

Session 9

Role of Men in the Church

Man as Caretaker

Joshua 24

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the Rivers, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

- I. Men and caretaking in the world today.
 - A. Caretaking may be defined simply as taking guardianship and custody for something (or someone) over which one has assumed responsibility.
 1. Men may be caretakers of a farm (or a garden). Man’s first known responsibility was to work and take care of the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:9)
 2. Men may be caretakers of a flock of sheep. (Luke 2:8)
 3. Men may be caretakers of a wife and family. (I Peter 3:7)
 4. Men may be caretakers of doctrine. (I Timothy 4:16)
 - B. Caretaking is basic to the concept of masculinity in virtually all cultures. Men are responsible for placing food on the table. In Mediterranean society, the notion of honor is about *being good at being a man*, namely building up and supporting the family no matter what the personal cost. (From Gilmore, 1990)
 - C. In our modern society, however, caretaking has become much more difficult to grasp (despite our high standard of living).
 1. Responsibilities for caretaking in the family have been divided between the man and the woman (not so much sharing as blurring of the respective roles of caretaking).
 2. We find very few things for which we actually provide care.
 - a. Most of us don’t “take care” of our automobiles, household appliances, food sources (such as a garden).
 - b. Men rarely are directly responsible for the safety of their families.
 - c. Success in our world is not nearly as closely tied to caretaking of the family as it once was.
 3. We find it difficult to gauge the success of our caretaking. In our society, a roof over the heads of our family, a coat on their backs and food on the table is far from sufficient.
 - D. The decline in caretaking is due in part to our strong belief in independence of the individual. For example, even if we believe that our children should go to college, we may also believe that they should pay for college on their own because that will teach them responsibility. Even if we could take care of our

children in some situation, we believe they must learn to “take care of themselves.”

- E. Ironically, however, most persons in our society are much more interested in being cared for than caring for someone or something else.
 - 1. A frequent excuse for the “mid-life” crisis is the desire to escape the responsibility for the family.
 - 2. A sign of success in our society is frequently a sign that someone else is taking care of us (e.g. a housekeeper, a chauffeur, or a personal trainer)
 - 3. In many ways, we just don’t know how to take care of ourselves. (How many of us know the skills for self sufficient living that most persons in third world countries have acquired?)
 - 4. We have, to varying degrees, looked to the government as a caretaker.
 - F. In sum, men have, to a significant degree, lost their role as caretakers in our society.
- II. Men and caretaking in the church.
- A. We have witnessed an upsurge in the overt recognition that our elders are caretakers of the congregation in churches of Christ.
 - 1. Elders are more and more frequently referred to as shepherds.
 - 2. We have emphasized that elders must escape the Board of Directors mentality and concentrate on the needs of the flock.
 - B. In reality, however, the identity of the male leader in our congregations is not typically that of the caretaker, but rather the evangelist, teacher, major financial contributor, or even star athlete.
 - C. Except in times of crisis, however, we generally believe that such caretaking is for others, not ourselves. Few men want to be dependent, on the elders or anyone else. Few men really want to be responsible for the caretaking of others.
 - 1. We believe people should take care of themselves.
 - 2. We would rather give money than undertake caretaking directly.
 - 3. We don’t like our schedules interrupted.
 - 4. We “ask” about needs but many times the needs seem so overwhelming that we “really don’t want to know.”
 - D. Much of the responsibility for caretaking in our congregations falls more often to the women of the congregation than to the men. For example,
 - 1. Preparing meals.
 - 2. Providing support in times of crises.
 - 3. Providing transportation for persons who cannot drive.
 - 4. Caretaking our children both during our services and at other times.
 - E. Men can be guilty in the church as in society, waiting for someone else to care for them. “Why doesn’t someone invite me out for breakfast?” or “I need some help cleaning my yard after that storm and no one seems to be volunteering.”
 - F. Our social environment is very different from that found in Jerusalem during the first century.

1. The state is mostly responsible for taking care of the widows (pensions and Social Security) and orphans (protective services).
 2. The state is responsible for those without financial resources (welfare).
 3. Where the state is not responsible, many non-church and parachurch groups have taken the responsibility (such as Agape).
- G. *We do find glaring exceptions –e.g., the food and clothes closet at Brooks is a prime exception where men have taken a very active role in caretaking for the community.*

III. Joshua the caretaker.

- A. Joshua was one of Israel's greatest leaders, the appointed successor to Moses and the person who lead Israel into Canaan. Numbers 27:18-23
1. He lead the forces of Israel against the Amalekites. Exodus 17:9
 2. He accompanied Moses up the side of Mt. Sinai. Exodus 24:12-13
 3. He spied on Canaan and was one of two among the spies who provided a favorable report of the Promised Land. Numbers 14:6-30
 4. He leads the battle against the Canaanites. Joshua 1-12
 5. He divides up the land. Joshua 13-21
 6. He unites Israel. Joshua 22
- B. We perhaps know Joshua best, however, from his farewell address near his death to Israel. (Joshua 23, 24) This address makes clear that Joshua viewed himself as a caretaker of both his immediate family and Israel. He speaks to Israel as a father speaks to his children for whom he has taken responsibility.
1. *Joshua is a caretaker who provides Israel with land for their crops and their herds..* He allotted the conquered land among the Israelites (did not keep it for himself). Joshua 23:4
 2. *Joshua is a spiritual caretaker.* He warns Israel, not so much to resist the enemy, but rather to resist the temptation to wander from the law. . Joshua 23:6-15
 - a. He warns Israel to keep themselves pure in the midst of the aliens. Joshua 23: 12,13
 - b. He reminds them that God is the true caretaker of Israel. Joshua 23:14
 - c. He warns them that, to be taken care of by God, they must remain faithful to God. Joshua 23: 15, 16
 3. *Joshua is a caretaker of memory and meaning.* Joshua 24:1-13
 4. *Joshua begins his caretaking at home.* Joshua 24:15
 5. *Joshua is a caretaker to whom the people respond.* Joshua 24:16
 6. *Joshua is a caretaker who puts appropriate responsibility upon those for whom he undertakes care.* Joshua 24:22

IV. Men as caretakers in the home and church.

- A. Caretaking begins at home.

1. Ultimately Joshua begins his caretaking with a dependent relationship upon God and a responsible relationship toward his family. Only then can he assume the responsibility for Israel. Joshua 24:15
 2. An elder in the church must “manage his own family”, otherwise, “how can he take care of God’s church?” I Timothy 3:4
- B. Caretaking begins with spiritual care for the family.
1. The Christian man is responsible for setting an example of love in the family, the love of one who knows he is loved. Ephesians 5:25
 - a. Love in the family begins with love for one’s wife.
 - b. Love for one’s wife means caring for her physically (not exposing her to excessive physical work).
 - c. Love for one’s wife means caring for her emotionally (not exposing her to excessive responsibility in the family nor excessive stress).
 - d. Love for one’s wife means encouraging her spiritual growth.
 2. The Christian man must be willing to make the tough spiritual decisions.
 - a. He does not make these decisions in isolation (such isolation is autocratic, not loving).
 - b. He does not make these decisions simply to assert his authority.
 - c. He must, however, be willing to take a stand. Joshua 24:15
 3. The Christian man must be willing to be the “keeper of meaning” for the family (and the community).
 - a. Keepers of meaning provide the continuity of the family through time, maintaining the roots of the family in Christ. John 15:1, 3
 - b. At the same time, keepers of meaning “prune” their excess traditions and weighty burdens. John 15:2
- C. The man who is a caretaker at home also:
1. Provides for his family financially.
 - a. In this caretaking responsibility God neither expects all men to provide abundantly for their families nor judges a man on the basis of how much he does provide for his family. God is more interested in the attitude toward providing and effort made by the man to provide for his family than the actual accumulation of goods in the family (remember the parable of the talents – Matthew 25:14f).
 - b. Rather God expects an attitude of financial responsibility.
 - (1) He does not approve of the man who permits his family to suffer because he is too proud to take a job which he considers beneath him.
 - (2) He does not approve of the man who puts his own financial needs ahead of those of his family.
 - (3) He does not approve of the man who is unfair toward his family financially (favoring one child over another – remember, Joshua allotted the land fairly).
 - (4) He does not approve of the man who forgets his extended family (single men have caretaking responsibilities as well). I Timothy 5:4
 - (5) He does not approve of the man who spends his money unwisely.

- c. God does not approve of the husband and father who puts money (or education and position) above all else. I Timothy 6:10
- 2. Protects his family.
 - a. Men rarely must “take up arms” to protect their families (and we must remember the command to turn the other cheek and to live peaceably with others).
 - b. Nevertheless, men (working with his wife) must take responsibility regarding:
 - (1) The choice of where the family lives – at times the choices may be limited.
 - (2) The choice of whom the children associate.
 - (3) The stress placed upon the family due to frequent moves, such as lack of support from extended family or friends.
 - (4) The entertainment to which his family is exposed.
- 3. Nourishes his family – God wishes the Christian man to facilitate the growth of his family, a growth beyond himself. Remember, Israel became a great nation after being lead by Joshua (and Joshua nourished them so that they could become a great nation).

V. The church and the man as caretaker.

- A. Examples set by men and women in the church become models for new Christians in terms of caretaking by men (and women) in the family.
- B. Men (and women) in the church will always be caught between the poles of the responsibility for caretaking and the potential to “lord it over” the flock.
 - 1. This is the nature of the Christian response to others. Jesus felt a deep responsibility for the rich young ruler. Nevertheless, he could only provide him with direction. He could not control him. Matthew 19:16f
 - 2. This is the nature of agape love.
- C. True caretakers seem to walk the fine line between responsibility and dominance with amazing ease!

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