale mass movement from the people is necessary to rewrite the strong and not so flexible rules and regulations of the nation as well as to abolish the iron fencing formulated by our economic structures; this has to be followed mostly by changes in the ruling political system. Unfortunately, no Christian Church in India has the capacity to take up such a task. However, it shall be possible for the Churches to encourage and help such attempts, if any, to a good extent. Along with that, Churches should initiate efforts to transform the value base of believers to Christian standards. It shall be remembered that even when being bound up under various social stigmas, there are areas where individuals or families or parishes can interfere and initiate moves to transform the society to goodness. Upholding these initiatives, Church shall take part in attempts to reconstruct the nation or our financial structure. For example, let us look into the dowry system. This has affected middle class people also very badly. But one of the main

reasons concerning their plight can be linked to their misconceptions on assessment of social values. Our middleclass people are not belonging to a category finding it difficult to have minimal clothing or optimum food; among these, there are people who can gift half to two or three lacks of rupees as family rights to their daughters. But when they look forward to relations with another category who expects, say Rs five lacks for their son, problems come up; then dowry system stares at them with its sharp eyes. On the other hand, if their relations are with people who match them in most respects and are of good Christian background and character, there would not be any such problems; they can do everything with a sense of satisfaction and content. There is no need for too much borrowing; there is no need of any senseless false pride; there is no need to have alliances with people who are not a match financially and socially; all these are adding up our woes now or later. Let there be no misunderstanding that an issue we have been discussing very seriously has been confined to a suggestive solution appearing too simple to practice. Even in the midst of unjust factors surrounding us, if we succeed to address them based on Christian principles, certainly many issues can be tackled satisfactorily. The Church and society should make endeavors to formulate action plans to put such approaches into practice. The dowry system can never be terminated within a short period of time. Based on the social analysis we have been carrying out above, the Church should come forward with strong exhortations to its members. Let us think aloud how this can be made practical.

Role of Church in refining Values:

1. Teach the believers strongly that there is no spiritual base for dowry system.
2. Let the feeling be inculcated among believers that looking at wealth as a basic criterion for marriage alliances does not match Christian values.
3. There is a popular tendency among people to accept that increase in wealth is a sign of spiritual growth and that the joy of family life rests with abundance of wealth. This attitude needs to be corrected through powerful messages. It shall be recalled that in New Testament, neither our Lord nor the Apostles have offered wealth but Satan has. Remember the verse, "All this I will give you," the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9). Only the Satan has given this assurance. Not only that, seeing the social life in the west, we can understand easily that wealth cannot provide joy in the family.
4. As our parishes are supportive to dowry system through the back door, let us wind up the system of accepting donations or fees for solemnizing marriages. There were people who has been lamenting once that the Supreme Court ruling on dowry system has caused damages to parishes. This is certainly an indication that our parishes wanted the dowry system to continue. This compulsory charging of fees has caused many obstacles to the Christian witnessing of our parishes and Church at large. This is not to mean that the charging of this fee has to be stopped forthwith, but proper planning can be done to look for other sources of revenue and slowly wind up the marriage fee. Regularity in monthly subscriptions, personal donations, tithe and such things should be encouraged so that there can be adequate compensation to wind up marriage collections. This will also help the Church to proclaim that whether there is dowry system or not, there is no role of bargaining from the parish side. The procedural formalities we are following in our parishes prior to a

marriage have been causing lot of inconvenience to the believers. Some of these create strains within family relations too. Whereas ecumenism spreads its wings globally, its significance is diluted locally though a paradox. Once we do not force such fees, the systems of the Church can be explained better to people concerned. Very often, even after accepting the necessary fees, the clearance note is not released which seems a dilemma to many among us.

5. Believers should be mentally strong to hold on to Christian values that a marriage proposal is not dismissed on financial grounds provided all other things are agreeable.
6. The boys and girls who are well off in the society to take care of them independently and subscribing to moral ideologies as also holding to Christian witnessing in life should be prepared to accept partners without any criteria of wealth.
7. Though mentioned last, this in no way is less important. Christian families should ensure equal rights for sons and daughters on ancestral assets.

If the Church and parish can do things like these with believers of Christian values taking initiatives, there can be reasonable transformation at least among our believers. There shall be no delay in our efforts channelized in this direction.

Questions:

1. Is the system of dowry a product of the present economic order? How did it come to being? Discuss this issue based on available records.
2. Can values be refined keeping it aloof from economic order? Clarify your views.
3. A parish accepting marriage fee is supportive to dowry system; explain your opinion on this.
4. Can we find Christian values in families accepting the dowry system? Discuss.

Lesson 4

Love Marriages and Family Planning

Love affairs leading to Marriage # Need for Family Planning # the stands adopted by Catholic and Protestant Churches # Practical Suggestions # Family Planning Methods

Love affair leading to Matrimony: In an earlier chapter, it was mentioned that a discussion on love marriages would be held later. Let us start from a live incident. One boy and a girl, both coming from conservative families fell in love; though Christians, they were from different denominations. Both were well educated and the boy got a good placement. The girl too had good employment prospects. Her

family did not favor this relation on the ground that they were belonging to different Church denominations; moreover, they were blindly against love marriages. However the boy's family gave their concurrence, may be on his compulsions. The girl who could not oppose her parents did not deny her love for that boy. Initially, they submitted before God and prayed sincerely for a solution. As they were seeking a spiritual remedy, did not venture to move ahead and go for a registered marriage or something like that denying their parents. Instead their maturity, may be spiritual maturity, prompted the boy to approach a third person known to both families and presented the entire matter. He was willing to act a mediator because he found this a good proposal despite being from two denominations; the social and cultural status, educational background of the boy and girl, Christian faith were all mutually complementary. Ensuring that the boy and girl were really strong in their love, he approached the girl's parents and suggested that it would always be better to concur to this. He also convinced them that their daughter's interest in this relation is very strong and that it was not just a normal excitement. In short, the girl's family came to reality and moved forward to make a formal proposal. Both families carried out mutual visits as it was customary. Though, the boy and girl had fallen in love, both were looking forward to enter matrimony with parental concurrence and blessings from the community. But, in the end, that did not materialize. The boy's parents were looking forward to a dowry far in excess of what the girl's parents could offer and the proposal got broken on this issue. And the boy, well educated, decently employed and capable to manage affairs fairly well and appearing to have been possessing Christian values simply danced to the tune of his parents without showing the courage to oppose his parents on the issue of dowry and married another girl arranged by them. In spite of the setback, the girl succeeded in holding together because of the strong support and affection she had from her parents and above all, by the grace of God. If we carry out a statistical survey of love affairs in our community, we would come across pathetic ends in certain affairs whereas in some others the end would be quite interesting. Most of such affairs are short lived; many of them commence during college days and end up with the annual vacation or when one of them finishes graduation. There are a few other affairs which progress further and come to parents where they get broken while other details are worked out. Even among those affairs ending up in matrimony, a few end up as broken partly or even totally, failing to face real life realities in a matured manner. Yet, there are such marriages surviving all odds and sustaining happily forever, but very few in number. These being the realities, possibilities are that love marriages would be on the increase in our society. Coeducation facilities, employment together, opportunities our womenfolk now have to spend time outside home rather freely are all factors favoring love affairs catalyzed further by not so suitable alliances worked out by parents as well as the tendency among youth to deny traditions. Under such circumstances, let us look into some of the aspects with which Christian believers can approach this issue logically and in a matured manner to arrive at proper decisions. Also, remember that there cannot be a flat answer to the goodness or otherwise of love marriages.

1. Apart from canonical provisions, Church has not imposed any restrictions on love marriages. In other words, if a Church member falls in love with someone against whom there is no canonical ban, Church cannot impose restrictions; canonical provisions are applicable to love marriages and arranged marriages equally.

2. Love marriages face threats usually from social restrictions. In our social background, marriages are relations between two families and not between individuals alone. Yet we see problems even where marriages are blessed by the entire family; if so, those marriages taking place without such blessings from families or society would possibly confront more problems and imbalances. Therefore, those who venture such relations should possess excessive courage to face the realities.
3. A saying goes like this: love is blind. This means that those who fall in love do not see the realities as they are immersed totally in their emotional extravaganza. Thus many real issues would be revealed only after marriage and they would not find them easy to address. For example, those who belong to different religions have got married at the Registrar's office and things have been smoothly progressing. Being financially well off, there has been no need to depend on others for their normal affairs. But once their first child is born, there arose differences as to the name to be given and later, at the time of school admissions, what should be entered as religion in the application form and so on. During the days of their flirting they never get worried about these or they never even think about these. Later, when it comes to living in reality, there are difficulties.
4. Some love birds may cross all limits to the extent of having pre marital sex too. This may lead to serious repercussions later; such acts are totally against Christian values. In such cases there have been occasional pre marital pregnancies also. For such people, a happy married life would remain a farfetched dream for long. The physical and mental imbalances caused in such situations are not simple. Even otherwise, those who have sex before marriage are said to experience more aloofness and dryness after marriage because they have nothing new to feel in the emotional front; these are self inflicted discomforts as they failed to contain themselves within the permissible limits of cultural and spiritual decency. Love affairs and love marriages are socially accepted in the west, but even there, pre marital sex and unexpected and unplanned pregnancy are creating more and more problems in their family relations. As such, those who are getting involved in love affairs should be cautious about these after effects if they are too immature in viewing emotional feelings; it is necessary that they are more serious and concerned about these. By any chance, if one is falling in love with another, it shall be ensured that there shall be no physical relations whatever are the temptations. The impacts of such relations are already discussed and hence not repeated.
5. Financial instability is a cause for problems in many family relations. In love marriages, the financial instability is more expressive causing stresses and strains in abundance. These also lead to the couple pointing fingers at each other ending up in avoidable quarrels.

These in no way mean that arranged marriages are fool proof or love marriages are failures. An attempt has been made to drive home certain practical realities. Let this analysis help us to take appropriate decisions when the need arises. Those love marriages earning social acceptance are likely to succeed. Same faith, matching cultural status, financial stability, emotional maturity, self control (determination not to have physical contact till solemnization of marriage), and educational level are all favorable factors that would work towards the success of love marriages.

Family Planning: Our ancestors would have been quite strong in their faith and traditions of the Church. But the present generation of believers has to address issues which have not been issues at all during their days. One such important aspect which has been totally alien to them is family planning. Our Church has not been live to this situation that there are no timely guidelines on the matter and believers are made to rely on logic and conscience to arrive at decisions. May be secretly, our members make queries as to how others decide on these and they move accordingly. Church should come forward and pass on suitable instructions in this matter similar to the stands being taken in other contemporary issues from time to time. In the absence of such instructions, a few inputs are summed up below which can be of help to our believers.

Need of Family Planning: Population explosion, unemployment, food for all infants being born, clothing, shelter, education, medical aid are all basic needs but we have limitations to meet these requirements to the full satisfaction to all. Considering these, it is logical that the members within a family be restricted to an optimum level. The conservatives among us vehemently argue that these problems are caused by the inequitable economic order and also that the one who is the 'cause of creation' is very much alive to the situation to provide for all; based on this, they stand to oppose any sort family planning methods. This may not cause many problems for the rich, but is certainly precarious for the poor. But there is another side of the story. The rich who are financially capable to rear up more children take adequate measures to restrict birth of children, but the poor do not follow any of such methods seriously and give birth to more and more children causing burden not only for them, but also for the nation. Considering all these elements, one has to agree to the need for family planning. However, there are differences of opinion on the methodologies those can be adopted.

Follow the restrictions advised by the Church on Physical relations: There are people among us who advocate a view that avoiding physical relations during the period of Lents including Wednesday and Friday is sufficient to control birth and there is no need to go after any other artificial methods. It is not possible to agree with this stand. Usually, a woman who has no anatomical problems and is normal with regard to fertility can conceive with a single physical relation with her husband. It is just commonsense that one can understand the fertile days in a woman during a menstrual cycle. As such, the above referred argument has no relevance.

The Catholic Stand: Let us look into what the western Churches say on this issue which do have specific stands on this subject. The Catholic Church has been teaching that the very purpose of marriage is procreation; based on this, they are against all artificial methodologies to control conceptions. On reading Genesis 38: 8-10, we come across what was done by Onan. St Augustine of the Western Church has pointed out two errors here; one, Onan did not oblige to carry out his duty and two, he stalled a possible conception. St Augustine found both these very serious errors on the part of Onan. Later, Thomas Aquinas also banned all artificial methods to check conception; he was favoring natural law in its totality. However, Catholic Church has, of late, diluted its stand that physical relation between husband and wife is exclusively for conceiving children. Now there is permission for their members to control conceptions using the discretion gifted by God. But they are not permitted at resort to any scientific methods; also, abortion is never permitted whatever be the justifications. But sterilization is

permissible in peculiar circumstances; if it is found necessary on health grounds. In short, Catholic Church advocates their specific stand that rhythm method alone is advisable as this is a natural process.

Rhythm Method: Normally, for a woman whose menstrual cycle is regular, more or less on the 14th day, the egg gets deposited in the fallopian tube to receive the sperm. This egg is live for 72 hours and the fusion with sperm should take place within this period for a conception. As such, avoiding physical relation during this period would help prevent conception. Scientific methods are there to ascertain this time more accurately by monitoring the body temperature and all, but these are not that practical for ordinary people. Considering the exact time of egg formation is not that specifically ascertainable, what is advised under rhythm method is that the first ten days after a menstruation are safe and the next seven to ten days are suitable for conception; the next ten days are again safe period. Any physical intercourse outside the fertile period will not yield conception. If the woman enjoys regularity in her periods and the couple can have adequate self control, rhythm method is quite ideal.

Compared to Catholic stand, Protestants are more liberal in these matters. Many decisions are taken in the Lambeth conferences of Anglican Church and also during other ecumenical meetings; among them, the Mansfield Report (2) points out these: Married life considers it very crucial that there shall be a feeling of oneness and unity between husband and wife always. Their mutual fellowship and spiritual, mental and physical relations are very important in married life. Therefore, this report favors adoption of any suitable family planning methods which is to their comfort and satisfaction complementary to each other. They can use methods that are not causing any danger to health. Again, to take care of serious health hazards for the mother, even abortion is permitted. However, sterilization is not encouraged as a means for ever. It may be recalled that these directives have been formulated in 1959 and since then, there have been far more liberalizations that now, sterilization and abortion are viewed too lightly indicating substantial dilution in their previously declared stands. In short, what would be ideal is a stand more or less in between those of Catholics and Protestants.

1. The best option for believers would be rhythm method and self control if practiced systematically. This method will not make one feel that the God given responsibility and blessing to be part of God's plan of procreation has not been spoiled once for all. There would be no room for any sort of anxiety.

But in practice, this may not be ideal for all couples. Those husband and wife who join together after long period of absence due to employment abroad or due to some other peculiar situations, it would not be easy to stick on to this method. Under such circumstances, the couple should submit totally before God and pray together seeking providential guidance to decide on the following aspects.

2. (a) Consider lasting pros and cons rather than temporary feelings. (b) Ensure absolutely that conception has been checked (c) Methods those are adopted shall not cause set back or lack of interest in sexual life for both husband and wife individually and together. (d) Adopted methods in no way shall have adverse impacts on the health conditions of both. (e) Ensure that no

decision in these matters is taken as tempted by others. Always, a serious thinking is needed when going for a permanent termination.

Family Planning takes place in two levels; one is permanent and the other, temporary. The names used in medical paraphernalia for sterilization is vasectomy for men and tubectomy for women. These are permanent processes. Temporary methods include condoms, pills and intra uterine devices. One cannot say that all these are totally foolproof. These react in many people not that uniformly. So, before resorting to any of these, it is always advisable to seek guidance from the family doctor with whom we would be having frequent contacts. The doctor being good in his field would be really valuable to us if he has Christian values too; such doctors are very often good in counseling the couple with a bit of spiritual outlook.

Questions:

1. Evaluate the good and bad elements within love marriages realistically. Contribute new suggestions that would be acceptable to all.
2. Narrate your views in adopting methodologies of family planning. (Those who are more practically exposed in this matter can make others understand things in a matured manner)

Lesson 5

Challenges to Christian Families

Why should there be no divorce # Basic Principles # Habit of Drinking – Ill effects and solutions

We have already gone through many of the problems of married life. Our subject for discussion in this lesson is something distinct from all those problems and more or less standing alone. Christian couples are expected to be aware of divorces and affinity towards drugs and drinks.

Divorce: Increasing rate of divorces is something that causes lot of concern in the west. In 1911, there were 650 divorces in England which increased to 28767 in 1951, 74400 in 1971 and 148200 in 1980 (REO White, A Guide to Pastoral Care, Pickering Paperbacks, UK, 1984, p. 217). We can just imagine what it would be now. Statistics in the west indicate on an average, every one in three marriages ending in divorce. In certain towns in USA, it has gone up as much as 40 to 50%. Many reasons have been identified for this alarming situation such as moving away from God individually and collectively, attachment to material comforts, financial freedom for women, popular and easy methods to prevent conception and legal sanctity to abortion ending up in deterioration of moral values. Statistics reveal that one divorce never ends up there; they get married again and again not having a

comfortable married life, but mental stresses and strains as well as personal setbacks and afflictions rule over. Many turn cardiac victims and many lose power of immunity; children face life too pathetic to carry on. They grow up without experiencing the togetherness of love and affection from father and mother; they are subjected to emptiness and dryness in life at so young an age ultimately turning to drugs and drinks and end up as anti social elements. In other words, divorce doesn't confine to two individuals, but affects the community as such. We are fortunate that that much of value deterioration has not affected us yet. But if we start blindly following the western life style and culture, it may not be too far that we are also placed in the same boat. It would be too much of a problem for our country to effectively address that we have 40% of our population living below poverty line.

Though our economic order is favoring the rich, always nourishing them and pushing the poor down to starvation at its worst, our social life is surviving somehow or other despite the hard financial structure crushing it from all sides just because of the reasonably high level cultural values and the strongly bound family relations. We did have certain blind rituals such as Sati; we do have discrimination to women; yet we survive. But as of now, divorces though less than that of the west, are causing lots of social compulsions particularly in providing for illegitimate children and such issues are damaging the very thin social fabric. A poor country like India would find it not easy to tackle illegitimate children in large numbers which can be contained and avoided only if we stay away from western pattern of disturbed family system. It is necessary that any tendency for a divorce should be addressed seriously and should be nipped in the bud.

Why should there be no divorce: What has been joined by God shall not be separated by man is the basic command that does not allow divorces in the Christian Church. We are called to be part takers of God's plan of procreation and spread the gospel of salvation to the whole universe; if this purpose entrusted to families is to be carried out, husband and wife should live together without ever even thinking of a separation till the end.

Husband and wife living together essential for the physical, mental and spiritual growth of children: Can we imagine the plight of children who live five days a week with their mother and two days with their father? Court ruling being so there is no way out, but how pathetic the children would be mentally and even physically perhaps. Children who are to spend their childhood laughing and playing ignoring all sorts of worldly tensions are seen to develop feelings of hatred, anger, disappointment, lack of mental security thereby littering the purity of their heart and getting suffocated. It has been proved that mostly, these children end up as antisocial beings as they grow up.

Living together is essential for the personality growth of husband and wife: The personality growth of husband or wife do not cease with matrimony. On the other hand, the growth of their personality enters a new phase because now there is one to care and love which is mutually complementing. This growth does not terminate at any stage; nor does it get completed. They discover new feelings daily till death ends their earthly togetherness. This is not to wind up with one and then commence with another. May be physical relations can be maintained with more than one, but the one to one

spiritual closeness that has been growing ever since they have been joined together cannot be transferred to another. Let us look at the close personal relation we have with a good friend. Though we have many friends, there is a special feeling with this one that carries a difference. Such close relationship is normally not possible with all. If so, the relationship between husband and wife sharing body, mind and spirit in their wholeness cannot be cut off and implant somewhere else; attempts to such implantation is something that does not match natural law. This is the psychological reason why those who are divorced are susceptible to mental disorders.

Certainty of Nature: This is an essential characteristic for the sustenance and growth of man; this is equally applicable in married life as well. Look at the law of nature where the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, stars lighten and rivers flow downstream; all these concepts have a certainty without which human life cannot sustain. It is a natural phenomenon that electricity produces heat and power; but what would have happened if this natural characteristic of electricity changes frequently? How would scientific innovations progress? In short, human life sustains and develops only on the firm belief that the certainty of nature can be depended upon totally. This makes married life purposeful, meaningful and deep in relation. Even those atheists who deny God stick on to something to lean on in life. The revolutionaries sing: losing bondages, gaining new earth. Here too we see a hope for tomorrow; good dreams are woven for tomorrow and pinning hope and faith there, a new meaning gets unearthed. This basic principle should be true for married life also. Married life is all the more cherished when there is a certainty for mutual care, love and affection, faithfulness and sincerity. The wife who gets angry and upset on discovering her husband's relation with another woman is more worried on her feeling that he is not faithful to her in sex rather than his attitude to have sex with the other woman. A wife doubting her husband's sexual life would doubt him in every other matter. Their married life is becoming disturbed on this lack of mutual faithfulness. While spending a long period in London, some friends there asked this writer, "would your wife wait for you even after a year?" Not one, but separation for many years would not raise thoughts for divorce as per our values; for them, not one year, but a separation for one or two months is enough to move for divorce. Which of these two is advisable? Thinking on these lines, we will realize the inseparable mystery of married life. Therefore, not only theological reasoning, but even psychological reasoning encourages matrimony to survive till the end.

The sex related diseases like AIDS which has been on the increase the world over, particularly in the west, reconfirms our traditional concepts of family relationships. Many social scientists and reformists have been clamoring now that pre marital and extra marital sex are unwarranted and that sexual life should be confined to husband – wife relations. These are all reasons that make divorces unthinkable for children of God. Some of the rarest of rare situations where divorces could be thought over has been discussed earlier and hence not repeated here.

Habit of Drinking:

Probably, in our society the habit of drinking is much more a serious vice than divorces. Though there are differences between rich and poor in our financial structure, the conditions of the poor has been contaminated a lot by this habit of drinking. Socialist countries which were upholding

theories of class wars have banned smoking, drinking and drug abuse. In India, the government is represented by political parties which change occasionally but has never thought of implementing this type of a ban despite being a poor nation with 40% of population below poverty line; these habits are spreading different types of social problems and health hazards. Political parties seem to be not at all worried on these and there have been no committed efforts from them. The factors tempting different governments in India not to interfere in this social malaise are the following: the incoming of huge revenue from these, loss of employment to those engaged in manufacturing liquor products and the likely increase in spurious productions. The government lacks will power to act strongly against these for fear of revenue loss from production of intoxicating drinks. But if this revenue is compared with the increasing anti social activities, road accidents, family problems and deterioration of health it is not difficult to infer that the damages to community are far more than the revenue earned. It is also seen that those states where legal brewing is not banned, spurious drinks are easily available on cheaper rates meaning that a total prohibition would certainly enhance spurious brewing. Thus side by side with appropriate laws, there must be efforts to conduct awareness programs too. Concerted attempts are needed to save the people from this malaise. But our political parties lack will power here. No political party has come forward to address this issue with total commitment and sincerity. The reason for this laxity on their part is understandable by reading between the lines of their various statements and declarations. Rather than serving the people, politicians have a priority to retain power if they are on the ruling front or regain the power if they are on the opposition bench. They have been receiving all sorts of support from those in the business of manufacturing liquor. Moreover, they need a mass down the line to be part of movements being organized by political parties; the mass should be retained at a particular level that they are ready to dance to the politicians' tune always. Those living at the lower level of our society work hard the whole day and then in the evening major share of their earnings instead of earmarking for the needs of the family is spent on drinking; on the other hand, if we can transform these people to spend the major part for family needs and spend their evening with all members of the family, their cultural status would move up; more than that, the liquor lobby will face setbacks. The politicians who exploit these poor men to suit their fancies too will get their 'returns'. The leaders cannot tolerate this. There is no other reason why politicians lack sincerity and commitment in eradicating this liquor mania. So the real work has to come from Church, spiritual organizations and anti liquor movements. There must be voluntary groups in each of our parishes to initiate propaganda against the consumption of liquor, against drug abuse and against smoking. If one drunkard is saved from this menace, at least one family is saved and gets transformed into true feelings of joy. Thus even solitary works are also relevant. In other words, let us not brand this as a national or global issue; instead, let us be pro active in our small pockets. A believer can never turn his back on this damaging menace.

The ill effects on liquor consumption, drug abuse and smoking and the methods to contain them are not being discussed here elaborately. But a summed up version of inputs can be provided. According to statistics released by the World Health Organization, among the causes for the health hazards faced by human beings, drinking stands fourth (REO White, A Guide to Pastoral Care, Pickering Paperbacks, UK, 1984, p. 217). If we add up drug abuse and smoking too with this, the combination stands first among

such causes of health hazards. The main reasons behind deadly diseases like cancer and cardiac problems are these three. Moreover, these are the main contributory factors to mental disorders too. The Holy Bible has been always asserting that one's health issues are related to the sins he has committed. In this matter, this Biblical teaching is proved in its perfection. The impact of these three destructs body, mind and spirit and do not confine to that person alone, but to the community at large. It affects his social relations and his family life. It disturbs his family as well as the next generation too.

Solutions: There are scientific studies conducted on addiction to liquor and drugs, the background behind its development, how to respond to them and other related issues. Those who are interested in a deep analysis can refer to such study papers. However, certain common approaches are suggested here.

1. According to statistics, among those who have simply tried liquor or drugs or smoking for the sake of mere fun or enjoyment, 10 to 20% are getting addicted. Therefore, those who have not tasted them must take a vow that they would not touch these even for fun.
2. There is a difference between those who use liquor or drugs and the one who is an addict. The addicts are not drinking to live, but living to drink. Spiritual guidance or counseling may not work with them; they have to be subjected to Psychiatric treatment a day earlier. These addicts want the drinks not only for a mental change over, but as a substitute for food. Thus, treatment is the only alternative.
3. Those who are not addicts often argue that they have taken to drinking due to their stresses and strains in life. May be, without his knowledge, the thoughts hovering his unconscious mind too would be playing a role here. Inferiority complex, feeling of guilt, hopelessness, unrealized wishes, dryness and such other mental discomforts can lead a person to drinking and drugs. But such people should be made to understand drinking or drugs are no solace to these discomforts; they have to open out in a Holy Confession or counseling and seek remedies. Resorting to drinking is not only helpful to tackle mental uneasiness, but spiritual, mental and physical faculties are further damaged and smaller problems are gradually magnified. Therefore creating proper awareness is very important.
4. Above all, believers should attempt to experience a joyful family atmosphere through spiritual life and Christian fellowship; if so, one may not be inclined to lean towards drinking and get addicted to that. Spiritual organizations, prayer meetings, charity activities are all good enough forums providing joy of Christian fellowship through which those who are undergoing stresses and strains can share their feelings and experience a oneness with children of God. This will strengthen them like anything that the tendency to turn to drinks can be thrown away.

Questions:

1. Explain the theological and psychological reasons why divorces are not permissible.
2. What are the problems coming up in a family life due to addiction towards drinking? What all remedies are there before us to eradicate this menace from the society?

Lesson 6

Paradise on Earth

“If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless; For the Lord provides for those He loves, while they are asleep. Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a real blessing. He will never be defeated.”(Psalm 127)

“Happy are those who obey the Lord, who live by His commands. Your wife will be like fruitful wine in your home, and your sons will be like young olive trees round your table..... May you see Jerusalem prosper all the days of your life! Peace be with Israel.” (Psalm 128)

The theological concepts of family life we come across in the New Testament may not be seen in its wholeness here, but a poetic insight that an ideal family is a paradise on earth is quite evident in these Psalms. Psalm 127 is considered as a song of ascents of Solomon but many scholars opine that this would have been written during or immediately after the days of exile in the background of building up the disturbed family relations of Israel. Psalm 128 would have been used as a song of benediction towards the close of worships. Both these Psalms reflect beautifully the basic principles of family life. Before winding up this small book, let us go through the meditational thoughts coming up through these two Psalms.

The Foundation of a Christian Family is God:

Let us repeat briefly what has already been discussed. Whatever precautions are taken, what all means of living discipline is practiced, what sort of calculations are made, a family life would be mingled with sorrows, tribulations, financial troubles, diseases and perhaps even separations. Many may doubt how come that those who live close to God are facing hard tests in life. In all such situations, a believer is held together only by his total faith in God. “So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, and the wind blew hard against that house; but it did not fall because it was built on rock” (Matthew 7:24, 25). Our Lord strengthens us to be courageous and energetic from the words of the Psalmist.

For the Lord provides for those He loves, while they are asleep:

This doesn't mean that God showers blessings on those who are lazy. ‘He giveth his beloved sleep’, meaning he provides good rest to his beloved. This is a continuation of what was said earlier. It is a waste to toil hard keeping God away. One, who accepts Him in personal life and family life as the center point and works hard, is provided rest everyday as also at the end. As hinted by the Psalmist, there are many among us, Christians, who toil hard targeting material wealth in its literal sense. For those who toil hard not bothering even their blessed family life would feel rest as an unrealized dream.

There is yet another side for this. Meaning the one dear to God, Solomon had another name Jedidiah. 1Kings 3:5-15 narrates the incident of God providing blessings to Solomon in his sleep. God promised him any wish he desired, but Solomon requested only a wise heart so that his subjects could be governed justly. This was greatly appreciated by God and He provided Solomon wealth, honor and wisdom. Likewise, children of God would always be provided virtues beyond their efforts. Solomon did not ask anything for him. He pleaded for his subjects only. It is, therefore, true that God would shower blessings to those who commit to use their talents for the welfare of others.

Children are the gift of God:

Family planning methodologies and scientific innovations make many feel that children are the creations of parents. Here too, the words of Psalmist are significant. Science may change; knowledge may change; but there shall be no change that children are gift of God. Only then, one can grow the coming up generation in relation to God. Once a child from a family, where there were regular family prayers, asked me: "When I pray to God, I feel about Him, I think about Him and I decide to do something for Him." The children of Christian families should experience this feeling.

Children of God shall not shy away when confronting enemies around them:

During those days when the Jews were living in their tribal tradition, elders needed assistance from youngsters of their community when the need arose to wage battles against other tribes. Now, such conflicts are not there.

The poet has sung, 'Townships rich in show off, villages rich in virtues'; possibly, he never has it in mind that villages are so rich with virtues and prosperity, but surely has it in him that the urban culture has been showing signs of disintegration of values. Lack of spirituality and abundance of immorality are ruling the urban culture where Christian families are to gain strength to ride over the enemies.

Happy are those who obey the Lord, who live by His commands:

The Psalmist was quite confident to say this, but the present day believers may not be so confident. The present generation counts highest ranks in examinations right from KG classes to professional courses, good positions in the society, acquiring wealth, possessing fascinating buildings and palace like residential premises as means of happiness. Who is on the wrong side here? The Psalmist or we people? Of course, the Psalmist is not wrong. What he has advocated is the lasting values of Christian faith most of which we have to accept and put into practice.

The family fellowship- grape vine and olive saplings:

It is a very meaningful analogy the Psalmist pictures here; the wife is a fruitful grape vine and the children are olive saplings. Those were days when women were enjoying limited freedom, but those who were from God fearing families were not having complaints. Women had been successful in living a meaningful life like a fruitful grape vine. However, we have to initiate certain steps urgently in our society where there are various discriminations against women even these days. Let us practice more Christian values in our life. Only in an atmosphere rich in Christian values can we extend a helping hand

to the destitute and the weak effectively. Law of the land would be useful for taking care of the society if implemented properly, but such laws cannot be followed as such within a family situation. The basis for a good family relationship would be experiencing Christian virtues like mutual love, sacrifice, sincerity, faithfulness, forgiveness, empathy and such others.

The olive saplings grow around the olive tree one nurturing the other; likewise, disciplined children in submission to parents live in one mind and in one spirit. Children earn these qualities not casually; they learn to interact with their parents who have been so pious in their relation with God. The Psalmist has presented this in a very beautiful manner; “The Lord guides a man in the way he should go and protects those who please him. If they fall, they will not stay down, because the Lord will help them up. I am an old man now; I have lived a long time, but I have never seen a good man abandoned by the Lord or his children begging for food” (Psalms 37: 23-25). Parents should have in them fear of God and discipline that the children would be having their commitment to God and parents. Even as days are progressing, there are no changes needed in these habits.

May you see Jerusalem prosper all the days of your life:

It is impossible for a Jew to find the meaning of his life without relating to his religion and faith. The joy of a family that possesses fear for Jehovah doesn't confine to family life alone. The fragrance of that joy spreads in all directions. Jerusalem is the center of the religion and the culture of a Jew. It is a meaningful concept that Jerusalem prospers when families grow in fear of God. Likewise, there is no two opinion that the wholesome progress of our parishes and Church is based on the Christianization of our families. It is through one's experience from his family that a believer earns sacramental nourishment for his spiritual life and establishes his relation with the Church. Those who cannot appreciate or practice even the family prayers of not such a long duration would not find the more lengthy worship services at the church of any spiritual nourishment. It is always a good practice that the family together has a Holy Confession and accepts Holy Qurbana on days of birthday, wedding anniversary and memorial days of departed family members as also during Lent periods. Also, it is not good for parents to minimize accepting Holy Qurbana just once a year carrying a wrong message to children though it may not be easy to do it every week. Believers have a responsibility to nurture the Church in all respects from where they receive spiritual life; if this has to happen, there should be timely experiences from family itself.

Witnessing me throughout the universe:

This is all that has to be added to what we have seen from the Psalms. The reflections of true spiritual life are not confined to just one place; but as our Lord has conveyed the apostles, this has to be carried out even now and forever. As indicated early, a family becomes a Christian family only when the purpose of God about family is accomplished. It is the basic duty of a Christian family to be responsible to the society. Our Lord has never called the living style of possessing personal virtues and being selfish as a spiritual way. Look at the rich man who came to Jesus seeking eternal life as narrated in Luke 18:18-29. He was one who was personally quite good possessing good values in comparison with many others in the Jewish community; but our Lord was not satisfied with that alone. He was asked to satisfy his

obligations to the society. “There is still one more thing you need to do. Sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you have riches in heaven; then come and follow me” (verse 22). The young man had not understood that attending to the needs of the society was part of spirituality and felt very sad at this response from the Lord. Our Lord was not having any sympathy to him in his sadness; he never showed any sort of compassion or made any attempt for reconciliation. Saying, “It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” (verse 25), he made his stand tough and justified what he had commented.

Our society is comfortable with a spirituality that is not bothered about commitments to the society. The Christianization of a family, therefore, has to enable an orientation in this direction. The transformation Zacchaeus experienced when Jesus called on him is worth studying in the above background (Matthew 18:1-10). “Listen, sir, I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much” (verse 8). The transformation of Zacchaeus led to his repentance followed by his intention to compensate the society wherever he has damaged it and also to honor his commitments to the people. These two are really relevant in our day to day life today. If we acknowledge these values, the false spirituality that has been created through selfish agenda in families would get exposed. Those families seeking eternal life should be committed to do the will of God and conduct introspection of their obligations to the society. This sort of a self evaluation is essential.

Looking at family life in these directions, one may feel it very tough to make a paradise in earth. Yes, it is true; but what is impossible for man is possible for God; children of God should possess this feeling. Be it in the high heavens or low in earth, ‘Paradise’ is with God. God builds it. Therefore, a Christian family that has been with God and entrusted God to build it can proclaim aloud: if there is a Paradise in earth, it is here! It is here!

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