# Building Family Relationships

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This book was designed for personal or group study. For group study, a Leader's Guide and Transparency Packet are available.

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# Foreword



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Hot summer evenings called for a relaxing family gathering on the front porch at Grandpa's house. But then in the winter, the whole family would gather around the one woodstove—the rest of the house was cold. The kerosene lamp was usually confined to the one room where the family gathered, thus conserving fuel. When the radio was turned on, everyone wanted to listen even though it was the noon livestock price quotations or perhaps a religious broadcast. Otherwise, the radio remained silent in order to conserve the "expensive battery."

This sounds like a long time ago; however, much has changed in the past thirty or forty years. Modern conveniences such as electricity, central heat and air, electronic conveniences, multiple automobiles per family, and diverse responsibilities of family members make it difficult for whole families to get together very often. Harmony in the home, however, depends on clear and frequent communication. Times of togetherness for wholesome and enjoyable activities promote unity and respect among family members.

Although there are no absolute formulas that apply to every family situation, there are biblical principles that, when applied to a family unit, cause it to

function as a beautiful pattern of love and devotion. In fact, the Lord used the husband/wife relationship to describe His faithful love for the church. (See Ephesians 5.) The better we understand and practice the love of God, the better we will function in our individual places in a family unit.

*Building Family Relationships* is very possibly the most encompassing of any study of its kind. It is not structured to address only one age group, but it is designed to strengthen and unify family ties and responsibilities. The study and practice of the principles presented will enhance husband/wife relationships, child/parent communications, financial concepts, Christian discipline, and worship in the home. The single parent will find encouragement and guidance, the relationship between the home and church will be enhanced, and the ability to adequately cope with changes in the home will be improved by a careful perusal and application of these principles.

The church that awaits the coming of the Lord in clouds of glory will become stronger and more effective as harmony in the homes of its members is maintained. This harmony blends with God's perfect will and creates a spiritual relationship that is to be desired by every Christian.

You will find yourself blessed and encouraged to face life's every trial as you apply these godly principles to your home, marriage, or individual family responsibilities.

# Contents


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| Foreword | | 3 |
| 1. | Biblical Principles for Marriage | 7 |
| 2. | The Husband at the Helm | 19 |
| 3. | Woman—God's Design | 30 |
| 4. | Intimacy in Marriage | 42 |
| 5. | Harmony in the Home | 55 |
| 6. | The Blessing of Children | 67 |
| 7. | Christian Discipline | 79 |
| 8. | Financial Stewardship | 91 |
| 9. | The Home—A Center of Worship | 103 |
| 10. | Church and Home in Partnership | 115 |
| 11. | When Trouble Comes | 125 |
| 12. | The Single-Parent Family | 137 |
| 13. | Adapting to Changes in the Home | 149 |

# Biblical Principles for Marriage




*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

*Genesis 2:24*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Genesis 2:18-25
Proverbs 18:22
Matthew 19:1-6
Mark 10:6-8
Ephesians 5:20-33
Hebrews 13:4
Revelation 21:1-3

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

"And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

"And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for

Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

"And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:18-25).

## Marriage Defined

Simply stated, marriage describes a "relationship" between two people. Marriage is neither an invention of man nor the result of some evolutionary process that man has conveniently adopted that may soon pass. God created man. The first institution that man entered into was marriage. Marriage was ordained by God for the benefit of man, His highest form of creation.

As an institution, marriage is in trouble in America, as well as many major nations. Nearly one out of every two American marriages ends in divorce; 80 percent of teenage marriages fail; and over 50 percent of all high school graduates do not live with their real mother and father. Moreover, it is vogue for couples to cohabit rather than enter the commitment of marriage, for divorce to be granted without cause, for limited liability marriages to be contracted, and for persons of the same sex to set up house together and to "raise" a family. Where has America gone wrong, and what influence will

this thinking have upon genuine Christian marriages?

If one wonders why America might not enjoy the blessings of God and the respect of other nations that it once enjoyed, one has but to observe the sinfulness of the people in their family relationships to determine the cause of the problem and why God is beginning to judge that nation. As the family goes, so goes the nation!

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

"The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:16-17).

Humanism is a common religion of our day, and anyone who subscribes to the tenets of this faith is trying to determine the course of his destiny without truth. Such a person is headed for failure at every turn and for sudden destruction.

## Guide to Family Relationships

The Bible is our only authentic textbook and guide for understanding family relationships and for working out family problems. Any other reference must base its premises upon the Bible to be a valid source of information. When a society or individual leaves the principles of this Book, chaos and confusion will result.

God designed marriage, and marriage is a permanent institution. It is a fearful thing to tamper with the plan of God. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

## Why Did God Design Marriage?

*Marriage is intended to take away man's loneliness and to make him complete.* It is not unfortunate that man is still incomplete when alone; God created man in that condition. "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). *Help meet* (one word in Hebrew) implies an "aide" or "one who assists."

Husband and wife are intended to be *compatible;* that is, to get along that they might be helpful to each other. They are also intended to be *complementary*; that is, to use their natural strength to reinforce each other's weakness. Although a man or woman can choose to live alone outside of marriage, perhaps the most fulfilling earthly relationship that exists for a man or a woman is a harmonious marriage in which they follow the principles of God in their home.

Is it any wonder that Jesus highlighted the Genesis 2 account of the first principles of marriage by emphasizing the unity and wholeness that marriage produces for two people joined together under God? "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:5-6).

To *cleave* means to "stick together;" to "be as one." In the eyes of God, marriage companions are no longer two independent persons each making independent choices. They exist for the good and completeness of each other. Man cannot separate two persons who are joined as one.

*Another reason God designed marriage was to reveal how the church is to relate to Him*. The church is the bride, and He is the Bridegroom. Why

is it that among all living organisms only humans have family relationships? The family is designed by God regardless of the efforts of humanists to destroy those relationships and to reduce human relationships to that of animals.

Man was made by God as the last and highest form of creation. Man was made in God's likeness and image and was given dominion (supreme authority) over all other living creatures on earth: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

Man did not evolve from lower life forms; he was created as a higher order than all living creatures, and he was given authority over them. It is not surprising that man's relationships should be of a higher order also.

## A Bride for God

The sanctity and honor of a marriage relationship can only be understood when we understand that God's purpose on earth is to find a bride for Himself—one that He will be honored to give His name to for eternity. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). (See also Revelation 3:12.) The reason God even made man and then dealt so patiently and persistently with him through the centuries was to find a people that would be worthy (through redemption) to bear His name.

The church is beautifully typified in Scripture as the bride of Christ. Christians are now carefully preparing for the day when the Bridegroom, Jesus

Christ, shall appear for His bride who has made herself ready. The time for preparation is this life. One of the places Christians prove themselves ready is in their earthly homes. God designed that each family member should help get the others ready.

Since man is made in the image of God and since God's purpose is to unite Himself in marriage to a people that are made worthy to bear His name, how should we then live in our earthly marriage relationship?

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:22-27).

Marriage is a great mystery to many nonbelievers. Its true meaning and purpose can only be clearly understood through the Word of God.

A person might ask, "What is God's purpose for me in marriage?"

As a person fulfills his or her responsibility as a husband or wife in marriage, that person is developing the same qualities necessary to be a committed Christian or bride to Jesus Christ. To the degree that he learns to successfully fulfill his commitment as a loving, caring partner, he is learning to be a loyal partner to Jesus Christ. Further, in marriage God desires for one to be an example and a witness to the world of the ideal relationship that Jesus has with His church.

## What Did God Design in Marriage?

*First, it takes three to make a marriage.* "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The marriage of two people is complete only with God who provides the spiritual elements that make all relationships rich and lasting. Husbands and wives should always keep God in the center of their relationship through their mutual faithfulness to God. Their marriage will grow to rich maturity and become a model for others, especially their children, to follow.

Where circumstances are such that one partner is not a believer, the believing partner has an even greater responsibility to trust God to bring the marriage to a mature relationship.

Christian virtues can be tested tremendously in marriage, especially when one partner is unconverted. What God has joined together in marriage, however, He does not give anyone the right to dissolve. A Christian should not seek to get out of his or her problem when it is God's will to help solve that problem.

*Second, man is appointed by God as leader in the marriage.* "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (I Peter 3:1).

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

When a marriage is weak, it is because of weak leadership. Husbands need to be willing to assume responsibility for the home. Leadership should be of a pastoral nature involving spiritual direction as well as social and financial concerns. A wife who may be more spiritual and perhaps more capable in leadership should surrender some of her natural tendencies to dominate in order to reinforce her husband's

God-given responsibility to direct the home. She can often help him by praying for him and by refraining even when it is so easy to give direction. Meekness may sometimes appear as a weakness of the wife who refrains from assuming her husband's responsibility of leadership, but it is a plan ordained by God.

*Third, man is the lover.* Just as some men need to learn to lead, some men need to learn how to express love. It may not be any more natural for the husband to initiate expressions of love in the marriage relationship than to initiate proper leadership, but it is commanded by God: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

True love is the ability to give of ourselves. Selfish love is simply getting for ourselves. Even some godly men might not understand the power of giving oneself to his wife and children. "For God so loved the world, that he gave . . ." (John 3:16). This is the theme of God's love for His people throughout the Bible, and it should be the theme of godly husbands in a healthy Christian home.

*Fourth, marriage is permanent and exclusive.* "They shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). "They are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed" (I Corinthians 7:27).

In marriage, as in all other relationships, Christians should seek to do the things they "ought" to do rather than what they "can" do legally. Since judgment begins at the house of God according to I Peter 4:17, we can rest assured that God has forgiven all our past sins when we first came to Him. However, after conversion we are accountable as a child of God, and we are to pattern our thinking and conduct after God's plan for our lives. God's plan regarding marriage is

one man for one woman, and that relationship is to be permanent. God outlined the ideal for this principle in the Book of Romans. "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man" (Romans 7:2-3). In other words, a widow or widower is free to remarry in the Lord.

*Fifth, marriage requires frankness and trust.* "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25). Within the relationship of a healthy marriage there exists a mutual candor that provides unreserved honesty, freedom from malice, and a loyalty which cannot be equaled in any other human relationship. This kind of frankness and trust does not come naturally, but it can be developed with the help of God (the third party in a marriage).

*Sixth, marriage is a process.* "And they shall be [become] one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). It takes time to build a lasting marriage, and without love, time cannot do its perfect work.

Love (giving of oneself) is the foundation upon which all lasting relationships are built. With true love (which comes ultimately from God who is love), all right relationships (including marriage) will grow to full maturity and will last. It is wise to remember that successful marriages are not dependent upon couples living together without problems, but upon couples working out their problems in love.

Just as "falling in love" is nonexistent, so is a "perfect marriage." Love is an attribute which can be acquired; marriage is a relationship which should

grow. We often expect to have a perfect marriage without stormy seasons, but if we do, we do not understand basic human nature (especially our own weaknesses). Storms are a normal part of life; we learn to cope with the storms that we may enjoy the rays of sunshine. Whenever a marriage is tested, as when a person's Christian faith is tested, a dependence upon God's grace results which can help create spiritual growth.

## Advantage of Christian Marriage

Christians have the opportunity to know the principles of God's Word which can create a happy marriage. A child of God can also learn how to correct the course of his marriage should it drift astray. This is one reason why Christians should be the happiest people on earth.

The best testimony that we can give to the world of God's love, of His power to forgive, and of the blessings of being in His kingdom is to display the same attributes in our family relationships. All problems, conflicts, and differences in the family can surely be resolved just as certainly as they are resolved in our relationship with Jesus Christ. An insurmountable contradiction exists in our testimony if we say that we have experienced the love, forgiveness, and blessings of Jesus Christ but we do not exhibit those attributes in our family relationships.

What could cause such a contradiction? First, if we are ignorant of the principles of God's Word that teach us how to overcome our limitations, we will not exhibit the attributes of God in our family relationships. Secondly, if we refuse to apply those principles that we understand to our daily problems, we will fail to manifest God's attributes.

Fortunately, we can both know the important biblical principles and obey them. Christians can be

approved by God through the study and application of His Word. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

Marriage was God’s first institution that was ordained for man; it will be God’s last institution through the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and it will last for eternity. All Christians should direct their energy and effort toward successful family relationships, as they look forward to that final and eternal relationship with the Bridegroom. God’s final approval of His bride will partly depend upon how successful she has been in applying His principles in the home.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. Marriage describes a _____ between two people.
2. In America, _____ percent of all teenage marriages fail.
3. _____ exalteth a nation.
4. To _____ means to “stick together.”
5. It takes a man, a woman, and _____ to make a marriage.
6. True _____ is the ability to give of oneself.
7. Marriage is a _____ and exclusive relationship.
8. It takes _____ to build a lasting marriage because marriage is a process.
9. Couples with successful marriages learn to work out their _____ in love.
10. Marriage was God’s first institution ordained for men, and it will be the last institution through the _____ Supper of the _____.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Can you honestly evaluate yourself as a Christian companion?

First, candidly list all the areas where you feel you rate strongly as a marriage partner with strong biblical principles. This is not egotism, but rather the basis of a sound, positive self-image. Every person can find some good points about himself if he will.

Secondly, list the areas of your role in the marriage which you feel need to be improved. Not only does every person have good qualities to be appreciated, but he also has room for improvement. Recognizing the need for improvement is the first and major step in accomplishing that improvement.

Third, list all of your companion's strong qualities. Recognizing and appreciating your companion's strengths will strengthen the entire marriage relationship. Make a genuine effort to let that companion know how much you appreciate him or her.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Read the verses of Scripture under "Start with the Scriptures" for chapter two. These will prepare a foundation for your study of the subject. Two additional books which are recommended reading for men are the *One Minute Father* by Dr. Spencer Johnson and *Maximized Manhood* by Edwin Louis Cole.

# The Husband at the Helm




*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*
*Ephesians 5:25*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Ecclesiastes 9:9
Mark 10:7-12
I Corinthians 13:4-8
Ephesians 5:22-33
Colossians 3:18-21
I Timothy 3:5; 5:8
Titus 1:6

Every ship must have a captain; every corporation must have a president; every nation must have a leader. Since God designed marriage and the family, surely He made provision for its organization and for leadership. Someone is evidently answerable to God for proper progress in the home. Who is "at the helm" in your family?

God disapproves of the modern concepts of contract marriages or limited partnership marriages. Likewise, He disapproves of multiple marriages or

homosexual marriages. Family relationships are intended to be models for the world of the church's spiritual relationship to God, our Father. God, then, evidently intends for leadership in the home to be patterned after the heavenly example.

Some people argue that God does not address problems of authority and that it is man's prerogative to determine if he needs to be under authority and what that authority should be in any circumstance. Some believe that in marriage each partner should have an equal voice of authority. Jesus, some would point out, was not under authority but did as He wanted, even defying Caesar. Christ, however, was quick to answer skeptics in His day by pointing out that Caesar had his place of authority and God His place of authority. They were to respect each authority in its own sphere. (See Mark 12:17.) Furthermore, Jesus declared that He was not free to direct His own life. He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38).

Actually, God's Word addresses the need for authority in every area of our lives including the marriage relationship.

*To believers:* "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

*To employees:* "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (I Peter 2:18).

*To citizens:* "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (I Peter 2:13-14).

*To children:* "Children, obey your parents in all

things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).

*To women:* "the head of the woman is the man . . ." (I Corinthians 11:3).

*To men:* "the head of every man is Christ . . ." (I Corinthians 11:3).

Every person is under many authority figures and all authority is under God. For one to deny control of his life by God's ordained authorities is to break God's commandments and to come under His judgments. God certainly does ordain authority in every area of life.

## The Husband's Responsibility to the Family

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:22-25).

The husband is obviously God's choice for leadership in the family. However disqualified the wife might feel that her husband is for that role, the husband has been determined by God to be the leader. He may not be as spiritual, as intelligent, or as assertive, but according to God, he is ordained to be at the helm.

Many wives have discovered the joy of turning the reins of family leadership over to the husband and have seen their marriage relationships improve as well as their relationships to God. One particular Christian woman, whose husband had grown cold in the Lord and whose family ties were damaged through his lack of spiritual leadership, felt that she had to assume more and more responsibility in the

home to keep things going. When she realized that God expected her husband to be the family head, even in his weakened spiritual condition, she turned the role of leadership back to him and began to support him and submit to his leadership. Within two weeks, he came back to church after a long absence, began to provide love and care for the children, and the marriage relationship grew stronger.

Some husbands have also misunderstood God's principle of headship and have misused the authority that was given to them. Leadership is not dictatorship and does not imply superiority. Leadership in the home implies responsibility and essentially identifies where the "buck stops."

God's Word does declare that the husband is the "head of the wife," but it is equally important to note that it says *how* this headship should be exercised: "even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

The pattern for the husband to follow in the home is that conveyed by Jesus Christ. How did Christ lead the church and provide for its needs? The husband should emulate the same concern, compassion, care and spiritual oversight that Christ exhibited toward His church. Jesus, as the Bridegroom of the church (His bride), not only gives His bride a new identity (we take His name), but He gives His bride a new hope for the future, a new family (brothers and sisters), and a new security (our rest is in Him). A husband gives his earthly counterpart a new name, a new hope, a new family, and he should provide security (financial, social, physical, and spiritual).

## How Does He Fulfill His Responsibility?

It is vitally important to God that a husband learn how to exercise godly authority at home. A man is literally disqualified from ruling in the church if he does

not first keep his home in order and rule his household in a Christian manner. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (I Timothy 3:5). God expects husbands to fulfill the priestly functions of leadership.

Marriage is the natural consequence of a love relationship between two people. However, marriage is not consummated until a vow unto God is made that binds the relationship until the death of one of the spouses. It is interesting to note in the Bible that not only is the husband expected to *continue* loving his wife to ensure that their relationship is a joyful, happy relationship, but he is *commanded* to love her (Ephesians 5:25). It is the husband's *duty* to keep love alive in marriage. Although the wife is also commanded to love her husband, a husband will find that when he keeps love alive (sometimes through considerable effort), it will be natural for his wife to respond in love.

It should be remembered that the marriage vow was not "until love us do part" but "until death us do part." Love's embers must be constantly kindled. Loss of love in a relationship is a poor and unacceptable excuse before God to end a marriage.

*Agape* (Greek word translated "love") is the highest form of love. It is love that is not based upon feeling but upon a commitment. When partners in marriage say they do not love each other anymore, they are talking about their feelings for each other. Those feelings can be rekindled, however, when the commitment to love is honored. Feelings are fickle and subject to moods but commitment is not; it remains the same. Agape is an act of the will—not of the emotions, although an emotional response will surely follow.

True love is the acceptance of a responsibility for someone else's welfare and success. Love is an attitude and it requires positive action. The consequence

of loving someone will produce feelings of love, but love in marriage should not be determined by feeling. "God so loved . . . that he gave . . ." (John 3:16). The love of God for the world cost the life of His Son. True love always costs, and one who loves is always willing to pay the cost.

What is the woman's role in giving love? Even though the husband is accountable under God to love, it is expected that a wife will love in return. A concerned wife can help a husband become the lover that he is intended to be by initiating love herself. She certainly should not take the attitude that she should be coddled and that she has no responsibility in love making.

A particular woman told a counselor that she had no feelings for her husband. As a matter of fact, she was "sick" of him. She was advised to set aside a whole day and do things "for" him—whatever would please him! This act of love revived his love for her and rekindled an old flame in her own heart.

"Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. . . . Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Colossians 3:19-21).

Love for one's wife and children will cause a husband to be kind, patient, and considerate of their needs. Husbands must be careful not to be "harsh or crude" (bitter) toward their wives. Fathers must be careful not to "scold their children until they become discouraged and quit trying" (provoke to anger). A concerned husband and father will maintain a delicate balance in his leadership between firmness and fairness, between justice and mercy. On the one hand, there is a danger of becoming harsh; while on the other hand, there is a danger of becoming overly permissive and providing no effective leadership at all.

## Results of Proper Leadership in the Home

Some families seem to have it all together. The father and mother apparently always get along well and seem so happy and secure in each other's presence. The children relate well to each other and do not appear to go through the rebellious stage that most teenagers experience. Even their house seems peaceful, and the family is a joy to be with.

Other families, even though Christian, exhibit tension and strain in their relationships. The parents seem cool to each other. The children seem to be in competition with each other. Even the very house they occupy lacks the peace that would otherwise make one feel comfortable.

What makes the difference? What is the secret of the happy family? Could it be that simple principles of God's Word are being violated by the family that lives in conflict? God's Word, after all, is full of principles that are associated with great promises and rewards. One may be ever so sincere in his desire to serve God, may have experienced the joys of salvation, and may be ever so knowledgeable of God's Word and yet, perhaps through ignorance, may have missed several simple principles of life that prevent him from becoming and enjoying what God has promised in His Word.

Simply stated, wives who will not learn to depend upon (be in subjection to) their husbands for leadership and husbands who will not become responsible for (provide proper leadership to) their family, can expect that many of their prayers will be in vain. We know, for instance, that "mustard seed faith" can move mountains, but sometimes we seem to have mountains of faith and yet we may not be able to move a mustard seed. Why? Perhaps we are violating a simple principle through ignorance that, if obeyed, would produce great results in our lives. A

husband who will come to the helm of the family in leadership, and a wife who will allow him to lead will experience greater power and effectiveness in their prayer lives.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Children are simply "in the way" in some Christian households, and parents wonder why their children rebel against them as teenagers. It takes love to "train." Children who are guided, nurtured, taught, and led in the way (God's way) are promised that they will not depart from (leave) it. What a reward for diligent parenting!

Training does not mean only taking them to church four hours a week so that the church can teach them. Neither does it mean only scolding them at home when they do something wrong. According to Deuteronomy 6:7, it is a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job to train children. Since we cannot be with them for twenty-four hours a day because of various responsibilities, we must entrust them to others who will teach them the same values that we hold as believers. We would not think of sending our children to a satanic place of worship on Sunday morning, or entrust their care at night to a criminal. Some naive parents, however, will send their children for thirty hours a week to educational institutions without even bothering to inquire of the values and moral standards presented in that school's educational process. Parents should realize their awesome responsibility in taking an active role in the education of their children. After all, the most valuable possession in all of life is our children.

Husbands should realize that the earthly destiny and eternal reward for their children are largely in their own hands as head of the houses. Sometimes our children fail because we fail as parents. Perhaps

the failure would be in neglecting some principle of God's Word in regard to training our children. On the other hand, what a great reward to apply God's principles to the raising of our children and to see them happily serving God.

"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Ephesians 5:28, 33).

Even though the husband's love must be based on commitment and not on feeling, and he must give love without selfishly expecting a return, love is not a one-way street. Love is affected by the law of the harvest: "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Selfish love says: "I will only give if I get." Selfless love says: "I will give regardless of whether I get."

A self-centered, egotistical person who does not have proper self-respect or self-worth will not be able to give love selflessly, and in the end that person will even hate himself. God's Word teaches the principle that if we can gain the nature of Christ, our example, we can learn to give love without selfishness and in the end we will be more loved, we will gain greater self-respect and self-worth, and we will receive proper self-love. (See I Peter 2:21-22.) To give is to receive and to love is to be loved.

The psalmist understood the blessings, reward and contentment of a husband and father who guided his family by godly principles. "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou

shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128).

In conclusion, one of the greatest honors that any man can receive is for it to be said that he is a "real man." He is a man in the sense of a provider, protector, priest, and ruler. He is a man of understanding, kindness, love, and patience What Christ represents to the church, so a real man represents to his family.

## Test Your Knowledge

True or False

_____ 1. Husband and wife are equally responsible to God for the organization and leadership of their home.

_____ 2. Contract and limited partnership marriages are approved by God.

_____ 3. Submission to authority is not really an issue with God.

_____ 4. Leadership is not dictatorship and does not imply superiority.

_____ 5. Husbands are commanded in the Bible to love their wives.

_____ 6. It is not necessary for a woman to love her husband.

_____ 7. Agape is purely an emotional love.

_____ 8. God's Word is full of practical principles that will aid families who live by them.

_____ 9. Children's training is accomplished at school and in Sunday school only.

_____10. A man should love his wife as his own body.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Perhaps the two most notable principles discussed in this chapter are *love* and *submission*. The order

of responsibilities follows the order of creation of the man and the woman. Man was created first, so he is obligated to lead in the family relationship by exhibiting his love toward his wife. As he expresses genuine love for his wife, she will naturally respond with love returned. Hence her responsibility follows her husband's, and it is to follow him in submission. These basic two principles properly followed could solve the problem of modern divorce.

*To the husband:* Examine your leadership of expressing love in your home. It is assumed that you love your family; this is commanded in the Bible. Do you, however, express that love openly, freely and frequently?

Make some goals for yourself in this area and write them somewhere where you can refer to them frequently, such as in a personal diary or calendar. Determine to show your love more openly (without inhibition), freely (expecting nothing in return) and frequently (often).

*To the wife:* Have you ever considered how important your role is to your husband's leadership? You function in a carefully designed, God-ordained support role. The way you respond to your husband's leadership with meek and supportive submission determines the effectiveness of your husband's leadership qualities.

Examine your role afresh and recommit yourself to the support of your husband. It can be a powerful force of vitalization within your marriage. Above all, pray for your husband and family daily.

## Expand Your Knowledge

The next chapter covers the role of the wife within a marriage. Prepare for the chapter by reading the Scripture passages under "Start with the Scriptures."

# Woman—God's Design




*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.*

*Colossians 3:18*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:20
Proverbs 12:4; 31:10-31
I Corinthians 11:1-16
I Timothy 4:12
I Peter 3:5-6

Created by God as the crown of His creation, the woman was not an afterthought, but rather was custom made to fill the final need in the earthly creation design.

Woman is an extension of God's image in this earth. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Together, man and woman, male and female, express the image of God, each having different functions, but both of equal

importance in reflecting His image. Together they are commissioned to rule and subdue within their respective spheres of authority. Woman is a vital part of God's design and plan.

Earthly roles differ. Spiritual relationships do not. However, there will be no conflict in earthly roles and spiritual relationships because God does not author confusion. This concept is important for a woman to understand her position and responsibility in fulfilling the design of God for woman. The modern cry for equality of status is founded in a gross misunderstanding. Equality does not mean sameness, but rather oneness, and this is God-ordained.

## Creation of Woman

According to Genesis chapter two, woman was skillfully made by God for a specific purpose. The Hebrew word for *made* as used in verse 22 can also be translated *builded*. Woman was not hastily produced but was the result of purpose and skill by the Creator. Careful study of the beginning of woman will create a greater understanding and appreciation of her design and role.

In Genesis 2:20 Adam was surrounded with created life, but for himself he found no "help meet," or translated, no "counterpart" of himself. There was no one to share the God-like nature inherent in Adam. So God declared He would make for the man a "help meet," or in the Hebrew "a help as before him," "a help as his front," his reflected image. The Syriac translates this as "a helper similar to him."

This deepens into a much greater understanding of the role of a wife when we look further into verses 21 and 22. In all other places *rib* is translated "side" or "flank." In view of this, woman is not a small part of man, but rather she is "one side of man."

Although he possesses a many-sided nature and character, without woman one integral side of him is missing. God then closed up the flesh thereof, leaving man without compensation for the missing part of his wholeness which is now embodied in woman. Then God took this side of man and the Hebrew states, "He built it up into a woman."

Woman was carefully molded and formed into the counterpart, the other side of, or the reflection of man. Then God Himself took the first woman to the man and in a majestic act, enhancing the original act of creating them, He declared they shall be one flesh again. Adam then exuded, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Several Semitic dialects translate *bone* as *self*. Adam knew that in his wife he had found part of himself which completed his longing. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Ephesians 5:28).

In I Corinthians 11:7, Paul stated, "The woman is the glory of the man." The wise man wrote, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" (Proverbs 12:4).

God crowned creation with a woman. He crowns a man with a virtuous wife. He will crown Himself before all creation when He takes to Himself the church as His bride.

There is something majestic and mighty in an understanding of marriage. The very fact that Jesus Christ and His church are symbolized by bridegroom and bride elevates the relationship of a man and wife to the apex of all earthly relationships.

## Woman—A Wife

The position of a wife is one of great dignity. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22). God

honored woman when He presented her to the man of His image to become his wife and the completion of creation. Proverbs 18:22 can be translated to mean "one who deserves the name of wife findeth favor of the LORD." Every godly woman desires favor of the Lord, so let us determine the attributes of an excelling wife.

As light illuminates a rare jewel, Proverbs 31 illuminates the multifaceted, virtuous woman. Proverbs 31 was originally written as an acrostic, using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin each descriptive verse. To the many women who have excelled in their difficult and demanding roles of wife and mother, this passage of Scripture perhaps expresses the extent of their responsibilities! Surely it covers everything from A to Z. However, it was probably written in this form so it would be easier to memorize. This denotes the importance of this chapter.

This passage of Scripture does not pertain to only one woman; it is a composite of all the qualities in women of excellence and strength. Women who desire to excel and find the favor of the Lord should attentively study the Scripture text of Proverbs 31:10-31.

A woman by God's design is creative. As a vital part of the image of her Creator, a great potential for her development and accomplishment is open to her. The "ideal" woman of Proverbs 31 indicates the latent ability of creativity in woman. The making of fabrics, tapestries, and designs is one area of creativity. (See verses 13, 19, 21, 31.) Her industrious capabilities indicate another area of creativity. (See verses 14, 15, 16, 24.) The organization and balance of such activities is yet another indication of the creative ability inherent in woman. (See verses 11-12, 14, 17-18, 20, 26-28.)

The Bible is replete with examples of the creative

ability of a woman's mind. Deborah persuaded an army of men to achieve victory. Abigail circumvented disaster coming to her household. Esther, anointed and inspired, changed the political course of a nation. Dorcas made her needlework a service to others. Mary made her home a prayer chapel. Eunice and Lois prepared an evangelist for the church through their influence in Timothy's life.

A woman by God's design is a creator. As an extension of the "mother of all living," woman cradles every created human being within her, then determines in large part the environment that will surround her new creation. Hannah gave birth in her heart and body to a baby, and then decidedly determined the course of his destiny to bring a nation to its knees. Jochebed did the same. In the pattern of their Creator, they gave up their sons for the redemption of others.

Proverbs 31:10 begins with a question, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" It follows that when she is found she should be considered a treasure—rare, beautiful, and valuable. This evaluation is based on her character or who she is, not on what she does. The things she does and the spirit in which she does them are the result of her virtuous, strong, and excellent character.

## Her Attitude

Low self-esteem is often a major problem among Christian women. Sometimes this results from not having a good understanding of the woman's role as designed by God. Although we are unworthy of God's blessing and salvation, at the same time we are of inestimable value, having been purchased with the most precious commodity known to man—the blood of Jesus Christ. A God-fearing woman is valued above jewels and is considered a glory and a

crown. She should reaffirm her worth before God. How we feel about ourselves is important. The command that we love our neighbors as ourselves is a deterrent to self-depreciation. Just as we are to esteem and respect others because they are created by God, we must have a healthy sense of self-worth.

Attitude is the aroma that surrounds all we do. The old saying, "Pretty is as pretty does," is for big girls as well as little girls. Beauty is not limited to the outward appearance. This is also strongly reflected by the fact that the virtuous woman received much praise graciously, without exhibiting a need to "put herself down." She was confident in her priorities, her performance, and herself. Her appearance was a matter of concern to her. Self-worth is often expressed in appearance.

## Her Desire and Diligence

The many facets of a woman's interests and abilities should be recognized. However, when a person surveys the multiplicity of her concerns, her ultimate desire seems best described in the words of verse 29—"Thou excellent them all."

It can be summed up in the New Testament admonition: "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation [behavior], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). She is an example of excellence. Her desire is an inner spirit committed to excellence.

It is amazing to note the parallels in II Peter 1:5-8, Philippians 4:8-9 and the description of the woman described in Proverbs 31. These inner graces described in the New Testament as the object of Christian discipline are exemplified and manifested in her lifestyle.

Excellence is almost a vanishing art in the ordinary course of life. It seems we often reserve the

desire for excelling for some special cause, forgetting that excellence is really an inner desire that commits us to doing our best in whatever we do. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord . . . for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24).

It was said of Daniel that he had an excellent spirit. It could be said that he had the spirit of excellence. In studying the Book of Daniel, we sometimes major on his prophecy and overlook how his excellent spirit manifested itself in the ordinary course of life. His kindness, respect, concern, faithfulness, honor, diligence, and discipline are what marked him as excellent, and they were derived from the *purpose* of his heart. This same spirit of excellence motivated the woman described in Proverbs.

## Her Discipline

Discipline binds the fragments and diversity of life together. It is the means by which purpose takes form. Purpose gives meaning to living. Without discipline, there is not only less accomplishment, but fulfillment is scant.

Discipline is not necessarily rigid, but it is consistent in its direction. In the description of this woman it is interesting to note the tense of these action verbs: *seeketh, bringeth, riseth, considereth, planteth, girdeth, perceiveth, layeth, stretcheth, reacheth, makest, looketh.* It is evident that she consistently and continually disciplined herself to her responsibilities.

From this passage of Scripture it is evident that she was balanced in her discipline. The management of her time, her responsibilities to home, family, self, and others, as well as her own abilities, gave balance to her life.

Her discipline brought her peace of mind. There is

a sense of contentment in the entire chapter. She was not afraid. The last part of verse 25 indicates that she was at ease and confident with her future. This confidence can only be attributed to disciplined preparation.

Peter referred to holy women who trust in God as daughters of Sarah if they "are not afraid with any amazement" (I Peter 3:5-6). The meaning of this is they do not give in to hysterical fears. Discipline is not only for duties but also for the mind. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3). The future causes no fear as she disciplines herself to present responsibility and trusts in the Lord.

"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (Proverbs 31:17). Peter warned us to gird up the loins of our minds (I Peter 1:13). A picture comes to mind of someone running or working with a long robe that needs to be tied up tight so as not to hinder. A woman's discipline is to include the strengthening of herself. In all areas of life—natural, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional—a woman who desires to excel will seek to be disciplined.

## Her Discernment

The woman described in Proverbs 31 is a thinking woman, a decisive woman, a woman of confidence. Her discernment, or ability to understand and decide, cover a broad spectrum. She is adept in creative planning and organization.

Her family does not suffer from lack or delay as a result of poor planning. She takes family and home responsibilities seriously. They are blessed because she makes good decisions which return dividends.

She has confidence in herself and her abilities. She projects a healthy self-image which gives her the ability to love her neighbors and herself. She is a

woman of wisdom in understanding her own needs, those of her family, and those beyond her immediate household. Wisdom and kindness are in the flow of her life. “The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel” (Proverbs 20:15). Her conversation enriches those around her. All that she does is governed by the law of kindness.

## Her Dignity

Strong character is no accident with a “virtuous” woman. Strengthening herself is as much a part of her life as is her service to others.

She has confidence in her work and her ability. (See verses 18 and 24.) She gives confidence and faith to her family, seeing that they are dressed well and do not live in an atmosphere of fear and negative thinking.

She carries herself with dignity. She dresses well and in good taste. Internally and externally she is attractive. (See verses 22, 24 and 30.)

## Her Husband and Family

In a marriage relationship, a woman should respond with such love and fidelity that her husband has no fear of betrayal, intimidation, unfairness, or wastefulness. This will engender in him a relaxed confidence which should produce praise for her, resulting in his affirmation of her.

The trust and confidence of her husband will open the way for her multiple talents to be utilized in many areas and for the good of many. As her leader, he should nurture and encourage her development. This relationship is to be a growing relationship all the days of their lives. It has far-reaching effects. In verse 28 we see the attitude of the husband reflected in their children.

Healthy family relationships flow together. A woman's responsibilities to her husband and family are priority and she works diligently. The husband is comforted and confident and praises her. In this atmosphere, the children follow the father's example and bless their mother. The natural response to such an appreciative atmosphere is that she works willingly. Each attitude flows into the others, strengthening the total family.

"Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land" (Proverbs 31:23). The strength of wholesome character within a wife gives her husband a sense of wholeness in himself, security at home, and confidence and recognition in the community.

"She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens" (verse 15). "She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (verse 21). Verses 15 and 21 can have a dual meaning: materially and physically this woman cares for her family. Time is devoted to their nutritional care and their general health and comfort. These verses can also have a spiritual meaning. A godly woman knows her family should not live by natural bread alone, so she makes time in her day to nurture her family spiritually and feeds them the "living bread." Ideally, she undergirds the spiritual leadership of her husband and reflects those spiritual values to her children.

## Her Home

This strong, capable woman is home-centered. She recognizes her priorities, beginning with her husband, extending to the home and family, and then to others.

The smooth operation of a household requires

great ability. It is a complex job. From early morning until late at night there are endless responsibilities of great diversity.

Goals and guidelines for an excelling, strong, and God-fearing woman are found in Proverbs 31. While great latitude is given for her various abilities, involvements, and achievements, Titus 2:4-5 sums up the primary responsibilities of a wife and mother:

"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

## Test Your Knowledge

1. Woman is an _____ of God's image in this earth.
2. _____ and woman, together, express the image of God.
3. The earthly_____ of the man and woman differ; however, their spiritual relationships do not.
4. God made woman as a _____ or counterpart of the man.
5. God _____ creation with a woman.
6. Proverbs 31 is a composite of all the _____ in women of excellence and strength.
7. A woman by God's design is _____.
8. Low _____ is often a major problem among Christian women.
9. The woman described in Proverbs 31 was balanced in her _____.
10. The relationship of a husband and wife is the most important of all earthly _____ because it symbolizes the relationship between Jesus Christ and His _____.

## Apply Your Knowledge

*To the wife:* Considering the ideal woman and wife as described in Proverbs 31, list as many of her attributes as possible. Beside each one candidly rate your own strengths and weaknesses, but do not deride yourself.

After evaluating your strengths and weaknesses, compile a list of goals for yourself. Positively determine areas of your life you desire to improve and then establish steps to employ to achieve your goals. Remember, however, that none are perfect and all persons have room for improvement. Through your strengths you can improve your weaknesses.

*To the husband:* Consider ways to express your appreciation for your wife's many qualities. It is very important that you let her know often how you feel toward her. Do not point out her weaknesses; she is probably already too aware of them. On the other hand, recognize and praise her strengths. This positive affirmation will encourage her to the degree she will desire and endeavor to improve her weaknesses also.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Already, you have studied some very basic principles that can greatly enhance and strengthen your marriage. Arrange for a time to be alone with your companion for a time of prayer and devotion together.

After praying together, you might desire to share some of your new goals with each other. This commitment to each other will reinforce your own personal commitment to reach your goals. It will also inform your companion of some struggles you are facing so that he or she may pray daily for you.

# Intimacy in Marriage




*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

*Hebrews 13:4*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Genesis 2:18, 21-25
Proverbs 5:15-20
Matthew 19:5
I Corinthians 6:15-20; 7:3-5
Ephesians 5:21-33

## Adam's Relational Joy

"And the LORD God said, It is not good (sufficient, satisfactory) that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet (suitable, adapted, completing) for him" (Genesis 2:18, *The Amplified Bible*). Adam had been placed in the beauty of the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. He had been given an ideal environment in which to live. He had been given dominion over all the rest of God's

earthly creation. Every herb bearing seed, which was upon the face of the earth, and every tree with fruit yielding seed was given to him for food.

Adam knew the fulfillment of having God, his Creator, talk directly with him. God saw all of this and remarked that it was very good, but God also saw something He labeled as being "not good." That something was a condition which He described as Adam's aloneness. Although Adam had a vertical worship relationship with God, who created him, although he had a dominating relationship over other creatures created by God, and although he had a responsibility to dress and keep the Garden of Eden, God said Adam was still alone—he had no one to relate to on his own level.

Causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, God made a woman, a helper *suitable* for, *adapted* to, and *completing* Adam—God's remedy for Adam's aloneness.

The meaning of the Hebrew words in Genesis 2:23 implies that when Adam saw Eve, he exclaimed, "At last, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" Adam finally had a relationship with someone like himself—someone he would neither worship nor dominate, but a companion to cleave to, to share with on all levels, and to become one with.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

This is the reason why men usually begin to sense the same "aloneness" that Adam felt. They begin to yearn for a relationship that will complete them and bring the total relational intimacy described by Adam as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Just as Adam did, every man longs to cleave to someone whose heart will pulsate like his own—one with whom he can relate intimately on all levels: in spirit, soul, and body. This desire causes men to seek a companion with whom they may share intimate,

relational joy. The Word of God states that this is good (Proverbs 18:22).

## Marital Intimacy—A Threefold Cord

Media influences have reduced the connotation of the word *intimacy* to a mere physical level. The joyful, unabashed intimacy enjoyed by Adam and Eve was much more meaningful than that. Intimacy is not merely an act, but rather a process by which married couples gradually open up their hearts, thoughts, feelings, and experiences to each other to an ever deepening degree.

Apostle Paul gave an insight into the trichotomy of man's relational levels in his first epistle to the Thessalonians when he stated, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23). To be sanctified wholly, or completely, involves first the human spirit—that deepest part of a person's being which is the seat of human conscience and God-consciousness. It also involves the soul—the personality part of a person's being comprised of his mind, will, and emotions. It also involves the body—that part which houses a person's spirit and soul and is intertwined with them.

Total intimacy between two marriage partners, therefore, involves not merely a physical union, but a oneness of their spirits, souls and a physical union which celebrates the total intimacy on every level. Thus a total intimacy on all three levels of existence brings relational joy, fulfillment, and completeness.

Becoming one flesh involves a marriage bond held together by a threefold cord of intimacy: intimacy of spirit, intimacy of soul, and physical intimacy. Solomon wisely observed, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

The popular, but false, myth of modern society that sex is the most important aspect of a marriage, ironically has reduced the impact of the fulfillment and joy that the Creator intended through its expression. Society propagates the notion that the most important of a person's drives are on the physical level, followed by those on the soul or psychological level, and thirdly by the drives of his spirit. God's order of importance, however, is the inverse of society's ideas. Spiritual drives are of prime importance, followed by a person's psychological/intellectual pursuits, and lastly the integration of one's physical drives based on his spiritual and intellectual values.

The cord of physical intimacy in a marriage will only have its greatest fulfillment and meaning when intertwined with the cords of oneness of spirit and oneness of soul. This threefold intimacy on every level gave Adam and Eve the relational joy intended by their Creator. "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not embarrassed or ashamed in each other's presence" (Genesis 2:25, *The Amplified Bible*).

How do a husband and wife approach this process of total oneness and intimacy? Since the most important relational drive God has created in us is that of our spirit, perhaps spiritual oneness should be considered first.

## Intimacy of Spirit

A general understanding of the concept of spiritual oneness can be illustrated by picturing a triangle with God at the top corner, the husband at the left base corner and the wife at the right base corner. As the husband and wife seek to draw closer to God, the base of the triangle is made smaller. Therefore, as a husband and his wife draw closer to God, they are also automatically drawn closer to each other.

A young couple came eagerly to the pastor's office one night to announce their impending engagement. Smiling kindly at them as they made their declaration, the pastor replied with the startling question, "What is the *vision* of your marriage?"

Looking rather dumbfounded at one another, the young lady finally stammered, "Why, I guess . . . uh . . . we just want to make each other happy!"

Feeling quite satisfied and relieved with her supposedly unselfish answer, her would-be fiance nodded his agreement to the pastor.

The pastor's kind and wise reply was, "I'm afraid that is not a good enough goal for a Christian marriage. Your marriage needs a higher purpose than just to make each other happy. Happiness eludes couples who make it an end in itself, but follows easily as a by-product or a result for those couples who have a vision of fulfilling God's plan for their married life together."

Fulfilling God's plan in a couple's lives means that their lives together should accomplish more for the kingdom of God than the sum total of their single lives alone. To have such a vision is one of the first steps toward achieving intimacy of spirit between marriage partners.

*Growing together spiritually.* Using the basic triangular concept of spiritual oneness, several practical steps followed by a husband and wife can facilitate a growing intimacy on a spiritual level. After understanding the importance of a "vision" for their marriage, each married partner should discover and understand each other's spiritual roots.

*The splashover factor.* Every person is principally a product of his past. All individuals have unconsciously picked up concepts, values, and attitudes from the home environments in which they grew up that have "splashed over" into their own adult value system. Each spouse brings "splashover"

assumptions ranging from the trivial issue of who should take out the garbage to who manages the checkbook and sets the family budget, to the even more important values such as our concepts of God Himself (His nature) and our responsibility to Him (in giving, in faithfulness to church authorities and involvement). If one spouse grew up in a family that gave liberally to the work of God while the other grew up in a family that tithed almost grudgingly, these differing "splashover" assumptions or concepts of giving will become sources of tension.

Husbands and wives do not have to remain unconscious slaves to their roots! By taking time to discover and discuss both the similarities and differences in the way they were brought up, a husband and wife can grow together spiritually by joining together in reconstructing joint, biblical concepts, values, and attitudes.

*Sharing and serving.* Marriage partners can also take a practical step toward spiritual intimacy by sharing a ministry. This ministry can be team-teaching a Sunday school class, working together in a bus ministry, a youth ministry, or many other ministries of the church. The important factor is that they *share* a ministry together—one in which they both pray, prepare, and work together.

Another important area of sharing between husbands and wives should be in the Christian disciplines of prayer, Bible study, the reading of Christian magazines and books, listening to sermon tapes, and consistent family devotions.

The husband should take the lead in involving himself and his wife in regular prayer and worship times together in the home. He should discuss meaningful points of the pastor's messages at home with his wife.

A husband and wife can "serve" each other by choosing to be humble rather than defensive about

their respective areas of spiritual weakness. If a husband knows he has a weakness for pushing the alarm clock "snooze" button when he should be getting up early enough for personal devotions, he should candidly ask his wife to help him in this area by a gentle nudge as a reminder. On the other hand, a wife who tends to argue with her children constantly, rather than taking positive disciplinary action, thus creating a needless atmospheric tension in the home (not conducive to spiritual growth), should let her husband "serve" her with a firm reminder not to spare the rod and spoil the child by allowing argument rather than taking gentle, but firm action.

*Marriage is spiritual.* Another important factor in developing "oneness of spirit" in a marriage is for both husband and wife to realize that the whole concept of marriage was spiritually designed by God. Marriage, instituted by God in Eden, has been continued throughout history, and will be continued beyond time into eternity in a spiritual sense when Christ unites with His bride at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

## Intimacy of Soul—Becoming Best Friends

Next to his spiritual drive, the most important relational drive in a man is that of his psyche or soul—involving his conscious mind, will and emotions. This part of a man or woman comprises the bulk of what we call personality. The process of developing intimacy or oneness of soul between marriage partners might better be understood as becoming best friends.

One young man sent his fiancée a card depicting a mushy scene on the cover with the words "I love you" across the scene. Upon opening the card, the inside message read, "and I *like* you too." Intimacy

of soul involves a husband and wife learning to understand and like each other in the areas of how they think about things (mind), how they tend to feel about life and react to it (emotions), and how flexible they tend to be in their tastes, choices and decisions (will).

To become best friends is the challenge of integrating our tendencies in each of these areas with our spouse so that we form a unified "marriage person," where the husband is the "head" of this marriage person and the wife is the "heart" of it. Each as best friends seeks the advice and feelings of the other's ideas at all times.

Many men have muttered to themselves in exasperation at times, "Why can't a woman think logically like a man?" On the other hand, with her keen intuition, many wives have after the fact said to themselves, "I knew it. I sensed it. I tried to tell him so. Why is he so insensitive?" A husband needs to understand that his own thinking tends to view logically the overall, long-range aspect of a situation rather than the immediate, pressing need. A wife tends to worry over the "bird in hand" while relying on her intuitive sense as much as her reasoning powers. When they both can realize this basic difference they can begin to merge and compromise their mental approaches for their best mutual interests. By seeking to understand each other's ideas, opinions and will, they can foster greater harmony in the home and make better, more equitable decisions.

The most marked difference between this "soul" area of men and women is in the area of emotions. Part of this difference is biological. Women generally tend to have higher "peaks" and lower "lows" emotionally over a shorter time period than do men.

It is important for both husbands and wives to understand these basic emotional differences and take them in stride. By doing this, a wife will suffer

less "little hurts" at her husband's supposed insensitivity and the husband will suffer less "alarm" at his wife's sudden mood shifts. In the process of this adventure in understanding one another, an intimacy of soul develops as husband and wife truly become "best friends."

## Physical Intimacy

When a husband and wife have understood the importance of *total* intimacy in their marriage, and they have taken the time to cultivate a growing oneness of spirit as well as an intimacy of soul, they should experience a fulfillment of physical expression void of awkwardness or negative inhibitions. Their sexual union should be a natural expression of and celebration of their total oneness.

Most sexual problems between married couples are only symptoms of deeper problems which reflect a lack of proper intimacy in spirit or soul between the two. The use of modern "sex therapy" concepts as stated in many secular books on physical expression in marriage is merely like trying to cure a respiratory infection with cold capsules. The cold capsule will at best only temporarily relieve the symptoms of the deeper infection, but until the infection itself is cured the symptoms will keep recurring. Thus the two cords of intimacy of spirit and intimacy of soul must be interwoven with the cord of physical intimacy in order to achieve the total fulfillment of marriage.

Four basic attitudes which are prevalent concerning sexual expression include: (1) those who deify sex to a position of supreme importance; (2) those who devaluate sex to a meaningless biological level of glandular function, purporting the whole experience to involve only pleasurable physical senses (a hedonistic view); (3) those who think sex is basi-

cally dirty—a necessary but contemptible evil that is "part of the curse"; and (4) those who accept the biblical perspective that while sex is biological to some extent as well as pleasurable, God designed it in the first place, and the fullness and wholeness of the sexual experience is the *result* of a relationship, not the beginning or the entirety of one.

The powerful force of sexual relationships is not love in itself, but should be an expression and celebration of the total intimacy and love between a husband and wife. Fulfillment never comes from an emphasis on the mechanics of sexual expression, but rather from the attitudes and motivation behind it and from an understanding of its intended meaning.

*To know.* To search out the biblical meaning of physical intimacy in marriage it is helpful to realize that three different verbs are used in the Old Testament to describe sexual union. The least frequent verb form used is "to go in unto" which was used to describe Abraham's union with Hagar merely for the purpose of procreation (Genesis 16:4).

Another verb found in a few instances was "to lie with." Joseph was propositioned by Potiphar's wife with her words, "Lie with me" (Genesis 39:7, 12). After David sent messengers and took Bathsheba, and she came in unto him, it is recorded that "He lay with her" (II Samuel 11:4).

In sharp contrast to the connotation of these two verb usages is the verb usage of "to know" for the physical intimacy between husbands and wives as in the cases of Adam and Elkanah (Genesis 4:1, 25; I Samuel 1:19). The "to know" experience involves much more than the physical act of sexual union. It incorporates a communion on all three of man's relational levels of spirit, soul, and body.

As illustrated by Gordon MacDonald in his book, *Magnificent Marriage,* this "to know" experience

based on a total intimacy between marriage partners could be compared to the fulfillment of mountain climbing. Just as a climber experiences an ecstasy upon reaching the summit, so there is an ecstasy in the moments of sexual union. In both instances, the fulfillment at the summit is heightened by the climb behind it. The difficulty, the strategy, the discipline, the hurting, and the fatigue were all elements of the climb, and the ecstasy at the summit is multiplied by the sacrifices of getting there.

*Sensitive and selfless.* The careful cultivation of a "to know" quality of total intimacy increases the sensitivity of both husband and wife to each other's feelings and needs. This sensitivity should carry over into their expressions of love physically. Having understood the depth of meaning inherent in the "to know" quality of physical intimacy, a wife would never want to desecrate or cheapen its sacredness by attempting to use sexual expression as a bargaining tool for other favors. On the other hand, a sensitive husband will never want to allow himself to devalue such an important means of his expression of love and commitment to merely a hurried, selfish physical act.

Each spouse should understand the other's unique physical makeup. Psychologists generally agree that men are stimulated by sight whereas women are more stimulated by the sense of touch. A wife should understand that a man's physical drives tend to be rather constant as opposed to the cyclical nature of her own physical drive which is closely related to her monthly cycle.

The apostle Paul instructed both husbands and wives in the importance of these areas of sensitivity and selflessness when he wrote to the Corinthians. "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights—goodwill, kindness and what is due her as his wife; and likewise the wife to her husband. For

the wife does not have (exclusive) authority and control over her own body, but the husband (has his rights); likewise also the husband does not have (exclusive) authority and control over his body, but the wife has her rights). Do not refuse and deprive and defraud each other (of your due marital rights), except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, that you may devote yourselves unhindered to prayer. But afterwards resume marital relations, lest Satan tempt you (to sin) through your lack of restraint of sexual desire" (I Corinthians 7:3-5, *The Amplified Bible).*

In His wisdom, God created both male and female and designed marriage as the crowning relationship for total intimacy of spirit, soul, and body between man and wife. God underscored the significance of this relationship by linking it to the mystery of the relationship of Christ and the church. As Christians grow in the threefold cord of intimacy in their marriage relationships, they reflect His love not only to their spouses, but also to all those who observe their marriages.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. It is not good that _____ be alone.
2. Total relational intimacy involves three levels: _____, _____, and _____.
3. Modern society has endeavored to reduce intimacy to only the _____ level.
4. A _____ cord is not easily broken.
5. The closer companions draw to God the closer they become to _____.
6. Each spouse brings _____ into a marriage relationship that must be understood by the other companion.
7. Marriage partners can take a practical step

toward spiritual intimacy by sharing a _____.

8. Acquiring intimacy of soul can perhaps be understood best simply as becoming best _____.

9. _____ union should be a natural expression of and celebration of a married couple's total oneness.

10. _____ never comes from an emphasis on the mechanics of sexual expression, but rather from the attitudes and motivation behind it.

## Apply Your Knowledge

You may wish to sit down together with your spouse and establish some specific goals for improving your level of total intimacy. Together, each partner can specify areas they perceive as problems that can be improved.

It should be remembered that there are three basic areas of intimacy to consider: spirit, soul, and body. Every level should be considered, for each is important to your marriage.

After goals have been set, establish plans for reaching your goals. Ask yourselves, "What can we do to achieve total intimacy in this goal?" Cooperation is the key to success in reaching your unified goals.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Read the Scriptures for the next chapter before studying the chapter itself. These will help prepare you mentally for the study.

Also, log your home activities for one full day before reading the chapter. Make a list of meals, conversations, disagreements, disciplinary actions, solutions discovered to problems, and every other family activity, including devotion. This list will help you fully absorb the potential of chapter five.

# Harmony in the Home




*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

*I Corinthians 7:14*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Amos 3:3
Colossians 3:1-21
Titus 2:5
I Peter 3:1-9

Music is made up of various components. Rhythm, harmony, melody and volume are some of its primary components. These four factors are very important in producing pleasant music. If the rhythm is not right, the music has an uncomfortable feeling. If the volume is too loud, it produces distortion and physical displeasure. If the melody is awkward, the music will not be memorable. But if the harmony is wrong, the music just doesn't work!

One family had two teenage boys who were both

musicians. The oldest would often play a song on the piano and end it with a major seventh chord, which has a minor, dissonant sound. That final chord would hang in the air and reverberate throughout the house. The younger son could hear that chord with all of its haunting, unfulfilled tones, and then he would go to the piano and resolve that disharmonic chord into a positive sounding major chord. He felt that disharmony just could not be left hanging in the air. It had to be resolved.

With the "music" that is produced by family members, there is rhythm, tempo, frantic pace or calm and peaceful pace. There is the melody, or lead line, where the father is leading the family in positive or negative directions. There is volume, where the quiet authority is sensed or loud, unsure orders are loudly barked. And there is harmony or disharmony, the rightness or wrongness of the home's "music."

Proper harmony occurs when two or more tones are played at the same time and at correct intervals on the musical scale. Each note must make its sound and still maintain its position without crowding the other tones or getting too far away.

Harmony in the home must also be made up of two or more people, all playing their "notes" at the same time, and keeping their personal tones in harmony or agreement with each other. It is impossible to sing a solo while participating in harmony with others. A harmonic home is not a solo act, but rather a duet, trio, quartet (or even a choir), where each member carries his share of the load and they play together as a group reaching for the same goal.

## Keeping Harmony in the Home

Our homes are important. When we speak of homes, we are speaking not only about the building of brick and mortar, but about an atmosphere where

family members can form a unit of strength. In this unit, each member gives to and receives from each other. In such unity, there is strength.

In order for harmony to be in the home, everyone must maintain his proper place. One church had a large number of tracts printed with the church's name on them, but they failed to proofread the printing. After some time had lapsed and the tracts had been distributed on several occasions, someone noticed the misprint. Only one small letter was out of place. Instead of "United Pentecostal Church," the tract read "*Untied* Pentecostal Church"! The location of the "I" made the difference.

If all of the "I's" in the church maintain their proper places, there will exist an even, harmonious, unified peace. If the "I's" are out of place, there will definitely be an *untied,* disjointed rabble of confusion. This illustration is even more acutely applicable to a home setting.

While living in a very small apartment, a homemaker noticed that if one small thing was out of place, it looked like everything was cluttered. When she moved to a large two-story home she discovered that the same thing out of place did not have as drastic an effect on the overall appearance of the home. When someone is out of place in the large body of believers called the church, the sheer numbers can often absorb it. When someone is out of place in the home, however, the whole household feels the effect of it. Every member must find his place and keep it in order to maintain a closely knit harmony in the home.

## Guidelines for Harmony in the Home

Colossians 3:18-21 is a prime scriptural presentation of the "place" each family member should maintain. In order to fully appreciate these verses of

Scripture, we should look at the entire chapter and consider the points of advice given.

"Seek those things which are above . . . Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1-2). When members of a family are only seeking earthly advancement, achievements, and possessions, there will be a failure to achieve heavenly goals. The father, as the spiritual head of the home, should set the example by placing his own affections upon heavenly goals for himself and his family.

The family should have common goals, and they should include spiritual objectives. It is imperative that we desire "things from above" if we are to expect spiritual harmony in our homes.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). The verb mortify means "to control (one's physical desires and passions) by self-denial, fasting, etc., as a means of religious discipline." We should practice self-control and self-denial so that we may be able to stay in our place and not allow ourselves to cause disharmony.

By comparing various biblical translations, the expanded definition of the following words take on fuller, more understandable meaning.

- *Mortify*—to deaden
- *Members which are upon the earth*—our lower, earthly nature
- *Fornication*—sexual immorality
- *Uncleanness*—impurity; "dirty-mindedness"; indecency
- *Inordinate affection*—uncontrolled passion; lust
- *Evil concupiscence*—unholy desire; evil desire
- *Covetousness*—greed; lust for other people's goods

These things should be put to death and removed

from our lives that we may keep our place and maintain family unity.

"Put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8). We should put these sins aside because we are Christians and because they will prevent harmony in our Christian homes. Looking again at various translations, we notice the following meanings:

- *Anger; wrath*—anger; passionate outbreaks; rage
- *Malice*—ill will; spite
- *Blasphemy*—evil speaking; insults
- *Filthy communication*—foul-mouthed abuse; filthy talk; rough abusive talk

"Lie not one to another . . ." (Colossians 3:9). This exhortation must be adhered to within the family unit if there is to be harmony. The family unit can withstand any assault providing there is no deception or sly work within the family circle. The "blade of the axe of dishonesty" will destroy the "trunk of the family tree" quicker than anything. When a person has put off the old man and put on the new man, he should be spiritual and "lie not one to another." We are made in the image of God.

"Put on . . . bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:12-13). We have put off certain negative human traits, but the new man must be clothed with spiritual traits that suit God's chosen people.

Again, comparing and combining definitions and translations, we notice these meanings:

- *Mercies*—tenderness of heart; heart of pity; tender affections of compassion; merciful in action
- *Kindness*—graciousness; kindly in heart

- *Humbleness of mind*—self-humiliation; humble in mind
- *Meekness*—gentleness
- *Longsuffering*—forbearance; patient

All of these virtues make harmony in the home an assured quality. When one member of the family thinks there is any ground for complaint, he should bear with the other members' faults, be generous to the others, and forgive as Christ gave the pattern for forgiveness.

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14). Over all of these other "spiritual garments," we are to put on the "robe of love." It is our love for each family member which binds us together in the perfect harmony God desires the family to have. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). Love is not a cover-up or an acceptance of sinful deeds, but it is a compassion to make more tolerant of petty faults and quirks that tend to annoy us. In a family love is needed to bind individuals together into a harmonious team.

*"Charity is a principle of prevailing love to God and good will to men, which effectually inclines one endued with it to glorify God, and to do good to others; to be patient, slow to anger, and ready to put up with wrongs; to show kindness to all, and seek the good of others, though with prejudice to himself. A person endued therewith does not interpret doubtful things to the worst sense, but the best; is sorry for the sins of others, but rejoices when any one does well, and is apt to bear with their failings and infirmities; and lastly, this grace is never lost, but goes with us into another world, and is exercised there. " (Cruden's Unabridged Concordance)*

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15). We are to let

the peace of God act as our umpire, settling all questions or disputes. There will be times that every family will be susceptible to tension and strife, and it can build up within the home. That is when the heavenly peace of God can help settle strained relationships and cool heated tempers.

The peace of God will calm the atmosphere if we will accept God's rulership. He rules not with favoritism, but fairness. His decisions are not for earthly, material gain but rather for eternal, majestic gain. When God functions as the conductor, the family's music will be harmonious. For this we can be thankful!

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

The harmonious family will have established an order of priorities early in their marriage. Which is most important, a church service or a birthday party? Sunday school or a fishing trip? Ladies prayer meeting or shopping? Popularity or godliness? Size of house or atmosphere of home? When a household has conflicting interests, they will naturally have conflicting times of confused anxiety.

God should come first on the priority list of every family. It is only when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness that the other things will come in proper perspective. When it is time for church, the children should never have to ask, "Are we going to church tonight?" It should be an accepted and established routine. We need premeditated priorities. Faithful attendance to church services will help the Word of Christ dwell richly in us. We must do more than just hear the Word, we must be doers of the Word also.

Our homes should be a sacred sanctuary from the world. We cannot control the language that people

use where we work; we cannot prevent the people on the bus from smoking; we cannot keep people from drinking in our neighborhood. But we can keep the sanctity of our home. Our home is what we make it. It can be an extension of a sin-crazed world—just as frantic, rushed, confused, and sin-filled as the world is. Or it can be an extension of God's will and be calm, peaceful, efficient, pure and clean.

Just because certain music exists does not mean we should invite it into the sanctuary of our home. Even good music, played continuously, can be distracting. God intended for music to be purposeful, not just for background.

Silence and quiet should not be feared. There are times that God can speak to us through the quietude. It is almost impossible to break forth into spontaneous praise singing "Amazing Grace" while the radio gives continual competition. A Christian's personal praise to God is worth more than any recorded song, be it religious or worldly in nature. Recorded gospel music is fine, but a person should never let it take the place of his personal praise.

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). Every family activity can be done in Jesus' name. If Christ cannot be included, then that activity should be abandoned in favor of one that is Christ-centered. Jesus Christ is the deciding factor on all issues. We should ask ourselves, "Can we do this in Jesus' name?" or "Can we give thanks to God while we are doing it?"

In a superb book called *In His Steps*, the author, Charles M. Sheldon, presents a challenge to all Christians everywhere. They are challenged first to ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" Then they are to be guided for this next year by their best answer to that question.

If every member of the family would be guided by

this principle, harmony in the home would be a natural outgrowth.

We have considered guidelines for harmony in the home. These guidelines as recorded in Colossians 3 build up to a biblical presentation of the places in which each family member should abide.

In verses 18-21, these places or roles are mentioned in all of their beautiful simplicity. One should not be deceived or confused, however, by their simplicity, for they are not trite, little formulas. Instead, they are powerful, workable solutions to a very present problem. The key to the solutions, though, is to consider them in the light of verses 1-17. The previous verses give depth and understanding of the spirit in which they should be carried out.

## The Place of the Wife

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). Have you ever wondered why the woman's role and place is mentioned first? Perhaps the importance of her role earned its prominence. When observing the second chapter of Genesis, it is noticed that God had a very special pattern of creation in mind. Man was made first, but no one makes harmony while being alone. It takes two or more notes played simultaneously at correct harmonic intervals to create harmony.

Man, since he was made first, was not made for the woman, but the woman was made for the man (I Corinthians 11:8-9). Man is responsible for leading the family, being the priest of the home, and being the "melody line." The wife is the *helpmeet* or, as another meaning renders it, "the harmonizer." The wife is the one who adds the beautiful tones of harmony by blending and submitting to her husband. The wife can either make or break the harmony of a

home. Her importance should never be underestimated.

## The Place of the Husband

"Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Colossians 3: 19). Husbands should rule with love. The first part of this chapter is very important for the attitude of the husband. If he simply rules, with no regard to love, harmony will be almost impossible. Verse 15 instructs us to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. The husband is obligated to pattern his leadership after that of God. He should follow God in all things and love his family as Christ loved His church. It is impossible to rule in bitterness when you are following Christ's pattern.

## The Place of Children

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:20). The only way for children to blend into a home is by obeying their parents. Children are not robots that can be programmed to be a carbon copy of mother and father, but they are impressionable youngsters capable of doing their best. The thing that pleases God is for children to obey their parents.

## The Place of Fathers

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). In this passage of Scripture God inspired two admonitions for the husband and father. A father is a representative of God for his family. His responsibility is immense!

In the companion book, *Why? A Study of Christian Standards,* also published by Word Aflame

Publications, a section is devoted to "A Happy Home." On pages 132-135 there are given four keys to a happy home. They are: discipline, devotion, discussion, and determination. If these keys are used, there will be less chance for division, dissension, and dissolution. (A study of these pages would be beneficial at this time.)

Peter recounted the role of wives and husbands in I Peter 3. He closed the passage of Scripture with these words: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (I Peter 3:8-9).

This is a powerful set of instructions to enable us to have harmonious homes.

If we all will keep our places as God's Word commands us, we will be united into harmonious families.

## Test Your Knowledge

True or False

_____ 1. Homes should have an atmosphere where family members can form a unit of strength.

_____ 2. In order to have harmony in the home, every family member must maintain his proper place.

_____ 3. Members of the family can seek only earthly goals yet achieve heavenly goals, also.

_____ 4. It is not beneficial for a family to have common goals.

_____ 5. Sin will create disharmony in the home.

_____ 6. God's decisions are for eternal gain.

_____ 7. It is not necessary to establish priorities for a family to have harmony in the home.

_____ 8. The wife is the helpmeet or harmonizer

of a home.

_____ 9. When the husband refuses to lead his family with love, harmony will still be present.

_____10. Fathers should not provoke their children to wrath.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Every successful corporation holds staff meetings. In fact, no serious corporation would endeavor to do business without regularly scheduled staff meetings.

Is making a product or service available for financial gain more important than raising a family of self-respecting, obedient and responsible citizens? "Of course not," you might say. Then why do not families hold regular meetings for the purpose of directing the home, establishing goals, and clarifying priorities?

You might consider using a portion of the family devotion once a week for the purpose of discussing goals and objectives, settling family disputes, and organizing all family efforts. Such a meeting could serve to keep sweet harmony in the home. It would give an opportunity for "airing out" hard feelings and communicating needs to each other.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Read the book, *In His Steps* by Charles M. Sheldon. If you have never read this book, it could totally change your disposition and outlook on life.

Also prepare for chapter six by reading the allocated Scriptures at the beginning of the chapter. You will find them listed under "Start with the Scriptures."

# The Blessing of Children




*Lo, children are an heritage of the* LORD*: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*
*Psalm 127:3*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Deuteronomy 6:1-15
I Samuel 1:4-22
Mark 10:14
Ephesians 6:4

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3).

The Lord has given the world a priceless gift—children. Their wonder, their freshness, their adaptability, their malleability, their trust and frankness, their faith and ability to "make-believe" in a world of reality all add up to a gift that is without comparison. It is a gift that grows with the passing of time. It is similar to banking in that the more a person puts into raising his children the more interest

and rewards he will reap. It requires a lot of time, but the dividends are priceless. Children are indeed an heritage of the Lord!

G. K. Chesterton said, "The way to love anything is to realize it might be lost." In the midst of a horrible, hectic, "hair-pulling" morning when everything seems to go wrong, a mother may wonder if children really are a blessing. When peace and quiet are things of the past and the future looks noisier and more dreaded than ever, a father may wish for a chance to read the newspaper in solitude. In the midst of the usual calamities of a household with children, some parents may envy the childless couple, but they should take a moment to count their blessings and realize the psalmist was right when he wrote that children are an heritage of the Lord.

## Why Children?

One of the greatest responsibilities a couple can ever face is to bring a child up in the nurture and admonition of Jesus Christ.

A boy gave a plaque to his dad which stated, "Any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad!" There is so much more to being a parent than just fathering or mothering a child. The biological reproduction of a child is one thing, but the training and rearing of that child are other matters altogether.

A child's life is like an empty book which is written by his parents one page at a time. As the child gets older, he will write upon the pages also, but the parents will have the most frequent entries. As time marches resolutely onward, the parents' entries will be fewer and fewer. For this reason, the pages of a child's life should be written prayerfully, strongly, lovingly, and consistently while he is very young. The introduction of the book should be based on

God's Word and direction.

Parents never know how the books of their children's lives will end. Some have surprise endings while some are more predictable, but all will have an end. Parents can have faith and trust in God. He is the supreme Author and Publisher, and He still rules in the affairs of men.

Let us consider this article from *The Spotlight*, February 8, 1936.

"Years ago there appeared a famous cartoon called 'Hardin County—1849.' A pair of oldtimers, in coonskin caps and homespun clothes are talking. One of them is standing knee-deep in the snow with a gun over his shoulder. The other is mounted on a horse with a bag of provisions behind the saddle. In the background is an old rail fence. Let's listen in:

'Any news down t' the village, Ezry?'

'Well, Squire McLean's gone to Washington t' see Madison swore in, an' ol' Spellman tells me that this Bonaparte fella has captured most all of Spain. What's the news out here, neighbor?'

'Nuthin' a tall, nuthin' a tall, 'cept for a new baby down t' Tom Lincoln's. Nuthin' ever happens out here.'

"The miracle of human life? Who would dream that the little red-faced boy baby, born in a log cabin to Nancy and Tom Lincoln, would one day take the oath of office on the steps of the United States Capitol? Who would dream that the little bawling infant would give voice to one of the greatest speeches of the English language?

"In some mystic way men are raised up to meet the problems of an unfolding universe. That youngster who sits across the table from you at breakfast may some day sit in the governor's chair. His freckle-faced, pug-nosed boy chum may some day discover a cure for cancer. The little fellow toddling down the sidewalk with a sled may write the Great

American Novel. The little girl next door may be the Sarah Bernhardt of tomorrow!

"And every one of them deserves, has the right to, the very best advantages it is in our poor power to give!"

Preparing to have children is a little more involved than merely buying a layette, bassinet, and rocking chair. Much prayer should be offered in preparation for the blessed event. The hearts of both husband and wife should blend in a harmonious heartbeat of agreement.

Parents need to agree as to the purpose of children. Children are not pets that are acquired on a whim to entertain for a while, and when tired of caring for them, to be given away. No, children are eternal, yet they are not eternally children. They possess an eternal spirit, and with that comes eternal responsibility. Some man or woman must care for each child!

*Children perpetuate the family name and memories.* They allow the name, reputation, and memories to continue unbroken and uninterrupted from generation to generation.

Consider the sad story of John and his wife (names changed). They had no children and were in their fifties. When John's only living relative, his mother, passed away, he made this statement: "With my mother's death, my past is gone. Without children my future is gone. I am living in a very lonesome spot." It is indeed a blessing to have children to carry on the family name and memories.

*Children also perpetuate truth and allegiance to God.* God-fearing people who were raised in a godly fashion are a tribute to their parents. When a person can sit in a local congregation and observe several four-generation families of Pentecostals worshiping together, he more fully realizes the blessing of children in keeping the doc-

trines of the Bible pure and intact.

An old Pentecostal pioneer from Louisiana once stated, "When my daughter was a baby, I prayed with her by her bedside. When my grandson was a baby, I prayed with him by his bedside. Now, when I go to his home, I pray with my great-grandchildren beside their bed. I'm hauling a plumbline, so I must keep it tight!" He did not want the truth to slip, so by God's grace he was instilling it into the lives of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They will perpetuate the truth!

## The Blessings of Having Children

The blessings are twofold. There are blessings within the home as well as outside the home. Inside the home is where the blessings of children are first noticed. Children are a delight and brighten a home.

There once was a picture of a mother bird looking at her four little baby birds with their mouths wide open. The mother bird was depicted as saying, "Lord, give me the patience to endure my blessings!" Assuredly, every parent feels the pressure of coping occasionally, but children are indeed true blessings of the Lord.

People outside the home are also recipients of the Lord's blessing as the children age and begin to contribute to an outside world. How great it is to deal with people who are respectful, courteous, honest and upright. So often when this occurs, we realize we are the recipients of some home's blessing.

As recorded in I Samuel, Hannah wanted a man child for two reasons. The first was to provide her husband with an heir; the other was to provide the Lord with a servant or prophet. This twofold reason for children should be on every parent's heart and mind—for our sake and for God's sake.

Children can provide protection and comfort to

aging parents. Parents are blessed to have loving children as they age. Children should never let their parents down; after all, they raised them. Just as the parents wrote in the child's book of life in his early years, so will the child possibly have the opportunity to write in the parents' in their final years. Both should write with prayer, love, and care!

Good communication will create the most memorable times a family will have. Around the table after a meal, family discussions can help direct and establish some priorities and goals. Every child needs to feel and know where the lines of approval and disapproval lie. Frank and open communication is most profitable in conveying the expected standards for behavior.

Communication should not stop when children move away. Letters, telephone calls, and visits should keep the communication continuing.

The majestic redwoods of California are the towering giants of trees. Some of them reach 300 feet into the sky and live for hundreds of years. One would think that such a massive tree would have a deep root system, but in reality the redwood tree has a very shallow root system that spreads out over a great distance to capture the surface moisture. A tree's roots in a redwood grove are intertwined with the other redwood trees' roots. They are locked together to support and sustain one another when the wind blows or a storm strikes. Redwood trees cannot live alone; they must have the other trees for strength.

Families are similar to the redwoods in their need for each member. The more the roots of the family tree intertwine, the stronger the tree is. Communication is a major contributor of strength to the family unit.

Every member of the family has something worthwhile to contribute to the fabric of the family. Dale

Evans wrote a superb book dealing with this aspect, entitled *Angel Unaware*. Parents who read this book are made to realize the blessing of children, for they function as angels unaware.

## The Couple Without Children

There are various reasons for a couple to have no children. The two basic reasons are choice and necessity. Some couples choose not to have children because of careers, past tragedies, lifestyles, or other reasons. Other couples, for biological reasons, cannot have children.

The childless couple, if they desire, can be a blessing to other children. Adoption may be a viable possibility. Others may love to work in Sunday school or church schools where they will have a strong involvement and influence with children.

One famous author of children's books was asked how he could write such successful children's books when he himself had no children. He replied, "I was a child myself, one day." All of us have more in common with a child than we realize.

## Parents' Responsibility

In considering the blessing of children, we should also look at the responsibility of parents. Every privilege or blessing is matched with a responsibility, if we will but recognize it.

Art Linkletter once stated, "More than anything else, I believe, a child must feel needed. A child wants to belong. And the family—presided over by a Mom and Pop who are not pals but parents—is still the best answer to that need. Parenthood is an essential component in the success of what remains the basic unit of society—the family. I say to my lecture audiences across America: 'Chances are, you

will never be president, or win the Pulitzer Prize, or make a million dollars. But there is a high-priority goal you can reach—to be an effective Mother or Dad.' Achieving that goal takes loving, sharing responsibilities, caring, and stroking, under an umbrella of patient, understanding discipline."

Being a good parent is one of the greatest accomplishments to which a person can attain. Will Durant, the famous writer of many fine books on philosophy, once made the statement: "I would rather bring up a fine family than write the one hundred best books."

In Deuteronomy 6:1-15, God listed some statutes and commandments that parents are to teach to their children all the days of their lives. Parents are diligently to teach their children the commandments of God. All Christian parents should take time to read these verses and be aware of the importance of teaching God's words and ways.

Children are hungry to be taught. Parents cannot leave all of the teaching to schoolteachers and Sunday school teachers. The parents must have input; they should have control over the things taught, for God has placed the child under the umbrella of their love and training. Parents cannot afford to waste time in training their children early.

In his book, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*, Dr. Benjamin S. Bloom of the University of Chicago made the statement that by the time the child is four years old he has achieved fifty percent of his general adult intelligence. By the time he is eight years old, he has already reached seventy percent. And further, as much of the child's intelligence development takes place during his first four years as in the next thirteen years. Dr. Bloom also points out that the environment in which a child lives plays an important part in the development of his intelligence.

Of course, we realize that some specialized skills may be acquired and some technical ability may be developed later, but the basic knowledge comes early. The parent should teach honesty, integrity, responsibility and kindness early in life. Joseph Joubert said that children need models more than they need critics.

**Children - and Parents, Too**

**If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.**
**If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.**
**If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.**
**If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.**
**If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.**
**If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.**
**If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.**
**If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.**
**If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.**
**If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.**
**If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world!**

**- Dorothy Law Nolte -**

The best way to teach children how to live for God is for the parents to live for God. The best way to teach unselfishness is to be unselfish. The most effective way to instruct a child on the necessity of Christian service is for the parents to be involved.

In James Stalker's writings, he notes the following: "John Ruskin has observed that there are no children in Greek art, but that they abound in Christian art—an unmistakable token that it was the eye of Christ which first fully appreciated the attractiveness of children." Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" Mark 10:14). He even took them up into His arms and blessed them.

He loved children and set an example for us to follow. Love is taught by loving, and hate by hating.

Japan still has perhaps the strongest traditional family unit of any nation in the world. Their family unit is remaining more intact than even that in North America. In the United States it is customary to bronze a baby's first shoes. In doing this parents are commemorating and celebrating their child's first steps, his beginning of independence away from his parents. In Japan, however, the custom is to keep the discarded navel cord, thus commemorating and celebrating the child's dependence upon the parents. This signifies a difference of attitude which is perhaps worthy of some thought on the part of Americans.

To all children, though, comes a departure from parents, a clipping of the "apron strings." They cannot be dependent on parents forever. Wise parents seek God about when and how to release their children. We never want the vacuum of the world to whisk away our "treasures"—our children—yet at some point we must turn them "loose." Proverbs 22:6 is reassuring to faithful parents: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

In his book, *The Prophet,* Kahlil Gibran wrote:

"And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, speak to us of children.

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
So He loves also the bow that is stable."

Someone stated, "An arrow bent in the making will never shoot straight." Alexander Pope said, "Just as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined."

Over twenty-five years ago a mother planted two oak trees side by side in her back yard. She twisted the two trees together and they have grown that way. Now, almost thirty years later the towering oaks are still twisted around each other.

Around the same time of the tree planting, two sons were born into the family. The two boys are still living for God today. It is a result of some early shaping in their life by parents who realized that children were a blessing. They trained, shaped, molded, and watered, but it is God who has given the increase. Children are an heritage of the Lord!

## Test Your Knowledge

1. _____are a priceless gift God has given to us that is without comparison.
2. Some parents may be tempted to _____ the childless couple.
3. It is a great _____ to raise a

child in the nurture and admonition of Jesus Christ.

4. Parents need to agree as to the _____ of children.

5. Children perpetuate the family _____ and _____ as well as _____ and _____ to God.

6. The blessings of having children are _____ the home as well as _____ the home.

7. _____ can provide protection and comfort to aging parents.

8. _____ is a major contributor of strength to the family unit.

9. Some people _____ not to have children for various reasons.

10. Parents are commanded to _____ their children diligently the _____ of God.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Plan a special outing with your children just to enjoy them and to let them know and feel that they are special to you. Children indeed are a blessing to our lives. What would this world be like without them? Let them feel their worth and value. Feeling loved and appreciated are essential for the proper development of their self-esteem.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Make it a point to read at least three articles about children this week. Perhaps one could be about discipline since that is the topic of chapter seven.

There is something special about children. Even Christ was closely drawn to children. Perhaps they blessed Him even as He blessed them.

Prepare for chapter seven by reading “Start with the Scriptures” in advance.

# Christian Discipline




*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*
*Proverbs 22:6*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Proverbs 4:20-22; 13:24; 23:13-26
Luke 2:51
Ephesians 6:1-4
Colossians 3:20
Hebrews 12:5-11

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5).

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Children belong to God before they belong to us.

He gave them to us; He will one day receive them again! In the meanwhile parents have the joy and the responsibility of training "God's Kids." This awesome responsibility requires that parents give an account to God for the success or failure of their children's lives according to the desires of God who made them. Since children belong to God before they belong to parents and since the parents are held responsible to train them properly, they should train them as God would if He were to train them Himself. God's manual for training children is His Word; Christian parents should know and practice its principles!

## Essential Principles of Discipline

Christian discipline is far more than just physical restraint or physical correction. Discipline is simply "the process of making a disciple." The only word that is an imperative in the great commission of Matthew 28:19 is the word *teach*, which means "make disciples." The great commission teaches Christians, who are themselves becoming disciples, that their greatest responsibility is to *make disciples* or to *discipline* others in the Christian faith.

The foremost harvest field for Christian parents is their own family. Parents are most accountable for their children's souls. God's Word clearly teaches the children's responsibility to parents and to God. It also teaches the parents' responsibility to their children and therefore to God. Should they fail to transmit those responsibilities properly to their children, they will likely fail in their own responsibility as well. Fulfilling the great commission in the lives of their children is the greatest discipleship ministry that parents are called to perform.

The Bible gives directives that parents must teach their children if they are to mature as believers. If

parents fail to discipline their children in these areas, they might wonder later why their children do not serve God.

*Children should learn to obey consistently their parents.* "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).

Some parents may require their children to obey them only when the child wants to. This is permissive discipline, and it can produce weak-willed Christians who will not stand for God when life's trials beset them.

*Children should be taught to honor their parents.* "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2-3).

"Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.

"Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever" (Deuteronomy 4:39-40).

Children will not honor their parents unless they are taught. To *honor* means to "esteem, value, and praise." If parents fail to *require* honor from their children, they cause them to miss out on many physical and spiritual blessings that God has promised them.

*Children should know that their parents are their instructors who teach them the way of life.* "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8). "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and

attend to know understanding" (Proverbs 4:1).

Children are naturally dependent on parents for instruction from their births. If parents fail to give proper teaching to their children, they will go elsewhere for guidance. God holds parents responsible and they must provide proper instruction or they and their children alike will suffer the consequences.

*Parents should teach children to willingly submit to physical discipline when necessary as it is a sign of the parents' love and concern.* "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24). "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7).

"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Some parents may fail to obey God in training their children through proper physical discipline. Parents who use physical discipline in the form of firm spankings that produce genuine tears of remorse are establishing definite boundaries of conduct for their children. Proper conduct is reinforced and the parents' concern demonstrated when spanking is administered in the proper attitude, in the proper place and at the proper time. Children left unattended by such discipline will bring shame to their parents as they grow up. One teacher stated, "Show me a willful, rebellious, disobedient child of five and in ten years I will show you a willful, rebellious teenager. The time to bring teenagers into control is before they are school age."

Jesus was the perfect man; therefore, He must have been the perfect child. If we knew very much about His childhood, we could determine the necessary steps to train our children after a similar fash-

ion. Very little information is given of His early life. We do know, however, that at the age of twelve Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents and that He was subject unto them. Our children should also learn to be under our control and authority. Children who are out of control as teenagers simply were not trained to be obedient to their parents as young children.

## Areas of Disciplined Growth

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Jesus, as the son of Mary and (adopted son) of Joseph, became the ultimate example and pattern for disciplined growth. He grew in each of the four categories of basic development: knowledge, physical needs, spiritual understanding, and social relationships. A child must be properly guided and disciplined to mature properly in these four areas. This verse of Scripture declares that Jesus increased; that is, He grew and matured in these human areas of need.

*Christian parents should likewise oversee their children's growth in wisdom.* They should actively monitor the schooling of their children and encourage their children to develop the mental faculties with which God has endowed them. Inasmuch as the early years of instruction that children receive bear the most influence on the development of their virtues, values, and character, Christian parents ought to carefully evaluate their children's education. There should be a wholesome balance between their secular instruction and their spiritual education at church and home. Parents contribute a far more vital role in the overall education of their children than formerly realized. It is vital that children formulate proper Christian concepts at an early age, and the development of these

are the parents' responsibilities.

*Parents should oversee their children's physical growth (growth in stature).* Jesus Christ had to grow up physically for the ministry He was to perform. One cannot imagine Jesus growing up on a constant diet of candy bars, "junk food," or improper sleep and exercise, yet some parents do not teach their children proper diet or personal habits. The bodies of Spirit-filled children are temples of God's Spirit, and God is concerned that they are properly cared for. God will judge parents that fail to teach their children to take proper care of themselves and to refrain from physical indulgences and abuses that defile the body. (See I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:18-20.)

*Jesus grew in favor with God.* We do not normally think of Jesus having to go to the synagogue to pray and learn Scriptures as a child, but the Bible states that Jesus increased in favor with God. This clearly implies spiritual growth.

Christian parents are responsible for the spiritual training of their children. This responsibility should not be left to the church, but parents should have God's Word hidden in their hearts and diligently teach it to their children in the morning, at noon, and at night. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-7.)

Since parents are responsible for their children's spiritual welfare, they should daily monitor their children's spiritual growth carefully. This should underscore the tremendous need for daily, family devotions in the home. Loving, caring Christian parents will surely desire to do all they can to provide a Christian education for their children so that they may find God's favor. The famous words of Matthew 3:17 "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," could only have been said because Jesus had "grown" in favor with God.

It is unthinkable that Jesus Christ would not have

attained His earthly ministry, yet His will was assuredly involved. (See Matthew 26:39; John 5:30; and Hebrews 10:7, 9.) Likewise, parents have a tremendous responsibility to train the will of their children to submit to the will of God. They should first teach them to submit to the parents' will and then submit to God's will. If children do not learn to submit to their earthly fathers, it is not likely that they will submit to and therefore gain favor with their heavenly Father.

*Jesus increased in favor with man.* Jesus Christ had to adapt to the society in which He lived. Certain manners of speech and custom may help us to be accepted in one culture and yet be despised in another. Jesus learned to get along in His culture and with His fellowman. If He were living in the twentieth century, His manner of speech (not just His language) and His customs would be somewhat different. This is not to imply that He would compromise truth. Truth is unchangeable in any culture.

Children should learn to hold to God's value system, regardless of the culture they are a part of. At the same time, however, children can learn to be congenial, courteous, and kind regardless of theological or practical distinctives. People love those qualities. Christ gained favor with Nicodemus, with the woman at the well, and with the woman caught in adultery because He exhibited those qualities of graciousness while relating truth to their social and spiritual needs.

## How Do We Train Them?

Every house is built from plans; every government is organized with laws. Successful discipline in the Christian family is dependent on a leadership plan that establishes guidelines for proper conduct. Children need to know specifically what they can

and cannot do, how far they can go in any area and what is expected of them by their parents and by God. Since God appointed the husband to be the head of the house, he should assume the role of leader and devise a leadership plan for the family. In a single-parent family where the husband is absent, the mother will have to assume that role. (See chapter twelve.)

The plan may be written out or it may be spoken, but in any case, a family plan should be devised, adhered to consistently, and taught in word and in action. Some of the elements of a workable family plan for leadership follow.

## Basic Policies That Govern Home Life

*The rules of conduct.* Basic rules relating to the kind of friends that children are permitted to have and forms of allowable entertainment as well as acceptable and unacceptable language should be clearly specified. Children should know exactly what is expected of them in all areas of conduct or they may determine guidelines for themselves with wrong consequences.

*The spirit of the home.* It is not an accident that one family exhibits a peaceful atmosphere while another family exhibits conflict and confusion. The leadership in the home is responsible to establish the level of peace that will exist. Such things as the toleration of noise, arguing, proper courtesy and respect for parents, the kind of music allowed in the home will all determine the spirit of the home, and such conditions should be carefully monitored for a home to display the proper spirit.

*Physical discipline for the children.* It is essential that parents agree on the limits of toleration for unruly conduct. They should agree also on consistent methods of discipline to be administered. When

these policies are made clear to the children and then carried out consistently, children will quickly learn their responsibilities to the family.

The home will be divisive when parents disagree on physical discipline. It is vitally important that parents mutually support each other when physical discipline is administered, even if one parent is not in full agreement with the one administering discipline. The basic rule here and at other times is: "Never argue in front of your children and never take sides with a child against your partner."

Lasting harm is done when one parent puts down another parent. Parents will not always have time to discuss discipline before it is effected, but they should always agree to support each other for the sake of the child's feeling of respect and his security in the family.

Physical discipline policies should always be established clearly in advance. Discipline can and should always be administered in love, never in anger. Discipline should always be concluded with prayer (we need God's help for the proper results).

## Major Issues That Determine Lifestyle

*The economic issue.* Such factors as the family income, basic costs of living, and concern for Christian moderation ought to be appraised to determine the family standard of living. To live beyond one's means will not only cause undue pressure on the wage earner to produce income, but will rob the family of spiritual blessings gained through living within the means of God's provision. The house we live in, the car we drive, the food we eat, and the clothes we wear will all be affected by our standard of living. We need God's help to realistically address this issue.

*The social issue.* Not only should parents determine for children the kind of friendships that are

acceptable and unacceptable, but family friendships must be decided upon and standards of social conduct must be determined. The kind of acceptable social activities as well as places that are acceptable (or not acceptable) must be established. The bottom line is that Christian conduct is always in order and non-Christian conduct or questionable conduct according to Christian standards is not in order.

*The spiritual issue.* The Christian family is only a godly family when the spiritual activity of that family is compatible with God's Word. Such things as the value of faith, prayer, tithing, offering and church attendance should be understood by all members of the family and should certainly be agreed upon by the Christian parents. Where both parents are not Christians, a working relationship must be established with regard to each person's position as it relates to God. The children, however, should be brought under the influence of godly teaching as much as possible, and Christian parents should be as faithful to godly influence as the situation allows.

## What Are the Results?

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (I Timothy 6:6). This is a beautiful scriptural axiom when applied to the Christian family. Christian parents will achieve the greatest success in their families when they strive to place God at the center of all their activities and they are content with the things God has provided for their welfare. When we do this, we will see positive results.

*Children will be blessed.* Children who are taught to come under authority at home are promised God's protection and His special provision for their physical well-being.

*Parents will be made glad.* The greatest reward

for parents in this life is to see their children grow up to fear God, to love their parents, and to be respected citizens in the community.

*Righteousness and salvation will follow.* The world, with its permissive approach to child rearing, would have us believe that we are hindering our children and limiting their creative minds when we exercise godly controls. One look at the results of the world's lack of discipline, however, is enough to convince us that lack of control results in chaos and rebellion for our children.

The home is the training ground for the church and therefore for heaven. While properly training our children to relate to their father and mother, we are also training them as God's children to relate properly to God, who is their Father, and to the church, who is their "mother." May every Christian parent one day hear Him say, "Well done!"

## Test Your Knowledge

1. Parents have the _____ and _____ of training their children.
2. God's _____ for training children is His Word.
3. The foremost harvest field for Christian parents is their own _____.
4. Children should learn to consistently _____ their parents.
5. To _____ means to esteem, value and praise.
6. Administering proper physical discipline when necessary is a sign of the parents' _____ and _____.
7. Physical discipline establishes definite _____ of conduct for children.
8. Jesus grew and developed in each of _____ categories of basic development.

9. Parents should mutually support each other when physical _____ is administered.

10. When God is placed at the center of all family activities, we will see _____ results.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Have definite boundaries of conduct been established for your children? It is essential that they understand what is expected of them if they are to abide by those expectations.

When problems arise, you will be better capable of dealing with them if you are certain that sufficient communication was maintained. For this reason much effort should be expended to maintain a healthy level of communication in the home. Discuss rules openly and candidly with your children. Provide principles and reasons for your expectations. Children cannot be expected to accept "Because I said so!" for a reason. Though parents may have the authority to answer in such a fashion, it is to both the parents' and children's good that a reason is properly communicated.

## Expand Your Knowledge

If possible, acquire and read *What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Money* by Larry Burkett. This book is an excellent source pertaining to the subject of chapter eight, "Financial Stewardship." It is tragic that many modern families do not understand how to control their finances properly and sometimes end up in extreme financial distress.

Read also all the verses of Scripture pertaining to the chapter as found on the following page.

# Financial Stewardship




*Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.*
*Proverbs 3:9*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Proverbs 24:30-34
Matthew 6:33
Luke 6:38; 15:12-21; 16:1-3; 24:28-30
II Corinthians 9:7-8
I Timothy 5:8; 6:6-11

Joe Louis, former heavyweight boxing champion, once said, "I don't like money, but it does calm my nerves." Many people have the idea that money equals security, happiness, and peace of mind.

All too often, however, instead of calming a person's nerves, money is the source of frustrations. Money matters are usually the major source of conflict in marriage and family life. A national association of family counselors estimated that ninety percent of divorces are related to finances. One minister of a

liberal church group suggested rewriting the typical marriage vows to say, "Until debt do us part."

God did not intend for our homes to be torn apart by financial stress. His plan for abundant living is that we prosper in a godly way that brings Him glory and gives us real security and lasting peace with ourselves and the members of our family. When we learn how to order our lives according to God's will, we can enjoy with our families a life that is richer and more fulfilling than we ever thought possible.

It is wrong to think that God wants to make us instantly wealthy at the expense of others and without any effort on our part. Mature Christians should never fall for religious schemes that try to manipulate God's promises into a "give and get rich" deal. But neither should they equate poverty with spirituality. They know that a person can go to hell from a shack as easily as he can from a castle. They do not feel that money, success, and prosperity are bad in themselves. They have a proper understanding of what is meant by God's kind of success. The apostle John wrote about it in his third epistle: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (III John 2).

## God and Money

Before his death, U.S. President John F. Kennedy remarked, "We Americans are in danger of becoming prisoners of our own price tags. We have learned the cost of everything and the value of nothing." Jesus Christ was even more concerned than Kennedy about how people acquired and spent money. In the four Gospels, one verse out of every eight is about the proper use of material possessions. Sixteen of the Lord's thirty-eight parables relate to that theme.

Christ's main concern was that making money did not rob us of the true riches of life. He warned that we can pay too high a price for financial security and lose our own soul and harm the souls of others in the process. He sought the unselfish commitment that causes a person to dedicate himself and all he has to God's control.

A wise man gave good advice to his son: "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10).

The word *honor* means to "allow to have the proper weight; to let have the proper influence." We honor God when we acknowledge that He is the source and owner of all we have. Christians generally agree that ten percent of their income belongs to God and ninety percent is theirs. Actually, one hundred percent of our income is God's, and He desires that after giving tithe and offerings that we manage the balance wisely for our families' best interests.

## Giving

There are two basic kinds of people—winners and losers, givers and takers. Takers are losers; givers are winners. Generous people are usually happy people, but stingy people are typically miserable.

The same principle can be extended into family life. Families that set aside a portion of their regular income for causes that benefit others discover the supreme joy of giving. It is the joy of obeying God's law in their finances.

In the Old Testament, God was pleased when His people set aside a tenth of all their increase for His work. Some people may attempt to excuse themselves from tithing today by saying that it was only done under the law. They fail to realize that Abraham

and Jacob tithed hundreds of years before the law.

The tithe is the Lord's. It belongs to Him. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal this truth. (See Malachi 3:10; Hebrews 7:8.)

Christians today should gladly give more than a tenth. In addition to supporting their local church through tithes and offerings, they have the opportunity to give to many worldwide ministries through various church-sponsored programs.

Apostle Paul expressed clearly his firm belief in giving in his letter to the Corinthian church: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Corinthians 16:1-2).

Paul called on everyone who gathered on Sunday to be ready with an offering. Although the father's name may be the only one on the paycheck, the children should have a part in giving. The parents should set an example with a worthy offering and place an offering in each child's care.

John D. Rockefeller explained how he always tithed, no matter how large or small the amount: "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was $1.50 a week."

## Spending

Chuck Yeager was a twenty-four-year-old captain in the United States Air Force in 1947 when he made history as the first person to fly an airplane at Mach I, the speed of sound. Breaking the sound barrier gave him notoriety, but not wealth. Today, as a retired colonel, Yeager lives on a fixed income. In a recent interview with *Modern Maturity* magazine,

Yeager explained how he managed to live on a limited income without anxiety. He answered, "I have learned to adjust my lifestyle to fit my income instead of killing myself trying to raise my income to fit my lifestyle."

Christians should exhibit the same attitude since their goals and purposes in living are anchored in the Lord—not in their standard of living. Their security comes from taking seriously the wise counsel of their heavenly Father.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

For harmony to prevail in our homes, we must be wise in how we spend the money God allows us to keep. Many excellent books are available on the subject of money management. Two of the best are *How to Succeed with Your Money* by George M. Bowman and *Your Money Matters* by Malcolm McGregor.

In both books, the authors talk about a budget system called the 10-70-20 plan. The 10-70-20 plan is this: After tithe, contributions, and standard taxes, save ten percent of the balance, live on seventy percent, and use twenty percent to pay debts.

Saving makes good sense and brings us a peace of mind. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics discovered that the average family spends $400 more each year than it earns. Those who follow such a pattern of spending will always live from paycheck to paycheck. They will never have the joy of financial security.

The reply of many who talk about saving money is, "But I don't earn enough to save any." Careful research proves that is not true. Millions all over the world could live on less than half what the average North American spends. Most immigrants to North

America save great amounts of money. One reason is that they do not allow themselves to get caught up with the luxuries we often call necessities.

In our society the word *savings* has almost come to mean "spending." Ads announce, "Save twenty-five percent" or "Save $10." People are fooled into thinking they are saving when in fact they are spending. The only cure is to realize it is more important to save money than it is to purchase things. No one ever saves money by spending it.

Next on the 10-70-20 plan is the money we live on. This requires that we never allow our total living costs to exceed seventy percent of our net income.

One dad agreed to give his son an allowance on the condition that the boy keep account of how he spent it. After the first month, the dad looked over his son's records. Various amounts were listed under headings such as "clothes," "food," etc. The largest column was marked "T.L.O.K." The boy explained it by saying, "I forgot how I spent lots of my money, so I put everything I could not remember under T.L.O.K. That stands for 'The Lord only knows.'"

We never realize how much money we lose unless we keep accurate records. It is estimated that a family without a budget wastes from $50-$175 a month on purchases that are not planned ahead of time.

## The Family Budget

A successful budget demands planning. Following planning, it takes determination to live within the planned budget. Each member of the family must cooperate in order to have total success. Whether a family is large or small, each person should participate in discussing the responsibility of the family income.

*The first step in a budget is to determine goals.*

This may include planning a college education for the children, owning a home, or a comfortable retirement.

In addition to these long-range goals, shorter range goals may include the down payment for a house, purchase of a new car, braces for a child's teeth, or an increase in contributions to the church.

Goals for the next year may be set. Buying a new washing machine or starting music lessons for the children might be considered. Every goal should be written down in a notebook for reference as the budget is planned.

*Next, an estimate of the family income and expenses for the next twelve months should be made.* Looking at check records for the previous year will indicate the past spending pattern.

A budget should add to our happiness, not take away from it. Unless we enjoy what we are doing we are not likely to stay with it. For each member of the family to cooperate with a budget, they will need an amount of money they can spend without question, even if it is only a few dollars.

It is a good idea to read some publications on money management. Experts say Sylvia Porter's *Money Book* can save a person $10,000 over a five-year period. Monthly publications that are available include *Money Magazine, Changing Times,* and *Consumer Reports.*

## The Credit Trap

Credit cards are convenient, but they are also dangerous. They feed our temptation to buy things we do not need and have not yet earned.

We do not think in terms of spending money when we use a credit card. Since all we have to do is sign our name to a slip of paper at the time of purchase, it is too easy to continue buying beyond our logical

means of payment. When this happens, a person's debt gets bigger and bigger and exorbitant interest rates are accrued.

We probably could do without most of the items we buy on credit. A good question to ask ourselves is, "If I were not carrying my credit card and had to either pay cash or write a check, would I buy this?" Careful purchase planning can contribute significantly to one's financial success.

Our decisions will be wiser if we refuse to let our emotions control our behavior. Resisting the attraction toward empty material goals is an important part of controlling our emotional behavior. A good rule that can save a person much money is to wait awhile between seeing something he wants and the time he buys it. When a salesperson finishes making his sales pitch, tell him, "Thank you. We will let you know what we decide." This allows you to make a decision away from the pressure of a salesperson and your own compulsiveness.

Interest is expensive. The average time span of a new car loan in the 1980s was forty-four months. Including interest, buyers will pay nearly twice the value of their cars. When we purchase something like that, we should ask ourselves, "Is the product really worth the total purchase price?"

## Suggestions to Aid the Budget

Buying food is a significant expense for the modern family. The following three basic rules will help a family get the most value for their dollar:

- Never go to the grocery store hungry.
- Shop only once a week.
- Follow a shopping list.

Many women say that planning their meals for a couple of weeks at a time dictates their complete shopping list. This enables them to go through the

store without picking up “goodies” they do not need and did not intend to buy.

Another tip is to shop alone. If someone is with the person shopping, it will probably influence him or her to buy more than was intended. Children can influence the purchases made by their parents. Husbands also can be notorious for adding little extras to the shopping cart.

When shopping, check the lower shelves. Sometimes the same items can be bought at a cheaper price without sacrificing quality. Buying “house” brands rather than name brands can save a person up to fifteen percent.

This does not mean a person should buy what is cheap without regard to nutrition. We should certainly be interested in our health as well as being frugal. It is wise, however, to avoid junk foods and processed foods. The more a food item is processed, the more it costs and the less food value it has.

Comparison shopping can help a family maintain its budget. Different stores offer various specials. Independent supermarkets are sometimes lower in their prices than the large chain markets.

When a shopper does find a real bargain, it may be a good idea to buy large quantities and stock the freezer. There is a tremendous savings in buying fruits and vegetables at peak season prices and freezing them.

When it comes to buying life insurance, the wisest choice is usually term insurance. Some insurance agents will try to sell whole life, known also as ordinary life or straight life. They explain that it is like a savings account because it has cash value. The cash value of such a policy, however, cannot compare with what we could save with an account at a bank or savings and loan institution. Experts agree that we pay more for insurance when we buy whole life. For a much lower monthly premium and adequate

coverage, term insurance offers the necessary coverage. The key is to save or invest the difference between the premium of the ordinary life policy and the term insurance policy.

## Getting Out of Debt

The third section of a budget is designed to help us get out of debt. First, we must make a list of all our creditors and calculate exactly how much is owed each one. After totaling the amount owed, figure the percentage of debt owed each creditor in relation to the twenty percent of income available for debt reconciliation. These percentages will reveal how much to allot each creditor.

For example, if your total debt is $5,000 and you owe the bank $1,000, that is twenty percent of the total. If you have $1,000 a month net after your obligation to God, that means you would set aside $200 for debt retirement. Of that, designate $40 for payment to the bank.

## Investment

It is suggested that a family should have at least half a year's salary saved for use in case of an emergency, such as the loss of employment. The longer a person lives, the more he realizes that life brings unexpected circumstances. We cannot control our future, but we can prepare for it with wisdom and foresight.

A wise Christian will invest his savings so that the money God gives to him will outlive him and continue blessing others. One of the best ways to know how to invest is to talk with other Christians who have demonstrated godly wisdom in this area. We should seek to build positive relationships with those who have attained worthy goals in life. We

become like the people we are around. They can help us with their sound advice and example.

Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA's) are good investments for retirement. Many factories offer savings and retirement plans to employees. Stocks and bonds can also be used to make our money work for us.

Every Christian should exercise the foresight of establishing a will. Such foresight is an important aspect of a Christian's financial stewardship. A person who dies without a will seems to be saying, "I do not really care enough about my loved ones and the Lord's work to see that my assets are used responsibly after my death."

Because we are blessed of God, we should decide to live in the way He desires us to, which includes exercising financial responsibility. He will help us, but many decisions of life are left to us.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. Many people have the idea that _____ equals security, happiness, and peace of mind.
2. God did not intend for our homes to be torn apart by _____ stress.
3. Christ's main concern regarding possessions was that making money did not rob us of the true _____ of life.
4. Families that set aside a portion of their regular income for causes that benefit _____ discover the supreme joy of _____.
5. The _____ is the Lord's.
6. Statistics show that the average family spends _____ more each year than it earns.
7. Unfortunately, in our society the word *savings* has come to mean _____.
8. A_____ should add to a family's happiness, not take away from it.

9. Credit cards are _____ but also _____.

10. Every Christian should exercise the foresight of establishing a _____.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Why not spend a few minutes together with your spouse either evaluating your family budget or planning one if you do not have a budget? A well-planned budget is an asset to any home. Proper planning can prepare a family for most any unexpected expense. On the other hand, a family without a budget lives from paycheck to paycheck and is seldom prepared for unexpected expenses.

If you have a budget, scrutinize it closely and determine if there are areas with too much slack or areas which are too tight. Budgets must be periodically adjusted to the specific needs of a family if optimum results are to be expected.

If you have no present budget, it would be wise to carefully plan one together with your spouse. Although it will require getting used to, a budget can save your family hundreds of dollars a year and prepare you for sudden, necessary expenses.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Read the verses of Scripture found under "Start with the Scriptures" for chapter nine. Reading these during a few moments of solitude and meditation will prepare you mentally for chapter nine.

Also spend some time in prayer asking God to make your home the complete center of worship that it should be.

# The Home—A Center of Worship




*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

*Deuteronomy 6:7*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Genesis 18:19
Psalm 119:11, 130
Proverbs 22:6; 15:1, 4, 7; 12:18, 25
John 4:20-24; 15:3
I Peter 4:10
I John 3:18

What do you see when you hear the words, "a center of worship"? Is it blue wisps of smoke rising from the altar of incense in the Tabernacle? Or is it hundreds of Christians on Sunday evening lifting their hands, hearts, and voices in jubilant praise?

Once a Samaritan woman asked Jesus where He thought men ought to worship. Jesus answered her, "God is a Spirit . . . and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (reality)" (John 4:24, *The Amplified Bible*). True worship is a

lifestyle where we align our attitudes, what we think, what we say, and what we do with the Word of God. Since we spend more time at home than any other place, our homes should be the center of our worship.

The foundation of our worship center will be the sure Word of God. Deeds of love will make a strong framework to be built on the foundation. We will create a joyful atmosphere of praise in our center of worship. Finally, we will furnish it with the restful attitudes of acceptance and forgiveness. Our goal of making our homes centers of true worship will only be attained as we build, rebuild and repair with faith in the Master Builder of homes enhanced by God's Spirit.

## The Word—A Sure Foundation

"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:33). We can build our homes on no better foundation than God's Word. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). This mandate to fill our children with the Word of God should evidently consume *much* of our time at home, not merely scheduled devotions.

One mother was rocking her two-year-old and reading fairy tales to him. Quite unexpectedly, the Spirit of God spoke quietly to her heart, "Why don't you make this limited time count by telling him about Me?" Our time with our little ones is short, but we can make it really count by giving them true heroes from the Word of God. Stories read or told on their level of comprehension are usually our first building tools.

Scripture memorization was David's stronghold against the enemy: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). Parents should select verses to meet needs on the child's level. They should make memorization an adventure with the whole family joining in the fun. For small children, charts, stickers, goals and rewards are great tools. The verse of the week could be learned on Saturday and practiced after breakfast each morning. The verse and the date memorized could be written on an index card. Parents should praise the child for his ever-growing Scripture box. Games played at devotions with the memorized verses keep their interest high. Let each family member give his interpretation of the verses. No time spent at home will be of greater value than putting the Word in their hearts. Bible quizzing programs teach young people responsibility, discipline, the ability to lose and win gracefully while they spend much time memorizing the only *eternal* words they will ever learn.

Although we hear the Word of God regularly at church, home is where the Bible is lived daily. Children can be given the invaluable experience of proving the Word.

We need to show our families that God's Word is the standard of conduct for all the family. A father whose hand is on the pulsebeat of his family can plan a devotion around a much needed area of improvement. Suppose that the topic is responsibility. After a Bible story that relates, he could let each family member choose two areas of life he needs to improve upon, letting Dad and Mom go first. Charts of needed improvement could be hung on bedroom doors as reminders.

The next devotion could be check-up time. Sibling fussing can be examined in the light of letting the law of kindness be in our mouths. The possibilities

are endless since God's Word has a relevant answer for the totality of our lives.

Home is where we learn by example and practice to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. The Lord commanded Joshua to have twelve men take twelve stones from the Jordan riverbed. The reason given was so the children would have occasion in the future to ask, "What do these stones mean?"

One particular couple collects figurines of potters to remind themselves of a particular time of molding in their spiritual lives. Someday their son will ask what the figurines mean. An opportunity to give valuable teaching to their son will be the result. Visible symbols in our homes, such as the figurines, can be constant reminders to us and our little ones of the blessings and promises of God.

A home library can be built little by little until we have many books with inspirational writings, devotions, Christian biographies and study helps for the family's continual reference. Our children will judge what we deem most important by what we read. One pastor's daughter said, "I heard all my life that we should pray and read our Bibles, but everyone was usually too busy at home to really do it." We should remember that children would rather see a sermon than hear one. The best example children can see of how to build a marriage is to see their parents have Bible studies and prayer together apart from family devotions.

The importance of and appreciation for the preaching of the Word is nurtured at home. One dinnertime a week could be designated as a family discussion of the pastor's sermon. What was said? How does it apply to our lives?

The Word of God is full of examples of godly parents who built a strong foundation of God's Word for their homes. Elkanah and Hannah built so well that at a young age Samuel could leave home and serve God all his life. Moses' parents were not afraid

of the king's commandment. (See Hebrews 11:23.) Is it any wonder Hebrews 11:27 says that Moses "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king"? The faith in Eunice's and Lois' hearts was carefully planted and nurtured in Timothy's heart. Joshua boldly declared that he and his household would serve the Lord. The Lord gave a great commendation for Abraham that revealed his faithfulness: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Genesis 18:19).

We need to remember that to little ears and minds, Bible terminology is often beyond their understanding.

During an intense time of seeking the Lord for guidance concerning a pressing decision, a Christian mother often played the piano and sang Jeremiah 29:13: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." One such night at dinner, her four-year-old son prayed with such earnestness, "And, Lord, when You are lost, please help us to find You." Although we may have to translate the Lord's precious promises to little ones, the main thing is to continue to build our homes on the sure foundation of God's Word, using any available tools we can find.

## Deeds of Love—Our Home's Framework

Now that the foundation is dug and poured, it is time to begin "framing" our center of worship. We are admonished to "not love (merely) in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth—in practice and in sincerity" (I John 3:18, *The Amplified Bible*). Jesus taught that the role of a servant is the best choice of all. A family who uses its time and energy to serve others in deeds of love is probably a fulfilled, happy family.

Dull, routine chores can be turned into blessed opportunities to serve by a change of attitude. One mother stated that she prays for each child as she irons or folds their clothes. We should be careful not to let orderliness and cleanliness make our home a prison for our family. Family relationships should always take priority over acquiring and preserving material possessions.

By opening our homes to our neighbors, we have a marvelous opportunity to let the "saltiness" of our lives make them thirsty for the Lord. We should entertain not only our friends, but those who cannot return the favor such as widows, the elderly, servicemen, college students away from home, and the fatherless. Jesus said we have blessed Him if we bless the "least of these." (See Matthew 25:40.)

Beware of an "our four and no more" philosophy of life. Selfless deeds of love are a vital part of making our homes centers of worship.

## Praise—A Joyful Atmosphere

Every beautiful home has its own unique atmosphere created by the people who live there. Let us check up on the words spoken in our homes. If we placed a whole week of our family's words through a sieve of Philippians 4:8, how many words would be left? There is such power in what we say! (See Proverbs 15:1, 4, 7; 12:18, 25.) "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Words of praise create a joyful, restful atmosphere; murmuring and arguing create a heavy, depressive atmosphere. We know from Israel's history how the Lord hates murmuring. Asaph said that when he complained, it caused his spirit to be overwhelmed (Psalm 77:3). Our words affect our emotions.

Christians know they should praise God, but sometimes they fail to focus on particulars. A praise

list will help a Christian encompass the realm of praise. There is something so enlightening about seeing our thoughts written on paper. Negativism is the voice of unbelief; praise is the voice of faith.

*First on the list is God.* Praise Him:

- For what He is (His character)
- For blessings (past, present, and future)
- For His promises

A good praise session, telling the Lord aloud of His greatness and goodness, will bring joy to both our hearts and His. It is wonderful to refer to the praise list on days when the clouds hang low and we feel "down." The psalmist referred to offering the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving. (See Psalm 116:17.) Many times we offer praise when we are void of emotion. Faith is not affected by how we feel, but it has its foundation in what God promised to do in His Word. Our homes should be filled with praise on dark days as well as on days filled with victory.

*Second on the praise list is to praise yourself.* That is not a misprint. Jesus said that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Before we can love others, we must love ourselves. We can thank God for our place in the body of Christ. (See I Corinthians 12:18.) When we remember where we were as Christians last year, we can thank the Lord for the progress we and He have made together. Before we can build healthy self-esteem in our children, we must have self-esteem.

*Third on the praise list is to praise others.* Since we are discussing the family, there is no better place to start. How is it that we sometimes tend to be less merciful to those we love most? "Don't flatter yourself that friendship authorizes you to say disagreeable things to your intimates. The nearer you come into relationship with a person, the more necessary do tact and courtesy become" (Holmes).

Psychologists state that labels we put on our children, such as “sloppy” or “clumsy,” usually stay with them for life. Since we are to teach children, it is easy to fall into a pattern of perpetually pointing out only their failures. Parents ought to catch their children doing something right, then compliment them.

On his list, a person could begin with his spouse and then his children. He could write down what he likes about their character and about their behavior. Then comes the fun part! He can use his imagination to think of ways to tell his family the things he recorded on his praise list about them. It could be a family project: “Next family devotion, we’re all going to tell something we really like about each family member.” When members compliment each other as freely at home as they do their friends at church, the family will grow closer together. We need to check and see if we have “church manners” and “home manners.” They really should not differ.

Our “praise others” list should extend to people we speak of in our homes. The old adage, “If you’ve nothing good to say, say nothing,” is a good family rule. One preacher had to refuse a mother’s desperate cry for help for her teenage daughter. He knew the girl had no respect for him because for years the parents had been critical of him in their home.

We need to consciously seek to build others up in our children’s eyes. They will follow our example. A regular practice of praising others will repel spirits of comparison, criticism, jealousy, envy and covetousness that would seek to tear down our homes.

Prayer in our homes should be as natural and as habitual as eating. If we take all decisions and all problems to the Lord, our children will view prayer as a lifestyle, rather than as a Christian duty.

Example is so needful, but we need to actively in-

clude our children in prayer, praise and fasting so that they too will have memorials in their walks with God. We should teach older children to keep a personal communion notebook, which can be a diary of their own relationship with God. They may record key verses, prayer requests and dated answers, promises that the Lord has given, and experiences where they grew in learning about God and His ways.

## Family Devotions

There are many excellent books on developing a family devotion time. Family devotions should become a top priority, or the cares of life will move it farther down on the "to do" list. Consistency is even more vital than frequency. Parents should not set their goals too high at first. One night a week is a good beginning. Planning is essential so that the family has something to look forward to each week.

Topics covered during family devotions should meet family needs. We should be flexible so that if in the middle of a series on Moses' life our family needs a devotion on forgiveness, then we can have it. The material covered should be on the children's level of understanding.

It is best that family devotions are not so long that "squirmy" little ones dread them. They should not be preachy. One girl recalled devotions as "Dad's hour-long sermon." Parents should be creative in approach, using skits, Bible games, panel discussions, buzz groups, sermonettes, or puppets. Interaction is always an important characteristic of an effective family devotion. Through interaction parents may find out what their children think, how they feel about topics, and their level of comprehension. The family can sing together, testify, take prayer requests. It is family devotion time, and all

heaven watches because home is where most children make up their minds to serve God. There are no cords as strong as the ones that bind the family together when it prays and praises together. Children can be filled with memories of precious moments spent together in the sweet, healing presence of the Lord.

## Acceptance and Forgiveness— Restful Furnishings

Just as every home needs couches, beds, and chairs where weary physical bodies can rest, so do our centers of worship need to be furnished with restful attitudes of acceptance and forgiveness. The first piece of furnishing could be the grace of God where the entire family may sit and rest: "Even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10). The same acceptance, unconditional love, and endless forgiveness we have received from God should be shared in the same manner with others. According to the parable of the unmerciful servant, the Lord wants us to be mindful of the acceptance and forgiveness we owe others. (See Matthew 18:23-35.)

There comes a point when tile cleaner will no longer whiten the caulking in a tile shower. Then we need to scrape it out and put in fresh white caulking.

Because we live so close together, the family provides endless opportunities to practice the art of forgiveness. We must "scrape out" the old relationship with confession and repentance, then restore the relationship with forgiveness. It is needful that children see their parents forgive each other. No parent stands taller in a child's eyes than the one big enough to kneel to eye-level with the little one and say ten key words "I was wrong. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

## Relax—You're Home

It takes quite a bit of energy, love, discipline and time to build a home as the center of worship. Just like our physical houses, they need constant maintenance and periodic repairs. *But, oh, what a haven we have when our families build on the sure foundation of His Word, do deeds of love for others, speak words of praise, and have hearts full of acceptance and forgiveness!*

## Test Your Knowledge

True or False

_____ 1. Since we spend more time at home than anywhere else, our homes should be the very center of our worship.

_____ 2. The foundation of our center of worship should be our attitudes.

_____ 3. Obeying Deuteronomy 6:6-7, filling our children with the Word of God should be accomplished primarily at church.

_____ 4. Scripture memorization was David's stronghold against the enemy and should be practiced in our homes.

_____ 5. Home is where the Bible is lived daily.

_____ 6. Appreciation for the preaching of God's Word is nurtured at home.

_____ 7. Family relationships should always take priority over acquiring and preserving material possessions.

_____ 8. Murmuring and arguing in the home create a joyful atmosphere.

_____ 9. Family devotion is a time to preach to all the children.

_____10. The finishing touch can be added to a home's atmosphere by the necessary attitudes of *acceptance* and *forgiveness*.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Create a praise list for each family member to use and follow in their personal, daily devotions. Information about compiling such a list is covered in this chapter.

The basic divisions of a praise list should be: (1) God, (2) yourself, and (3) others. Completing and using this list can improve our communication with God and with our family members. It can even help us communicate better with ourselves. The purpose of acknowledging ourselves on the praise list is not for egotism, but rather to maintain a healthy self-image. Before we can fully appreciate others, we must be able to appreciate certain qualities about ourselves. If we suffer from a poor self-image, we will likely resent and disapprove of others.

As mentioned in the chapter, think of unique ways to express your appreciation for other family members. You may be surprised how positively your family can be affected by just a few simple expressions of love.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Many outstanding, creative ideas for family relationships can be acquired by listening to the daily radio broadcasts of Dr. James Dobson, *Focus on the Family*. This program can be received on most Christian radio stations. Check with your local facilities for broadcast schedules.

Read also the Scriptures for the following chapter, “Church and Home in Partnership.”

# Church and Home in Partnership




*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

*Joshua 24:15*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Deuteronomy 6:4-7
Joshua 24:15
II Timothy 1:5
Philemon 2
Hebrews 11:7
James 1:17

The home and the church have the potential of becoming the most ideal partnership that has ever existed. Since both were established by God, it is only natural that they complement and strengthen each other. When the home and the church are in harmony with God and His Word, they automatically function in one accord.

It seems logical that two institutions made by a perfect God should be compatible. In fact, the church and the home should function together as

harmoniously as one's right hand and left hand.

## The Home and the Church

The home was established by our Creator in the very beginning of man's existence. God was the Father of the bride and groom. He performed the first wedding ceremony and gave marriage a spiritual sanction. Genesis, the book of beginnings, relates the account of how the first home came into existence. (See Chapter 1 of this book.)

The apostle John proclaimed that Jesus Christ was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The church was planned by our all-wise God at the beginning of time. Long ago the Creator-Surgeon leaned over Adam and skillfully removed a rib from his side. Then He made his bride. Possibly at that moment He looked forward to the day when blood and water would flow from His spear-pierced side. From His wounded side, He made the church, the bride of Christ!

## The Home Is a Type of the Church

A study of the home and the church involves a study in typology. The noun *type* is derived from the Latin *typus* which means "image." The home and the church are so similar that one is almost a mirror image of the other.

*The Father.* God ordained the man to be the head of the family and to fulfill the role of the father. (See chapter two of this book.) As a father, he originates life through the divinely-planned reproductive process. Then he serves as the provider and protector of the family.

Jesus Christ taught us to approach God as we would approach a loving, caring father. When we pray, we start with the affectionate greeting, "Our

Father which art in heaven . . .” (Matthew 6:9). Christ also showed us how willing our Father is to give us life’s greatest gift. (See Luke 11:11-13.)

*The Mother and Children.* The mother adds love, grace, and beauty to the home. Only a mother can know the joy of carrying an unborn babe in her womb. She experiences the labor and travail at birth, then she nestles the little child in her arms near her heart. She nurtures the little one and thrills to see him grow to full maturity.

Mothers beautifully typify the church, and children represent the sons and daughters of God. The Scriptures show that Jerusalem, which represents the church, is the mother of us all (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).

The prophet Isaiah spoke of Zion travailing and children being born (Isaiah 66:8). A terrible tragedy occurs when “children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth” (Isaiah 37:3). This usually causes the death of the mother and child. It is also very important that the church has the strength to bring forth children through the new-birth experience.

*The Family.* The family usually consists of a father, a mother, and possibly children. As these individuals fulfill their God-given roles within the family, they contribute to the happiness and success of each other. This is a perfect parallel to the church. The church members, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, make up the family of God.

## The Christian Family

The Christian home is a family consisting of loving people and not a building made of wood, brick, or stone. Jesus Christ is truly the most important member of the Christian family.

Spiritual training is surely the most awesome responsibility that parents face. What good have parents done if they supply their children with the finest bread and fail to feed them the Bread of Life? They have miserably failed if they clothe them in splendor and yet the children never wear the spotless, eternal robe of righteousness.

The home is like a laboratory where ideas are tested and theories proven. The wonderful truths of God's Word are applied to real-life situations. Eternal laws of God are brought into the crucible of actual living. Bible teaching is put into practice and children discover that God's way really works.

## Lessons from a Business Partnership

In the world of business, a partnership is an association formed by two or more individuals. All partners agree to run the business together and share the profits.

The value of the common goals of the church and the home far outweigh the worth of mere financial gain. Jesus explained, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Actually, partnerships come into existence so that members can combine their resources and do together what neither could do alone. The spiritual parallel is obvious here. The church and the home can unite for a common need such as the salvation of the children. A great and noble burden is successfully carried on the strong, combined shoulders of the home and church. Everyone shares in the rewards as the youth live fruitful, productive lives according to the will of God.

Ordinarily, any action a business partner takes is legally binding on the other partner because he is an

agent for the partnership. Thus, an irresponsible associate can lead his partner into debt, financial loss, and even bankruptcy.

This paints a graphic picture. The failure of the home can damage the effectiveness of the church within the family. A severe church problem can divide and weaken the home. Only eternity will reveal the total importance of the unified relationship between the church, home, and God!

The association of church and home is not temporal, but eternal. Our purpose is not earthly, but heavenly. We should strive to strengthen one another as we labor for the eternal crown of glory that will never fade.

## The Home Has Obligations to the Church

The first wedding involved a man, a woman, and God. After the ceremony, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden daily, during the cool of the day. Sin's horrible influence left a couple hiding among the trees and God walking alone. From that day until now, any marriage that leaves God out will be an empty failure.

Actually the divine plan for the family has always been the same. God made man in His likeness and placed woman by his side near his heart. Together the couple would have children and introduce them to their Creator whom they would cherish and worship.

Since the church represents God in our lives today, it is obvious that the home has many definite obligations to the church. We shall examine three vital areas: the ministry, the fellow Christians, and the church services.

*The Ministry.* Christ loves His body, the church, and considers every believer to be a member in particular. He longs for His body to mature to the

stature of the fulness of Christ. (See Ephesians 4:13.) In order to bring the church to this exalted place, God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).

The father and mother should love and respect those who are a part of the apostolic ministry. The children will generally manifest the same attitudes toward the pastor that their parents do. Families need to honor and obey the "shepherd's" teachings because he watches for the well-being of their souls.

Any experienced pastor can attest to the fact that children usually acquire their parents' attitudes—whether positive or negative. When the parents are positive about the church, so are the children, but when they are negative they also effect that attitude in their children. A tragic commentary is generally the story of children whose parents do not respect the pastor and who criticize the church. They often disobey the man of God and justify their wrong spirits and deeds before their children. Finally, the day may arrive when rebellious teenagers are in deep trouble and tearful parents beg for help. Unfortunately, God, the pastor, and the local church are powerless to help because their influence has been destroyed by the parents.

We should remember the terrible judgment that came to the mocking children in Elisha's day. Little children came out of the city jeering the prophet, "Go up, thou bald head" (II Kings 2:23). Sad to say, they probably learned their irreverence from their parents. Forty-two boys and girls were torn apart by bears because of their disrespect.

*The Church Family.* The home has a spiritual obligation to love and respect fellow saints. The apostle Paul taught us to honor elder believers as fathers and mothers and the rest as brothers and sis-

ters. Indeed, all Christians are redeemed by the same precious blood and share the same wonderful family name of Jesus. (See Matthew 25:40; I John 4:20.)

*The Church Services.* God desires for the family to be faithful to the church services. The families' greatest needs are met through the Word of God. Anointed preaching, one form of prophecy, is God's way of speaking unto men for edification, exhortation, and comfort. (See I Corinthians 14:3.)

A beautiful example of the home and the church working together is found in the life of Timothy. Even though his father was a Greek, he was established in the faith by a godly mother, Eunice, and a saintly grandmother, Lois. (See II Timothy 1:5; 3:15.) Under the apostle Paul's leadership, Timothy became a pastor also. So the church strengthens the home, and the home blesses the church.

Faithful church attendance gives the believers an opportunity to share with one another through songs, testimonies, and worship. The writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote some good advice regarding faithfulness: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

The home should always be eager to participate in the prayers and worship of the church. There are many lessons our children will learn by precept and example at church such as the giving of tithes and offerings to God. These and other marvelous acts of devotion need to be learned by our children.

The greatest work of the church is evangelism. Through the unity of the church and the home, the souls of children can be saved. Perhaps this is the most urgent reason for parents to be faithful to the church.

## Responsibilities of the Church to the Home

Many churches have influenced sin-torn families by introducing them to the gospel of Christ and a glorious salvation from sin. Fathers no longer squander the family paycheck on whiskey and gambling. Mothers radiate happiness because Christ helps them to become precious mothers and wives. The children often come to church with Bibles under their arms, food in their stomachs, and possibly even new shoes on their feet. In a few years these same children will probably have promising jobs, beautiful marriages, and happy children who also know God.

The church has a God-given commission to teach the family members the Word of God. (See Matthew 28:19-20.) The mother church nurtures new converts with the milk of the Word. She feeds her growing young the meat of truth. Continually, the Bread of Life is served, and the mature saints begin to produce spiritual sons and daughters.

The Sunday school can be very effective in assisting parents to develop strong Christian character in their children. The values of children can be shaped by the Word of God. Their heroes and heroines are the mighty men and women of faith. Their role models are Sunday school teachers whose lives glorify the Lord.

The youth department of a church can be a vibrant spiritual force in the lives of impressionable youth. Wholesome activities can take the place of sin's dark influence. Christian fellowship meets their social needs. The Word of God challenges them to be "an example of the believers" (I Timothy 4:12).

The missions and outreach ministries of the church open up exciting involvements for the whole family. Families can take part in the eternal work of the kingdom of God and share their faith with others.

Wise pastors consider the special needs of every member of the family from the babies in the nursery to the "Golden Years Fellowship." Special activities are planned to meet their social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Caution should be used, however, not to schedule so many church functions that the family units suffer.

The ministry of the church is always available to the family. As a qualified professional, the pastor offers spiritual advice concerning marriage and family problems.

From the cradle to the grave, a dedicated pastor can be a family's dear friend. He dedicates the babies, marries the couples, celebrates the special occasions, buries the dead, and comforts the grieving loved ones.

Perhaps most important of all, the pastor and church continually build the families by Holy Ghost renewal and spiritual revival. As a great bulwark, the church stands against the flood tide of evil in this depraved world, which seeks to destroy the home. The wonderful refreshings of the Spirit give each family member grace to make it all the way to his eternal heavenly home.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. A study of the home and the church involves a study in _____.
2. The Latin word *typus* means _____.
3. The father serves as the _____ and _____ of the family.
4. Mothers beautifully typify the _____.
5. Partnerships come into existence so that members can combine their _____ and do together what neither could do alone.
6. The church and home can unite for the common purpose of the _____ of the

children.

7. Children will generally manifest the same _____ toward the pastor that their _____ do.

8. Faithful _____ _____ gives the believers an opportunity to share with one another through songs, testimonies, and worship.

9. The church has a God-given commission to _____ the family members God's Word.

10. Christian_____ meets the social needs of the family.

## Apply Your Knowledge

Plan a special event to express your family's appreciation for the ministry of the church. If possible, you could host a nice appreciation dinner for the pastoral staff of your church. This would be a good way to express your appreciation for the ministry and to teach your children by example that appreciation should be expressed.

If a dinner is not feasible, perhaps you could simply send a nice, personal all-occasion card to each of the pastoral staff members. A special note of appreciation such as this can mean as much to your pastor as anything you might do. Be sure to allow each of your children to write their personal notes in the card.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Read the Scriptures under "Start with the Scriptures" for chapter eleven before continuing.

If you wish to further prepare yourself for studying the subject of the next chapter, you may wish to read again the Book of Job. It is always refreshing to read of Job's faith through the severest of trials. It will challenge your faith anew.

# When Trouble Comes




*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

*Hebrews 4:16*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Philippians 4:6-7, 16
Hebrews 4:14-16; 12:1-3

What family has lived without trouble? The storybook family consisting of a capable, honorable father and a beautiful, gracious mother who are blessed with talented, disciplined children who all live together in a harmonious rhapsody of growth and achievement is just that—a storybook family. Such a statement is not cynicism, but an honest admission of humanity.

The family is a complex system of personalities, possessions, schools, church, community, health,

hobbies, friends and foes. The possibility of all these forces functioning in an orderly fashion through our lives without conflict is unthinkably remote. A person can usually handle most of these conflicts successfully, but occasionally there comes a day when the incredible happens—the job shuts down, a companion is ill, a son is failing in school, and the car payment is overdue. Then, the person has a headache because he needs glasses, and he is still angry from the unresolved argument he had last night. Positive thinking will not make the problems go away. Where is help? One may even question, "Where is God?"

One trouble seldom arrives alone. It is usually accompanied by a host of smaller troubles and potential "time bombs." Like a storm at sea, the wind of adversity tears the sails, waves of problems wash the decks, and the sea of life pounds the frame without mercy until contact is lost with the outside world. There seems to be no star, voice, or "compass" to guide such a person in turmoil. His only hope is to call on God for mercy.

At the point of absolute desperation, there is no hesitancy or self-consciousness in casting ourselves wholly on the mercy of God. And God hears as He always does, for it is His character and nature to hear. He made the promise, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). One of the last admonitions He spoke to His disciples was, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" Matthew 28:20). God is concerned with the modern family and will become involved in their behalf.

The only sure factor that touches a Christian's life is the Word of God and His character as expressed in His Word. So it is to God's Word and to Jesus Christ that a person should turn in search for help.

## Perspective—Seeing from God's Viewpoint

One of the greatest problems with trouble is that it can disorient a person until he is in danger of having his values distorted, if not destroyed. For this reason troubles should be placed and kept in perspective. The only safe reckoning point by which problems can be properly evaluated is eternal values.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . ." (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus, in His eternal kingdom, is the "North Star," the "Polaris," of a Christian's faith and the "compass" of his soul. The voices of family and friends may sometimes clamor with conflicting advice, but His voice is the signal by which we may direct our lives.

*Looking at the Christian race from the perspective of the Author and Finisher of that race helps a person distinguish and establish priorities in life.* The writer of the Book of Hebrews counseled to lay aside the weights and sins that would entangle the Christian with the world so that he might run with patience to the finish line. Trouble often exposes those things which hinder us and weight us down. When things are going well, we can usually carry a certain amount of "extra baggage," hardly realizing it. When trouble strikes, however, it is a good time to take inventory and deliberately and thoughtfully lighten the load. Perhaps some family members should carry more responsibility and perhaps some should carry less.

*Looking at the Christian race from the Author-Finisher's point of view gives the race purpose.* The Christian does not run like a squirrel in a cage because he is addicted to running. He runs in the Christian race because there is a goal, a reward at the end that is worth the trials and exertion. Moses was able to lay aside the prestige and wealth of Egypt (which he might have argued were huge

assets) to choose rather to endure ill-treatment as one of the people of God. There was a day in his race when he realized he was not going to make it if he held on to Egypt. He chose to lay it down as a passing pleasure. The eternal purpose, his future reward, drew him on.

A family is not troubled without purpose. The "jackhammers" that seem to destroy schedule and security may possibly be the building tools of creative change.

*The eternal perspective changes a person's time frame.* A little boy once stood behind a fence looking eagerly up the street. The parade was coming, and it was to pass by his house. People began to gather along the parade route, and soon the fence was lined with sightseers. The little lad could not see out. He heard the music playing and the march of the band. The crowds cheered, but he was missing the parade. Then his brother called from an upstairs window. "Come up here. You can see everything." He ran, dashed up the stairs, and much to his delight, he exclaimed, "I can see the whole parade—the parade that was here and the parade that's coming."

God is at such a vantage point. He can see the beginning and the end. He lives in the eternal "now." Past, present and future are all present with Him. He never has to hurry to meet our impatient needs. Our crisis is on His schedule. Granted, our schedule and His may not always seem to be the same, but He sees the whole picture of life. He is not arbitrary in His timing; the crisis simply is not present with Him until the moment of need. He lives in the "now."

This may be the toughest lesson that troubles can teach our time-conscious generation. A parent who can exemplify a worry-free confidence in God has gone a long way toward establishing his children in faith.

*Looking at troubles from the standpoint of*

*eternity gives a person strength to endure circumstances he cannot change.* If a Christian can endure today, then by God's grace he can endure tomorrow and every day of his life. Life is short, and God's grace is sufficient to help every Christian live victoriously.

The importance of God's perspective cannot be exaggerated. How do we come into this perspective? It is only possible by focusing our minds and thoughts on Jesus Christ. A Christian cannot be trouble-centered and Christ-centered at the same time. When Jesus Christ is central and supreme in a person's thoughts, that person will be elevated, and his perspective will become clear, his heart will be strengthened, and his attitude will become whole.

## Attitude—The Gauge of Maturity

As oil is measured in an automobile, so God measures our maturity by our attitude in times of stress. Attitude is the expression of a person's thoughts, and they are highly contagious to those nearby, especially children. One's attitude can be like a fragrance or like a stench. It can smother hope or excite hope in ourselves and those around us. A poor attitude is the breeding ground of more trouble.

A Christian's attitude should brighten considerably when he recognizes that the Author of this race is also the Finisher. He designed the race and sponsors us as winners. Jesus Christ is committed to our successful finish. He does not, however, offer to finish every project we begin, but He will bring our salvation to fruition.

Our attitude determines the approach we take to trouble. As an individual or as a family unit, we can approach trouble with weakness or strength. The attitude with which we approach it makes the difference.

What should characterize a Christian's attitude? The believer's commitment to God and his trust in God's love are his greatest witnesses to the world of his faith in God. Every problem, burden, and trial should be faced with confidence in God, realizing His supreme care for His children. We are stewards of life. Every thought, idea, relationship, every piece of property belongs to Him. He is the master and owner of all things, and He will carefully manage His creation.

Anxiety denies the effectiveness of the saving power of Jesus Christ that repentance and baptism affirm. Anxiety and fretting are like festering around an open wound. It has to be cleansed before healing begins.

Sometimes worry arises from our awareness of lack of faith. Faith comes by hearing from God. When the Spirit quickens the Word of God to the heart, faith is born. If, in one's present trouble, that person cannot see how God will solve his problems, he can focus on Jesus Christ and His faithfulness. Our faith can rest in His faithfulness.

Faith believes in God's power; trust rests in His character. Trust is perhaps the highest praise a person can offer God. When our perspective and attitudes are right, we are ready to take action.

## Action—The Thrust Toward Wholeness

"Strike the sails, batten down the hatches," the captains call through the pages of sea stories. When trouble strikes the family, there are usually a host of needs demanding attention. The question is obvious: Where do we start? How can we sort the possible from the impossible, that which can be done from that which is beyond doing? And which comes first? Often we do not know where to begin. Storms are bigger than people.

During times of trouble we should reinforce our values and fortify ourselves with all the truth God has given us. It is seldom a time to make major decisions that can wait. The "do something, even if it's wrong" tendency often complicates the situation and hinders God's will. When we know we have heard from God, we can act; but it is well said, "When you don't know what to do, stand still."

*Pray with confidence.* "Let us therefore come boldly . . ." (Hebrews 4:16). The writer of Hebrews makes a strong and winning case for our seeking help in the time of need. He glorifies the Lord as our intercessor. (See Hebrews 4.)

- His word is alive and powerful, sharp and discerning (verse 12).
- Nothing is unnoticed by Him (verse 13).
- He is our great High Priest (verse 14).
- He is transcendent (verse 14).
- He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God (verse 14).
- He is touched with our weaknesses (verse 15).
- He overcame all of life's troubles and circumstances (verse 15).

On the basis of these assurances, we are instructed to come before His presence boldly. His throne is a throne of *grace* and *mercy* in our time of need.

*Obey what you know.* In areas where logs are floated down the rivers into the sawmills, "logjams" occasionally occur. Sometimes a single log will get wedged against a rock and begin to function as a dam, catching and holding other logs. Such logjams can build up to powerful proportions. Skilled lumberjacks venture out onto the logs and begin hooking logs and moving them on down the river. There are usually a few "key" logs that, if moved in the right direction, will release the jam and restore the flow.

In a similar fashion "jams" tend to occur in a Christian's life when he has not been obedient in

small, seemingly insignificant ways. Sometimes we might become slack in certain important areas of our lives, thinking they can wait until a future time. All the while our lives can become more ineffective, and the crisis builds in proportion. When this happens to a Christian, he should begin obeying; start doing those things he knows to do. The Lord will lead His children step by step until a spiritual "flow" is released in the right direction.

*Run with patience.* Running and patience seem to be contradictory terms to those who do not run. But runners understand pace and plan. The longer the run, the more pace and plan (patience) are involved.

The distance runner builds to a pace he can handle. If he thrusts himself into the race at full speed and gives out exhausted and injured, he is in trouble. Patience will cause a Christian to plan and set a pace that he may keep running.

*Live one day at a time.* "Take therefore no thought for the morrow," were Jesus' words to His hillside followers, "for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

We face stressful situations daily; however, God's grace is sufficient for every need.

*Accept ministry.* It is very difficult for those who are used to giving, to receive. But it is an experience necessary to humility. We are members of a body, Christ's body, and we must allow ourselves to be ministered to.

## Where Troubles Hurt Most

*In trouble with relationships.* The closer the relationship, the more devastating is the effect of damaged or broken relationships. Christians have chosen to make their relationships with Christ and with others the most important factors in their

lives—above prosperity or personal comfort. We live in a selfish, covenant-breaking world, and as a result our churches are filled with people who have been hurt in their relationships with others.

Christians make covenants to each other whether as marriage partners, as parents, or simply as members of Christ's body. If times were always easy, we would not need covenants with each other. Covenants are made for the hard times when little is left but the pledge to do as promised. Keeping our covenants will effect personal discipline and spiritual maturity.

*In trouble with finances.* There is little that strikes as deeply at a person's sense of security or makes his responsibility to the family as clear as money problems. Modern society has gendered production-oriented values to the extent that a person's friends are often chosen by the similarity of economic status. The result of such thinking is that often when a person suffers a financial loss, he usually suffers the loss of some friends. And as people grow older and are able to produce less, they sometimes suffer a certain loss of self-esteem. These are the standards of society, not Christ's.

God's Word teaches that we are His stewards. Any possessions we might accumulate are for Him and His service. Our wealthy Lord does not find joy in the poverty of His stewards—in fact, their blessings speak of His richness. Neither, however, does He find joy in self-indulgent, selfish stewards who trust in what they have rather than in His goodness.

Christians should exercise their stewardship as wisely as possible but let God be Lord of their lives. He has no covenant with material things, but He does have a covenant with His children: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

*In trouble with illness and death.* In the special

burdens of illness and the emptiness of grief, more than at any other time, we find we need to be carried by the Shepherd. Our special dependency on Jesus Christ at these times is both humbling and precious. Whether the illness is our own or we stand by the side of another, when we are aware of our helplessness, it matters little. There are some things only the Lord can do. When we have done all that we can, we especially realize our need of Him.

It is frightening to a healthy person to lose his sense of well-being. Prolonged illness can give us tunnel vision—allow our world to close in around us. When pain intrudes a person's every moment, it is very difficult to avoid being possessed by selfish thoughts, locked in a prison of unwanted self-centeredness. But Jesus came "to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

The passage from which Jesus read, Isaiah 61, continued: "To comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:2-3). Comfort for the grief-stricken is the Holy Spirit's special ministry.

Grief cannot be hurried but neither should it be clung to. There is no virtue in grief. We must be willing to offer the Lord the ashes of our loss and our heavy spirit of mourning. He will give us in return the oil of His joy and make us beautiful in the garment of His praise.

## The Birth of Hope

Troubles do come to an end. There are times of trouble, seasons of distress, nights of weeping, but joy comes with the morning. (See Psalm 30:5.) David reminded his soul, "Hope thou in God: for I

shall yet praise him" (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5).

Trouble is Christ's invitation to become a partaker of His divine nature. We are to accept it with thanksgiving. By His promises He has given us all that which pertains to life and godliness, and through the appropriation of these promises we become partakers with Him. (See II Peter 1:2-4.)

As the Lord quickens His Word, grasp it by faith and begin to process it into your life and thought patterns. We do not lack promises, but we sometimes let them slip by, not mixing them with faith. (See Hebrews 4:2.) By mixing His promises with faith we can become a partaker of His divine nature.

When we are helpless to do anything for ourselves in our own situations, we can ask God to make us a blessing to someone else. In becoming the answer to another's need, we will be drained of tension, self-centeredness and fretting and be filled, instead, with trust and faith. With our trust and faith anchored in God, we can once again dare to plan and dream for the future, for we know that He is with us. In fact, He has been there all the time.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. One _____ seldom arrives alone.
2. At the point of absolute desperation, there is no hesitancy or self-consciousness in casting ourselves wholly on the _____ of God.
3. Trouble can _____ a person until his values become confused and distorted.
4. Attaining to God's perspective helps a person establish proper _____in life.
5. A parent who can exemplify a worry-free _____ in God has gone a long way toward establishing his children in faith.
6. One's attitude is his gauge of _____.
7. _____ denies the effectiveness of the

saving power of Jesus Christ that repentance and baptism affirm.

8. _____ arises from one's awareness of lack of faith.

9. During times of trouble is seldom a time to make major _____.

10. Trouble is Christ's _____ to become a partaker of His nature.

## Apply Your Knowledge

It is always best to be prepared for trouble *before* it strikes. We often are not in the frame of mind to make rational decisions after trouble has already besieged us. This is not to say we should exercise negative faith by expecting the worst; we should, however, be ready for any trouble.

Prepare a small handbook for dealing with trouble that you can keep in a convenient place for reference in times of trouble. The handbook could be a brief summary of action under each of the following five categories: (1) pray with confidence, (2) obey what you know, (3) run with patience, (4) live one day at a time, and (5) accept ministry. These topics are covered in this chapter.

If we can exercise these simple, basic actions during times of trouble, God can give us the strength we need. We should remember, however, that self-pity is our greatest enemy. We cannot see God's eternal purpose when we are consumed with self-pity.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Do some research on single parenting in our modern society. Due to recent trends, there is a growing amount of information available on this subject. Such research will help orient you more fully to the following chapter.

# The Single-Parent Family




*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

*I Peter 5:7*

**Start with the Scriptures**

Psalm 23:1-6; 27:10; 68:5; 146:9
Proverbs 18:24
Isaiah 41:10
Matthew 19:9-12, 29
Mark 10:29-30
I Corinthians 7:10-40
I Timothy 5:5, 10
James 1:27

In the early days of World War II, Great Britain and France were allied against Nazi Germany. Neither the U.S. nor Russia had entered the war. Then the French surrendered. At that time, Prime Minister Winston Churchill gathered England's morale with a dynamic speech. "Countrymen," he announced, "for the first time in this bold conflict we are facing the enemy entirely alone." Then, after a dramatic pause he added, "I find it rather inspiring."

Facing problems with such an outlook turns difficulties into challenges. Unlike Churchill, we may seldom see life's pressures and problems as inspiring. Depressing perhaps but not inspiring.

Single parents are more likely to feel the lament Samuel Coleridge expressed in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

*Alone, alone, all, all alone,*
*Alone on a wide, wide sea!*
*And never a saint took pity on*
*My soul in agony.*

Raising a family in this generation is tough enough with both parents working together in harmony and love. When the major duties rest on just one person, however, the stress levels can get especially high. The day-to-day frustrations can be enormous.

Happily, God has resources that enable all Christians, regardless of state, to cope with the worst of times. With Him, a single parent can find life a satisfying challenge with real inspiration. Christians can build bridges beyond their self-defeating attitudes of worry and pity. Life can be rich with purpose. It can be packed with meaning. Through Christ's wisdom and strength, the tasks of life can be fulfilling and satisfying. We do not have to fail. We can succeed.

## Acceptance

According to the 1980 census, there are eight million households in the United States with a single parent. Ninety percent of them are parented by women alone. Thirteen million children are affected. These figures include homes broken by death, divorce, and separation. Also included are those where the parent has never been married. In addition, thousands of other homes are directed by one parent while the other is away due to a job or military duty.

When in such circumstances, a person should first take hold of reality and honestly face the facts. There are many frustrations that can only be conquered by surrender to the real situation. Much misery can be created by refusing to accept what is inevitable.

Carol's husband walked out on her one evening, and she has not heard from him since. "It's been five years since Rob left," Carol said, "and I still think of him all the time. I guess in some ways I am still waiting, hoping he will come back."

If we cling to the broken pieces of our past, the joy of the present slips through our fingers. While it is certainly acceptable to hope "Maybe Rob will come back," she should realize that her happiness should not depend on whether Rob returns. We should not build our lives around false hopes. Even if the person did return, there could only be happiness if they were both willing to contribute toward creating a happy, successful relationship.

In her book, *Single Again—This Time With Children*, Alice Stolper Peppler stated that it took her approximately two years to bridge the gap between being married and alone. She stated, "During those two years of constant struggle, it seemed like everything we had was taken away."

Life can also be just as painfully empty for a widow or widower as the one who is separated. In *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis wrote about the death of his wife. He said that his unhappiness was that not only did he suffer, but he kept thinking about the fact he was suffering: "I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief."

Kate was tempted to do the same thing when her marriage ended. "I had read the Bible daily all my life and memorized a lot of verses. That helped me more than anything. In the Bible I read that there

was a set period of mourning. So I decided I would let myself grieve for thirty days and no more. I had three small children and could not spend the rest of my life allowing my thoughts to be caught up in reruns. That's what I did. And I went on with my life. I decided that all of life was a gift from God, whether I was married or single. I refused to let bitterness poison my spirit. I knew that if I did it would cut me off from people who found me to be negative."

Emotional pain is as real as physical pain. When we hit our finger with a hammer, our hand throbs. When our emotions are injured by another person's words or actions or by circumstances, we hurt.

Rather than feeling false guilt over depressions and loneliness, a Christian should accept his feelings and take the appropriate action necessary to find restoration. Jesus Christ was able to accept and express His true feelings, regardless of what they were. He said to His disciples in Gethsemane, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34).

It is true that mature Christians develop the ability to express gratitude instead of wallowing in gloom and despair, but it may not come instantly. Only after a person has embraced his feelings and experienced them in depth can he release them to God and enjoy the freedom He imparts. Only then can a Christian heed the command, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Peter 5:7).

## The Church

Connie's husband had never been a Christian. After ten years of a difficult marriage, he left her for another woman. Throughout the ordeal, Connie continued to attend church services faithfully with her two children, but it was not easy.

"I did not even like to go anymore," she said. "I did

not feel a part of the group. I sat there alone with my children. I'm sure it was just me, but it seemed like there was a big sign over our pew that read, 'No husband, no father!' No one showed an understanding of our struggle. There were no programs to meet our needs."

Anniversaries, baby dedications, holiday banquets are all times when the single parent is reminded of his or her unique role. In view of scriptural teachings, it is unacceptable for Christians to maintain resistant attitudes towards those who are not married. Jesus and Paul were both single. Each had a significant ministry.

It is possible for single parents to both give and receive in meaningful service in their church. Married persons should refrain from gossiping, show genuine friendliness, and welcome single parents into their homes for fellowship. Never should they be treated as second-class Christians. As the plaque says, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."

No matter what the attitude of our church toward us, our loyalty to God calls us to gather with other Christians for worship and instruction.

Genuine worship keeps life from losing its focus. Daily trivia tends to leave our minds confused and our spirits heavy. The wonder of worship is that it puts God where He belongs—at the center of our lives.

Worship is like watching a sunset and forgetting our headache. It is like listening to a nightingale and being oblivious of the neighbor's barking dog. Strangely, when we fasten our attention on God, we come to view life from His eternal perspective. We realize that He is not far off, beyond the mists of the Milky Way. He is very real and very near. Indeed, as David said, "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5).

Single parents also need a minister whose care for them is expressed through his Bible-oriented, Christ-centered preaching. Hearing Spirit-filled preaching, our faith is strengthened and our lives are inspired. Instead of man's answers to man's problems, we have God's answer to our dilemma. It does not come from reason, but from revelation. "The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow" (Psalm 146:9).

When God's Word is preached, we are not merely hearing something about God, but the voice of God Himself speaking to us personally through His ambassador. The power that we sense is the same power that spoke creation into existence. God's Word reshapes our lives, effects growth, and changes us for the better. It anchors us to the eternal God who is able to fashion something beautiful out of our struggles. God's Word is the means of giving His truth entrance into our understanding. His truth links us with reality and places us in touch with life that is worth living.

Friends are another blessing the church affords. Unfortunately, there are many lonely people in church. It takes more than a handshake and "Praise the Lord!" to meet the deep emotional needs of each individual.

It is possible to hide behind a church service and never reveal one's true self to others. We can sit beside a person in Bible study and never touch his or her inner self in a way that causes a closeness to develop and that brings a deep, personal friendship and fellowship.

The worst kind of loneliness is not that which occurs when we are by ourselves. It occurs when we are with others that we think do not understand us. All of us need the kind of friend Solomon spoke of: "A friend loveth at all times" (Proverbs 17:17). We should believe that God wants us to have friends

who will bring joy to our lives.

The right attitude is important in developing friendships. Friends are made by those who can accept human nature as it is. Having a healthy self-appreciation and a tolerant attitude toward others is essential. It is the outlook that sends out the signal, "I like myself and I think you are pretty terrific also."

In her book, *Wide My World, Narrow My Bed*, Luci Swindoll told of her personal struggle as a single woman to make close friends. She shared how hard it was for her to learn how to communicate effectively and to really be unselfish enough to care about another person's feelings. An adage that helped her see people in terms of their needs rather than their faults was: "The way to keep from stepping on other people's toes is to put yourself in their shoes."

## Children

One single parent described her plight as "too much children, and too little time and money." But another felt just the opposite as he expressed, "Having children is the only thing that keeps me going."

As Christians, we have a God-given responsibility *to* our children; however, we are not ultimately responsible *for* their actions. The way to be free from unnecessary guilt is understanding the difference between the words *to* and *for*. The burden of training is on us, but the burden of response is with each child. They make their own choices, right or wrong.

A wise man once wrote, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

To the Hebrew parent, *train* meant more than tell. It referred to the palate, or roof of the mouth. When a child was born, the midwife would rub her finger

in the juice of a crushed date. Then she would plunge it into the newborn's mouth and massage it until the child began to suck. After the child began sucking her finger, the midwife would hand the child to its mother.

To train, then, means to create a thirst for life. For parents it means to demonstrate life in such a way that the children long for a real experience with Jesus Christ, who offers abundant living.

"In the way he should go" might better be translated, "according to his own way." It means to take into consideration the temperament of each child as a unique person. It requires learning the child's innate personality and guiding him accordingly. A parent should tailor his methods of discipline to the individual child's temperament.

Children should develop an educated conscience that is influenced by the parents. Children's moral training should not be left only to schoolteachers or Sunday school teachers.

Authorities have determined that the process of internalizing values is usually complete by the time a child is four or five years old. By the time they start school, their attitude toward authority, their level of ambition, and their understanding of right and wrong are already greatly set.

Children need punishment when they do wrong. (See chapter seven in this book.) It must be consistent and firm. They also need plenty of praise when they do well. Encouraging children does not make them proud. It gives them the proper confidence in themselves. Criticizing children and calling them names such as "dumb" and "lazy" destroy their motivation and lock them into a bad self-image. They tend to live up to our expectations of them.

Single parents should avoid treating their children as adults. They should not be expected to take the place of a spouse as a person with whom to confide

one's troubles. Neither should they be used for selfish reasons. Immature love says, "I love you because I need you." Mature love says, "I need you because I love you."

Divorced, single parents should especially be careful not to use their children as a tool against the other parent. It is improper to ask the child to snoop and tattle. The children should be urged to enjoy their time with the other parent and not be made to think we love them less if they have an exciting day with the former companion.

## Dating

Statistics indicate that eighty percent of divorcees remarry after their first divorce. Those statistics include five out of six men and three out of four women.

In His love, God has set certain relationships off limits. In Matthew 19:9-12 and I Corinthians 7:10-40, specific exclusions are given for those who consider remarriage.

Often a person's eagerness to remarry is prompted by his low sense of self-worth. This idea was reinforced years ago by a popular song that proclaimed, "You're Nobody Until Somebody Loves You." The concluding line, "So find yourself somebody to love," is a concept that has led many single parents back into marriage without regard to God's desire for their lives. This defiant, selfish attitude makes them vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

In a society where people travel in pairs, it is easy to conclude that being married again would make the divorced person happy. We must, however, be very careful to avoid entering into relationships that would be displeasing to God. There is something worse than being single and lonely—being remarried and unhappy.

Sexual relationships apart from marriage distort God's plan for our lives. It is condemned by God because He knows that only the commitment and intense caring of a Christian marriage can make sexual relations the joyful gift God intended them to be. Outside of marriage, sexual activity is self-centered and can never fulfill a person's deepest desire for intimacy. It shames a person with guilt and lowers his or her self-esteem.

Iverna Tompkins spoke of a woman's difficulty with the opposite sex in her book, *How To Be Happy in No Man's Land:* "There is always somewhat of a caution in the heart of a married woman toward singles—unmarried women, widows, and divorcees. Often the married woman considers us a threat. She thinks, 'That lady is after my husband!' Sometimes she's right."

It is never acceptable for a single man or woman to flirt with a married person, even if only seeking approval. There are other means of acquiring the attention needed in order to feel he or she is desirable company. If a Christian will entrust every aspect of his life to the Lord, God will give him the security needed to feel good about himself.

## Working

Whether it is a single dad or a single mom, if they must work and be away from their children more than they would like, they should not allow themselves to suffer guilt. God understands their problem. With His help, Christians can balance both tasks. They should not become workaholics at the expense of their children's needs. However, neither should they allow worry over their children to keep them from excelling at work. If the job is not fulfilling, perhaps they should consider finding another one more suited to their talents. Charles Kettering,

the engineering genius of General Motors, once said, “We have come to fear failure too much.”

Regarding the many challenges that face single-parent families, perhaps it could be said that the only failure is the failure to try. God will give single parents the courage and insight they need if they look to Him in faith. His encouraging promise to all His people says, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

With promises such as these, how can we fail?

## Test Your Knowledge

True or False

_____ 1. According to the 1980 census there are eight million households in the United States with a single parent.

_____ 2. Ninety percent of the single-parent households are parented by women alone.

_____ 3. The current statistics include homes directed by one parent while the other is away due to a job or military duty.

_____ 4. Emotional pain is not as intense as physical pain.

_____ 5. It is possible for single parents to both give and receive in meaningful service in their church.

_____ 6. Genuine worship helps the single parent keep life from losing its focus.

_____ 7. God is able to fashion something beautiful out of our struggles.

_____ 8. The worst kind of loneliness is that which occurs when we are alone.

_____ 9. Divorced, single parents should be careful not to use their children as tools against the

other parent.

_____ 10. It is never acceptable for a single person to flirt with a married person of the opposite sex, even if only seeking approval.

## Apply Your Knowledge

*To the single person:* Seek out ways that you may become actively involved in a church program. The most beneficial action a single person can take to fight depression, loneliness and other such afflictions is to become active helping others. Naturally, you should not neglect your children, presuming you have children. Nonetheless, it is rewardingly healthy for all Christians, single or married, to stay active within the church. Even if you have to acquire an occasional baby-sitter, you will improve your overall morale.

*To the married person:* How can you be a blessing to the single adults, especially parents, of your church? If you have never considered this question before, do not feel alone. Many have not. There are many ways, however, that you might be an encouragement and blessing to the single person. You might even consider involvement with a singles ministry within your church.

## Expand Your Knowledge

Prepare to study the final chapter by reading the Scriptures on the following page in advance. Spend a special time in prayer for those in your local church assembly who are single parents. There is an unbelievable amount of pressure on them which is created by the many demands of modern living. They need your support.

# Adapting to Changes in the Home




*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

*Philippians 4:11-12*

**Start with the Scriptures**

| | |
|---|---|
| Joshua 24:15 | Philippians 4:8-13 |
| II Samuel 14:28 | I Timothy 5:1-18 |
| Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20-23 | Titus 2:1-7 |

Examine this precious family portrait carefully. Great-grandma, with silver-gray hair and deep wrinkles, seems so old. Grandpa's bald spot seems much larger and Grandma's hair sure has turned pepper-gray. Mom and Dad smile blissfully, but the sparkle of youth is forever gone from their eyes. Older brother's masculine features are so easy to spot now. Big sister looks beautiful in that pretty dress like mother wears. Little brother has the appearance of a tornado wrapped in cloth, and baby

sister coos contentedly in mother's arms.

You are looking at a marvel of our age—the photograph, which has symbolically frozen a moment in time. Never again will this moment be repeated exactly, because life is continually changing. Maybe when the next family picture is made Great-grandma will be missing because she has been laid to rest in the cemetery. Big brother will have a bride, and baby sister will look like a young princess.

Many anointed Bible writers spoke of the rapid changes of life. James asked, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). David once exclaimed, "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (I Chronicles 29:15).

These changes, which will certainly come, are most evident in the home. Of course, God, who lovingly designed the home, has equipped this divine institution with a strong survival instinct. Every family member has a God-given ability to adapt to life's joyous as well as heart-breaking surprises.

It is very possible that today's babies will be tomorrow's parents and the future's grandparents. One person, as he journeys from the cradle to the grave, could fill many family roles. As these various family roles are examined carefully, eternal principles will be found in the Word of God which should be diligently applied. The Bible is the ultimate "life manual" and teaches those who will listen how to adapt to life's changes in the home.

## The Children's Role

The psalmist proclaimed that children are a marvelous gift from God. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children. . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver

full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

God in His infinite wisdom placed children under the watchful care and loving authority of parents. Let us consider God's instruction to the children.

*Obey your parents.* Paul emphasized the first thing that children should be taught: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:20). A child who can learn to be obedient to his parents will more readily submit to God's authority.

Joshua, the commander-in-chief of Israel who led the conquest of Canaan, was a dynamic leader. But his secret of success was his diligent obedience to the Word of God: "As the LORD commanded . . . so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses" (Joshua 11:15).

Evidently, Joshua instilled this sincere faithfulness into the hearts of his own family. No wonder, as an elder statesman of Israel, he could say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

*Honor your parents.* Paul's admonition went deeper than just obedience. He declared again the same commandment that God had thundered from Mount Sinai long before, "Honour thy father and thy mother." (See Exodus 20:12.) Paul underscored the fact that this was the first commandment given with promise: "that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

The command to honor means to respect greatly and to regard highly. This surely applies to toddlers and teenagers, but it does not stop there. This affectionate respect should continue as long as the parent lives. Even if the children move far away, they should maintain consistent communication with their parents.

*Care for parents.* Children have a God-ordained responsibility to care for their elderly parents.

Paul taught, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. . . . If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:4-8, *NIV*).

Jesus Christ spoke against a hypocritical evil of His day. Addressing the Pharisees, He cautioned and admonished them regarding improper treatment of their parents. (See Matthew 15:3-7.)

## Parents' Role

A handsome groom and beautiful bride stand before the altar. The preacher reads the Creator's words: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). From this sacred moment onward, the couple should strive to attain complete spiritual, emotional, mental and physical unity. Since they are two entirely different people from two different families, this will take time, effort, and patience.

Before children are born to this couple, many uninterrupted hours can be shared. Blissful physical unity should naturally occur since there is a strong natural attraction; however, the marriage that does not go beyond that aspect of unity is headed for trouble. Spiritual unity can be found by praying and sharing God's Word together. Mental and emotional harmony can be found in communion, shared dreams, and by facing life's challenges together.

Then one day, the wife might make a stunning announcement: "I think we are going to have a baby." The maternal aspect of her nature intensifies and becomes very noticeable. Meanwhile, the man's

paternal traits of providing and protecting increase dramatically.

Parents were created by God to provide food and shelter for their children, but this is only the beginning of their duties. They should teach and train with the urgent knowledge that life and eternal destinies hinge on their effectiveness. Indeed, they should control and discipline the children with Paul's advice in mind: "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Above all, they need to show love and set a godly example.

Take a careful look at the development of a child as he moves from infancy toward maturity.

*The infant.* Birth to twenty-four months represents the foundational years in a child's life. This is a time of incredible physical growth. His height will almost double and his weight will almost quadruple. His spiritual and mental growth are equally astonishing. Care should be taken to ensure that the home and church provide the right environment for the child's crucial first impressions.

God arranged for Moses, the future deliverer and lawgiver of Israel, to be first placed in a godly home. All the treasures and knowledge of Egypt could not match the developmental contribution of his God-ordained parent-teachers. Later, when Moses was in Pharaoh's palace, the overwhelming influence of Egypt could not erase his early training.

*Nursery.* Ages two and three are years of imitation and discovery. An eager child can discover that Jesus is God, the Bible is God's book, and the church is God's house. The nursery boy and girl will not only wear their parents' shoes, but will imitate them praying. At this same age, the great prophet Samuel probably gained his lifelong devotion to God from his praying mother and faithful father.

*Early childhood (kindergarten).* This four- and five-year-old is a bundle of questions, and he believes

readily the answers his parents give him. Seeds of faith can be planted deep into his fertile heart during this opportune time. Also, proper discipline is very important at this age, but it should include forgiveness and love. Like Samuel, all Christian children need to meet the God of their parents.

*Middle childhood (primary).* The six- to eight-year-old is physically a "dynamo" and mentally a keen observer. Socially, he makes friends easily and strives to please his Sunday school teacher. Spiritually, this child has a tender conscience and a strong desire to obey the gospel. Parents should be alert to his spiritual needs and teach the difference between right and wrong. Perhaps Timothy was this age when the sincere faith of Grandmother Lois and Mother Eunice became his also. (See II Timothy 1:5.)

*Later childhood (junior).* The junior (ages 9-11) craves excitement and overflows with abounding energy. Mentally, he is an investigator. Spiritually, he is a hero worshiper. He needs to dream about great Bible and Christian characters.

Later childhood is called the "golden age of memory." Parents need to feed his hungry mind the Bread of Life. Possibly, Paul referred to Timothy as a junior when he said, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures . . ." (II Timothy 3:15).

*Early adolescence (junior high).* The parents' role becomes more complex as the child moves into the transition period between childhood and adulthood (ages 12-14). This young person will want to make his own decisions and be more independent. He strives to act as an adult but still needs childhood security. Physically, he grows rapidly, although not always at the same rate as his friends. Puberty produces development of the sex glands and the accompanying masculine or feminine characteristics.

Early teens desire companionship and are greatly influenced by their peer group. Parents who main-

tain close ties with a true Bible church will benefit enormously at this point in their children's development. Instead of being persuaded to smoke pot and drink alcoholic beverages, they will be encouraged to be part of a vibrant, wholesome youth group. An early teenager will mature naturally in the strict, but loving, environment of a Christian home and church.

*Adolescence (senior high)*. The teenager (ages 15-17) seeks mature relationships with other young people. A girl is concerned with her appearance and figure. A boy is interested in developing his strength and physique. Both need to be taught that obedience to God's Word also produces spiritual strength and inner beauty.

A teenager's reasoning ability is developing rapidly and he often asks, "Why?" Evil, adult influence could entice him to desire sin's depravity; however, godly influence can challenge him to search the Scriptures.

*Young adulthood*. When does adulthood actually begin? At eighteen, a teenager can enter military service, and marry. Twenty-one is the traditional age of legal responsibility; however, the chronological age is far less significant than the maturity level. A true adult is socially adjusted and intellectually capable! He generally has direction concerning a vocation and ambition for life. Emotionally and spiritually, the young adult is prepared for marriage, should he choose to enter such a commitment.

When spirituality and knowledge of God is coupled with maturity, the marriage will be abundantly blessed. Natural, amorous love will blossom when a marriage is founded upon God's *agape* love. Husband and wife companionship will be gloriously enhanced by communion with the Lord through praying together.

A beautiful young couple who have just exchanged

vows at the altar are physically approaching their peaks. With a thirst for life, they will eagerly adjust to marriage, possibly start a family, buy a home, and advance in an occupation. The church is blessed when this couple channels their abundant energy into the work of God instead of bogging down in materialism.

*The single adult.* There are some mature, single adults who choose to wait on marriage. Wise parents will not push their adult children toward marriage with threats of being an "old maid" or "bachelor."

The apostle Paul had a deep insight into marriage and wrote concerning the profound principles of love and submission. (See Ephesians 5:22-25, 28, 31.) He explained that a married person will naturally spend much time pleasing his or her companion when actually each should work together to please God. However, the single adult can, "Care for the things of the Lord. . . ." (See I Corinthians 7:6-9, 28-35.)

*The grandparents.* When a baby is born, the life-supplying umbilical cord must be severed. He began life in a state of total dependence on his parents and in total submission to their authority. Gradually he should progress until one day, he will leave his father and mother, become independent, and cleave to his new wife.

At this time of independence distinct dangers emerge. The parents might fail to "cut the apron strings" and try to continue to baby their son or daughter. Interfering parents will try to dominate a young couple's finances and personal decisions. Such interference will only strain and damage the young couple's relationship with the parents.

On the other hand, a young couple who is encouraged by two loving, supporting, sets of parents is abundantly blessed. Their veteran parents can offer experienced counsel and unselfish advice. Their

fervent prayers, godly example, and proven principles of life can save the young couple many unnecessary heartaches.

Though grandparents should not interfere in the marriage of their grandchildren, they have a vested interest in the lives of their children and grandchildren. They should continue to be the spiritual examples and leaders for their descendants.

*The empty nest.* Children are one of God's bountiful blessings that we can take to heaven with us! Yet it should be remembered that children are with their parents for only a few years.

A person's marriage partner, on the other hand, should be by his or her side "until death us do part." Some couples might allow the flame of togetherness and tenderness to burn out. When the children are gone, they can find themselves living lonely lives and sharing a house with a stranger. God's wonderful will is that these years should be the years of enrichment, achievement, and fulfillment.

## Elderly Parents

In Old Testament times the term *family* included much more than a married couple and their children. For example, Joshua sought for the guilty sinner that caused the humiliating defeat at Ai. The search was first narrowed to the *tribe;* then to the *family*, then to the *household*, and finally man by man until Achan was pinpointed.

Elderly parents in Bible times occupied places of great honor. Paul admonished, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father . . . the elder women as mothers . . ." (I Timothy 5:1-2). He implied that all senior saints should be treated with dignity befitting a parent.

A reckless young generation who ignores the wisdom of the elders can make Rehoboam's costly

mistake. He forsook the counsel of the old men and followed the advice of his rambunctious peers. It resulted in the enormous and tragic loss of the majority of the kingdom. (See I Kings 12:1-20.)

In order to be honored, however, the elderly have some solemn obligations of their own. They should do more than just grow old! Paul taught, "That the aged men be . . . temperate, sound in faith," and that "the aged women" behave in a holy manner and be "teachers of good things" (Titus 2:2-5).

*Widows and widowers.* God has always been deeply concerned about widows and orphans. Moses, the lawgiver, proclaimed a severe penalty to anyone who oppressed a widow or fatherless child. (See Exodus 22:22-24.) They were not only protected, but also specifically included in such joyous occasions as the Feast of Pentecost. (See Deuteronomy 16:10-11.) And James preached the same message: "Pure religion . . . is . . . To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction . . ." (James 1:27).

Perhaps the widower is not mentioned because he did not usually encounter the same economic hardships, but he surely needs the same loving support. When we bestow compassion, understanding, and kindness on a widow or widower, we are fulfilling one of the highest duties of Christianity.

Even though one spouse is gone, the surviving partner should maintain a strong sense of purpose.

It is very important that the widow and widower discover a strong recognition of self-worth. God had a purpose in allowing them to be the longest-living partner. They should develop new areas of ministry and service. Anna, the prophetess, lived as a widow for eighty-four years. So she "served God with fastings and prayers." (See Luke 2:36-38.) It is little wonder she played a beautiful part in the Lord's first coming!

## The Ideal Home

It is a heartrending commentary on modern society when the home is no longer the center of family activity. In some modern homes the family is fragmented and scattered. The family altar (and even the family table) has been replaced by a television set in some homes. Forgotten, older parents waste away in loneliness. Rebellious youth from such homes search for elusive happiness in drugs and immorality.

Modern society needs to rebuild the family altar and the spiritual sanctuary called the home. Following Bible principles, Christians can lead the way by fortifying their homes to the benefit of the whole family, and at the same time meet the individual needs of every family member.

Each member of the Christian family progresses through his natural role, guided by the Spirit and the Word of God. They adapt to each successive role with grace and enthusiasm.

## Test Your Knowledge

True or False

_____ 1. Time brings changes to every home.

_____ 2. The first lesson for children to learn is to obey their parents.

_____ 3. The child who learns to submit to parents will probably be willing to submit to God's authority, also.

_____ 4. It is not necessary for children to honor their parents as long as they obey them.

_____ 5. Parents have a tremendous responsibility toward their children.

_____ 6. The child in the early childhood or kindergarten stage of development is easily influenced.

_____ 7. Adolescence is an awkward time of physical growth and personal searching of oneself.
_____ 8. It is grandparents' duty to involve themselves in their adult children's lives.
_____ 9. Grandparents can offer a wealth of advice and support if sought out by the children.
_____10. It is not necessary to accept the counsel of the elderly.

## Apply Your Knowledge

A family changes all too soon. Before two young parents realize what has happened, they find their children gone from home and themselves sitting on an "empty nest." Time marches on . . . marches on . . . marches on. . . .

Why not spend some time *today* building memories, loving, caring for, enjoying your children, parents or even grandparents? They will be gone in a little while, and your relationship with them will rest solely on the foundation you built while you had them near. An investment of time will never cost too much—not even in a busy, bustling society.

## Expand Your Knowledge

There is a wealth of information and study material awaiting you in all of the Word Aflame Elective Series. For personal study or group study alike, you will want to have each volume. Other topics of study include:

*WHY? A Study of Christian Standards*
*Spiritual Growth and Maturity*
*Bible Doctrines—Foundation of the Church*
*Salvation—Key to Eternal Life*
*The Bible—Its Origin and Use*
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