

REALIZING THE DREAMS OF MARRIAGE BY THE REV. DAVID H. LINDROOTH

“And Hannah prayed and said: My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation” (I Sam.2:1).

This is a sermon on marriage. The Lord offers us a highly idealistic picture of marriage, especially in the book *Conjugial Love*. There we read that “[the delights of true married love] surpass the delights of all other loves, and true married love also gives delight to these other loves according as it is present and at the same time united with them” (*Conjugial Love* 68:1). We also read, “All delights have been gathered into this love, from the first to the last of them, because of the excellence of the use that it serves...” (*Conjugial Love* 68:2). “This love,” we are taught, “is celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean, more so than any other love which exists...” (*Conjugial Love* 57). Of the individual relationship, we read “true married love regarded in itself is a union of souls, a conjunction of minds, an effort to conjunction in breasts, and a consequent effort to conjunction in body” (*Conjugial Love* 179).

This union is so intimate that we are taught that angel couples living in heaven can continually grow to be more and more united as one the longer they dwell together. (*Conjugial Love* 177)

These passages are a terrific source of inspiration and joy to the newly engaged and married. The hope and promise they offer is so innocent and precious. But what about the couple that has been married a while and the sweetness of new love has faded?

Many couples are inundated by responsibilities of daily life, particularly when there are children. We juggle jobs, face all the workplace pressures. We struggle with finances; deal with the

weekly routines of grocery shopping, laundry, dentist appointments and trips to the doctor's office. There is a home to maintain. We struggle to meet the social, emotional, educational and medical needs of the children. Beyond all that there are our own private evil lusts that slam us when we are weak.

With all that and more it is true that not all couples survive the challenges this life throws their way and their marriages fail or are significantly stressed. However, Jesus Christ came on earth for the lost, *not* the found. His precious message on marriage is for each of us even when we have experienced the pain of a lost marriage. With the Lord's transformative power through a life according to His Word, we as individuals can come to experience the love that is so innocent, peaceful, holy, pure and clean.

Are we not sometimes like Hannah in our story, tormented, deeply saddened because the fruits of our marriage do not seem to be there as we had hoped? If you have ever experienced: disappointment, failure, longing, frustration, boredom, grief over what is missing in your marriage then Hannah's story has a message for you! Whether you are currently married, single or widowed, it is the same; Hannah's story can help you. In a world where bearing a son was the measure by which women were judged successful, not only was Hannah childless, but also Peninnah, who stood next to her as a rival, tormented her.

Hannah, we read, "Was in bitterness of soul, and wept in anguish" as she poured out her prayer to the Lord. Her prayer was so ardent that Eli the priest took her to be intoxicated. This prayer was a turning point for her and it represents an important focus on our lives as we work to realize the spiritual love that the Lord offers all in a marriage.

Hannah's distress represents the torments, the anguish, the unhappiness, fears, and disappointments we experience during times of weakness in our marriage. The reality of any marriage between two people is that there will be temptations—combats

over personal issues, differences of opinion, conflicts resulting from self-love over desires, finances, intimacy, anger and a myriad of other issues.

These come up in a marriage because we are human beings who are growing and striving to become angels—but are not there yet. As human beings, we come with a whole host of defects and incompetencies, evil habits and inclinations. But it is really not our weaknesses that give rise to the temptations themselves. Temptations originate from conflicts that are of a larger scale. They are combats taking place between good and evil, between heaven and hell, and the battleground *is* our spiritual lives.

We read a description of this in the *Arcana Coelestia*, “When a person undergoes temptation unclean spirits are near him and round about him. They activate the evils and falsities residing with him; and they also confine him to these, increasing them to the point where he reaches despair” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5246:2).

Another passage says, “(a person's evils) are like the sea pressing against every part of a dike. If the dike were to develop a split or crack, the sea would never cease to pour through and flood the land until nothing was left standing. It would be like this with the person if the Lord alone did not bear up against the conflicts experienced by him in temptations” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1692:2).

When a husband and wife have to pay the bills, do the laundry, go grocery shopping, get ready for work, feed the kids—and are longing for more free time and more money, and perhaps that new car, and a few pet evils are active at the same time, it can seem like they are standing there at the base of the dam watching the cracks opening to what will soon be a flood of negativity washing their life away. Here is where we need to turn to the Lord and call on His presence for protection.

Think of Hannah and her supplication—the ardent nature of her prayer is a stirring reminder that represents our need to rely

completely on the Lord to sustain us in these temptations. In these times, we may feel alone with our negative thoughts and impulses, while the reality is that the Lord and His mighty angels are hard at work. “In temptation,” we read, “it looks as if a person is left to himself, but he is not, since God is then most closely present in the person's inmost, and secretly gives him support. When therefore anyone is victorious over temptation, he is most inwardly linked with God.” (*True Christian Religion* 126)

It is helpful to remember that there is a spiritual nature to these battles—a key element in allowing the genuine nature of true married love to be more active in life. In the *Arcana Coelestia* we read: “temptations are the means by which evils and falsities are dispelled, also by which goods and truths are introduced, and by which the things belonging to a person's external are brought into obedience, so that it may serve the interior or rational, and through [this] serve the person's internal, that is, the Lord who operates by way of the internal” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1717:3).

Put into the imagery of the Word, a psalm says: “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose”. When we might think our married life is a wasteland because of the temptations endured, the Lord is really hard at work sowing the seeds in that desert that will blossom as a garden.

Another teaching describes the change that occurs as we struggle to stay close to the Lord in these states of mind. The passage compares temptation to a fermentation or distillation process in the making of wine. The marriage is purified, allowing the love from the Lord—that true love in a marriage—to come forth and bring a new level of life to the relationship. While the relationship is clouded by impurity, the nature of the relationship is changing, and in time those impurities fall away leaving a new and pure wine—much better than what was there before. (See *Conjugal Love* 145)

It is not that couples are suddenly liberated from the cares of

the world. Nor do assaults from their selfish hereditary inclinations suddenly disappear. Rather, it is that these issues no longer have the emotional choke-hold they once had on the relationship. They, lose their sense of importance. Their visceral nature fades and they no longer have the hook in our emotional life they had earlier. Instead, the sweet, pure nature of the Lord's love that exists between a couple becomes recognized and celebrated as the real life and strength in the relationship. The result is that the quality of their life is improved.

What is our part in the spiritual growth and development of our marriages? We know that the Lord forms a Marriage. We also know that the Lord alone has the power to conquer in temptations. What is then our role in nurturing our marriages so that they can be blessed with life from the Lord?

I believe the answer to this lies in cultivating what the Writings call "the wisdom of life." We read: "In brief summary, (the wisdom of life) is this: to refrain from evils because they are harmful to the soul, harmful to the civil state, and harmful to the body, and to do good things because they are of benefit to the soul, to the civil state, and to the body. This is the wisdom that is meant by the wisdom to which married love attaches itself" (*Conjugal Love* 130). The last line of that passage is important: "This is the wisdom to which married love attaches itself." True married love attaches itself to the wisdom that is involved in shunning evils as sins and turning to the Lord.

This says that people who actively use their powers of reason to take a stand against evil behaviors and to do what is good, are opening themselves to receive that special life that the Lord alone can give to relationships. This love is attached to the wisdom they are developing. One can see this when one reflects on the lessons learned as a person moves through temptations in his or her married life.

Think of the husband who, for example, is struggling to resist outbursts of anger in his relationship. He begins to turn to the

Lord for help when the angry impulses arise, and is guided to discover other, more positive ways of dealing with the unhappiness. With the Lord present in those moments where an outburst is threatening, he discovers he can turn to the Lord and take time to sort out in his mind and isolate those thoughts that are provoking him. He can then reflect on the situation with an eye to what is wrong. He can help right the situation from a stance of love and mercy. Then the husband, instead of shutting himself off with anger, is in better communication both with the Lord and with his spouse. Without the aggression present in his life, he can then be moved by higher and more spiritual feelings, feelings he was not aware of before.

This type of development through the adversity of temptation can be seen as Hannah being blessed with a son—the son dedicated to the Lord. The inference here is that when we are going through the tough times in marriage, we can succeed by firmly choosing to focus on the Lord's help. The love that is celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean, is offered to all, who—regardless of background or history—are willing to let the Lord shape their lives according to “the wisdom of life” that He offers through His Word. This is the wisdom that will help us live in a way that allows us to enjoy the most precious jewel of human life, the love of marriage which only comes from God.

The promise is that one day in heaven you can rejoice as Hannah did, exclaiming, “My heart rejoices in the Lord, My horn is exalted in the Lord, I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your Salvation.” *Amen.*

Lessons: Genesis 1:27-2:3; I Samuel 1:1-2:2; *Conjugal Love*
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