

Love, Health, and Faith in Family Life

“In the 19th century the problem was the death of God: in the 20th century the problem is the death of man” (Eric Fromm). Unfortunately, Fromm saw no connection between the two facts. The “death of God” leads sooner or later to the “death of man”. Self-deification, with its accompanying entourage of narcissism, leads to sheer individualism. A colossal crisis in relationships is one of its main outcomes. In the midst of this arid moral landscape we need to regain the biblical view of relationships in general and within the family in particular. What are the hallmarks of relationships according to God’s design? What is a healthy family?

Pablo Martinez was a European Leadership Forum steering committee member for more than 10 years. He currently works as a psychiatrist at a private practice in Barcelona. He has also developed a wide ministry as a counsellor and itinerant speaker. He has been a plenary Bible teacher in more than 30 countries. He served as one of the vice-presidents of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA). He filled the role of President of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance (1999-2009) and Professor of Pastoral Psychology at the Spanish Theological Seminary for seven years. His books have been published in 14 languages. His most recent works (to be launched in summer 2018) are *Mad or God?: Jesus, the Healthiest Mind of All* (Inter-Varsity Press, England, co-authored with Prof. Andrew Sims) and *Take Care of Yourself: Survive and Thrive in Ministry* (Hendrickson Publishers & Lausanne Movement). For more information see <http://www.christian-thought.org>

Introduction:

It is no coincidence that the rampant process of secularization in the West has been accompanied by rising individualism and a pervasive **crisis of fidelity**. I am referring not only to conjugal fidelity but to all human relationships (parents and children, siblings, friends etc.).

We will focus our attention on three “protagonists”: the world around us (“the selfish triangle”), our response from a biblical perspective (“the loving triangle”), and God who guides and sustains our relationships (“the divine sap”).

I. “Am I my brother’s keeper”: the selfish triangle:

- A. The moral and social background: “*the pattern of this world*”
- B. The selfish triangle reflects the current idols people worship today
 1. My right to be myself (selfism)
 2. My right to change/break commitments (pragmatism)
 3. My right to be happy (hedonism)
- C. The ego is in the center: the “me first” generation.

D. What sociologists call “social instability” conceals a shattering individualism. Hence the deep rooted links that used to be for life have now become precarious and with a very early “expiry date.”

E. The outcome:

1. A rampant individualism permeates every layer of society
2. An erosion of commitment leads to fragility in relationships.
3. Broken relationships lead to emotional problems: anxiety, depression and loneliness.

II. “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay”: the loving triangle

A. What is our response to this needy society? God’s truth is a source of health and peace (Jer. 33:6).

B. The book of Ruth as a model: a very realistic love story.
Three key words in the story of this family:

1. **Suffering:** what happens to us: Events outside our control
2. **Love:** how we react, what we do in the midst of these events
3. **Restoration:** God’s response and provision throughout our (family) life story

This same pattern is repeated time and again in millions of families.

C. These three words make a very different triangle: the loving triangle that describes a healthy family and reflects God’s design for human relationships:

1. **Patience:** “*Love is patient*”. Strength to endure and persevere together
2. **Self-giving:** “*Love is serving*”. “You first”. Love is the most powerful transforming force
3. **Trust:** “*Perfect love drives out fear*”. Faithfulness is the seal of a love that “*never fails*”

D. The center of the triangle is Christ: faith in a personal God that nourishes and sustains the relationship.

III. “The God under whose wings you have come to take refuge”: The divine sap

- A. If God is the architect of the family (Psalm 127:1) and all human relationships (Gen. 2) we need to depend on him.
- B. God is able to transform our tragedies into “fables” (stories with a purpose)
- C. Our strength –the divine sap- comes from Christ (John 15:1-5) and flows through **prayer and meditation** in His words. These resources become the cement that gives cohesion to the relationship because:

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecl. 4:12)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5).