

SERMON TITLE

**May 5, 8, & 9, 2004 – Mother's Day
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI
Pastor Bill Heiges**

What I'd like you to do now is to take out that sheet in your bulletins called "Home Depot Approach". Today we are celebrating Family Sunday, and whenever you celebrate Family, you have to understand in our congregation we have all kinds of families. We have the traditional family, the original mom and the original dad plus their children. We have single parent families; we have blended families. We have singles – a large number of singles in our congregation, which I sometimes call a family of one, and also remind them that they came from a family. They quite often have brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, aunts and uncles. We have family and extended family. You ask anybody what's most important in their life, and they'll say "It's my family."

My approach to family ministry as I go around the synod teaching this is the Home Depot Approach. You know the theme for Home Depot? "You can do it." "You can do it. We can help." Family ministry is really the ministry that's done in the family. It's not the ministry that we do for your family here in the church that is the most important ministry. It's the ministry that is done in the home by you. What really works is the ministry that you do in your home. You give me your children for eight hours a day, and I'll teach them all kinds of things from God's word. I will have an impact, and I will have an influence on them, but it will not even come close to the impact and the influence you as parents have over your children.

Do you know that 86% of parents believe that their teens don't want to hear from them when it comes to matters like sex, decision making, and all kinds of other issues they are dealing with? That's what parents believe. The truth is that 86% of teens want to hear about these issues from their parents before they hear it from us – just the opposite of what most parents believe.

Family ministry is connecting parents with their children and the all important task of passing on the heritage of faith, the legacy of Jesus Christ. I believe that is exactly what Psalm 78 teaches. Will you please read that Psalm together with me.

O my people, listen to my teaching. Open your ears to what I am saying for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past, stories we have heard and know, stories our ancestors handed down to us.

We will not hide these truths from our children, but will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord. We will tell of his power and the mighty miracles he did; for he issued his decree to Jacob.

He gave his law to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children so the next generation might know them, even the children not yet born, that they in turn might teach their children, so each generation can set its hope anew on God, remembering his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.

The way God set it up is that faith gets passed on from generation to generation in the home - grandparents, parents, children, and the grandchildren. That's the way God laid it out.

I believe that our church and our school exist to help you. You can do it, and we can help. I believe we have an outstanding elementary school and a tremendous faculty. We're getting two incredible teachers coming on to it. And I believe we have an outstanding Kids For Christ program (Sunday School), a wonderful youth group program, two great teachers in our catechism courses; but they were never meant to take the place of the parents. They were never meant to do your job for you. We're the second string. We back you up, we help you, we aid you, we assist you in your teaching of key Biblical truths, so that when they come here, they hear the same thing they hear from you at home. That's what's most important.

I believe that how you and I live our lives impacts two to three generations as we seek to live our life for Christ. That impact is called our legacy and our heritage. Do you want to hear about the heritage and legacy of the **Jukes** and the Edwards? The **Jukes** generations were followed by this: The **Jukes** family produced 310 vagrants – 44 were known to be caught and living in open sin, 123 prison inmates, 7 murderers, 190 prostitutes, and over 100 alcoholics. That's the legacy they passed down.

The Edwards family, which is traced back to the preacher Jonathon Edwards, produced over 300 clergymen, over 100 college professors, over 100 attorneys – 30 of them became judges, 60 physicians, 14 university professors, numerous business leaders, 3 congressmen, and 1 vice-president.

Do you now see how important the way you live your life is, the impact it will have, and the deep impressions it makes on your children and on your grandchildren? Some of you know a little bit about the legacy that's been handed down to me. I come from a long line of unchurched heathen people on both sides of my family. My parents were divorced, and my grandparents on both sides were divorced. Alcoholism runs in my family. My grandfather was an alcoholic, my uncle's an alcoholic. I've seen lots of alcoholics in my family. I come from a yours/mine, ours and theirs kind of a mixed blended family; and out of that mix, two stepbrothers are dead from drugs, six of them have been divorced, only three besides myself have remained married to their original spouses. And I see that curse passed on to my nieces and my nephews and the messes that I see in a lot of their lives. By God's grace, I determined that I did not want to pass that on to my children. The passage that defines me and my life is **“But by the grace of God I am what I am,** (1Cor.15:10a). God in his grace took me out of that unhealthy environment and brought me into other Godly families. I got to see what healthy family living and good marriages were really all about. And God in his grace enabled me to pass a different kind of life on to my children.

What I'm holding in my hands here is a track baton. It's used in a relay race. I used to run those back in high school even though I was slow as a turtle. The most important part of a relay race is the passing on of the baton into the hands of the next runner. It was the responsibility of the person running with the baton to pass it firmly and cleanly into the hands of the next runner. See, this baton represents our faith in Jesus Christ, the legacy and the heritage of faith your parents, your grandparents, your pastors, your teachers handed on to you. It's in your hands right

now, and you and I are called by God to run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us; and the most important thing you and I do in life is pass our faith in Christ on to the next generation and to our children. I took one of these batons, and I gave it to my son at the wedding reception when he was married. It was beat up, scratched, bent, and dented, and I said “This baton is beat up, scratched, and dented because I failed you many times as a father. I failed my wife many times as a husband. I’ve failed many times as a man. I’ve dropped the baton over and over again in my life; but you know what – the grace of God and the forgiveness that Jesus Christ has given me and all of us has enabled me to keep picking that baton back up, even though I failed, keep running with it and pass it on to my children.” As I handed it over to my son, I said, “Now it’s your turn to run with perseverance the race marked out for you, and I will be there for you to help you and to aid you in your race of passing your faith in Christ on to your children. My job is not done and never will be till I die. I will continually pass it on to as many people as I can.”

The next passage you have is Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which we won’t read – you can do that on your own. But that passage makes a couple of points; that is, before you and I can impress these truths on our children, they first of all have to be here in our hearts and in our lives, that our children catch from us more than we ever teach them. They look to us and they watch us and they see our model and our example. They want to know that faith is real for you and me. They want to know that it is effective and genuine and working in our life. That’s why God says that these things must be on your heart and we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Thanks to God his grace enables us to do that again and again. I know there are many people out there saying, “Well, I’ve failed.” Well, you know what? So have I! But the beautiful thing about Christianity is even though we failed so often in our past, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin, and God says from this day on, now run with perseverance your race. Make today and tomorrow count by passing on the most important things to your children.

The illustrations on the next page of the bulletin teach what I believe is the church’s role in helping you. The old way of doing it is that you send your children to us - to the school and to all of the educational agencies of the church, and we do your work for you. We turn out little professional Christians for you. But that’s not the way God meant for it to be done. That’s not the way it really works in real life. The real ministry takes place in the home, and the church exists to help equip, train, and assist you in the ministry that you do. You can do it, and we can help. So the illustration below has the church assisting the home. The home is like a little church in which mom and dad realize the most important priority in their life is passing on their faith to their children, as mom and dad seek to bless their children and bless each other every day and share Christ so that you and your family become a sphere of influence for Christ in the workplace, the school, the marketplace, the neighborhood, and places of recreation. Our goal is to turn every home into a little church where Jesus is trusted, loved, worshipped, and shared; and each home and family in turn influences their world for Jesus.

This is the little Bible study that takes the place of our Scripture readings for this morning.

May God's grace give us the power and the strength to live according to his will as husbands and wives and children in that wonderful institution God has created called the family. Amen.

Let me make two disclaimers. First, everything I'm about to tell you is totally politically incorrect. It goes against the world's view that is commonly held today, and it grates against the 21st century American mindset. The second thing is that even though I'm addressing primarily the institution of marriage, those of you who are singles - and there is a significant number of you out there - you can pick up lots of things here that Peter teaches about what makes a woman a woman and a man a man in God's eyes and apply those principles and truths to your own personal life. With those two disclaimers in place, let us listen to Peter as he now teaches about that incredible and important institution of marriage in 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. This is the word of our Lord.

In Jesus Christ who is the head of every family, including His family of believers, my dear friends.

Peter gives us some pretty practical advice here on how to live as Christians in a non-Christian world and impact our world for Christ. I believe that every one of us wants to see strong homes and healthy families, homes and families that can withstand the storms of life, overcome whatever attacks are made upon it, homes and families that have a strong unshakeable foundation. Well, my friends, that foundation is none than Jesus Christ in His word, including the word that Peter shares with us right here.

I believe that churches are only as strong as the home, and the home is only as strong as the marriage in that home because they (the husband and his wife) are the leaders in the home. I believe that when we have our spiritual alignment right, life goes well. When we put God first in our life, because that's the most important relationship - that's the only relationship we have that is eternal - then if we're married, our spouse comes second, and if God gives them to us, children are third, our work is fourth, others are fifth, and I am sixth. You mess with that alignment, and you are asking for problems and troubles, heartache, and hardship in life. If you place yourself higher in that order of alignment, that is when sin shows its ugly face again and again to sabotage your happiness.

Peter here teaches us how to live as Christian husbands and wives, how to be a good Christian wife, and how to be a good Christian husband. Our job is to listen to his words, take to heart what God is telling us, and apply to our own individual situations and life whatever God is teaching us. He addresses wives first and then husbands.

The way I've summarized this is this way. The best thing you can give your family after Jesus is a good marriage. In fact, you will find that statement in just about every single book on marriage out there. Peter starts out by saying, **Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands.** Now, as I said, this is politically incorrect today, right? It doesn't make sense. I believe that what Peter is telling us is that wives choose to submit. You can't make a wife submit. In fact, any man that tries to use this passage to browbeat his wife or control her, or order her around is totally misusing and misapplying what God is saying to us here. That's absolutely dumb, don't do that. It doesn't work. Wives have to choose submission for themselves. It is their choice, their decision to make. See, the word submit means to yield, to place oneself under the authority of another in a chain of command. It's a military term. And, of course, we see how that works in the military, but if you think about it, this principle holds true in all of society, doesn't it?

There is always a "buck stops here" kind of person in everything. For example, in the school, who is the "buck stops here" kind of person? The principal, right? In the classroom it's the teacher. You know that's the way it works. Who is it in the workplace? The boss, right – the foreman, the manager, the president, the CEO. There is a line of authority, a line of command. In the government it goes all the way up to the President of the United States, the Congress, the Senate, and our Judiciary, the Supreme Court. Why would we think that doesn't hold true for the home. You see, our God is the God of order, and he has established an order for us to live by. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says **I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.** That's the order that God has set down going back to the order of creation.

Now when you think about the order of creation, God established the man first and then the woman. The Apostle Paul pointed back to the fall into sin. He said even though the woman sinned first, who was held responsible for that sin? The man. Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. The man was held responsible because he was to be there to protect his wife from the assault and attack of Satan, and he failed in his job. There is an order of authority that God has established. I believe to be submissive to another in authority means to cooperate voluntarily out of love and respect for God and that person. Does that make sense? That's how it works in God's scheme of things.

Peter says **Wives, in the same way** – four simple words that have a powerful meaning. What does he mean by "in the same way"? Well, Peter is pointing back to what he had just written in 1 Peter 2. He is pointing to the example of Jesus Christ who suffered for doing good, who suffered for you and me, who endured everything, including crucifixion on the cross. Now, why did he do that? Why did he endure that? Because He submitted to His father's will. He volunteered cooperatively with His father's will of saving and rescuing you and me. That's why Peter says Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. That's why He suffered and died for us, and that is why by His wounds we are healed. He says, just as Christ voluntarily submitted to and cooperated with the will of His father, wives are to submit to and voluntarily cooperate with

the mission of the family under the headship of the husband. When we do this, life works well. Jesus did that out of love for His father, and wives do that out of love and respect for God and for the man that God has given to them.

I also believe this mission is mutual, that we do it to one another. Just before Paul launches into his advice for husbands and then wives in Ephesians 5:21-33, he begins that section by saying **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** Thus, in the same way, that will also apply to men as it does to women, to husbands as to wives, and that men submit by serving their wives and their families and by loving them with the self-sacrificing love, the same kind of love that Jesus Christ demonstrated for the church. **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,** Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:25. It is that kind of love.

You see, it is easy for a woman to submit to her husband when her husband is in submission to God and Jesus Christ, because the head of every man is Christ. Have you ever driven out on a country road, come across one of those little narrow bridges, and you see a yield sign in the front – those little 1-lane bridges? You go across that bridge. You go and you do your thing. You visit people, and you come back; and as you're coming back, you notice that on the other side of the bridge there is also a yield sign. Both sides have yield signs. Both sides are to give the right-of-way to the other car in order to what? – to avoid a head-on collision. Now, if husbands and wives got this in their marriage, if both husband and wife daily practice giving the other the right-of-way, think of the head-on collisions that would be avoided in the home. That's what submit means, and there is nothing more attractive and more powerful to the power of the Gospel than when a husband and wife are working in harmony together, putting aside differences, and working through conflicts in a healthy peaceful way to serve the higher good of their family and each other.

Now Peter launches into the other piece of advice he gives on how to be a good Christian wife. The first is choose to submit. The second is choose to be beautiful, but he puts it this way. He says **Your beauty should not come from outward adornment such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.** Now, Peter is not condemning outward beauty. He is not saying you shouldn't wear make-up, you shouldn't get your hair done. (That'd save me a lot of money!) He's not saying that. He's not teaching that. In fact, I believe that husbands and wives should make themselves as attractive as possible for their mates. I mean, why do we do that before we get married; and after we get married, we kind of take each other for granted and we no longer work on that stuff, on staying attractive for our mate? I believe all throughout life I am going to take the best care of myself, I want to look as good as I can for my mate; and I hope and pray that she would want to do the same thing for me. Makes sense to me.

He's not condemning outward beauty, but what he's saying is that there is something of greater value in God's sight and that's the inner beauty of a woman. The real beauty comes from the inside out; it's not on the outside. That is the beauty of an inner spirit, of a godly woman where faith and love in Christ beams through. You can't hide that beauty. That's where a woman is really working on the inner godly character, developing that inside of herself. I believe if we are

pouring God and his word into our hearts and into our minds, we'll be able to draw that wisdom and draw that strength and power of his great forgiveness out and be able to give it to others and to our family. And I believe that you can see this kind of beauty. It's seen in our behavior. He talked about wives living with a husband who is not a believer. He says they will be won over – how? Not with talk, but without talk by the behavior of their wives as they see the purity and reverence of your lives, as they see you seeking to live as a godly wife and woman and showing that as an example.

I think that kind of beauty is also seen in our attitude. He talks about the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Now, you get into hot water when you talk about things like submission and gentle and quiet. Notice he didn't say "silent". I believe this is talking about a strong woman, a woman who knows who she is in Christ and knows where she stands in the family, that she doesn't need to assert herself. She doesn't need to be overbearing. She doesn't need to force her way on others in the family. She doesn't need to nag or control or manipulate or do any of those things. That's not beautiful. She is a woman who is self-assured, and her quiet and gentle way wins her family over better than words or any other kind of behavior.

The word gentle means meek. It's the same word used of Jesus Christ, and that meekness is not weakness. There was nothing weak about Jesus Christ, and there is nothing weak about women. They are some of the strongest creatures there are. If you don't believe me, you try bearing a child for nine months and delivering it, guys. I haven't done that. I mean, they are strong and powerful in so many ways, but a gentle, meek woman has her strength under control and a quiet spirit. Like I said, it doesn't mean silent. It's like the guy who is reading the newspaper came across this research and felt he had to share it with his wife. He said, "Hey, dear, did you know they determined that women need to speak twice as many words in a day as men?" The wife didn't even look up from the book. She said, "I know, it's because we have to repeat ourselves." The husband replied, "What was that, dear?" It's true. There is a quiet strength in a godly woman that is absolutely incredibly beautiful and appealing. And he uses the example of Sarah here as exhibiting that kind of attitude. Now, don't get this part wrong. Was Abraham the master, she the slave? No, Abraham loved his wife Sarah and elevated her to a place of honor and respect, and she willingly worked with and submitted to Abraham and his authority over her. That's how the godly women of the past made themselves beautiful. That's how they did it. And women who do that well honor God and are a treasure to their husbands and families.

Now Peter addresses the husbands. He teaches men how to be a good Christian man and leader of his wife and family. He says **Husbands, in the same way** – he goes back again to the model of Jesus Christ. He says, Husbands, if you want to learn how to love your wife, look at the way Christ loved the church, his bride, and gave himself up for her. Look at the way he served her. Look at the way he sacrificed for her. Husbands, in the same way, with Christ as your model, now you know how to love your wife; now you know how to live with her. He says **husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

As you live with them, I believe that the single most important commodity in life today is not money, but time. We have precious little of it. There are so many demands made upon the

family today. We go our separate ways far too often, and we spend less and time with each other and with the people that are most important in our lives. You ask any wife and any child how you spell love, and they will spell it t-i-m-e. We need to carve time out of our everyday schedule or out of our weekly schedules time to show our wives, to show our families, you are number two and three in my life. God is number one, and they need to see that too by spending time with God and his Word and with them. How do you get to know them, how do you get to impact them and influence them if you don't spend time with them? It's so important.

Be considerate, Peter says. It literally means to live with understanding, with knowledge of your wife. That's what the word means. I believe the only way you can do that is to do that dreaded word that men hate: communicate. "Dear, we need to talk." Do you ever hear those words? And you know, when you communicate, you need to turn ESPN off. Now, in the early days of my marriage, my wife would be talking and then she'd stop and be silent for about 15-20 seconds, I thought she was done. I'd pick up the paper and start reading. She wasn't done; she was just reloading. And what did it for me was the day that I heard the match light. She almost got to the paper. Right then and there I decided, you know, if I want to make this thing work, I better get all these distractions out of the way because I'm an easily distracted kind of guy. I'll pick up anything and start reading, and I'm in that world – I'm not in her world anymore; and I wasn't being very considerate of her. How can I get to know her if I don't listen to her, and that's perhaps the most important part of communication - to listen. Listening is a learned skill. Any man can do it. You can learn. Get everything out of your way. Listen to her. Hear her heart. Let her share her dreams. Ask her questions about how she feels or what she thinks. How are you going to get to know her needs? How are you going to get to know how to serve her if you don't listen to her and hear her out?

Women will teach you how to love them and how to love your children. The person who has helped me the most in relationships in my life is my wife. She has pointed out faults and mistakes that I was making and said that if you want to have a better relationship with her and my children, you better do this. And I've learned to listen to her, because women have a built in understanding and knowledge of how to make relationships work, and so, men, this is a clue. Listen to your wives and hear their heart. Ask them questions. Shut your mouth, because James 1:19 says we **should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry**. God gave us two ears and one mouth to be used in direct proportion. That's how you learn how to serve them, how to meet their needs.

And Peter says **treat them with respect**, with honor, with dignity. Literally the word means with value. Place a high value on your spouse and your family, and they'll know by the words that you speak. When you walk in the door, your eyes and your expressions – "Wow! I can't believe I'm married to you! Wow, I can't believe you are my child! I can't believe how blessed I am!" When you place that kind of honor and value on your wife, and you treat them with respect in front of your children, you show that respect and honor to your wife, what a teaching tool that is!

And I believe that it's men's job to teach their boys how to show respect and honor to women. I believe every man should be teaching his son and demanding that they show respect and give honor to their mother and to the elderly, to others, and even to their sisters. I believe that's a job

every man has. Where do they get their values? They get them from Jesus Christ. He is the one who shed His blood for this woman, their mother, your wife; He is the one who gave His life for her; He placed a value on her and then He puts her into your hands and says you treat her with the same value, the same honor, the same respect that I gave her. When husbands do that, your wives will know it. They will be blessed, and so will you. Why? Because they are our partner.

He says they're the weaker partner physically. It doesn't mean they are inferior, not intellectually, and definitely not spiritually. They are **heirs with you of God's gracious gift of life**. They are our partners. They share the same gift of eternal life given to us and to them, the same forgiveness, and the same grace as we do; and together, as we work in harmony with one another, we both cooperate voluntarily out of love for one another and out of love and reverence and respect for God. We need to pass the value of respect on to our children and in our homes. That is when your prayers will not be hindered. If you treat your wife poorly, ignore her, abuse her, show her no respect and give her no honor, you are harming your relationship with God. You treat your wife well, and you are aiding your prayers. You will be able to do as Jesus says in Matthew 18:19 **Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.** And when husband and wife come together under Jesus Christ, loving each other and forgiving each other, doing like Peter says, loving each other deeply from the heart because love covers over a multitude of sins, what a powerful witness and testimony that is for the children. What a powerful home that will be. You will have healthy marriages, and you'll have healthy families and healthy homes that will impact our churches and our society and give all the glory to God.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.