

It's Time to Restore Hearts

by Patrick & Dwaina Six

God is all about marriage and family relationships! In Genesis we read that after creating the heavens and the earth, the **first** thing God did was to bring the first man and the first woman together as husband and wife. At the end of the Old Testament in Malachi 4:6, God said that He would send a prophet who would “...*restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...*”

The New Testament opens with the genealogy which traces Jesus’ family line as far back as Abraham. In the last chapter of the Revelation, the apostle John writes, “*And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’*”

As you can see **from the beginning to the end** of God’s Holy Word, He is all about healthy relationships with Him, and within marriages and families.

For a while Dwaina and I have had a theory about the growth of youth ministry, and a correlation in how that theory may point toward a current trend in marriage ministry. Although denominations have provided youth studies and programs for many years, the growth of youth ministries developed out of a crisis. During the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s and 70’s, churches began to realize they were losing

the next generation as teens began leaving the faith by droves.

In response, concerned people within the church began to provide activities for teenagers to give them positive alternatives. Churches began to call Youth Ministers onto their staff. In time, Youth Ministry developed to the point that some seminaries offer a track of study specifically for Youth Ministry. This ministry has evolved from a largely activity approach to a more well-developed discipleship/service approach.

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Today our nation is at yet another **crossroad of crisis**. The church isn’t rising above the culture. We are floundering in our marriage and family relationships. The divorce rate is staggering, both in the world and in the church. Many married couples express significant dissatisfaction in their marriages although they have no plans of divorcing. Many unhappy marriages decide to end their relationship through a painful divorce. Usually when a couple divorces, one or both of them will leave the church they once

attended together. Some will go on to find another church; but many actually leave the body of Christ and do not return.

Everyone – family members, friends, the church, our society – **is adversely affected** by divorce and unhappy marriages.

Because churches are being hit with the devastating affects of divorce and dysfunctional families, they are recognizing that something must be done. The questions that were being asked about young people in the 60’s and 70’s are now being asked about marriages and families in the 21st Century. Churches recognize there is a problem, but the question is **what to do about it**. For some churches, their solution is to provide a counseling service. Other smaller congregations who cannot afford to have a counselor on staff may provide funds to help a couple off-set their costs for counseling. Still other churches, in an effort to be proactive, will try to either provide an annual marriage strengthening event or to promote a marriage retreat that is taking place somewhere else.

Counseling is
REACTIVE.

Restore Hearts (con't)

There is nothing wrong with any of the things churches are trying to do in strengthening marriages. All of these are good things. But counseling, as needed as it is, is **REACTIVE**. Although marriage counseling from a biblical standpoint sometimes works to prevent marital break-ups from occurring, counselors are trying to do it after much damage has already been done. Marriage retreats at a church will only reach a small percentage of a church or community population because of the negative connotation the words "marriage enrichment" carry with it. Additionally, when a couple goes to a marriage retreat they will get some great information, but without ongoing instruction and encouragement, the couple will usually revert to their old patterns after a while.

What we are seeing is the need for churches to become **PROACTIVE** in helping engaged

couples and married couples to nurture and strengthen their relationship through the power of Jesus Christ **BEFORE** tragedy strikes. There is the **need to help couples learn** how to grow and nurture their relationship with one another on a **continuing basis**. We must have **intentional** marriage ministry within congregations.

We need to be
PROACTIVE.

Dwaina and I are honored to join the ministry of Growing Toward Oneness Marriage Ministries. Because of the current crisis in marriages and families, we see the need to equip lay leaders and ministers to provide **ongoing marriage ministry** in their church. This is why we feel the ministry of GTO is so timely

and vital. This is why we are so excited about our vision for equipping others. This is also why we are so excited about the opportunity to join hands with them in this equipping ministry.

God may be calling you, dear reader, to become involved with Him in this ministry of ongoing marriage enrichment/strengthening in your local congregation. If so, we would invite you to go to www.marriages.net and click on the link for Marriage Enrichment Leader's Training on the left to see how you can begin the process in becoming a part of this wonderful new aspect of marriage ministry.

If you should sense the Lord leading you in this direction, **you will be a part of God's plan** in "*restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.*"

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