



Abundant Living Ministries

Encouraging Christian Living since 1978

March 2019

We were only married a few years, but we felt as though we needed a fresh start! I was scrappy and didn't mind an argument. Sharon was sweet and soft-spoken and just wanted to hide from any conflict. She really didn't want to argue... which further frustrated me. But I might add that, in spite of her gentle ways, Sharon was no pushover. She had her firm opinions and would stubbornly dig in her heels... all with a pleasant look on her face.

Our fresh start began when we both went back "to the foot of the cross." We admitted to the Lord that we were discouraged and disappointed about marriage and that it wasn't turning out the way we had expected. We both told the Lord we would "lay at Your feet... at the foot of the cross" the demands and expectations we had brought into marriage. And we asked sincerely, "Lord, would YOU please show us and teach us what meaningful, intimate marriage looks like?"

We purposed to forgive each other for the offenses we thought we had suffered. And, we gave each other a fresh start, more-deeply rooted in scriptural principle, and in love. Several of Christ's teachings became the fundamentals for our new marriage. One of those foundational principles comes to mind as the topic for this letter.

In Acts 20:35 we read that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Or, in our own paraphrase, "I will be happier, more content, more blessed today if I stay focused on giving to others, rather than getting bent out of shape over what I think others *ought* to be giving to me, or doing for me. We adopted a slogan, "We will be *GIVERS*... not *takers*."

I remember the young couple who met with Sharon and me, many years ago. They had purposed to have TWO date nights per week, in an effort to strengthen their marriage. "But," the one reported, "it's already not working!" She explained that Mondays and Thursdays were to be their date nights; the husband would plan the Mondays and she the Thursdays. She had little appreciation for sports and just hated watching football on TV. Imagine her disappointment when her husband announced that, for their first Monday Date Night, they would make some microwave popcorn, cuddle on the sofa, and watch Monday night NFL football. She was really mad!



So, she figured two people can play that game! On Thursday, she told her husband they would be joining her parents to play bingo at the fire hall... something she knew her husband despised! "So, you see," she exclaimed, "our date nights are already not working!"

We suggested that, going forward, they could change just one thing about their planning. When the husband planned the evening, he would plan an activity he thought SHE would really enjoy. And the wife, on her nights, would plan to please her husband. In other words, they would both become GIVERS, rather than takers.

Think about it. They would both have one evening a week doing something they really enjoyed. And both would have one evening when they sacrificed to bless the other. **But they would both feel so different**, because the planning was done as GIVERS, rather than takers.

Hmmm...

Maybe Jesus knew what He was talking about!

John (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)

Born for Heaven



Question: Our family just lost a much-loved elderly relative. Although I know that he was a Christian and is certainly in heaven, I admit that the whole idea of dying is hard for me. It makes me fearful just thinking about it. And my uneasiness, makes it even more difficult to talk positively with my children. Any helps with such a difficult subject?

Response: What a practical question! As we all know, death is a very real part of life. Each one of us will experience it, unless Jesus returns first. But it is understandable to have fears about something that we have never experienced before.

My mother-in-law told me how she used to dread going to church as a child. She would sit on hard wooden benches and listen to dreary singing and sermons that droned on forever. Often her mind wandered. She would fidget and squirm, trying to get comfortable and wishing she could somehow escape. One Sunday she was horrified when she heard the preacher say, "Heaven is going to be glorious. It will be like being in church for all eternity!" Well, to a little girl, thinking of sitting on hard pews for ever and ever sure didn't sound very appealing!



In reality, heaven will be wonderful, beyond our wildest imagination. Something that has helped me look at death and what lies beyond, in a very different way than that preacher's description... a much more positive and exciting way... is an example from a baby!

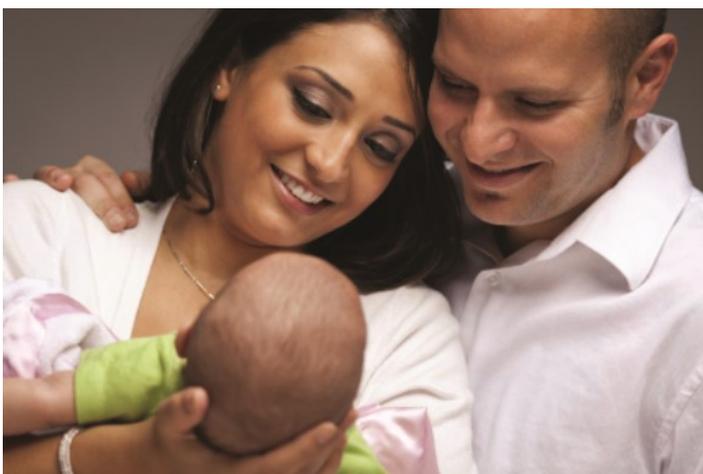
As a childbirth educator for over thirty years, I never cease to be amazed by the birth process. For nine months a tiny baby grows within his mother's warm uterus. The Bible calls this cozy nursery a "womb." In the first months the baby has lots of room to float and move. It is the only world the baby knows and he is comfortable in his nice warm abode. He couldn't begin to conceive of anything beyond his little environment. As the weeks roll by however, the space in that "room" grows tighter and tighter. He begins to feel cramped and one cannot help but wonder, if he doesn't sense a restlessness to be freed from what has become not-so-comfortable.

By the time the baby is about six months along in development, he is beginning to hear pretty well. By eight months he is hearing very well. Granted, the sounds he hears are muffled by the barrier of flesh and organs that separate him from the outside world. Nevertheless he is learning to recognize voices and particularly the voices of his parents. Inside the womb, the baby opens his eyes. Of course, it is pretty dark in there and on top of that he is submerged in fluid, so whatever sights he manages to make out, must appear very blurry.

And then somewhere around the 9-month mark, the baby begins to feel a new sensation... the uterus is beginning to contract and the baby is now being squeezed and pushed in a way he has never felt before. He must wonder what

on earth is happening to him. The labor and pushing might take hours, or be very quick... and then suddenly... birth! The child who has lived safe and secure inside its mother, is suddenly awakened to a world he could never have possibly imagined... a world of sound and color, of laughter and beauty... and best of all... a world where he suddenly sees his parents face to face. The voices that he learned to recognize before birth are now clear. The visions that were blurred and shadowy are now crisp and sharp.

Those who get to witness childbirth frequently, marvel at the instant bond between newborn and his parents. The child gazes at his parents' faces and is enthralled with their voices. It is like that tiny brain is thinking, "So these are the faces that go with the voices I have learned to know over these months! But oh... this is so much better, seeing them face-to-face and hearing them clearly!"



The longer I live, the more convinced I am that much of the universe is designed by God to help us understand important spiritual truths. And I have been struck by how similar birth is to death...

When an individual puts their faith in Christ for salvation, he begins a new life. It is undeveloped and immature at first, but gradually that person begins to grow and mature.... much like the developing baby in the womb. The believer learns to hear His heavenly Father's voice and seeks to see things as He sees, although the Divine voice often seems muffled and His face remains hidden. Earth is the only "nursery" the believer has ever known... when he was a child, that world seemed a wonderful place, with adventure and discovery. It seemed safe and comfortable. But as believers grow old, that same world doesn't seem to fit them as well.... their bodies seem confining, their environment uncomfortable. They begin to feel weary of waiting. They begin to long to be released from the confines of their humanity.

And then suddenly, they find themselves being nudged/pulled/pushed and may very well wonder what on earth is

happening to them. It is death... their short journey into a whole new world. And suddenly they open their eyes to a scene so vast and vibrant, wildly beyond anything they had ever imagined, so much more spectacular and colorful and amazing than the earthly "womb" they had lived in for so many years. And suddenly they hear a familiar Voice... only now so much more close and clear... and for the first time they look into the tender loving eyes of their heavenly Father! They must think at that moment, "Oh, so this is the Face that goes with the Voice I have heard throughout my life on earth... only now it is crystal clear and now I see the beautiful face of the One I have already come to love! It is similar to what Paul describes in I Corinthians 13:12, *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*



Those who witness the birth of a baby, rejoice and cheer... a small party compared with the celebration among the rejoicing angels and waiting loved ones who witness a believer's arrival in heaven! Why does Psalm 116:15 say, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints? Death is precious to Him, because it is the arrival of the treasured child He has carried so long. He has been waiting for and preparing for His child. That's why Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:54-55, When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true; "Death has been swallowed up in victory." Where, O death is your victory" Where, O death, is your sting?*

It is true that many of us don't like to think of the death of those we love or even of our own death. But why not try viewing death as an amazing process... just like the miracle of birth. Picture it as an arrival into a dazzlingly beautiful new world, and into the arms of the One who made us and has loved us and has always been with us! The prospect might just become much less scary and much more of a wonderful prospect!



Written by Sharon Charles

Upcoming Classes at ALM

Open Arms Childbirth Class

Five consecutive Thursdays at 7:00pm
April 4 - May 2, 2019

Taught by an experienced childbirth educator, this class covers the same information offered in a hospital course, but includes a distinctively-Christian perspective. You will meet and connect with other expectant couples and gain many practical helps as you prepare for a great labor and delivery. There is no cost for this course. Please register by contacting the ALM office (see contact information below).

Lay Christian Counselor Training



**Six Monday evenings
October 7-November 11, 2019**

7:00 - 9:00 PM

**\$120 per person or
\$150 per couple
(textbooks included)**

Designed for those who wish to be
more-effective people helpers
within the Christian community.

Please register no later than SEPTEMBER 20th

by calling the ALM office at 717-626-9575 or emailing Chris at info@AbundantLivingMinistries.org

Contact Information

Address: 541 W. 28th Division Highway, Lititz, PA 17543

Website: www.AbundantLivingMinistries.org

Email: info@AbundantLivingMinistries.org

Phone: (717) 626-9575

Facebook: www.facebook.com/alm4u