I still remember a young couple who, a couple decades ago, met with Sharon and me. They explained that their marriage was fizzling and that they had purposed to have two date nights per week, in an effort to strengthen their relationship. (I had a twinge of guilt… TWO date nights per week?!?!)

"But," the wife 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.

This wife had little appreciation for sports. And, she simply hated watching football on TV. So… imagine her disappointment and disgust 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!

Well, she figured two people can play that game! On Thursday, she informed 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 to us, "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 which he thought SHE would really enjoy. And the wife, on her nights, would plan to PLEASE HER HUSBAND. In other words, they would both purpose to bless the other in their planning.

They would both become GIVERS, rather than TAKERS. Think about it. Same as before… They would both still have one evening a week doing something they themselves really enjoyed. And both would have one evening when they sacrificed to bless the other. **But they would both feel so different,** because they planned as GIVERS, rather than TAKERS. I can imagine that, if the wife actually PLANNED to cuddle on the sofa with her husband, watching Monday Night Football… she could enjoy it because now she was a GIVER in the situation. Likewise, the husband could take the initiative and plan for Thursday night bingo.

In Acts 20:35 we read that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." My own paraphrase goes like this, "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." In fact, this is one of the goals Sharon and I have in our marriage, "We will be *GIVERS…* not *takers."*

John 3:16 is usually considered the most-popular and well-known verse of scripture. Notice, *For God so loved the world that he **GAVE!*** Our own Father set the example for us to follow… that of being a GIVER! And what He gave was not a game of bingo. He gave his most-precious… his only Son, to die on our behalf. Notice the pattern? God GAVE His son.

And then, Jesus continued as the GIVER… giving His very life for us! What an example to follow!

Purposing to follow in His footsteps
John Charles (for Sharon too)

On the Way to a Good Name

In last month's article we looked at the importance of gaining a good name… ***in God's eyes!*** Jesus Himself said, *You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God-knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.* (Luke 16:15)

The intense focus on achievement, so obvious in today's culture, often relegates character-building to the place of lesser importance. Yes, it is a good thing to recognize a child's God-given talents, strengths and abilities. Yes, it is important that we take steps to nurture and develop these. But if the priority is placed on pursuing such values as academic superiority, financial success, athletic accomplishment, societal recognition… OVER the pursuit of God and His character, we rob our children of the fulfillment that comes only through gaining a good name by God's standards.

So... How can we, as Christian families, work on building a good name for God's glory?

Check your attitudes and speech. Do you talk more enthusiastically about the latest sports events, movie releases, or in-the-news personalities, than about blessings Jesus has given, spiritual lessons you are learning, and opportunities you have had to help others? Children are prone to adopt their parents' values. What are they "catching" from us?

Put earthly success in perspective. An interesting proverb (Prov. 27:2) tells us, "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips." When someone compliments you on a job well-done, thank them sincerely, but give the credit to God. Teach your children to do likewise. Recognize that there is NO good thing that comes our way, except because of God's kindness, mercy, and grace.

Prioritize being helpful and kind. Assign chores to the children. Look for ways to help others … baby-sitting, mowing a lawn, running errands. When working, don't grumble and complain. Instead, express gratitude for the ability to give assistance to others. When praying, spend more time thanking God for His blessings and praying for the needs of others, than in expressing your personal "wants." Jesus said that He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He also said that there is greater blessing in giving than in receiving (Acts 20:35). In today's me-centered culture, it is easy to forget that the most effective way to help children gain a sense of purpose and fulfillment is to provide many opportunities for them to serve others.

Read biographies or watch programs about ordinary people who did much for God. Talk about people in the Bible who were not "great" in society's eyes, but who God used greatly for His glory.

Memorize the following passages with your children… *This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, or the strong boast of their strength, or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this:* ***that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight****," declares the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24*).

Let love and faithfulness never leave you*; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a* ***good name*** *in the sight of God and man (Proverbs 3:3-4).*

Notice that God delights in **love, faithfulness, kindness, justice, and righteousness** over human accomplishment. May these be the "good-name builders" we exemplify in our daily living and that we diligently nurture in the next generation.

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