

A photograph of a green, two-story house with a dark roof and white shutters, set against a bright blue sky with white clouds. A vibrant rainbow arches over the house. The house is situated on a green lawn with a concrete walkway leading to the front door.

A HEAVENLY HOME

ZAC POONEN

DEDICATED TO
Our four sons,
Sanjay, Santosh, Sandeep and Sunil
AND TO
Their wives – our four daughters,
Kathy, Meghan, Laura and Anugrah
By your grateful parents
Zac and Annie Poonen

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(Messages given at the weddings of our four sons)

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CHAPTER ONE

A HEAVENLY HOME ON EARTH

(Message given at the wedding of Sanjay (my eldest son) and Kathy)

It's a great joy for me to speak at my eldest son's wedding. We have been looking forward to this day for many years.

I want to share a phrase with Sanjay and Kathy that is found in *Deuteronomy 11:18 to 21* (in the *King James Version*). There God says, "*Impress My words upon your heart so that your days may be as the days of heaven upon earth.*"

What an expression that is: "*That your days may be as the days of heaven upon earth*".

Think what the days of heaven are like. There is no strife or conflict in heaven, but only peace and joy. And above all, *love* – everywhere. You can have a home like that – where everyday is like a day of heaven upon earth. That is the way God intended every home to be.

The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve and ends with the marriage of Christ to His people, the Church.

When God conducted that first wedding – of Adam and Eve – He wanted their days to be like days of heaven upon earth. Their first home was a paradise – Eden. But Satan came and made their home into a hell. And now we have homes like hell all over the world, today.

But praise God that was not the end of the story. The Bible tells us, how right there in Eden, as soon as Adam sinned, God promised to send His Son to solve the problem Satan had created. That's where we see this great truth: *That God is always on our side against the Devil*. Before God cursed the earth for Adam's sin, He told Adam and Eve that a seed would come through the woman Who would bruise the head of the Devil. It was only after that, that God pronounced their punishment.

Even though the Devil had come and messed up things, God wanted Adam and Eve to know that He was on *their side* against the Devil. No matter what the Devil may ever do in any home, God is in the business of redeeming homes. He wants to bring our homes back to His original plan where our days will be as the days of heaven upon earth. And now that Christ has come and the work of redemption has been accomplished, this is a real possibility for every one of us.

The Manufacturer's Instructions

Some time ago, I bought a digital camera. Before that, I used the simple "point and click" cameras that used a roll of film. But with this expensive digital camera, I discovered that the pictures were not better but worse. They were fuzzy and out of focus. After spending all that money, I got pictures that were fit only to be thrown in the trash – just like many marriages.

And why was this so? Because I had not read the manufacturer's instructions. We know that every expensive piece of equipment always comes with an instruction-booklet that the maker supplies. Is it possible then that God Who ordained marriage could have left us without any instructions? Of course not. He *has* given us instructions. It is because we don't follow those instructions (as I did with my digital camera) that our marriages turn out fuzzy, out of focus and fit for the trash-can.

And so I read the manufacturer's booklet and followed his instructions exactly on how to use my digital camera. I did not dare to imagine that I knew better than the maker of that camera. It would have been foolish to have thought like that. But that is the foolishness found in many who ignore their "Maker's Instructions" when it comes to marriage – and who imagine that they can produce a better marriage by listening to psychologists and human tradition than to God Himself.

God has given us very clear instructions on marriage. When I finally followed the digital camera-maker's instructions, my pictures came out perfect. And that's exactly what will happen in a marriage, when the husband and wife follow the Makers Instructions.

There is only one book in the world that contains the Maker's Instructions on marriage - *the Bible*. I started studying it many years before I got married. And my wife and I studied it together after we were married. And in the 37 years of our marriage we have tasted a little bit of what it means to have "*days of heaven upon earth*".

The message of the gospel is this, that we can have *two heavens* – one right now, as our days on earth become like the days of heaven. And finally a *physical* heaven, when Christ returns.

The other alternative is to have *two hells* – one right now, and the other in eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ came to save us from that.

The Foundation

Sanjay and Kathy are going to be living in a two-storey-house. And we can look at that as a picture of marriage. That house has a foundation first of all, on which the first and second storeys are built.

The most important part of any house is its foundation. What every marriage needs first of all, is also a good foundation. And the foundation for a good marriage is *God's perfect and unconditional love for us*. The truth of God's unconditional love is the greatest truth found in the whole Bible. Even when we falter and blunder and fail and make a mess of our lives, God's love for us never changes.

When God wanted to illustrate His love for us, He used the example of a mother's love for her newborn child. We know that a mother expects nothing in return from her baby.

On the other hand, the love that is portrayed over television and in the movies is a selfish love. A young man may say that he "*loves*" a girl. But he wants something from her for his own pleasure. And she wants something from him for herself too.

God's love however is different. It is like a mother's love for a newborn baby. The mother does not want a single thing from her child. In fact, her little baby can't give her anything at all. A mother's love is the most unselfish love on the face of the earth. That is the example God uses in *Isaiah 49:15*, when He explains His love for us – it is a love that is totally unselfish and expects nothing in return. Like a mother, God serves and suffers for the sake of His children. Have you seen how a mother looks after a sick child? That is how God loves us too.

Being aware of this perfect love of God for you both is what you need as the foundation for your new home. On that foundation you can build the two floors. If each of you is not individually secure in God's love, then you will have many problems between yourselves.

I am convinced that many of our problems are caused by our insecurity. We have not found security in the unconditional love of a heavenly Father. And when we are not secure in the love of our heavenly Father, we will not be able to love others as we should. We will have jealousy, a competitive spirit and many other problems in our relationships. But once we are secure in God's love, we become free – and then we can start building.

The First Floor

When someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was, He replied that there were two commandments that were the greatest – not just one. The first was to love God with all one’s heart, soul and strength; and the second was to love others, as He loved us.

And those are the *two floors* of the house. You can’t build the second floor before you build the first. A lot of people make that mistake – they try to love others without first loving God with all their hearts. They haven’t read the Maker’s instructions – and so their love for others withers away after a while. We’ve got to love God first, before we can love others the way we should love.

When God made Adam and Eve, He didn’t make them together – at the same time. He could have done that easily if He wanted to. He could have taken *two* lumps of clay instead of one, and made both man and woman at the same time, and breathed into both of them. But why did He make Adam alone? So that when Adam opened his eyes, the first person he would see would be God – and not Eve! Then God put Adam to sleep. Why? Not just to take a rib out of his side. But so that when God made Eve separately in some other corner of the garden, and she opened her eyes, the first person she would see would also be God and not Adam. She didn’t even know of the existence of Adam. She only saw God at first.

That was the first lesson God wanted to teach Adam and Eve: “*I, your God, must be first in your lives always.*” That is the lesson that all of us must learn too.

You have heard of the well-known industrial glue, *Fevicol*, which is used to stick wood together. I saw an advertisement for that once, that showed two pieces of wood stuck together with *Fevicol*, and two elephants trying to pull them apart. And those elephants are unable to separate those two pieces of wood. That is how a truly Christian marriage becomes too, when Christ is in the centre, between husband and wife, holding them together. No force on earth or in heaven will then be able to separate such a husband and wife from each other. If however Christ is *not* first and the binding factor between husband and wife, then such a marriage will be like two pieces of wood just put together without any glue. They will fall apart, even without anyone pulling them apart. No wonder, we see so much of divorce in the world today. Those couples truly imagined that they loved each other deeply, on the day they were married. But what they did not realize was that theirs was a selfish love, because Christ was not Lord of their lives. Thus, a few months later, they found themselves snapping at each other.

“Love one another” is a nice, over-used expression. But you can’t really do it, if you don’t love God first. You won’t be able to endure to the end in love for your spouse, if Christ is not Lord of your personal life.

But once you have built the first floor – loving God – then you can build the second – loving one another.

The Second Floor

I want to say three things about loving one another.

First of all *love expresses appreciation*. There is a whole book on married love that God has included in the Bible – the *Song of Solomon*. All married couples should read that book – *to each other!* It’s amazing to see there how Almighty God expects a husband and wife to talk to each other! And that book is inspired Scripture just as much as the other books in the Bible!

Let me read you a few extracts from this book, so that we can all learn to appreciate each other as husbands and wives. We are all *misers* when it comes to expressing appreciation. We are quick to criticize, but very slow to appreciate. We look at people and find so many faults in them. That is human nature. And that is how the Accuser, the Devil gets a foothold within us. On the other hand, God gets a foothold within us, when we look at others and find something to appreciate in them. Each of us can examine our own conduct here.

See what the husband says to his wife here in *Song of Solomon* (from the *Message Bible*):

“You're beautiful, my dear love, from head to toe - beautiful beyond compare and absolutely flawless. You're as lovely as the ravishing visions of my ecstasy. Your voice is soothing and your face is ravishing. Your beauty, within and without, is absolute, my dear friend. You're a paradise.”

(I am not inventing all this. It is all there in Scripture.)

“You've captured my heart. You looked at me, and I fell in love. One look my way - and I was hopelessly in love! My heart is raptured. Oh the feelings I get when I see you and the stirrings of desire I have. I'm spoiled for anyone else!”

(How I wish that were true of every husband.)

“There is no one like you on earth, there never has been, and there will never be. You are a woman beyond compare.”

(God permits a little poetic license there. It is not a question of scientific accuracy here, but of how the husband feels.)

And now listen to what the wife says. This is her response:

“And you, my dear lover are so handsome! You are one in a million. There's no one like you! You're golden – you're a rugged mountain of a man. Your words are warm and re-assuring. Your words are like kisses and your kisses are all words. Everything about you delights me. You thrill me through and through! I long for you and I want you desperately. Your absence is painful for me. When I see you, I will throw my arms around you and hold you tight. And I won't let you go. I am yours alone and you're my only lover and you're my only man.”

How did God put something like that in Scripture? Because God Himself is a Lover.

Sanjay and Kathy, be lovers like that. God wants you to love one another like that. Your days can be as the days of heaven on earth if you learn to appreciate one another like that.

Jesus is the Great Example for us all in this area. How lavishly He expressed His appreciation for people.

The second thing about true love is: *Love is quick to forgive.* Love is slow to blame but quick to forgive. There will be problems between husband and wife in every marriage. *But if you put those problems on the back-burner, they are sure to boil over.* So be quick to forgive and be quick to ask for forgiveness. Don't wait until the evening to do that. If you get a thorn in your foot in the morning, you will take it out immediately. You won't wait until the evening. If you hurt your spouse, you poked him/her with a thorn. Take it out immediately. Ask for forgiveness immediately and be quick to forgive.

And finally, *love is eager to do things together with one's partner* – and not alone. How different the history of man would have been, if when the Devil came to tempt Eve in the garden, she had just said *“Let me consult my husband first before I take a decision”*. Oh what a different story it would have been then.

Remember that all the problems in the world arose because one woman took a decision on her own, when God had given her a companion whom she could have consulted, before taking that decision.

True love does things together. Two are always better than one.

In conclusion, let me read again from God's word in *Song of Solomon - Chapter 8, verses 6 and 7* (from the *Message Bible*): *“The fire of love sweeps everything before it. Flood waters cannot drown it. True love cannot be bought. It cannot be found in the marketplace.”*

Only God's love is like this. That's why this love is called *“the flame of the Lord”* in verse 6.

Only God can give us such love.

Sanjay and Kathy, ask God to give you such a love for each other.

May God bless you both. Amen.

CHAPTER TWO

MAKE THREE CHOICES IN YOUR MARRIAGE

(Message given at the wedding of Santosh (my second son) and Meghan)

God has given us only one Book. If we really believe that, we will look in that Book for instruction for everything in life. We read in the Bible that it was God Who ordained marriage for man. He was the One who first thought of it and He was the one who created man and woman with a desire to be united together. And He has given us warnings and instructions in His Book on how a married couple should live.

In *Genesis chapter 3*, we read about the marriage of Adam and Eve. As soon as God united them in marriage He sent them into a beautiful garden. In three things that happened in that garden, we see three choices that you, Santosh and Meghan, must make – and that all married couples must make - if you want to have the happy marriage that God planned for man.

Such happy marriages are rarely seen on this earth, because most people don't read the Scriptures, and many who do, don't meditate on them, to find out exactly how God wants them to live as married people.

When God sent Adam and Eve into this garden, although He gave them ample freedom, He did make one restriction. He forbade them from eating of one tree. There was a reason for that. Without **choice**, no-one can be a son of God. No-one can be holy *without personal choice*. So when God sent Adam into that garden, if He had *not* given Adam the opportunity *to choose*, Adam could never have become the son that God had wanted him to become. We don't realize how important the choices we make are – for our life on earth and even more for eternity.

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the power to choose. And He will never take that power away from anyone. You can choose to be a son of God or you can choose to live for yourself. But whatever you choose, at the end of your life, you will reap the consequences of your choice.

The Bible says, "*What a man sows, that will he also reap*". The Bible also says that "*it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment*". But God will not judge men arbitrarily on that final day. His judgments will be based on the choices that each man has made.

This principle applies in marriage too. You can choose whether you want to have a happy marriage or a miserable one. That choice is yours, not God's. Adam could choose whether to yield his life to the devil or to God.

So I want to speak to you, *Santosh and Meghan*, about three choices that you must make in your marriage:

1. Be Centred In God – And Not In Yourselves

First of all, choose to be centred in God in all areas of your life.

There were two trees in the garden of Eden – and they represented two ways of life. The tree of life symbolized a life centred in God – where God would be the centre of every decision made by man. The tree of knowledge of good and evil on the other hand, symbolized a life where Self would be the centre, and where man would live without consulting God and would determine himself what was good and what was evil. God sent Adam and Eve into that garden and told them, as it were, "You can choose now which of these two ways you want to live by". And we all know what Adam chose. He chose to live a life centred in himself.

All the misery, sorrow and murders and every other wretched thing that we see in the world around us, is due to man having decided to choose for himself what is good and what is evil. He doesn't want God to tell him. And that is the reason for every unhappy marriage as well – even among Christians. Multitudes of Christians live with Self as the centre of their life – and they reap what they sow.

When God made Adam He wanted him to rule over the earth. Adam was created to be a king, not a slave. And God wanted Eve to be a queen beside Adam. But what do we see today? Men and women are slaves everywhere – slaves to their passions and to the corruptible things of earth.

When God created this earth He made everything beautiful. The forbidden tree was also beautiful. When Adam and Eve stood in front of that tree, they had to make a choice: Would they choose the beautiful things God had *created*, or would they choose God *Himself*?

That is the choice all of us have to make every day. If our life is centred in ourselves, we will pursue after God's *gifts* (the things He has created) and not after God *Himself*. Most of the quarrels that take place in homes are over earthly things. Such quarrels arise because the husband and wife choose created *things* instead of God *Himself* – and they reap the consequences of their choice. They sow to the flesh and so they reap corruption. Man becomes a slave when he chooses created things over his Creator.

Jesus came to deliver us from this slavery. Man is a slave today to the power of money, to illegitimate sexual pleasure, to the opinions of others, and to many other things. He is not free. God created him to be like the eagle that flies high in the sky. But everywhere we find man in chains, unable to conquer his temper, unable to control his tongue, unable to control his lustful eyes. Jesus came, not just to die for our sins, but also to deliver us from this slavery.

I want to say to you, Santosh and Meghan, you can have a supremely happy marriage if you refuse to make the choice that Adam made, and if you will say to God, "Self will never be the centre of our lives, Lord. You alone will be the Centre. Everything in our lives will be centred in You."

The Bible says that God is Light and God is Love. God's Love is His Light. In a dark room, the power of light drives away the darkness. God's power is like that. Life without God's power, without His love, will only be darkness.

Our whole life on earth is a period of testing and probation, to prepare us for a kingdom in eternity, where everything will be ruled by the law of love. Every situation and circumstance that God takes us through now is therefore designed by Him to test us in one area – whether we will live by the law of love. And that is why God allows so many trials and difficulties in our lives. God is Almighty and He could have made life on earth such that we never had any trials at all. But God in His great wisdom has ordained trials as a means by which we learn to love. If we overcome our selfishness and determine that love alone will guide our life, God will be able to prepare us to be rulers in His coming kingdom. We have to think about that *now*, or else we will find in eternity that we missed the opportunities that God gave us on earth – and never learnt what we were supposed to learn.

So the choice you have to make in your marriage is this: Will you live by the law of love or by the law of selfishness? If God is the Centre of your life, His love will guide every single thing that you say and do.

2. Accept One Another – And Don't Wear Masks

The second thing I want to say is this: Accept one another and don't wear any masks.

Before sin came, "*Adam and Eve were naked and were not ashamed*". They were open and honest with each other and had nothing to hide. But as soon as they sinned, things changed. They covered themselves with fig leaves immediately. Why did they do that? There were no "*peeping Toms*" in that garden. And they were certainly not covering themselves from the animals. Why then did they need to cover themselves with fig leaves? They were covering themselves *from each other*.

One of the results of sin is that we hide from one another. All people hide the parts of their personality that they feel are ugly. They would be embarrassed if others knew those details about them. And so they wear masks. They put up a front, appearing to be relaxed, cool and happy, when all the while, they are miserable and defeated beneath the surface.

You must determine in your marriage to be yourself with each other – never wearing any masks. Let there be no pretence and no fig leaves.

Inside everyone is a desire to find someone who will love him even when the other person knows him fully. We wear masks because we have had bad experiences with other people. We know that people will not accept us if they know everything about us. And so we put up a front before people, so that they will accept us. This is true among Christians too. When Jesus was on earth, He found many religious people wearing masks – and that was why He could not help them.

I want to urge you both to make a decision today – never to wear a mask, but to accept each other always just as you are. Santosh, will you accept Meghan when you see faults in her? Meghan, will you accept Santosh when you see faults in him?

The wonderful thing about God is that He accepts all of us just as we are. A religion that teaches that you've got to improve, before God accepts you, is a false religion. Jesus did not come with such a religion. He came with the message that God loves us just as we are. God knows that we cannot change ourselves. And so He receives us just as we are – and He changes us Himself. The Bible urges both of you, Santosh and Meghan, to *“receive one another just as Christ received you.”*

I read an article some time ago that addressed this issue. I don't remember the author's name. The article said:

*“All of us go through life playing a ‘hiding game’. Because we are ashamed of what we are, we hide from each other. We wear masks so that others won't be able to see the real person living inside us. We look at each other through our masks and call that ‘fellowship’. We give people the impression that we are secure and undisturbed, but that is only a mask. Underneath that mask we are confused, afraid and lonely. We fear lest others see through us. We are afraid that if they saw the real person inside, they would reject us and perhaps laugh at us - and their laugh would kill us. So we play the ‘pretending game’ – appearing to be confident and assured, but all the while trembling like a child within. Our whole life becomes a front. We talk and joke with others, telling them all the **un**-important things about ourselves and nothing about that which is really crying out within us.”*

“We long to be accepted, understood and loved by others. But we have found in experience, that whenever we expose our real selves to others, they reject us. We keep searching for someone who will accept us, even when they know everything about us. But we never find such a person. We hear of born-again Christians talking about love, and hope rises within our hearts that perhaps they might accept us. But when we join them, we discover very soon that they too are wearing masks. And they only find fault with us.

*“What is the solution to this? We need to see ourselves accepted and loved by God just as we are. God is Love. To experience the love of God will make us bold. And we will no longer need to pretend. We will then **be ourselves** – with God as well as with man. The love of God will never force us to do anything. God recognizes all our imperfections and He still accepts us without condemning us. On the other hand, He wants to perfect us. To know that we have been accepted by God **in spite of all that He sees in us and knows about us**, is the root of a happy Christian life. This is the abundant life that Jesus came to give.*

“Knowing the love of God will also bring a permanent end to our seeking for acceptance from man. We will be filled with confidence. Our guilt will be gone and our fears will be driven away. We may be alone sometimes, but never lonely, for God has promised never to leave us or forsake us.”

There is something crying out within your marriage-partner – a longing to be accepted. And so it is important that you give a listening ear, not only to the words that your partner speaks, but also to the words that remain unspoken – to the silent words in the heart that are never spoken.

The great tragedy is that we don't believe that even God will accept us as we are. And so we hide from Him as well. That is what Adam and Eve did. They ran behind a tree to try and hide from God.

Many husbands and wives cannot love each other because they have not found the joy of being accepted by God, themselves. They have got religion but not Christ. One of the devil's masterpieces has been to give people an empty shell of a Christian religion without Christ – and that has made people miserable. Multitudes turn away from such a religion, which is not true Christianity. True Christianity is Christ Himself.

Every home where Jesus Christ is the Centre will be a peaceful home. It will be a home where husband and wife understand each other, where they accept one another because they are secure and confident in the fact that God has accepted them both. That is the type of home you must build.

Jesus loved you when you were ugly and ruined – not when you pleased Him, but when you were evil, not when you gave Him pleasure, but when you gave Him pain. God is now calling you to love your partner in the same way – freely, without looking for any grounds in your partner for your love.

As you live with each other, you will soon discover faults in each other that you don't see right now. And the thing that will help you to love each other then, will be the assurance that God accepted you in spite of all that He saw in you. God sees things in you today that you still can't see in yourself – and He still accepts you.

If you love each other like this, you will break down every prison-wall that each of you may be hiding behind. God's love in you is stronger than those walls and it will gently break them all down. And then both of you will become truly one.

And now let me read the concluding words of that article:

*“Your kindness and gentleness and the fact that you care enough to try and understand your partner's feelings, will make your partner grow **wings** – small wings and feeble wings initially, but wings. And if you don't give up, those wings will grow, so that one day both of you will fly up into the sky as eagles – the way God intended you to.”*

3. Do Things Together – And You'll Overcome Satan

The third choice you must make is to do things together.

When Adam and Eve went into the garden, God sent them there together. But Satan came along and separated Eve and talked to her alone. Adam stood there and allowed his wife to make a fatal choice all by herself. He should have said, “Wait, darling. You remember what God told us. We are not supposed to eat from that tree”. What a different story it would have been, if he had only said that.

It is when husband and wife begin to act independent of each other that many problems arise. You cannot confront Satan alone. Satan is looking for opportunities to mess up your life and your home. The home is the place where he attacked first – and that is where he attacks even today. As Jesus said, Satan comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. But if both of you stand together, you can overcome Satan.

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says : “**Two are better than one**, for if one falls, the other can pull him up. One who stands alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three is even better, for a **triple-braided cord** is not easily broken”*

These verses are closely connected to an amazing promise in *Matthew 18:18-20*. Most husbands and wives are unable to claim this promise, because it requires that they be united with each other. I want to pass on this promise to both of you – because it has brought wonderful answers to prayer to Annie and me in the 38 years that we have been married.

It says here that if the two of you are united and agreed in your spirit, you can ask for anything, and your Father in Heaven will grant your request (*verse 19*), because Jesus Himself is in your midst (*verse 20*). The two of you

(along with Jesus as the Third Person in your midst) can also bind Satan's activities and they will be bound (verse 18). The three of you will then be like **a triple-braided cord** that cannot be broken.

God can solve every problem in your life. You may come across numerous problems that man cannot solve. But there is no problem that God cannot solve. But both of you have to be united if God is to solve your problems. *So do everything together.*

Forgive one another *as soon as you realize* that you have hurt your partner. Don't wait. Ask for forgiveness immediately. Preserve your unity at any cost – no matter what else you may have to lose on this earth. Keep your unity, and then when you pray, you will get answers from God – quickly. And Satan will never be able to enter your home. That is God's promise.

Let me say one more thing in conclusion: Every thought, word and action in your marriage that was not done in love will be destroyed one day.

God's love in you will enable you to overcome every difficulty. It will open closed doors and break down walls. If you pursue after this love, yours will be the happiest marriage in the whole world.

It is not enough to choose the right person – you have done that already. Now you have to make the right choices, all through your married life

If you adopt this principle of love today, that will be finest start that you can make for your marriage. And if you continue along this way each day, you will prove to an ungodly generation that the love of God can overcome all things and will never fail. And God will be glorified in your life.

I pray that your home will be a great testimony for the Lord. I pray that these words will not be mere words that you have heard, but words that become flesh in your life, so that your home can be a light unto others.

The world is full of needy people. If God can work out something in your life and manifest His love through you, He will use you – mark my words – ***He will use you to help many needy homes in the world around you.***

May God bless you both. Amen.

CHAPTER THREE

A MARRIAGE LIKE A GARDEN

(Message given at the wedding of Sandeep (my third son) and Laura)

The first marriage was conducted by God – in a garden. So it is good for us to be in surroundings like we have here, at this wedding. Eden was something like this garden we see here, but a lot prettier. So we are very thankful to God that we can meet here for this wedding.

Sandeep & Laura, I want to give you a promise from *Isaiah 58:11*: “*You will be like a watered garden*”. And I would add “**Your marriage will be like a watered garden.**”

It says in Genesis 2 that “*the Lord God planted a garden and He put the man and woman there to cultivate it*”. But there was another garden that God gave Adam and Eve to cultivate too – and that was their mutual relationship. That was the garden they did not cultivate. They allowed the devil to come between them.

The Lord has given you both a garden today, to cultivate. A garden can very easily become a wilderness if it is neglected. In *Proverbs 24:30-34*, we read about the garden of a lazy man that had become such a wilderness. That is what has happened in many marriages. But it need never happen in yours. God’s promise to both of you is, “*Your marriage will be like a watered garden.*”

I want to speak to you today about three gardens found in Scripture.

1. *The garden of Eden.*
2. *The garden of Gethsemane and Calvary.*
3. *The Bridegroom’s garden (in the Song of Solomon).*

Sin came in a garden. Salvation also came in a garden. And your marriage can be like a garden that glorifies Christ.

The Garden Of Eden

How did sin come in that garden? It was basically because of two wrong attitudes that Adam and Eve had.

The first was pride. They thought they knew better than God. They thought they could disobey God and get away with it. That’s how many people in the world think today too.

The second was selfishness. They thought of what they would get for themselves if they ate of that fruit. It says there that “the woman looked at the fruit and saw that it was good, that it would satisfy her desire and make her wise.”

Pride and selfishness were the causes of sin in the beginning. And these are the root-causes of all the sin in the human race today – and there are many manifestations of these.

Basically, man is centred in himself and wants to live a life independent of God. That is how sin comes.

The Garden Of Gethsemane And Calvary

Sin came in a garden. And Jesus wrought our salvation in a garden too.

Many know about the garden of Gethsemane. But they don't know that Jesus was crucified in a garden too and that He was buried in a garden as well. *John 19:41* says, "*In the place where He was **crucified** there was a garden, and in the garden a **new tomb** in which no one had yet been laid.*"

Jesus was betrayed in a garden, He was crucified in a garden, He was buried in a garden and He was raised from the dead in a garden. Salvation has now come for both of you in that garden. The benefit of all that Jesus did in that garden can be yours today.

When we look at the earthly life of Jesus, we see in it, the exact opposite of the pride and selfishness that we see in Adam's race.

In Christ's life we see a humility that was willing to do exactly what His Father wanted Him to do – even if it was to die on a cross. He readily chose that way – without any reservation whatsoever.

Christ also selflessly thought of the needs of others and not His own – and was willing to sacrifice Himself in order to help them. This is the attitude He wants both of you to have as well

The Garden Of The Bridegroom

The third garden I want to mention is one which is not so well known to most Christians. This garden is mentioned in the Song of Solomon (which is a song that describes the relationship between a Bridegroom and a Bride, between a husband and a wife).

In *Song of Solomon 4:12*, the Bridegroom says, "*My bride is like a private garden*". The bridegroom here is Christ. And we, His bride, are to be a garden reserved exclusively for Him. This is what you need to recognize first of all: You are to plant a garden together in your marriage. But that garden is not primarily for your benefit, or even for the benefit of others, but for the Lord. Keep this in mind always – that your marriage is to be a private garden for the Lord. Then, as a by-product, others will also be blessed through it.

This is what Jesus taught. When somebody asked Him what the greatest commandment in the law was, He said, "*The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart - and then will you be able to love your neighbour as yourself*" (*paraphrase of Matt.22:37-40*).

Our life must always begin with God first. That was why God created Adam and Eve separately and not together – so that when Adam opened his eyes, the first person he would see would be God and not Eve. And when Eve was created later and she opened her eyes, the first person she saw was God and Adam. That's the way it must be in your life always, if your marriage is to be like a watered garden.

Every garden needs rain. And in the new covenant, we have the opportunity to be filled with the Holy Spirit – the rain of heaven. I want to encourage you to seek God wholeheartedly for this. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to have every area of your life under the control of the Holy Spirit. Open yourself to heaven's rain then, every day of your life.

I find there is a lot of difference between Eastern culture and Western culture. But pride is the same in both cultures! In Eastern culture – in marriages in India – they don't sing, "Here comes the *bride*". They sing, "Here comes the *bridegroom*". In some Indian marriages, the bridegroom comes riding in on a horse because he is the important person in an Eastern wedding. And the bride just walks behind the horse, because she is considered inferior. That is Eastern culture.

In Western culture however things are the opposite. Here everybody stands up for the bride during the service, but no-one stands up for the bridegroom! Because the emphasis here is on the bride: "Here comes the bride"!

But in a Christian culture it should be, “Here comes *the Lord*”. Both Eastern culture and Western culture have been defiled by sin. In one, the man is prominent, and in the other, the woman is prominent. But when the Lord is given first place, then you can say “Here comes the Lord”.

Further: in Eastern culture, the man glories in saying, “I didn’t go and ask for her. Her father came and asked for me.” Do you see the pride there? In Western culture however, it is the girl who says “I didn’t go seeking for him. He came and wooed me and won me”. There is pride there too.

In Christian culture however, we humbly say, “The Lord brought us together. We love the Lord and we are both equal in His eyes.”

I want to encourage both of you to rise above the pride of your respective cultures and to be Christian. Let your song each morning be, “Here comes the Lord” – and may both of you be His humble servants. Then your marriage will be like a watered garden.

Along with pride, selfishness also is common to all cultures. When a man looks for a girl to marry, he selfishly looks for beauty – for a pretty girl. And when a girl looks for a man to marry, she selfishly looks for money – for a rich man. This is true all over the world.

But in a Christian culture, you choose a person primarily because He loves the Lord and honours Him. And so I want to urge you both to rise above the selfishness of the human race too.

Since both of you are from different cultures originally, I thought I would make it clear that no culture is superior to the other. Easterners think they are superior to the Westerners, and Westerners think they are superior to the Easterners. But they are both wrong. Christian culture is the highest – and that is what God wants you to follow.

I did a ‘Google’ search, to find out how to plant a good garden, and here are five rules that I found:

- 1 Use seeds that are resistant to disease. The key to good disease-control is prevention. We sow seeds with our tongue. Make sure you don’t spread disease with the words that you speak to each other. Use words that are resistant to disease, when you speak. Some diseases require frequent spraying with chemicals to protect the plants. You’ll have to be ruthless in dealing with your tongue, if you want to avoid having weeds in your garden. I hope you will never have allow weeds to grow in your marriage.
- 2 Improve the soil with fertilizers. If you want a happy marriage, encourage one another and appreciate one another. Put fertilizers such as these into the ground – and then you will get a really good crop!
- 3 Destroy any plants that have diseases that cannot be controlled. This refers to activities that have become uncontrolled and addictive – like watching too much television. Destroy that – I don’t mean the TV set, but the time wasted in front of it. Be in control of such activities. This rule refers to diseases that cannot be controlled. If you can control them, then it’s fine. But it is important to control such activities.
- 4 Cut off diseased leaves as soon as you notice them. This means that as soon as you realize that you have hurt the other person – that’s a diseased leaf – cut it off immediately. Ask for forgiveness immediately. And forgive immediately. And then the leaf is cut off. Otherwise such problems can become severe. And one more thing: Throw away that diseased leaf: Don’t remember the past.
- 5 Do not plant more than you can take care off properly. Don’t overcrowd the plants. Over-crowding prevents good air movement and exposure to adequate sunlight. That means you shouldn’t try to do so many things in 24 hours a day, that your marriage-garden gets neglected – and your family becomes your last priority. The garden of your ‘family’ must always be your Number One priority. Over-crowding will prevent exposure to adequate sunlight (God’s light) and also good air movement (good fellowship between both of you).

These are the laws that God Himself has made for gardens all over the world. So make your family your first priority.

And now let me turn to *Song of Solomon 4:16*. “Awake, O north wind, And come, wind of the south (the wind from the north is cold and the wind from the south is warm). Make my garden breathe out fragrance. Let its spices be wafted abroad. And may my Beloved Lord come into his garden and eat its choice fruits!”

In every marriage, we will face the cold north wind of adversity, and the warm south wind of prosperity. But when Jesus is our Head and we allow Him to control our lives, then whether we face adversity or prosperity, trial or comfort, both these winds will spread abroad the fragrance of Christ through us.

In the world, they are unable to do that. In the world, they complain about everything. They complain even against God in times of adversity. Everyone in the world can handle the south wind of prosperity. But they cannot handle the north wind of adversity.

But the Bride of Christ can handle both adversity and prosperity triumphantly. It can be like that for both of you – and for all of us who are married.

And finally: We read here, “*May my Beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits!*” Your triumphs in times of adversity are for the Lord alone to see – and not for you to show-off to others. The Lord sees your life in secret, at times when others do not. And when He comes into His garden, He should find something there always, that delights His heart.

May God bless you both. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HOME – A SANCTUARY FOR GOD

(Message given at the wedding of Sunil (my fourth son) and Anugrah)

God's Word is the foundation for our life, for our home and for everything else in this world - because God created this world by His Word. And so if we keep God's Word alone as our foundation, nothing can go wrong.

In *Exodus 25*, we see for the first time, God revealing His will that He wants to dwell with man. God says there in *Exodus 25:8*, "Let them construct a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." That was referring to the tabernacle upon which the fire of God rested – the glory of God that marked those Israelites out as different from all the other people in the world.

It is easy to make a tabernacle exactly like the one we read of in *Exodus*, because all its dimensions are given there. We can make an exact replica of that tabernacle, but there is one thing there that we will not be able to duplicate - *the glory of God that rested upon it*. The most important thing about that sanctuary was the glory of God that rested upon it – and this indicated His presence among His people.

Sunil and Anugrah, now that you are getting married, the most important thing you must do is to *make your home a sanctuary for God* - not a place where you seek to please each other, although you should seek to please each other; not even a place to bless other people, although your home should bless other people; but *primarily* a place where God can manifest His presence, and where Jesus feels at home. God says "Let them make a place *for Me to live*".

And I want to say to both of you: *God is commanding you to build a home for Him to live in*.

We all know how when we go into some homes that we don't feel at home there. Whereas in other homes, right from the moment we enter, they make us feel completely at home. It is difficult to explain this feeling, but we all know it. A Christian home must be a place where Jesus feels completely at home. That means that He is happy about everything He sees there. He is happy about the books you read, the magazines you get, the conversation between husband and wife, the things you talk about, the programs you watch on TV and everything else. In many Christian homes, they have Bible-verses hanging on the wall. But Jesus does not feel at home there.

Can you imagine with what tremendous anticipation God brought Adam and Eve together. What wonderful plans He had for them as a Father. I am a father, and I know with what anticipation I see my son getting married today. But what I feel is only a fraction of what God felt when He brought Adam and Eve together. He hoped that they would have a wonderful home where He would always be first. But how soon God was disappointed. He was not angry with them, He was sad. I believe there is a lot of sadness in God's heart today when He sees the condition of many a Christian home, where there is no peace, but only quarreling and fighting. They turn to Him only when they are in trouble. The people of the world turn to God only when they face some problems. But as Christians we are to be different. God is not an emergency number that we are to call when we are in some difficulty. No. God must be the Centre of our lives at all times.

God's Word has been given to us exactly like the "*Manufacturer's Instructions*" that we get with any gadget that we buy. All of us are so careful after buying an electronic gadget to follow those instructions exactly. If your gadget has some problem and you take it to the manufacturer, the first question he will ask you will be, "Did you follow the Manufacturer's instruction-booklet exactly?" In fact, in most guarantee cards it is clearly written that the guarantee becomes invalid if you don't follow the instructions exactly.

The wonderful thing about God however is that when we go to Him with our messed-up life at any time, He is still willing to rectify it. His is not a one-year guarantee! It's a life-long one! If you come to Him with your broken life, He will straighten it out. That's the wonderful thing about God - He is a loving Father. And it's very

important that you know that the One Who is asking you to make a sanctuary for Him in your home is a loving Father. He is very, very interested in your lives, right from this very first day, and He wants you to be happy until the day that Jesus returns.

I have tasted a little bit of that happiness with my wife for many decades in our married life. And I can tell you that the most wonderful life you can ever live is one where Jesus is the Centre of your life, and where everything in your home is determined by whether it makes Jesus happy or not – the way you spend your time, the way you spend your money, and the way you do everything else. If you live like that, then when you come to the end of your life, or if Christ returns before that, and you stand before Him, He will say, “*Well done*”. It won’t matter then what others thought about you.

One characteristic of man is that he judges by the outward appearance. I did that myself for many years, when I was a legalist. But I now see more clearly that it is the heart that God looks at. I want you both to remember that it’s your heart that should always be pure. Whether your home is a palace or a hut is secondary - the outward appearance is secondary. It’s your heart that God sees. So make sure that your hearts are together a sanctuary – a holy place – for God to dwell in.

1. A Home Where There is Peace

Where does God dwell? First of all in a home where there is *peace*. When Jesus sent His disciples out to different places to preach, He told them in *Luke 10:5-7*, to look for a home where there was peace. And when they found a home like that, they were to stay only there and not look for another home. Why did He say that? Because He knew that they would not find many homes where there was peace.

God dwells in a home where there is no fighting. What do husbands and wives fight about in any case? Mostly about material things - some earthly matter that went wrong. Things will go wrong in this world. But when something goes wrong, remember that the only thing that is serious is sin. All other matters are secondary and unimportant. I hope both of you will see this clearly: *That the only thing that is serious is sin*. If you have bitterness at any time and won’t talk to each other because of earthly problems, that will grieve God’s heart. Let me share this little bit of wisdom with you: *Hate sin – because that is the only thing that can destroy your marriage*.

Remember that your home is to be a sanctuary for God. And if anything comes up that disturbs the peace in your home, it won’t be a sanctuary any longer. I am not saying that the Lord will be angry with you or curse you. No. He will never curse you or be angry with you, at any time. But He will be *unhappy*. And I am sure you want Jesus to be happy in your home from Day One.

I pray that in everything you do, you will say. “*Lord, we are not interested in whether men are happy with us or not. Are You happy? Is there anything in our lives, in our thoughts or our attitudes towards one another that is making You unhappy. We want you to be happy in our home. We are going to assess everything in our lives by this question: Will this please the Lord?*”

Can you imagine what your home will be like then? It will have the same glory of God that shone on the tabernacle. And people will be drawn to the living God through your home.

God dwells where both husband and wife are willing to give up their rights for the sake of peace. Once a young couple came to me, who were on their way to catch a train and they said, “Brother Zac, can you give us an exhortation in two minutes?” I said, “*Sure. Here it is: Always be ready to ask forgiveness from one another; and always be ready to forgive one another.*”

If you’re ready to ask forgiveness as soon as you have done something wrong and you’re ready to forgive immediately, as soon as the other person asks for forgiveness, I can give you a written guarantee that your home will be a home of peace, everyday.

Your home can be like that. But you have got to be very sensitive in this matter. If you get a thorn in your foot, you won’t wait even for a second to remove it. In the same way, as soon as you sense some disturbance in your

heart, you must remove it at once. It's a thorn; and it will destroy you. It will infect your heart more than any thorn can infect your foot. Pursue peace at any cost. Never mind whatever else you may lose – money or whatever. Those things are not as important as peace. I hope you both will recognize that if you were to weigh peace and money in a balance, peace will be found to be much heavier than money. Remember that!

Did something go wrong at home one day? Did the food get burnt? Never mind. What does it matter if you can't eat one meal because the food was burnt. That will probably keep you fitter and healthier and perhaps even make you more spiritual! But if you get upset over it, then the devil would have won the victory.

Remember what happened to the first home that God established. The devil was just waiting on the sidelines trying to come between Adam and Eve. And he succeeded. He succeeded in coming between Job and his wife too. And he succeeded in coming between Isaac and Rebekah as well.

It is never God's will that Satan should come between a husband and a wife. So may it never happen to you. May God be happy with your home always and may He grant you peace at all times.

2. Where Husband And Wife Are Contrite And Broken

The second thing I want to say is found in *Isaiah 57:15* : “*God dwells in the high and holy place and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit*”. God dwells with those who are contrite and broken in spirit. A broken person is one who is more aware of his **own** lack and failure than anyone else's. The world is full of people who are aware of the failures of other people. In the average home today, the conversation is mostly about the failures of other people and their families. We are quick to notice failures in others. But often, we don't see the good points in those people. We have all been guilty of this. I have been guilty of it myself in the past. But God has given me light on this evil, and I have repented.

We have no right to throw stones at anyone, for we ourselves are sinners, saved by God's grace. But hopefully, we are people who don't want to keep on committing the same sin again and again – especially the sin of speaking about the faults of other people. We all know the difference between a bathroom mirror and a driving mirror. In a bathroom mirror we see our own face. In a driving mirror we see someone else's face. It says in *James 1:23-25* that God's word is like a mirror. But is it a bathroom mirror or a driving mirror? Whose face do you see in it? Do you see in it a word to preach to someone else? Or do you see in it something that **you** are not obeying. It says in *Hebrews 10:7*, “*In the Book, it is written about me.*”

I spent many years of my life foolishly, looking at God's word like a driving mirror, looking for verses to preach at other people. And in those years I was miserable, and I brought others into bondage too. But I have been liberated from all that now. I still have my convictions, but I never impose them on others. I share them with others, but I never *impose* them on others, because that is not my business. I have to live before God's face alone.

And now I know this wonderful truth, that the other person may not have as much light as God has given me. This truth has helped me so much in the past 20 years and more. Before that, I expected everyone around me to have the same light and understanding of sin that I had. But I have discovered through the years that each person has only got a certain amount of light and understanding. And Almighty God expects each person to live only according to the light *that he himself has*, and not according to the light that someone else has. We know how much light God has given *us*. But we don't know how much light God has given that other person. So we must be merciful.

[The video-light goes off at this point due to a loose connection]

Did you see the way that light went off just now! That's an illustration. Recognize that some people see things clearly in a very bright light, whereas others see things in a dimmer light. It was good of God to give us a demonstration of this truth before our eyes right now – with that light going off!

So Sunil: Recognize that Anugrah may not have as much light as you have in some areas.

And Anugrah: Recognize that Sunil may not have as much light as you have in some areas.

Each of you must live by the light that *you* have, and leave the other to live according to the light *he or she* has.

A sixth standard student knows more than a second standard student. So if a sixth standard expects a second standard student to know as much as he does, then he is being foolish. And if I, at the age of 65, expect a 26-year-old to have as much light and understanding on God's ways as I have, then I am being foolish. But I won't be foolish.

Many Christians are foolish. They expect others to acquire in one year the wisdom that they themselves have acquired in thirty years.

How much wisdom then do I expect this young couple to have? Only the wisdom of people in their twenties.

And Sunil and Anugrah: I'll tell you something to encourage you: You will probably do ten times *less foolish* things than I did when I was your age! I hope you are encouraged by that. But God has been merciful with me, and He has encouraged me in spite of all my mistakes.

Let me say something to you both as a father. And by the way Anugrah, I am not your father-in-law. I decided a long time ago, that since I was not under law but under grace, I would never have a daughter-*in-law*, but only *daughters*. You can test me out on that in the next few years and see whether I treat you like a daughter or a daughter-in-law. And if I slip up at any time, please remind me of what I said today that I would treat you like a daughter. I will.

What I want to say to both of you as your father, is that I will never expect either of you to have the light or the wisdom that I have. I hope you will have as much wisdom as I have, before you reach the age of 65 – perhaps by the time you are 45. And by the time you are 65, I hope you will have a lot more wisdom than I have right now.

So when you meet people who expect you to have the wisdom that they have acquired in 40 years, just ignore them. There is a lovely verse in *Isaiah 42:19* that says a true servant of the Lord is both blind and deaf. *Be blind and deaf to the opinions of people around you.* That verse has helped me tremendously. It will help you too. It is only as you are blind and deaf to the opinions of people around you, that you can live before God's face as His servants.

So seek to find out what's wrong with yourself and not with the others who criticize you. If others want to destroy themselves, by criticizing you, let them destroy themselves. But I decided years ago that I was not going to destroy myself like that. I did many foolish things in my younger days. But I have a little more wisdom now. Paul said, "*When I was a child, I behaved like a child, I spoke like a child, acted like a child. Now that I am grown up, I have put away childish things*" (1 Cor.13:11).

I want to encourage both of you also to grow up quickly.

3. Where Husband And Wife Are Holy

God dwells in a home where the husband and wife walk in holiness every day.

It says in *Ezekiel 43:12*: "*This is the law of God's house - the **entire area** shall be Most Holy.*"

The tabernacle had three parts – the outer court, the holy place and the most holy place. And of the three, the Most Holy place was the smallest.

But here we read that in the new covenant, there will be no outer court or holy place. The *whole* area will be the *Most Holy Place*. That means that the glory of God under the new covenant will rest not just in one corner like in the tabernacle, but over the whole compound.

What that means for your life is that you are going to be holy all the time - not just on Sundays but every day. You are going to be holy not just when you read the Bible, but when doing anything. Every nook and corner of your life and of your home is going to be holy. And holiness is not a matter of following certain religious rituals, but of avoiding everything that displeases God - according to the light that you have. May this be true in both your lives.

God has a wonderful plan for your lives together. When God first made Adam, there was no Eve. God breathed life into Adam and when Adam opened his eyes, the first person he saw was God. And I hope, Sunil, that the first person you see every day in your life will be God Himself. Then God put Adam to sleep and took out one of his ribs and made Eve. And when Eve opened her eyes, the first person she saw was God too. And I hope, Anugrah, that the first person you see every day in your life will be God Himself. Eve didn't even know that Adam existed when she saw God. It was only after that, that God brought Eve to Adam and said, "OK. Now both of you can get married." They really loved each other then - because they had both seen God first. That is the secret of a continuing love in marriage – both must see God first.

And what God did for Adam, He also did for you, Sunil. 26 years ago when you were born, we were happy as your parents. But God knew about your birth long before that day. Your name was written in the book of life long before your Mum and I were even married. The wonderful truth is that God had planned for your marriage too, before you were born. And so, a few years after you were born, God brought a little girl to birth in another part of India - with a plan that you didn't know about and that Anugrah didn't know about either. God is a great Matchmaker and He had this wonderful plan for both of you that neither of you knew anything about. And as this little girl grew up, all the time God had you in mind for her. And then one day, He brought you both together, exactly like He brought Adam and Eve together. How good God has been to you.

And so my prayer for both of you is that God will be really happy with your life and that you will build your home as a sanctuary.

May God bless you both. Amen.
