

A Three-Fold Cord

“For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1Peter 3:5-7).

A braid appears to contain only two locks of hair; however, it is impossible to create a braid with only two locks. If the two could be put together at all, they would quickly unravel. Thus, what looks like two locks requires a third, and the third, though not immediately evident, keeps the locks tightly woven.

In a successful and happy marriage, like the third lock in a braid, God's presence (His revelation, law, and will) holds the husband and wife together in a sacred bond. “Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecc. 4:9-12).

Shaping Onesimus

For almost one hundred years, a huge piece of flawed Carrara marble lay in the courtyard of a cathedral in Florence, Italy. Then, in 1501, a young sculptor was asked to do something with it. He measured the block and noted its imperfections. In his mind, he envisioned a young shepherd boy. For three years, he chiseled and shaped the marble skillfully. Finally, when the eighteen-foot towering figure of David was unveiled, his student exclaimed to Michelangelo, “Master, it lacks only one thing—speech!”

Onesimus was like that flawed marble. He was an unfaithful servant when he fled from his master Philemon. But while on the run he came to know the Master Sculptor. As a changed man, he served God faithfully and was invaluable to Paul's ministry. When Paul sent him back to Philemon, he commended him as one “who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me” (1:11). He asked Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother (v.16). Paul knew what it meant to be given another chance after past wrongs (Acts 9:26-28). He knew personally the transformation God can accomplish. Now he saw it in the life of Onesimus. The Lord can chisel His image on our flawed lives and make us beautiful and useful too. But our rough edges must be chipped away to bring out the image of Christ. (D. DeHaan)

Reconciled Today

In Judaism, the holiest day of the year is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day, the nation seeks God's forgiveness for sins both personal and national. What is interesting, however, is the day before Yom Kippur, known as Erev Yom Kippur. It represents a person's last opportunity to seek forgiveness from other people before Yom Kippur begins. This is important because, in Jewish thought, you must seek forgiveness from other people before you can seek the forgiveness of God.

Today, we are called to do the same. Jesus pointed out that in order to worship Him with all our heart, we first need to resolve matters with others. In Matthew 5:23-24, He said, “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Even in a matter so basic as our giving, the ability to truly worship God is hindered by the reality of relationships broken by our wrong actions, attitudes, and words. So that our worship can be pleasing and acceptable to God, let us make every effort to be reconciled to one another—today.

When the Birds Leave Our Nest

Comedian Henny Youngman used to say, "I've got two wonderful children—and two out of five isn't bad."

When children reach adulthood, most parents have an opinion about how their offspring have "turned out." Some are proud of everything their kids have done, while other parents express misgivings or disappointment about the choices their children have made. How can we continue a positive parenting role after the birds have left our nest?

In 1Corinthians 13, often called "the love chapter" of the Bible, Paul writes that the greatest gifts of speaking, understanding, and sacrificial service are worthless without love (vv.1-3). Love itself is the foundation of winsome behavior, and its influence never ends. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vv.4-8). When our children no longer seek our advice, they still value our love. In every stage of parenting, it's not only what we say but what we do that counts. A parent's love never ends. (D. McCasland)

The Professor and the Custodian

Walking through campus one day, a seminary professor came upon a custodian reading the Bible during lunch hour. The professor asked what he was reading. "Revelation," the custodian said. "I'm sure you don't understand what it means," said the professor condescendingly. "Actually, I do," he replied. "It means Jesus wins."

In the face of life's challenges, it's important to remember that ultimately God always wins! And since His plans are always in the victory lane, it's infinitely wiser to converge with His will rather than compete with it.

In the story of Ruth, God providentially set the stage for Boaz to rescue Ruth and Naomi from a life of poverty and the shame of not having an heir. Ruth could have been bitter about her status as a young widow, and Boaz might have thought that as a foreigner Ruth was not worth his time. But they recognized the hand of God in their circumstances and converged with His plan to provide for her needs. The best part is that their story doesn't end there. Salvation for the world was yet to come through their descendants—first David and then Jesus (Matt. 1:5-16).

We can compete with God's plan and pursue our own agenda. Or we can converge with God's plan and join the winning side. The choice is ours. God's plans always lead to victory. (J. Stowell)

Information Overload

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Neil Postman warns us of the danger of a world of information overload. He reminds us of a chilling futuristic vision—Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which describes a world thoroughly flooded with information. But that data is manipulated so that none of it has any significance.

A glance at the Internet or a magazine rack hints that we are living in just such a culture. We're drowning in a sea of information often marketed by the unscrupulous. We need discernment to choose wisely whom we will listen to.

In John 6, Jesus delivered His "I am the bread of life" message (v.35). It was a sermon so controversial that, at its conclusion, many of His followers went away and stopped following Him (v.66). They chose to stop listening to the voice of Christ. When Jesus challenged His disciples as to whether they would also walk away, Peter wisely responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v.68). In a world swamped with confusing and contradictory information, we can, like Peter, turn to Christ for wisdom. He cuts through the words of confusion with words of life.