

"Multiplying the little things
creates a healthy marriages/relationships"

Text: Mark 4:30-32 *The Mustard Seed is the smallest of the seeds, but when sown it grows to become the largest of the shrubs with large branches so birds can make nests in its shade (Others can enjoy its existence.)*

II Corinthians 5:16-17 *"Let us regard no one with a worldly point of view...Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a NEW CREATION, the old has gone and the new has come!"*

Romans 12:10 *"Outdo one another in showing honor." "Be devoted to one another with brotherly affection."*

Summary Sentence: Father's Day is a weekend we can reflect on not just the father's influence in our lives, but a time to explore all family relationships.

I. Introduction: The Power of the Small

When Jesus spoke of the Parable of the Mustard Seed, he was saying that as he looked at a handful of mustard seeds the size of some dry white sand. Can we imagine these small seeds growing into a large shrub or tree where the birds, squirrels could ramble in to build their nests? As we observe the germination of these seeds with water and warmth into growing roots and trunk, could Jesus be saying to us: THERE IS AN INFLUENCE WE CANNOT SEE OR EVEN IMAGINE? Let's imagine going into an elementary science class where the children have placed a seed into a clear plastic cup of soil and nutrients. They are observing the expansion of the seed into a plant. They may come home saying, "Mommy or Daddy, I could almost see the roots and plant forming. Something is happening that I cannot see."

Yes, indeed, as you and I open ourselves to Christ's Love for us, unusual things begin to happen. When we allow Christ to attach himself to us, and the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts in small moments, we grow larger in our maturity.

II. On this Father's Day, I want to identify many
small behaviors that may help our family relationships BLOSSOM INTO FULL BLOOM. A FAMILY
WITH BLOOMING FLOWERS AND FRESH FRUIT.

III. Another title of this sermon:

"Little things mean a lot" (pop song several decades ago)

To help us remember the points of this sermon I want to use mathematical concepts as we reflect on our family.

1. It is often stated that marriage is a 50-50 proposition. How many times have you heard it espoused, "Marriage is a 50-50 relationship"? Sometimes it is a 60/40 or 30/70. Each person has a little more than they are used to sharing due to, for example, a new position or job, a traveling position requiring more than 50 %, military tour of duty overseas, illness the family, etc. In interviews with over 351 couples, the happiest ones often stated: "Sometimes one member has to put in more than you take out." The Christian marriage vow goes this way: "For better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health. " The vow does not say I do 50 and you do 50.

2. Emotional Bank account: Psychologist John Gottman has a 10-to-1 scale of conflict. According to Gottman, we need 10 deposits of kindness and consideration in our emotional bank account to cover one BIG EMOTIONAL LETDOWN OR TRAUMA IN THE RELATIONSHIP.
3. Ten Little pinches and one Big Crunch: 10 little pinches make a big crunch. James 5:16 states: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed." All relationships have moments of irritation, behaviors that have the potential of festering emotions. Deal with them before the sun goes down, according to Paul in his letter to the Ephesians.
4. Multiple commitments--more than one commitment into several commitments. Key is the recommitment. We have to multiply our commitments. Here are a few transitions Zoe and I have experienced. You have had some of the same transitions that require recommitments. First job, first move away from home, life without children, first children, spouse in new job, job change, relocation, empty nest with children leaving the household, renewing the relationship after children leave, entertainment and development of friendships.
5. I Corinthians 13:4-5 "Love does not keep a journal or record of one's wrongs." Be careful of saying, "There he goes again!"
6. Romans 12:10 "Outdo one another in showing honor." Agape does not keep a record of the wrongs of others.
7 complements a week and one new creative affirmation every week. Married 30 years x 52 weeks = 1560 weeks. (See writings of Presbyterian pastor, Charlie Shed)
7. Percentages of couples that pray together compared to those couples that do not pray together. According to one Gallup survey, happy marriage is better predicted by how often a couple prays together than by how often they make love. (*Faithful Attraction*, NY, St. Martin's Press, 1991, p.190)
Those who pray together = 82% compared to not praying together 62% *manifest more respect for their mate*
Those who pray together =73% compared to not praying together 59% *agree on how to raise their children.*
Those who do not pray together =62% compared to 49% believe their mate is a skilled lover. Individual prayer correlates with marital happiness too, but joint prayer correlates at a level twice as high.
Some suggestions to aid in joint prayer: (1) Begin the prayer time with Devotions for Individuals and Families in BoCP on p. 136 or the prayers for all occasions in the back of the BoCP. Then end with conversational prayer. (2) Begin with short petitions, thank you's, and intercessions about whatever is on your mind. (3) Confess the wrongs you have done within the family and ask the Holy Spirit in difficult areas of your life.

IV. Encouraging the spiritual development of our spouses, our children, and ourselves. I recall as a father of several pre-school children attending a clergy conference on Life Planning Skills. We had a pie chart divided into the parts of our life: Parenting, spouse relationship, financial matters, work, leisure/recreation, friends, and extended family. Somehow it hit me in my thought processes: the physical development and growth of our children will come as naturally as eating and sleeping.

There will be no need for all types of choices and varied experiences. Their genes and growth plates will determine their size, weight, color of hair and eyes.

But when it comes to spiritual and moral development, the children will need to be exposed to parents who pray, church school, worship, biblical stories, essential Christian ethics. Unassisted they will not grow up to love God, to understand his will for them, or to understand that God wants to be their FRIEND AND LORD. This takes some planning and intentionality in the role of parents and spouses.

In the Exhortation and the Prayer petitions for marriage in the BoCP, we state: " and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord." (p.423). Also, on page 429, "Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you."

So going back to the issue of planning: All of us need some intentionality, some perseverance, some setting of priorities, or as mentioned in the Adult Class, we need to work the 12 steps. In the past two decades in the literature on family life, many professionals mention the need for a Family Mission Statement. This statement needs a spiritual and church component. What is the mission and purpose of your family? (e.g., My decision to be "the best father I knew how" and also the be "the best grandfather I know how." This is not a laissez-faire attitude about grand-parenting but some planning, priority setting, etc.)