

PRAYING FOR A CHRIST-AWAKENING

Honoring Marriage Covenants



Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Heb.13:4)

PASTOR SAM RODRIGUEZ

SCRIPTURE STUDY

HEBREWS 13:4
MALACHI 2:14
1 PETER 1:16
GALATIANS 2:22
EPHESIANS 2:10
ROMANS 8:29; 15:7
2 CORINTHIANS 5:9
MATTHEW 18:20

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
 May our marriages and our homes
 reflect Your love and purity.
 In Jesus' Name,
 Amen

No doubt, our culture is sex-obsessed and desperately in need of God's healing and restoration. But if the oxygen supply of impurity is ever to be choked off in this nation, the healing must begin with us.

So let's be done with it. Let's diligently confess any active impurity in our own hearts and minds, holding ourselves open to the searchlight of God's Word. Let's keep our relationship with Christ holy and daily enough to avoid ever being blindsided by temptations that, if acted upon, could tear our families apart. And just as fervently, let's pray that all sexual sin will be exposed in our culture for the devilish deception it is. What it eats away from our national conscience and our Christian confidence is more damaging than we can begin to measure. This is not too big for God, and it is not too late for a Christ Awakening. Purity can indeed be reborn in our land, in our hearts, and in our churches. Pray and pray hard for righteous relations between men and women; decrease in divorce rates, cohabitation, same-sex relations, sexual abuse, sexual trafficking, out-of-wedlock children, and STDs.

The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. (Mal. 2:14)

HD TV, 3D TV, and a host of other technological advances change the shape of our society. The American church needs a similar overhaul. It must either make the necessary modifications or no longer be relevant on a cultural platform that has zero tolerance for archaic "rabbit ears." American Christianity seems to be more analog than digital. Surveys ranging from Barna to Pew Research exhibit a lack of connectivity between Millennials (those born after 1980) and the church. The U.S. church stands in a state of crisis where the signal of who God is and what He is saying sounds broken and blurry.

For example, Sunday mornings exist to placate a culture obsessed with consumerism, while simultaneously injecting motivational overtures to a spiritually impaired audience. Meanwhile, scandals fill the pulpits, divorces destroy the families, and our youth embrace universalism while we preach more about money than we do the soul. Rabbit ears—nothing more than the church still using a set of archaic rabbit ears. Just as high-definition (HD) TV changed our viewing by exponentially enhancing the quality of televised images, so must we get rid of our old receptor modules and embrace digitized spiritual platforms. What then, does an HD church look like?

A Church That Loves

First it presents a crystal-clear picture of the gospel: a living God who repudiates sin while loving the sinner. Without a doubt, a fresh holiness movement needs to take place sans the vestiges of legalism, yet with a commitment to simultaneously address a sin-tolerant culture as a church that incorporates God's eternal mandate to "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). The cross shows us that we have both a vertical and a horizontal existence. We basically live two lives, and the balancing of that life is the secret of success. And the strongest point of our journey here on Earth lies in that nexus, that convergence—at the perfect place where vertical connects with horizontal.

Vertical living means to stand upright in all that we do. Vertical living is love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, goodness, gentleness, temperance, mercy, and faith. Vertical living means concomitant, communication with God. It's being crucified daily. It's renewing your mind. It's becoming more like Jesus. It's Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

A Church That Reforms

Second, an HD Christian movement in America will require direct interaction with the culture. American culture can't just be engaged by the church; it must be reformed by it. In recent years, it's been the reverse. Homosexual lifestyle is no longer even an issue in our culture. Now our culture laughs mockingly at any referenced images of Moses or Paul admonishing us to stand against perversion and deviation from God's marriage model. It's obvious that we need a clear picture, a biblical and righteous transmission of God, family, marriage, morality, righteousness, and justice.

A Church That Addresses Real Needs

Third, HD Christianity requires programs, systems, institutions, and communities that can all facilitate clear and viable transmission of the gospel via multiple screens. Just as digital television enables viewers to multitask onscreen, the church must stand ready to address the social, spiritual, physical, and intellectual needs of all its constituents.

It's this addressing of "real" needs in the name of Jesus that moves us from irrelevancy to relevancy. I see it every time we reach out to those in need. I see it every time we see a smile on a child who's impoverished and we provide some sort of resource—even if it's only for a day or a week or month. I see it in the little things, and I see it in the big things. I see it in the individual accomplishments and doings and acts. And I see it corporately.

That's where I see it. Whenever we restore a smile and bring a couple one step closer together, and their troubled marriage one step further away from divorce. When we give hope to a young man who was involved in gangs and tell him, "You may have grown up without a father, but one day you'll be a wonderful father—if you follow the Father and adhere to the following principles. Your true heritage does not come from the father who abandoned you, but rather, the Father who has created an incredible future for you. You have the ability within you to change your destiny."

At the end of the day, churches that upgrade their tools of transmission will be relevant in twenty-first-century America. Our nation needs an ecclesia that embodies "habitus Christi"—the life and habits of Christ – with a clear signal that transmits an image of a God who still saves, delivers and heals and will return. Good-bye rabbit ears, welcome revival.

Insights and Impressions

Thanksgiving

_ Thank You, Lord, that we experience support through the church as we “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way . . . fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

_ Jesus, we are grateful that we can share Your acceptance in the church as we “accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted. . . in order to bring praise to God” (Rom.15:7).

_ Dear God, we are grateful that we can be comforted within the church—“that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble” (2Cor.1:4).

Confession

_ Is there a church that loves? Forgive us, Lord, for not loving and sacrificing for our marriages.

_ Is there a church that reforms? Cleanse us, Dear God, for not allowing You to transform us into a family unit.

_ Is there a church that meets real needs? Jesus, we regret that we haven’t let You build Your character in us.

Petition

_ Lord, may we purpose in marriage to model Your love, motivated to please You: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (2 Cor. 5:9).

_ Lord, may we witness a decrease in divorce rates, cohabitation, and same sex relations as marriage is viewed as a gift from You: “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22).

_ Jesus, help us to honor You through our marriage relationship: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb. 13:4).

The Father’s Promises for you

A Church That Loves

Lord, may You use the church to shape us into effective ministries to others: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

A Church That Reforms

Dear God, might You involve the church in the process of building the values, attitudes, morals, and character of Your Son within us: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

A Church That Addresses Real Needs

Jesus, might we encounter true intimacy and authenticity in our relationships as we come together in Your name: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20).

Award-winning Sam Rodriguez is president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals, serving 15 million Latino believers and 18,000 churches. www.nhclc.org

Excerpts from Ministry Today, May/June 2009, p.12. and The Path of Miracles (New York, New York: New American Library, a division of Penguin Group, 2009), used by permission.