

"BUILDING A HOME"

A Sermon By

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Those of us who are pet lovers might be sympathetic to these young people's ethical dilemma, but the point that Prager seems to be making however is that many people today have no fixed point of reference for their values except what they feel - and feelings can be fickle and unreliable, even a feeling as noble as that of love.

I think it was David Barry, a "humor-writer" who once wrote a piece that exposes in a humorous way the unreliable side of love. He writes,

"Love can be wonderful....but it can also be very destructive. It can cause people to lie, to cheat, to commit murder and worst of all...to write lyrics like these, 'Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near?'" Lyrics, of course, from the huge hit by the Carpenters, "They long to be Close To You".

Barry continues,

"You frankly have to ask yourself, 'Do I really want to be near somebody who causes birds to appear suddenly? And didn't Alfred Hitchcock once do a horror movie about birds being close....'"

Of course, Barry is writing with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, but it is true that we need to have a more reliable gauge for our actions than our emotions. We need solid principles that grow out of our faith in God and in our understanding of God's plan for the lives of people. We learn these principles, these values, these foundation blocks in the home...RIGHT?

And many of you are trying and trying hard...I know that. Ladies Home Journal once did a survey of working moms. And they found that many of them are still trying to keep traditional parenting habits and customs alive. For example: "Dinnertime is family time". Almost 30 percent say they eat dinner as a family every night and 44 percent say most nights and the others?

And what about In God They Trust? Fifty percent send their 13 to 17 year olds to religious services - Sunday School or both. 'Course, it's even better if parents TAKE their children to church rather than just send them. The point of all of this is simply this: the inculcation of values is the second of three critical tasks of the home. The first, remember, is: the formation of identity. The second: the formation of character.

A PLACE OF SECURITY TO WHICH THE YOUNG CAN ALWAYS RETURN

of security in this uncertain world to which the young can always return.

The third is to create a place

In His life and in His teachings, Jesus always elevated the role of relationships high above every other human responsibility. We were created out of love and we were created for love. God's very nature is love. And those ties that "bind" us together as individual families and as the family of Christ are sacred ties that are not to be severed except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. Our children may make all sorts of mistakes in life, but they need to know that there is one place where they can always receive forgiveness, nurture and love - and that is AT HOME. Part of our responsibility is to create a secure place to which they can always feel they may return, if necessary.

A closing story that conveys the message of today's final point. Patty Clairmont's heart just sank when she saw that she had been assigned a middle seat on the airplane flight. She hated the discomfort and the inconvenience of squeezing into a middle seat between two people who would most likely hog the arm rests. But...nothing good can come from a bad attitude, so she turned her attention to a polite young man on one side of her. His name was Michael.

Patty guessed correctly from Michael's impeccable manners that he was a member of the Armed Forces. Turns out, he was just returning from a year and a half in Desert Storm. Michael was nervous about returning home, afraid that his family was expecting a hero. He was afraid of crying in front of everyone. He had been away...in the company of rough and tough men, and often in some difficult situations. He didn't know how much he had changed or how much of his family had changed. He was looking forward to TWO THINGS when he got off the plane: telling his mother how much her letters had meant to him, and hearing his little nephews call him Uncle Michael.

Patty, a mother herself, was able to offer a sympathetic ear. She told him about her son's return from fighting in Guam years ago. When he got off the plane, he pulled Patty into a long and heartfelt hug. It had meant the world to her. Before the plane landed, Patty informed the flight attendant about Michael's time in Desert Storm and the attendant, in turn, notified the pilot who then announced over the intercom:

"It has come to my attention that we have a VIP on board. ....a returning GI from Desert Storm and is in seat 12F. As a representative of this airline and a citizen of the United States of America, I salute you, Michael, and say thank you for a job well done."

And with that announcement, the other passengers broke out into enthusiastic applause.

After the plane landed and the passengers filed off, Patty lingered near the waiting area, hoping to see Michael reunited with his family. She spotted them almost immediately. It wasn't hard to tell who Michael's mother was. As soon as she spotted her son through the crowd she began to cry and then to sob until the tears spilled on to the floor. Michael went to the sobbing woman and wrapped his arms around her for a long hug. After general hugs all around, Michael and his family headed down to the baggage claim area to wait for his luggage. A little boy scampered over to Michael and tugged his slack. Michael lifted him up into his arms and someone asked the youngster, "Honey, who's got you?" And the little boy answered back, "Uncle Michael"!

Michael, of course, was most fortunate to have such a home to come back to. Everyone needs that. Everyone. And that is why Jesus told a parable long ago about a young man who went off to a far country and came back home defeated and in terrible disgrace. But his father welcomed him home with open arms. Everyone needs a home like that. A home where they learn a healthy sense of their own identify...and where they are taught principles and values that will last a lifetime. And everyone needs to know they can always go back home. Mushy sentimentality? No - not at all...just some authentic Christian faith for that is the love that God has for each and everyone one of us. Never forget that.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive, O God, to Your presence...to Your nearness in these moments. We believe that the deepest things within us are stirred up in our times of worship....and that down below the surface of our lives, Your spirit is striving to bring forth the highest and the best that we are meant to be!

Wrestle with us until we are conquered by Your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who knows His sheep by name and who gently calls them home to Himself. In His spirit, we pray. Amen.

WORK IN

Remember what Buck Showalter once said about his mother.

"She told me to be like a duck! Be calm on the surface and paddle like hell underneath". "And that's what many of us have tried to do!"