



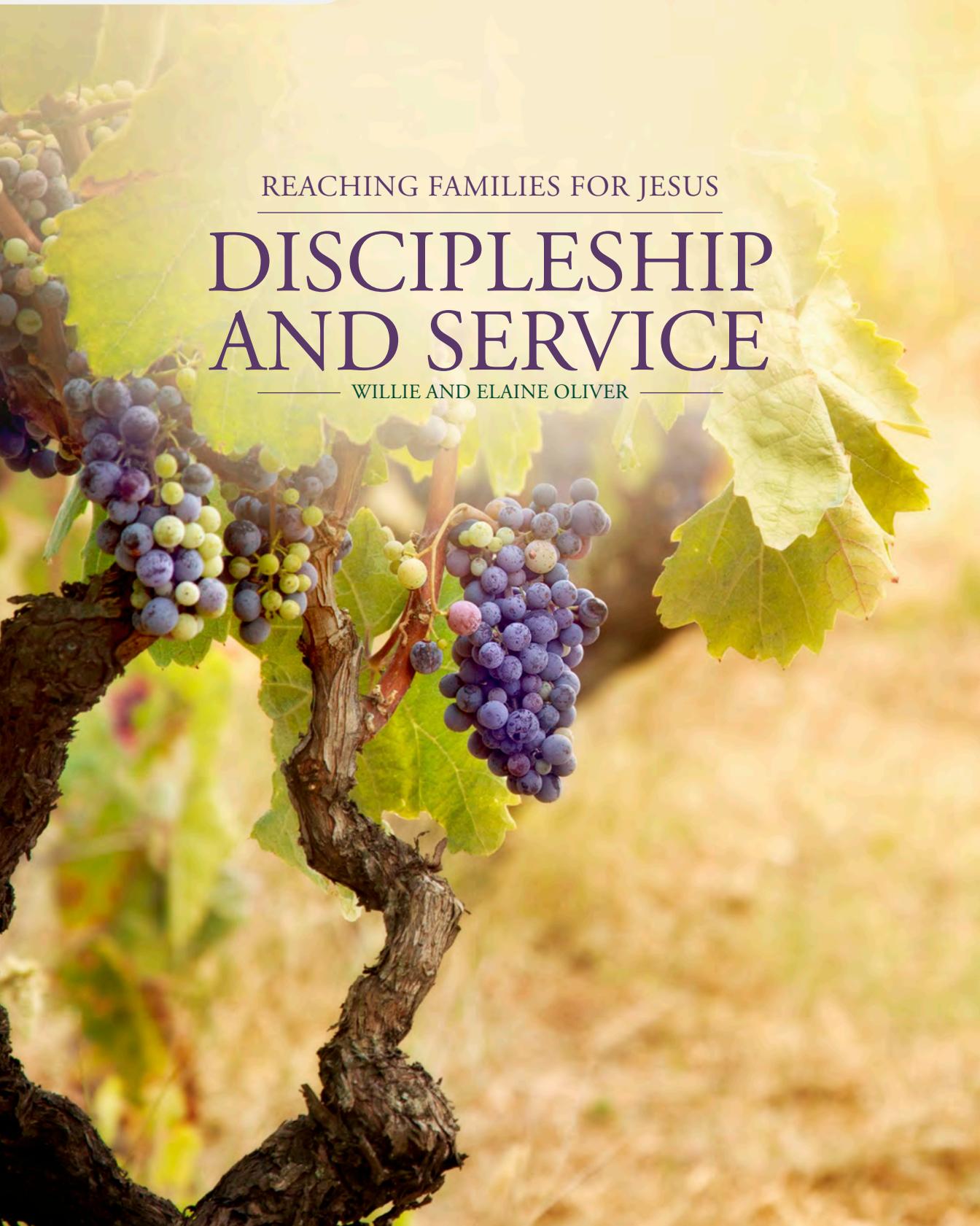
2018
PLANBOOK



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

— WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER —

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Preface

In John 15:4, 5, and 7 Jesus proclaims:

“ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU. AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT OF ITSELF, UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE, NEITHER CAN YOU, UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME. ‘I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. HE WHO ABIDES IN ME, AND I IN HIM, BEARS MUCH FRUIT; FOR WITHOUT ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING... BY THIS MY FATHER IS GLORIFIED, THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT; SO YOU WILL BE MY DISCIPLES.”

The viability of every disciple, to be sure, is predicated on connection with Jesus. The agricultural metaphor is poignant, purposeful, and persistent. To be disciples of Jesus we **MUST** abide in Him, and in turn, He abides in us. This points to a relationship that is dynamic, energetic, and vibrant. A relationship that is **ALIVE!**

The truth is, we cannot be disconnected from the vine and remain alive. If disconnected, we have severed all contact with the life-giving reality of His amazing grace, without which we cannot be of service to anyone, and **CANNOT** bear fruit.

We profer that discipleship is about service. And service is directly connected to fruit-bearing. And fruit-bearing can only take place when we remain connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ. This is something every faithful disciple will do—abide

in the love and salvation of our Lord and Savior. This leads us to *Total Member Involvement*, in the process of *Reaching Families for Jesus*.

Ellen White writes in *Gospel Workers*, “Obedience is the true sign of discipleship” (p. 92). Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

It is our hope that the resources in this volume will facilitate your capacity as leaders in God’s church to remain connected to Jesus each day, and bring a more dynamic meaning to *Discipleship and Service* in *Reaching Families for Jesus*, equipping them to do the will of God.

Maranatha!

For stronger and healthier families,

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors
Department of Family Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters
Silver Spring, Maryland
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100 Years of Family Ministries Around the World

On October 8, 1919 the General Conference Committee created the Home Commission, which became operative in 1922 with Arthur W. Spalding as director, who worked in this capacity with his wife Maud, until 1941. Spalding created literature for the education of the entire family. A series of leaflets were produced dealing with different phases of home life entitled, The Christian Home Series. Arthur W. Spalding wrote the lessons and Maud Spalding graded them.

Five books of the Christian Home Series came from the pens of Arthur Spalding and Dr. Belle Wood-Comstock, which provided instruction for family living.

Christian Home Day was set for the first Sabbath in February and is still preserved on the church calendar as Christian Home and Marriage Week, from the second Sabbath to the third Sabbath of February.

In June of 1941, a General Conference Convention on the home was held, perhaps the first Family Life International.

The Home Commission became part of the Department of Education in 1941. During the next three decades marriage and family life programs were promoted by Parent and Home Education Secretaries:

Florence Rebok (1941-1947), Arabella Moore Williams (1947-1954), Archa O. Dart (1954-1970) and W. John Cannon (1970-1975).

At the General Conference Session held in Vienna, Austria in 1975, to address the need for stronger, more stable Adventist homes, the Home and Family Service (HFS) was organized. A husband and wife team, Delmer and Betty Holbrook, were elected as directors. The Holbrooks organized and conducted training seminars for administrators, pastors and laity in every world division.

Karen and Ronald Flowers joined the HFS staff in 1980. D. W. Holbrook directed HFS from 1975 to 1982, and Betty Holbrook served as director from 1982 until 1985 when Home and Family Service became part of the Department of Church Ministries (CM).

Family Ministries continued as a strong section of the Department of Church Ministries through the efforts of Betty Holbrook, an Associate Director of CM until her retirement in 1988, and Karen and Ronald Flowers, Associate Directors of CM until 1995. D.W. Holbrook, Director of CM from 1985-1987 also assisted with Family Ministries.

At the 1995 General Conference Session held in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, the

Department of Church Ministries was disbanded, with several separate departments being formed, including the current Department of Family Ministries, with Ronald Flowers as Director, and Karen Flowers as Associate Director, until their retirement in June 2010, at the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, an infrastructure of Family Ministries Directors were elected at Division, Union and Conference/Mission levels; and the Family Ministries leadership training curriculum was put in place, as well as the publication of annual Family Ministries Planbooks.

At the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia, Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected on June 28, 2010 as Director and Associate Director, respectively, of the Department of Family Ministries. The Olivers came to the Department from a long career in Family Ministries, having directed the Department of Family Ministries of the North American Division (NAD) since its inception at the NAD Year-end Meeting in 1995; and Willie Oliver serving as Director of the Departments

of Family Ministries for the Atlantic Union Conference (1994-1995), and the Greater New York Conference (1989-1993).

During their first quinquennium as Directors of Family Ministries, Willie and Elaine Oliver prioritized the training of all Division and Union Directors of Family Ministries in the PREPARE/ENRICH modality of premarital and marriage enrichment counseling; developed Real Family Talk with Willie and Elaine Oliver, a television program seen on the Hope Channel around the world; continued the annual publication of Family Ministries Planbooks; advanced the Family to Family evangelism process as a part of the Mission to the Families in the Cities—Mission to the Cities—initiative of the General Conference; and became authors of the Real Family Talk column on Adventist World online.

Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected to a second term as Directors of the Department of Family Ministries on July 6, 2015, at the 60th Session of the General Conference held in San Antonio, Texas.



How to Use This Planbook

The Family Ministries Planbook is an annual resource organized by the General Conference Family Ministries department with input from the world field to supply local churches around the world with resources for the special family emphases weeks and Sabbaths.

VIII

Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 10-17

Christian Home and Marriage Week occurs in February embracing two Sabbaths: Christian Marriage Day that emphasizes Christian marriage and Christian Home Day that emphasizes parenting. Christian Home and Marriage Week begins on the second Sabbath and ends on the third Sabbath in February.

Christian Marriage Day: Sabbath, February 10, (Emphasizes Marriage)

Use the Marriage Sermon for worship service and the Marriage Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Christian Home Day: Sabbath, February 17, (Emphasizes Parenting)

Use the Parenting Sermon for worship service and the Parenting Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Family Togetherness Week: September 2-8

Family Togetherness Week is scheduled in the first week in September, beginning with the first Sunday and ending on the following Sabbath with Family Togetherness Day. Family Togetherness Week and Family Togetherness Day highlight celebrating the church as a family.

Family Togetherness Day: Sabbath, September 8 (Emphasizes the Church Family)

Use the Family Sermon for the worship service and the Family Seminar for a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon and/or Saturday night program.

Within this planbook you will find sermons, seminars, children's stories as well as leadership resources, reprint articles and book reviews to help facilitate these special days and other programs you may want to implement during the year. In Appendix A you will find useful information that will assist you in implementing family ministries in your local church.

This resource also includes Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars and handouts. Seminar facilitators are encouraged to personalize the Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations with their own personal stories and pictures that reflect the diversity of their various communities. To download them please visit: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2018>

SERMONS

What Do You Need From Jesus Today?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

MARK 10:46-52

(MATT 20:29-34; LUKE 18:35-43);

REVELATION 3:18

Introduction

10

A few weeks ago we came back from the Middle East where blind people seem more noticeable on the street than most places we have visited. Blindness, invariably, affects a person's social reality and dims their prospects for upward mobility. To be sure, blindness continues to be a burden to many, often forcing them to beg for food on the streets in order to survive.

Blindness remains a worldwide scourge in spite of medical and technological advances that build on the ancient study of medicine in the Middle East and in Greece. The Greeks introduced us to concepts such as medical diagnosis and prognosis. We owe them a debt of gratitude for advanced medical ethics, such as that embodied in early versions of today's Hippocratic Oath. In spite of all our advances, blindness remains a problem all over the globe.¹

Take the United States, for instance. According to the Centers for Disease Control,

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approximately 11 million Americans aged 12 years and older could improve their vision through proper refractive correction. More than 3.3 million aged 40 and older are either legally blind or suffer with reduced vision in the better-seeing eye. The leading causes of blindness and low vision in the United States are primarily age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma.²

If lack of sight was relegated to the realm of the physical, human beings might yet be able to cope with its debilitating effects. However, the opposite is true. Here's what we mean.

We have been Christians all of our lives. We are theologically, sociologically, and psychologically trained. Married for more than 33 years, we have been ministering to families for almost three decades, yet we still experience moments of blindness in our marriage. One such moment emerged recently when I (Willie) felt Elaine should have made up our bed one morning after being the last one to get out of it. She had "fallen-down on the job," and I told her so when I returned from my morning exercise.

Elaine was gracious. She accepted my feelings, but later challenged me on the merits of my observation. "Willie," she began, "after being married for so many years, how difficult would it have been for you to simply make the

bed when you found it unmade?” Her question cut to the heart of the matter. It took but seconds for me to recognize my blindness, and in embarrassment I apologized.

Truth be told, Elaine does so much more for our marriage day-to-day than I do, and she does it without complaining or seeking recognition. I unthoughtfully decided to call her out on a matter of little consequence that I could have easily addressed. Like Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, I (Willie) called on Jesus and saw the light. Because of “seeing” moments like these, we continue to have a healthy, satisfying marriage that affords us opportunities to share such experiences with you and others who quest to “see” better.

Today it is our hope that we will all be able to identify the true blindness in our lives and declare as we leave this worship experience, “We have seen the light!”

We have titled the few thoughts we will share with you today, **What Do You Need from Jesus Today?** Let us pray.

I. The Text: Mark 10:46-52

Turn in your Bibles with me to Mark 10:46-52:

NOW THEY CAME TO JERICHO. AS HE WENT OUT OF JERICHO WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND A GREAT MULTITUDE, BLIND BARTIMAEUS, THE SON OF TIMAEUS, SAT BY THE ROAD BEGGING. AND WHEN HE HEARD THAT IT WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH, HE BEGAN TO CRY OUT AND SAY, ‘JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!’ THEN MANY WARNED HIM TO BE QUIET; BUT HE CRIED OUT ALL THE MORE, ‘SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!’ SO JESUS STOOD STILL AND COMMANDED HIM TO BE CALLED. THEN THEY CALLED THE BLIND MAN, SAYING TO HIM, ‘BE OF GOOD CHEER. RISE, HE IS CALLING YOU.’ AND THROWING ASIDE HIS GARMENT, HE ROSE AND CAME TO JESUS. SO JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, ‘WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?’ THE BLIND MAN

SAID TO HIM, ‘RABBONI, THAT I MAY RECEIVE MY SIGHT.’ THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, ‘GO YOUR WAY; YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL.’ AND IMMEDIATELY HE RECEIVED HIS SIGHT AND FOLLOWED JESUS ON THE ROAD.

MARK 10:46-52

The context of this narrative finds Jesus on His way to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, but also to Calvary, and to His death on the Cross for your sins and mine.

In Mark 10 we find the Master Teacher using an innovative approach of sharing the gospel. Here He does not use symbols or miracles, neither types, parables, nor proverb. Rather, Christ uses paradoxes to make His point clear. A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself and yet expresses a valid truth or principle. For example, “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10) is a paradox. When the Apostle Paul pictures himself “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:8-10), he is again making use of paradox to make a deeper point.

Instead of preaching a long sermon, Jesus shared five important lessons by uttering five paradoxical statements: 1. Two shall be one (Mark 10:1-12); 2. Adults shall be as children (Mark 10:13-16); 3. The first shall be last (Mark 10:17-31); 4. Servants shall be rulers (Mark 10:32-45); and 5. The poor become rich (Mark 10:46-52).³

II. Explication and Application

In the fifth paradox mentioned by Jesus in Mark 10:46-52, He highlights the story of a poor beggar who becomes transformed when his poverty intersects the abundance of Jesus. He became instantly rich by receiving all he had ever wanted—his sight!

Warren Wiersbe, a noted biblical scholar, suggests that a large crowd on their way to the Passover followed Jesus and His disciples to Jericho, an 18-mile journey from Jerusalem. There were two cities with the name Jericho:

one was the old city that was in ruins. The other was a new city about a mile away where Herod the Great and those of his lineage had built a luxurious winter palace. This reality may help clarify the apparent inconsistency between Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 which says, “as He went out of Jericho,” whereas Luke comments, “as He was coming near Jericho.” Their perspectives were slightly different based on the old or new Jericho, which both gospel writers used as their reference point.⁴

Mark’s account continues in chapter 10 verse 47, “**And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’**” It is worth noting that when someone is blind, their other senses tend to be heightened. This is the body’s marvelous way of compensating for the loss of any sense. Middle Eastern cities tend to be noisy, and Passover time was one of much movement of peoples from the neighboring, and not so neighboring, cities to Jerusalem where the main temple was. I imagine the sound decibels of the crowd were quite high. However, for Bartimaeus whose survival depended on how focused he was on everything happening around him, the chatter that one as powerfully anointed as Jesus was in his immediate vicinity was an opportunity that he could not allow to slip by.

Commentators suggest that the healing fame of Jesus had spread far and wide throughout the countryside. Something in the heart of this beggar—perhaps his measure of faith like the lowly mustard seed—moved him to action at the most opportune moment! Something in the blind man’s soul believed this Jesus was no ordinary man, but the Messiah sent from God! He may have been blind, but he was no fool. He was even up on his theology and his history since he hails Jesus by the well-known national Messianic phrase “**Son of David,**” not once but twice.⁵

His yell was so piercing that it startled those around. “**Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more. ‘Son of David, have mercy on me’**” (Mark 10:48). When the soul is desperate for a change, nothing

else matters. Friends and acquaintances do not matter. The crowd may want to drown out our focus on Jesus, as it did that day for Bartimaeus, but we must not be deterred. Modern distractions such as social media, movies, and pop music all vie for the time and space we should reserve for our relationship with Jesus. Are they winning?

Bartimaeus refuses to be denied by the crowd. He is focused, he is relentless, he will not lose this opportunity to get close to the Master. Some in the crowd were probably offended by the Messiah title the blind beggar used to arrest the attention of Jesus, but Jesus is not offended. In fact, Jesus makes no effort at all to silence Bartimaeus. He is in fact headed to Jerusalem to accomplish his task as Messiah, Savior of the world. Like Bartimaeus, we must keep our eyes on the Prize; we must keep our eyes on Jesus to be healed of our debilitating blindness.

Feeling the plaintive tug of blind beggar’s extremity, Jesus stops. **Mark 10:49** says, “**So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.’**” When Jesus calls, Bartimaeus is ready. There is no hesitation, no lag time, no fooling around, no fear. There is nothing more important for Bartimaeus than to connect to Jesus, the Source of all goodness, the Source of all power, the Source of all compassion, and the Supply of every need. This same Jesus is calling today. Can you hear Him? He wants to heal you of your blindness. Are you ready? The impatient crowd that day recognized the cry of agony from the blind man and felt compelled to facilitate the blind man’s connection to Jesus. Do we feel the need to connect people to Jesus?

Mark 10:50 says: “**And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.**” Some commentators suggest that Bartimaeus’ outer garment was probably also used as a pallet. They further surmise that by employing such language, Mark was seeking to signify the removal of sickness and infirmity. This garment which in the past was Bartimaeus’ “security blanket,” his protection from evening chill and morning dew, probably represented all

his earthly possessions. Yet at the call of Jesus, he gladly casts aside this garment to respond quickly to Jesus.⁶ Are we willing to cast aside the things of this world which are preventing us from getting to Jesus? Bartimaeus cannot see Jesus, but his keen sense of hearing has picked up not only the voice but the very location from which the voice is coming. He casts aside all and runs in the direction of his healing.

“So Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man said to Him, ‘Rabboni, that I may receive my sight’” (Mark 10:51). What an interesting question to pose to a blind man. It is the same question Jesus poses to James, John, and Salome, in Mark 10:36.⁷ It is the same question Jesus poses to you and me every day of our lives: *What do you want Me to do for you?* So, in turn our message today poses this question to everyone who will hear: *What do you need from Jesus today?*

Remember, Jesus is the One who healed the 10 lepers of their terrible disease. He is the One who fed 5,000 men, women, and children with two little fishes and five loaves of bread. He is the One who at the wedding in Cana of Galilee turned water into wine. Remember, He is the One who raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). He has the power to do anything for you and He asks today, *What do you want me to do for you?*

In order to grow spiritually, and in every one of our important relationships, we must answer Jesus like Bartimaeus did that day near Jericho. First, the blind man was unequivocal about who Jesus was—he called Him Rabboni, which means my Master, my Teacher. To call someone Master means that you are ready and willing to follow Him. The only other person in the Gospels who used this term was Mary (John 20:16), and she did so when she saw Jesus in the garden after he had been resurrected. The blind beggar twice called him “Son of David,” a national messianic title, but *Rabboni* was an articulation of personal faith.⁸ As the blind man approached Jesus, he declared his total belief in Him.

Second, Bartimaeus was crystal clear about what he needed from Jesus that day. The Greek word is *anablēpō*, “**that I may receive my sight**” (NKJV); however, the English Standard Version of the Bible expresses the blind man’s request as “**let me recover my sight.**” New American Standard Bible conveys Bartimaeus’ request as “**I want to regain my sight!**” Some commentators suggest that *anablēpō* could mean to recover sight.⁹ This notion is very plausible and closer to the original, which suggests that like most people in the Middle East who are blind, Bartimaeus may not have been born blind, but became blind with age, with lack of medical attention. Remember, there were doctors in Bartimaeus’ day but Bartimaeus may not have had the means to access their help. He lacked health care, but all was taken care of by the grace and mercy of Jesus. Do we believe that Jesus can do the same for us today?

So, we ask the question again: *What do you need from Jesus today?* What is your blindness? Do you realize Jesus has the power, capacity, and willingness to grant the request of your need? Do you see Jesus as your Master, as your Teacher, as your Savior? Is your blindness spiritual? Does it need to be drawn to the light of Jesus so that He might heal you and you can go from ambivalence to full blown faith in Him? Is your blindness relational. Do you need his transforming power in your marriage, parenting, parent or sibling relationships? Do you need it in your relationships with people you dislike?

Mark 10:52 concludes, “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.”

Bartimaeus was healed immediately, and you can be too.

III. Conclusion

What is your blindness today? Can you identify it and recognize your need of Jesus? Is it to live an authentic life so you can live your

core commitments of connecting meaningfully with others—including your husband or wife, your children or neighbors, the people at work, and other important relationships? Are you ready to operationalize your commitment of growing in Jesus, as you forget the things that are behind and move forward to the call in Christ Jesus?

Are you able to recognize Jesus as the Master, the Teacher of your life, so you can grow daily in your relationship with Him and we together can grow the church of God? Do you believe in Him? Do you trust Him? *What do you need from Jesus today?*

Bartimaeus could not see, but he could speak, and he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Bartimaeus could not see, but he could run to Jesus. Who needs to run to Jesus today so you can see, bringing light to all the relationships in your life, including your walk with Jesus?

14 Ellen White shares: “Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son.”¹⁰

Revelation 3:18 states, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Our marriage isn’t perfect, but we trust God for patience and kindness each day to deal with each other in a way that gives honor and glory to Him. Every day we ask God to heal us of

our relational blindness so we can see, and have the kind of relationship that brings joy and contentment to our home.

It is our hope you will make the decision to ask Jesus for what you need today. That you will leave this worship experience rejoicing, able to declare that though you were once blind, now you see, and the light that you have received permeates every relationship in your life.

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

Notes

- ¹ “*Visual Impairment and Blindness*.” World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>. (accessed on September 14, 2017).
- ² “*Common Eye Disorders*.” Centers for Disease Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics/ced/index.html> CDC common eye disorders. (accessed on September 13, 2017).
- ³ Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, pp. 143-148.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 148.
- ⁵ Ibid, p. 148.
- ⁶ Brooks, James A. 1991. *The New American Commentary: Mark*, p. 174.
- ⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 148.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Strong, James. 2009. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*.
- ¹⁰ White, Ellen G. Year. 1999. *Steps to Christ*, p. 22.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

SONG OF SOLOMON 5:16

Do you love chocolate?
Do you love milk?
Do you love ice cream?
Do you love the weather?
Do you love your parents?
Do you love your spouse?
Do you love God?

We use the word *love* for so many different things and in so many different ways that it loses its value. Maybe this is why love may not appear to mean much to most people. What we do know is that when it comes to love and commitment, our culture's message is clear: Nothing lasts forever. Love, at least as presented in films, novels, music, and celebrities' lives is a powerful emotion that ebbs and flows and eventually dries up. The Scriptures take a dramatically different view. In the Song of Solomon, the bride exclaims, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

If you are weighing a lifetime commitment to another person, it is this understanding of love you need to consider. But what does it involve?

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From our experience and study of Scripture, we have made some observations about the nature of lasting love.

OBSERVATION 1: Marriage Requires Friendship

One key to a healthy marriage is friendship rooted in common values and interests. That's not the type of love people today typically look for in romantic relationships. The ancient Greeks can give us insight into this dilemma. The Greeks recognized that there were many forms of love, and they used an array of terms to describe them. Two of their favorite terms were *eros* and *storge*.

Eros is powerful romantic love that flares up quickly and expresses itself in dramatic ways. Erotic lovers experience all the soaring peaks and gut-wrenching plunges of an emotional roller coaster. Erotic lovers are adrenaline junkies who desperately seek new thrills.

On the other hand *storge*, or the love between friends, is slow to develop but lasts. Marriage, perhaps more than any other bond, needs this durable love—a love that lasts. When people are dating it is easy to get caught up in the romance of *eros* love. But in marriage, love and commitment are often expressed through mundane, daily responsibilities and sacrifices that are more associated with friends—*storge* love—than lovers.

Scripture confirms this connection between passionate, romantic love and friendship. The bride in Song of Solomon describes her lover as radiant and compares his body to “polished ivory” (Song of Solomon 5:14). When he touches her, her heart pounds (verse 4). And we could ask ourselves, What stirs such powerful romantic feelings? After sensually describing her husband’s body, she states, “[This] is my lover, my friend,” (v. 16, NLT). Her friendship with Solomon and her romantic feelings for him were inseparable.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the French philosopher and humanist once said, “It’s not a lack of love but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.”¹ A lot of social scientists—sociologists and psychologists—agree.

OBSERVATION 2: Enduring Love is Unselfish

For love to last, it must be unselfish, but today self often comes first. We have often heard spouses in troubled marriages ask, “Don’t I have a right to be happy?” Marriage and relationships are good only if they enrich you. If a relationship takes too much time, attention, or sacrifice, many would advise you to throw it away and move on. It’s not surprising then that many of the couples who attend marriage workshops and retreats struggle with selfishness. I like the apostle Paul’s definition of love. You know where it’s found, right? 1 Corinthians 13 is one place. But here’s another place: “Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends . . . Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand” (Philippians 2:3-4, MSG).

We could simply say that marital love is work. Or as Paul states, love is the daily decision to “put yourself aside” and focus on the needs of another. Think about this, there is no switch you can flip on your wedding day that suddenly allows you to look out for another person’s interests before your own. The ability and desire to be selfless is tested in the daily interaction of dating.

As your dating relationship turns serious and marriage becomes a possibility, it’s time to ask some probing questions: “Am I willing to put this person’s needs above my own, even when it’s inconvenient?”

I recall the time a couple came once to my office. They were both from Mexico—a young couple married just three and half years. He came to the United States to make some money to help her so she would be able to finish her nursing training. While in Mexico, a former boyfriend of hers became obsessed with her and raped her. He threatened her, kidnapped her for a week, and only let her go after she promised to have all charges dropped, which she did after he released her. She told her husband and her parents, with whom she was living, what had happened to her. He asked her to come to the States so they could be together. Understandably, the young wife developed some barriers that prevented her from giving herself completely to her husband as she would have in a normal, healthy marriage relationship. When she could not overcome her emotional and psychological barriers, she told her husband that she was not being fair to him and that they should divorce so he could find himself a good wife. That is how much she valued the well-being of the man she loved.

With tears in his eyes, the husband said to his broken wife, “But I love you. I learned from Jesus’ sacrifice for us that because I truly love you, I am willing to give my life for you. And if I have to wait months or years before we can be intimate again, before we can have a good marriage again, I’m happy to do so, because I love you.” This couple—both husband and wife—exhibited the true meaning of unselfish, other-centered love. Not my needs, but my spouse’s needs come first.

OBSERVATION 3: Premarital Sex Complicates Everything

Avoiding sexual intimacy before marriage is another component of finding lasting love. Besides the fact that it goes against God’s directives, premarital sex clouds judgment. Deciding to marry someone is one of the most important steps

you'll ever take; you need to be able to evaluate the relationship clearly. Yet, sexual intimacy often makes a couple feel closer than they are and hinders their ability to see each other in nonsexual ways. The overshadowing power of sex is one reason Scripture instructs us to reserve it for marriage. The Apostle Paul writes, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3, NASB).

When God puts something off limits it is because He wants to protect and provide. In this case, God wants to protect us from making clouded decisions about another. What does it mean to abstain from sexual immorality in a dating relationship? While the Greek word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, *porneias*, covers a broad range of sexual actions, it mainly focuses on intercourse. Paul also adds that we should avoid "lustful passion" (verse 5), or actions that would cause us to desire to have sex.

Because sex and dating are considered synonymous in our culture, pursuing lasting love with someone will require you to ask difficult questions of yourself and your relationship. From the more psychological point of view, there is great value in the privacy and intimacy reserved for marriage. Once that mystery is removed, there is a great loss in the relationship. Sadly, statistics do not lie. Couples that live together before marriage greatly increase their chances of divorce compared to those that do not.

Rabbi Schmuley Boteach writes,

SURRENDERING SEXUALLY TOO EARLY IN A RELATIONSHIP IS ALMOST ALWAYS GUARANTEED TO DESTROY THE BUDDING ROMANCE, CHIEFLY BECAUSE IT UNDERMINES THE SENSE OF MYSTERY. YOUR BODY, COVERED IN CLOTHING, IS A MYSTERIOUS TREASURE WHICH ONLY BONDS OF COMMITMENT CAN REVEAL. WHEN YOU GO AHEAD AND REMOVE IT ALL, YOU ARE A PUZZLE THAT HAS BEEN SOLVED. EROTICISM (FROM THE GREEK EROS) IS LOST FROM THE RELATIONSHIP SINCE THERE ARE NOW NO OBSTACLES WHICH MUST BE OVERCOME IN ORDER FOR PLEASURE TO HAD."²

OBSERVATION 4: Marital Love Requires Commitment

Our culture assumes love will be short-lived, so couples are not expected to commit to each other. That's why more and more couples are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage. Which, by the way, is one of the reasons most cohabiting couples never marry the people with whom they live. And those who do marry have a much greater chance of divorce due to the "no commitment" mentality that follows them right into marriage. Instead, the Bible's picture of mature romantic love, implies lasting commitment: Jesus said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be **united** with his wife" (Matthew 19:5). The word we most often use for united is the word *cleave*. The literal meaning of cleave is to make a covenant. It means to make a public vow of commitment to God and to the person you are marrying.

That is what Ezekiel says God did when He cleaved to us: "Then I passed by you again and saw that you had reached the age for love. I spread my cloak over you and covered your nakedness. I swore a solemn oath to you and **entered into a covenant** with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine" (Ezekiel 16:8, NLT).

The essence of marriage is a covenant! That's why the marriage vows are not really a declaration of a person's feelings for the other but a promise of what they will be and do for the other. Most of you repeated these or similar vows: I, (name), take you (name), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part.

To love and to cherish is not referring to a feeling. It is not to feel love toward a spouse, or to feel like cherishing one's spouse. Rather, it is a decision of the will. This decision forms a covenant bond that controls one's future actions. The way to control and not be controlled by your past is to forgive; the way to control your future is to make a covenant. Both

love and forgiveness are decisions we must make! When we attach our souls, our very beings, to another we become one with that person spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. For all our clamoring for independence and freedom, most of us want to be stuck with someone we love and who loves us—for life.

If you are considering marriage, the relationship described in Genesis should stop you cold in your tracks. It is asking you to put your security on the line and committing entirely to one person, one person with whom you will face a lifetime of challenges together.

One of the movie blockbusters of 2011 was “The Vow,” based on a book by the same title.³ The book tells the story of Kim and Krickitt who met and fell in love over a long-distance phone call in 1992. They bonded over their Christian faith and were married a very short time later. Just ten weeks into their marriage, the couple survived a terrible car wreck that left Krickitt in a coma with severe head trauma.

When she woke up from the coma, Krickitt experienced amnesia and was essentially married to a stranger, forgetting the last eighteen months of her life. Some people encouraged Kim to divorce Krickitt. “After all, she doesn’t know you,” they told him. But he refused. It was the couple’s religious belief in the unbreakable vow of marriage that kept them together. “You make a promise before God with your wedding vows,” said Krickitt Carpenter, “You have to take that seriously.”

You may think, *Where am I going to find the strength to love one person consistently for life?* The answer lies in the most important observation about romantic love.

OBSERVATION 5: Divine Love is the Key

Our ability to love a person—and enjoy that person’s love in return—is dependent upon our experience of God’s love. The reason becomes apparent when we consider the type of love all of

us hope to receive. When I ask young people to describe the person they want to love for the rest of their lives they respond, “A person who will always care for me, always look out for me, always accept me, always pursue me, always be interested in me.” The love they envision is powerfully described in the Scriptures:

LOVE NEVER GIVES UP. LOVE CARES MORE FOR OTHERS THAN FOR SELF. LOVE DOESN’T WANT WHAT IT DOESN’T HAVE. LOVE DOESN’T STRUT, DOESN’T HAVE A SWELLED HEAD, DOESN’T FORCE ITSELF ON OTHERS, ISN’T ALWAYS “ME FIRST,” DOESN’T FLY OFF THE HANDLE, DOESN’T KEEP SCORE OF THE SINS OF OTHERS, DOESN’T REVEL WHEN OTHERS GROVEL, TAKES PLEASURE IN THE FLOWERING OF TRUTH, PUTS UP WITH ANYTHING, TRUSTS GOD ALWAYS, ALWAYS LOOKS FOR THE BEST, NEVER LOOKS BACK, BUT KEEPS GOING TO THE END. LOVE NEVER DIES.”
1 CORINTHIANS 13, MSG

This description of love resonates with us because it was inspired by God for people who were made to be receptors of His divine love. Our fascination with and yearning for perfect love has been embedded into our hearts. But if we’re honest, we realize there’s no way we can always love someone as Paul describes. Expecting an imperfect spouse to love us that perfectly is equally unrealistic and invites disappointment and hurt. Only one person can love perfectly—God. Experiencing His unwavering love is the only way human love can be satisfying. Why? Because when we allow ourselves to be loved by a Divine Lover—who does not have mood swings or bad days—our need for transcendent love is fulfilled. We are then free to be content with the love others can offer. And we’re better able to love others in the way God loves us. If the ability to love someone is dependent upon experiencing God’s love, then it’s crucial to assess your walk with God and that of the person you are dating.

Conclusion

Assessing your views of romantic love and realigning them with God’s perspective takes

time and effort. But think about it this way: If you knew you would drive the next car you purchased for the rest of your life, how would that knowledge affect your decision? What precautions would you take to ensure you were buying the right car? Perhaps you would find out how *Consumer Reports* rates it. Maybe you would pop the hood and see if everything is in place. Surely you would take the car for a long test drive. And yet, the most important thing you could do is take it to an expert mechanic who knows how a car is supposed to run. His exhaustive checklist would trump any list you could put together.

Well, ironically, when it comes to marital love, most people are content to create their own checklists. These lists often reflect an amazingly limited perspective: “Do we have fun together?” “Do my friends like him or her?” “Do we like the same church?”

As Christians we have access to the perspective of the Author of love. God is not just a lover, but love itself (1 John 4:8). His opinion, revealed in His Word, can guide us as we move from dating to love, to a lifetime commitment with another. If you are considering marriage, there is no surer path to a relationship that will not only be deeply fulfilling, but will also provide an example to a culture desperate for lasting love.

So, what’s love got to do with it? If you want to have a lasting, successful, happy marriage, you need at least four facets of love:

- You need **storge** love, a love rooted in friendship.
- You need **eros** love, an attraction for each other.
- You need **phileo** love, a brotherly love, as if we had always been together.
- And most importantly, you need **agape** love, God’s unselfish, everlasting, all-encompassing love for us and through us.

Robertson McQuilkin, at the peak of his career, resigned as president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in 1990 to become the full-time caregiver for his wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimer’s.

McQuilkin did this, he said, because Muriel was much happier when he was with her. As Muriel needed more and more of him, he wrestled with who should receive his full-time attention, Muriel or Columbia Bible College.

As McQuilkin explained it,

“WHEN THE TIME CAME, THE DECISION WAS FIRM. IT TOOK NO GREAT CALCULATION. IT WAS A MATTER OF INTEGRITY. HAD I NOT PROMISED, 42 YEARS BEFORE, ‘IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH, TILL DEATH DO US PART?’ THIS WAS NO GRIM DUTY TO WHICH I WAS STOICALLY RESIGNED, HOWEVER. IT WAS ONLY FAIR. SHE HAD AFTER ALL CARED FOR ME FOR ALMOST FOUR DECADES WITH MARVELOUS DEVOTION; NOW IT WAS MY TURN. AND SUCH A PARTNER SHE WAS! IF I TOOK CARE OF HER FOR 40 YEARS, I WOULD NEVER BE OUT OF HER DEBT. IT IS ALL MORE THAN KEEPING PROMISES AND BEING FAIR, HOWEVER. AS I WATCH HER BRAVE DESCENT INTO OBLIVION, MURIEL IS THE JOY OF MY LIFE. DAILY I DISCERN NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF THE KIND OF PERSON SHE IS, THE WIFE I ALWAYS LOVED. I ALSO SEE FRESH MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD’S LOVE—THE GOD I LONG TO LOVE MORE FULLY. SHE IS SUCH A DELIGHT TO ME. I DON’T HAVE TO CARE FOR HER, I GET TO.”⁴

Notes

- ¹ Quoted by Les & Leslie Parrot in *Relevant Magazine*, Sept/Oct 2008;
- ² Boteach, Schmuley. *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy*. Danvers, MA: Harmony Books, p.172.
- ³ Krickitt And Kim Carpenter, Couple Who Inspired ‘The Vow,’ Talk About Love That Endures. OWN. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/krickitt-and-kim-carpenter-the-vow_n_5676474.html
- ⁴ Zylstra, Sarah Eekhoff. Died: Robertson McQuilkin, College President Praised for Alzheimer’s Resignation. Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/june/died-robertson-mcquilkin-columbia-president-alzheimers-ciu.html>

The Perfect Spouse

DEREK J. MORRIS

The Text

EPHESIANS 5:25-33

Subject

How to love your spouse

Complement

With agapé love: sacrificing, nourishing, cherishing.

Preaching idea

Let your marriage be a reflection of the immeasurable, unending love of God.

Purpose

To encourage my hearers to love their spouse with a heavenly love by sacrificing, nourishing, and cherishing their spouse.

My wife Bodil and I met at Newbold College in the UK. She was 18 and I was 20. We quickly became good friends. I loved her before I ever touched her hand. We shared a wonderful school year together, but soon she was back home in Takoma Park, Maryland preparing to enter the nursing program at Columbia Union College, now Washington Adventist University. I was able to visit her in the US that summer, and just before I left her

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parents invited me to join their family for a ski vacation in New England in December. It sounded like a wonderful idea, but I knew as a poor college student, I could never afford such luxury. Before I'd had a chance to get depressed over my poverty, her parents told me they would pay all of my expenses, including my airfare!

My final semester of undergraduate studies passed quickly and soon I was on my way to the US for an exciting winter vacation. Little did I realize it at the time, but I was embarking on a one-way trip. While on holiday, I was offered a pastoral position in the Pennsylvania Conference. I never went back home. Eight months later we were engaged. A year after that we were married.

It all seemed so perfect, but I was soon to discover what an imperfect spouse I was. After several years of pastoral ministry, my wife wrote me a letter. When I read it, I felt like someone had just punched me in the abdomen. I realize now she wasn't trying to hurt me—she wrote the letter because she loved me and cared about our marriage. Here's what she said, "You tell me I'm at the top of your list, but I don't feel like it." I was an abusive spouse and I did not even realize it. I would never hit my spouse. I don't ever remember shouting at her, but I was abandoning her, working from early in the morning until late at night, and to make matters worse, I was doing it in the name of Jesus.

After that reality check I began to be more intentional about my marriage. I found some wise counsel written almost two thousand years ago by the Apostle Paul. He's writing to husbands in this portion of his letter to Christians in Ephesus, but I'm convinced the counsel is appropriate for every spouse.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Notice again how Paul begins in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives." As you may know, there are several specific words in Greek which are translated by the rather broad English word "love." The verb used here is *agapao*, from which we get the noun *agapé*. It is used whenever God's love is spoken of. So when the Bible says "God so loved the world," the verb *agapao* is used. When Jesus says, "A new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you" the verb *agapao* is used. Paul is saying here, "Husbands, have agape love for your wives." And we might add, Wives, have agape love for your husbands.

Paul is challenging those of us who are married to reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. And the verb is in the present imperative, which is a command and an earnest ongoing appeal. Love, and keep on loving, your spouse with a heavenly love.

Perhaps someone is thinking, *Let your love for your spouse be a revelation of the immeasurable,*

unfailing love of God? What do you mean by that? Well, fortunately, the Apostle Paul outlines three aspects of that heavenly love.

I. Sacrifice for your spouse (Ephesians 5:25)

First, to reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God to your spouse means to sacrifice for your spouse. Look again with me at Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Christ demonstrated His agape love for us, his church, by making the supreme sacrifice for us. He gave Himself up on our behalf. He gave Himself up in favor of us. He took what we deserved, which was death, that we might receive as a free gift what He deserved—everlasting life. And He did not come saying, I'll give 50 percent if you give 50 percent. He gave 100 percent, unconditionally, even though He knew that many would not even appreciate His gift.

That is how we are to love our spouse. Love your spouse with a heavenly love. Sacrifice for your spouse. Unconditionally give 100 percent. You say, "That doesn't sound fair! Why should I have to give 100 percent? What about my needs? My rights? I can't love like that!" You're absolutely right. We can't love our spouse with a heavenly love if our hearts are selfish and unconverted. Unless you have committed your life to Christ and have asked Him to fill you with His agape love by the Holy Spirit, you cannot love your spouse with a heavenly love. It's impossible. You'll fall short every time. But if you pray each morning, "Lord, please fill me with your agape love," then God's love can flow through you to your spouse. Part of loving your spouse with a heavenly love is this: you will sacrifice for your spouse.

Many years ago, I was privileged to baptize a young couple, Gary and Laurie Moyer. Laurie had cystic fibrosis and she had struggled to stay alive as long as she could remember. As a child, she was molested by a hospital employee. Life was hard. But finally she met Gary, a young man who loved her for who she was. Not for what

he could give her, or what he could make of her, but simply for who she was. Laurie treated herself six hours a day just to be able to breathe freely. She was diligent and disciplined, but finally her lungs began to fail. No additional medical options were available, except one—a lung transplant. Her devoted husband offered to give her one of his lungs. That, my friends, is a visible demonstration of loving your spouse with a heavenly love. You sacrifice for your spouse. You love your spouse more than life itself. Such love, my friends, isn't worked up. It's prayed down. Such love is a gift from above, poured through you to those you love.

Laurie wasn't strong enough to go through that surgery. She sleeps in Jesus now, in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection when our Lord Jesus returns in glory. Even so, in this life she caught a glimpse of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God, and she will rejoice in that love throughout eternity.

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II. Nourish your spouse (Ephesians 5:28-29)

A second aspect of loving your spouse with the immeasurable, unfailing love of God is to nourish your spouse. Notice Ephesians 5:28-29: "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."

Paul uses the illustration of a person caring for his own body. He says just as a person nourishes his own body, and Christ nourishes the Church, so as a Christian you should nourish your spouse. The verb used here, *ektrepho*, means to nourish fully or to encourage growth. Loving your spouse with a heavenly love means not only to sacrifice for your spouse but also to nourish your spouse, to encourage her, to encourage him, to grow and develop.

One way to nourish your spouse is to encourage your spouse to grow personally. Forty years ago, on June 26, 1977, my wife and

I were married in Takoma Park, Maryland. We wrote our own vows for the wedding. As part of my vow, I promised to help Bodil become "all that God wanted her to be." That's what it means to "nourish" your wife. Though I've failed many times, that promise has been an important part of our commitment. When Bodil completed graduate school and marched off the platform with a masters degree in her hand, I do not know who was more excited—her or me! It almost felt like we were all graduating! She took all the tests and wrote all the papers, including an extensive thesis, but it took a family commitment to "nourish her," to encourage and support her in her growth. As Christians, loving your spouse with a heavenly love involves not only sacrificing for your spouse but nourishing your spouse as well.

A second way to nourish your spouse is to encourage your spouse to grow spiritually. In fact, listen carefully my friends, I would suggest that nurturing your spouse spiritually is the best way to strengthen and safeguard your relationship. Are you praying with your spouse? Are you praying for your spouse? Are you having worship together? Are you encouraging your spouse to grow spiritually? Those are ways to nourish your spouse, part of loving your spouse with a heavenly love.

III. Cherish your spouse (Ephesians 5:29)

But there's a third aspect of loving your spouse as a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God found in Ephesians 5:29 and that is "cherishing your spouse." "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and *cherishes* it, just as the Lord does the church."

Again, Paul uses the illustration of a person caring for his own body. The verb translated cherish in verse 29 is a unique one. Found only twice in the New Testament, the verb *thalpo* means to cherish, to comfort, to keep warm. The only other usage is in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 in reference to a nurse or nursing mother caring for her children: "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own

children.” What a beautiful picture! To reveal the immeasurable, unfailing love of God to your spouse means not only to sacrifice for your spouse and to nourish your spouse, but also to cherish your spouse. To comfort. To keep warm. And that’s not just talking about warming cold feet on a wintery night, but making your spouse feel special, precious, cherished.

I read a beautiful illustration this past week of a husband who did just that. He cherished his wife, and she felt it. The story was recorded by a surgeon who witnessed the touching scene. You see, this young lady had just undergone surgery to remove a tumor from her face. In the process of the operation, a facial nerve was severed, leaving her mouth twisted and her face contorted. Her young husband was in the hospital room standing beside the bed as the young woman asked the surgeon, “Will my mouth always be like this?” “Yes,” he replies, “it will, because the nerve was cut.” She nods in silence, but the young husband smiles. “I like it,” he says. “It’s kind of cute.” Gently, her husband stoops to kiss her crooked mouth, twisting his own lips to accommodate hers, just to show her that their kiss still works.¹ I don’t know about you, but that touches my heart. A simple, yet beautiful illustration of what it means to cherish your wife as a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

Conclusion

I have also been blessed with a life companion who has been a revelation to me of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. That hasn’t been easy, because I’m not a perfect spouse. What makes the miracle even more remarkable is this: she isn’t a perfect spouse either! But she asks the Lord to fill her with His agapé love and she loves me with a heavenly love—sacrificing, nourishing, and cherishing me. So today, 40 years and a few days after we said “I do,” I want to publically thank her for a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. [*Note: The speaker would recognize their own spouse now, then invite others to do the same.*]

I bought some flowers to say thank you, but they’re not all for you! They’re also for you to share with someone else here who wants to say thank you to their spouse for a revelation of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

If your heart is filled with gratitude for someone who loves you with a heavenly love—sacrificing, nourishing, cherishing—then come, take a flower, and thank that special person in your life for helping you to catch a clearer glimpse of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.

Notes

¹ Dobson, James C. (2014). *Straight Talk to Men*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, p. 112.

The Power of Praying Parents

S. JOSEPH KIDDER

The Text

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

Introduction

24

I met Larry during Christmas. He was rough looking and heavily covered with tattoos—up and down his arms, on his neck, even on his head. In the course of our conversation, he told me that he was the head deacon at his church. I was taken aback! I don’t normally see myself as judgmental, but I could not understand why a church would let a guy who looked as rough as Larry be the head deacon. That is when he shared his story with me.

He grew up in the Church and was the product of Adventist education from elementary school until the first year of college. When he got to college, he did not feel like he fit in with their strict rules and regulations. He left school and ended up joining the Hells Angels. He totally embraced the gang life—drugs, women, drinking, full-body tattoos.

During Larry’s years away from God, his mother woke up at five o’clock every morning to pray for her son. She had little contact with Larry and often did not know where he was,

whether he was dead or alive—in jail or out of jail—but she kept clinging to hope. For fifteen years, Larry’s mother faithfully prayed for her son and claimed Bible promises on his behalf.

Fifteen years later, Larry finally decided it was time to leave the Hells Angels. He and his girlfriend settled down in the Bay Area. He got a job, but stole from his boss to support his drug addiction. He was caught and fired. Soon after, he ran out of money. He and his girlfriend were evicted from their apartment and shortly thereafter, she left him. Larry, unable to recover, lived on the streets of San Francisco. He ate from trash cans and scavenged for necessities.

Larry became so depressed that he felt suicide was the only option. One Sabbath morning, he took his gun and pointed it at his head. With his finger on the trigger, he heard a voice telling him to go to church. He had not been to church in fifteen years so he ignored the voice. Resetting his grip, he heard the voice again saying, “Go to church.” He tried to ignore the voice again. This happened several times. How did Larry respond? What happened to him? We’ll get back to that shortly.

Covering Our Children with Prayer

Every single day we may find ourselves doing a lot for our children—loving and caring for them, nurturing, teaching, training, helping,

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leading, equipping, encouraging, protecting, and so much more. We spend precious hours just living out life, helping with homework, and driving them to activities. We spend money on sports, lessons, and various classes to help them grow and become all they can be, providing opportunities for them to do what they most love in this world. But in the midst of busy, full lives we have to ask ourselves: Are we praying for our children?

I am not referring to quick prayers that have little thought behind them. I mean *really* praying specific, powerful, promise-filled, hope-inspired prayers. The only thing of eternal significance that will stand the test of time is our prayers for our children. Our prayers for our children never die. They live on in their lives. Their relationship with Jesus is the only thing they can take with them to heaven, and for this we should pray for them.

When my two children were young, after supper we would have family worship. Shortly after that I would typically leave for a meeting or pastoral visitation. My wife would tuck the children in bed after praying with each one of them. When I would return home, I would go into their rooms and also pray with them. Then my wife and I would go into our bedroom and pray for our children's salvation, protection, future, and character. Many times we would claim specific Bible promises on their behalf. To this day, my adult children remain committed followers of Jesus.

There is nothing more powerful than the earnest prayers of parents who humbly kneel down and lift their children before the Lord. Ellen White writes,

“THE POWER OF A MOTHER’S PRAYERS CANNOT BE TOO HIGHLY ESTIMATED. SHE WHO KNEELS BESIDE HER SON AND DAUGHTER THROUGH THE VICISSITUDES OF CHILDHOOD, THROUGH THE PERILS OF YOUTH, WILL NEVER KNOW TILL THE JUDGMENT THE INFLUENCE OF HER PRAYERS UPON THE LIFE OF HER CHILDREN. IF SHE IS CONNECTED BY FAITH WITH THE SON OF GOD, THE

MOTHER’S TENDER HAND MAY HOLD BACK HER SON FROM THE POWER OF TEMPTATION, MAY RESTRAIN HER DAUGHTER FROM INDULGING IN SIN. WHEN PASSION IS WARRING FOR THE MASTERY, THE POWER OF LOVE, THE RESTRAINING, EARNEST, DETERMINED INFLUENCE OF THE MOTHER, MAY BALANCE THE SOUL ON THE SIDE OF RIGHT.”
WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME P. 266

In my pastoral ministry I have seen the difference it makes when parents pray for their children. Those children are protected by God. They often decided to follow Jesus and more often than not, come back to the Lord when they go astray.

Prayers are powerful because we have a God who does even the impossible when we pray. Hannah prayed for something that was impossible for her—to have a child—but God granted her wish. The same God who granted Hannah's wish for a child honors the prayers of parents for the salvation, protection, and future of their children. Hannah knew Who had helped her: “I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him” (1 Samuel 1:27). My hope is that every parent will be able to claim this promise on behalf of their children.

Now I would like to share with you seven important areas for which to pray concerning your children. At the end, there is 31-day prayer plan which may help you get started praying for your children. You may repeat it or adapt it as you wish.

1. Salvation

As a father, my greatest desire in the world is to see my children walking with the Lord, and I pray for this all the time. John had it right when he wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

I want to pray that my children have an experience like Paul who said, “I want to

know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11, NIV). When children do this, is there any greater joy that a parent can have?

Prayer for Our Children’s Salvation:

“Father, I pray that my daughter will confess with her mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in her heart that You have raised Christ from the dead.

May my daughter call on Your name (Romans 10:9,13)! Father, lead my daughter in the paths of righteousness for Your name’s sake. I pray that You will shed Your love abroad in her heart, and teach my daughter to delight in You (Romans 5:5).

Jesus, bind Satan and break his power over my daughter for he is a defeated foe. Please send your angels and godly men and women to minister to my daughter.

Holy Spirit, I ask that you draw my daughter to Jesus Christ and into a close, personal relationship with Him.

Thank You, Lord, for Your gift of salvation. Thank You for saving my daughter. I pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.”

2. Character

We desire very strongly for our children to be Christ-like. The Apostle Paul’s prayer was that they would follow his example, as he followed the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). We pray that our children not only know doctrine, but that they would know Jesus and have His character. Our greatest hope is that others will be able to see Him in them, that their light would shine before others, that others may see their good deeds and glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

It is not enough to simply “wish” that our children would be like Jesus. We must be godly examples of Christ to our children, and we

must earnestly pray His character into their lives. In my own Bible study I love to discover the character of God in His word. Whenever I list these characteristics, I prayerfully ask Him to place those characteristics in my children and me. There is no greater act of worship than to be Christ-like, for we were created in His image for fellowship with Him.

Prayer for Our Children’s Characters:

“Father, thank you that my son is Your child! You have chosen him to be holy, and he is dearly loved. Out of that love, may my son’s life be marked by tenderhearted mercy, by kindness, by humility, by gentleness, and by patience. May he grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Let my son’s light shine before others, that they may see his good deeds and glorify You (Matthew 5:16).

I pray that my son will be quick to forgive an offense, forgiving as quickly and completely as You forgave us! And above all else, I pray that he will live a life of love which binds us all together in perfect unity (Ephesians 4:32).

May my son’s heart be filled with the peace of Christ and thankfulness. Let every detail of my son’s life —words, actions, and thoughts— be done in the name of Jesus, thanking You every step of the way.

May my son learn to do right, seek justice, and defend the oppressed. May he take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17).

I pray my son will serve You faithfully with all his heart and consider what great things You have done for him” (1 Samuel 12:24). In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

3. Relationships

Our prayers should be centered on God guiding our children “along the right paths for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3) and leading them in choosing their friends and future spouses. We are to pray that they will have relationships

that are positive and which will lead them to Christ.

Ask God to protect your child daily from those who would be an evil influence to them. “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:1, 2, NIV).

One of the biggest influences on our children are their friends. We pray that God will bring committed Christians like the apostle, Andrew, to their paths who will help lead them to Jesus. We also want our children to be like Andrew and bring other people to Christ.¹ We might even pray that God will miraculously remove a friend of questionable character from our child’s life.

Prayer for Our Children’s Relationships:

“Father, bring to my children’s paths the friends You want them to have. Lord, keep them from the wrong influences. Provide my children with godly relationships and fun things to do that are also pleasing to You.

Father, thank You that my children walk in the way of godly Christians and keep the paths of the righteous. Thank You, Father, that You provide wise and godly friendships for my children. May my children find godly spouses that will encourage them in their faith and walk with the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:14). In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

4. Joy

We desire to bring happiness to our loved ones. That desire is a tiny reflection of God’s desire to lavish our children with happiness beyond measure. The concept of joy is found more than 200 times in the Bible, thus showing the value God places on it.² Joy is even a fruit of the Spirit, a result of having the Holy Spirit in our lives (Ephesians 5:22).

The ultimate joy is having God’s presence in our children’s lives. “You make known to

me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand” (Psalm 16:11, NIV). Picture the unimaginable, eternal delight that God wants to give. Make eternal happiness in God’s presence your reference point and goal as you pray for your children.

Ultimately, only God can offer total, eternal happiness. This joy is not based on material possessions, accomplishments, or circumstances, but contentment in the Lord. Paul says, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-13, NIV).

Prayer for Our Children’s Joy:

“Oh Jesus, You alone know what will make my daughter happy and whole. You alone have set her on the path to eternal happiness in Your presence, so do whatever You think is best. I only ask that You fill her with Your Holy Spirit, as I place her in Your hands. May Your joy be her strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

May she be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that she may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that she may know You (Colossians 2:2). May my daughter keep her life free from the love of money and be content with what she has, because You have said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ (Hebrews 13:5, NIV). May Your presence and eternal delight rest in her heart, mind, and soul forever. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

5. Protection

When I was studying at Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon, a civil war between the Christians and the Muslims broke out. The college was located in the Christian territory at the edge of the battle line. Many rockets would fall on the campus, increasingly becoming more and more dangerous. My mom prayed every day and claimed the promises of protection in Psalm 91 on my behalf:

“WHOEVER DWELLS IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL REST IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY. I WILL SAY OF THE LORD, ‘HE IS MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS, MY GOD, IN WHOM I TRUST.’ SURELY HE WILL SAVE YOU FROM THE FOWLER’S SNARE AND FROM THE DEADLY PESTILENCE. HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS FEATHERS, AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU WILL FIND REFUGE; HIS FAITHFULNESS WILL BE YOUR SHIELD AND RAMPART. YOU WILL NOT FEAR THE TERROR OF NIGHT, NOR THE ARROW THAT FLIES BY DAY, NOR THE PESTILENCE THAT STALKS IN THE DARKNESS, NOR THE PLAGUE THAT DESTROYS AT MIDDAY. A THOUSAND MAY FALL AT YOUR SIDE, TEN THOUSAND AT YOUR RIGHT HAND, BUT IT WILL NOT COME NEAR YOU.”
PSALM 91:1-7, NIV

The reason I am alive today is because she claimed those promises for me. Therefore today, I pray a prayer of protection on behalf of my children for the many dangers they face every day. I also ask God to protect them from sin and evil. Every day they face such temptations as drugs, alcohol, pornography, and even friends who could lead them down the wrong paths. In our struggle against evil we are dealing with spiritual powers. Therefore, we are to put on the whole armor of God and stand against the attacks of the evil one.

“FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN HIS MIGHTY POWER. PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR STAND AGAINST THE DEVIL’S SCHEMES. FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE POWERS OF THIS DARK WORLD AND AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS. THEREFORE PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT WHEN THE DAY OF EVIL COMES, YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND YOUR GROUND, AND AFTER YOU HAVE DONE EVERYTHING, TO STAND.”
EPHESIANS 6:10-13, NIV

One powerful weapon that every Christian parent has is the ability to pray a daily hedge of protection around their children. “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3, NIV).

Be specific in claiming the promise in Scripture that is related to the kind of protection that is needed for your children. For example, for protection from sin you can claim a verse such as Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you (King James Version).” For protection from discouragement, you could claim this promise: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6; and see also Hebrews 13:5).

Prayer for Our Children’s Protection:

“Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray a hedge of protection around my children. I thank You that You are a wall of fire around them. Thank You that You have given Your angels charge over my children to keep them in all their ways. I thank You that Your angels surround them while they are out and away from home. Thank You that You protect them from harm, accidents, and all kinds of danger. In peace may they lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make them dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

“Thank You, Lord, that You are the fortress and the refuge of my children. Thank You that Your Word is a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. Thank You that the wicked one can’t touch them, and no evil will befall them.”³

“Father, bless them and keep them; Make Your face shine on them and be gracious to them; Turn Your face toward them and give them peace (Numbers 6:24-26). In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

6. Future

It is our sincere prayer that our children will now and forever walk faithfully with the Lord as Enoch did (Genesis 5:24) and that Jesus would be their lifelong Friend and Savior.

For our children's future we pray that they will choose Jesus to be their guide in every decision they will make. We want them to make decisions not based solely on logic or the needs of the moment, but based on God's will guided by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:105).

We must ask God to help them make wise decisions. One of the most important decisions they will make is the choice of a spouse. This decision should be made with much prayer, counsel, and wisdom. God promises wisdom to all who simply ask: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5, NIV). We pray that our children will desire God's will, surrender their lives, and ask Him to be their directing agent. Our prayers should be centered on them choosing wisely and choosing someone God would approve, somebody who will encourage them in the Lord.

We pray for our children to have a future that is secure in Christ. He is in control and will be present with them long after we are gone.

Prayer for Our Children's Futures:

"Lord, I thank you that you know the plans you have for my son—to prosper him and not to harm him, to give him hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). May You supply all of his emotional, physical, and spiritual needs according to Your riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). I pray that my son will not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But may his delight be in Your law, and may he meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:1–2).

"I pray that my son will trust in You with all his heart and lean not on his own understanding; in all his ways submit to You, and that You will make his paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6). May my son forget what is behind and always strive toward what is ahead. (Philippians 3:13). May he be confident that the good work You began in him will be carried out to completion until You come again (Philippians 1:6). In Jesus' name, Amen."

7. Faithfulness

Our desire for our children is to be faithful in the small and big things of life. We want them to be faithful to God, their spouses, children, work, finances, and Church.

The Early Church was very faithful in their church attendance, praise and worship, and prayer. "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts," (Acts 2:46, NIV). We yearn for our children to do the same thing.

When the time comes when they must stand for their faith, we want them to stand like Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who had a choice between worshipping the king and avoiding the fiery furnace or worshipping God alone and potentially dying. They said to the king:

**"KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR, WE DO NOT NEED TO DEFEND OURSELVES BEFORE YOU IN THIS MATTER. IF WE ARE THROWN INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE, THE GOD WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US FROM IT, AND HE WILL DELIVER US FROM YOUR MAJESTY'S HAND. BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW, YOUR MAJESTY, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE YOUR GODS OR WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF GOLD YOU HAVE SET UP."
DANIEL 3:16-18, NIV**

In order to make sure we are faithful in the big things, we have to be faithful in the little things. Luke writes, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10, NIV).

When I became an Adventist, I faced a challenging dilemma—be faithful to God and honor His Sabbath or go to the university and take my exams on the Sabbath. I decided that I would be obedient to God and follow His will. When I failed to take the exams for two years running, the university kicked me out. My family nearly beat me to death for becoming

an Adventist. I was abandoned by them and thrown out onto the street. That was 38 years ago. As I reflect on that time, I see that God was making all things work together for good for my family and me. Today I pray that my children will do the same and stand faithfully for God in the small and the big things of life, no matter what the price.

Prayer for Our Children's Faithfulness:

"Lord, You are always faithful to us. Your Word shows us time and again that You are faithful. I pray that my children will be faithful to You, that they would not wander from You. I pray that You teach them what it means to be faithful to You, to Your Word, and to Your Church. Give them steadiness as they follow You. Teach them to be faithful in small, simple acts of faith, as well as big acts of faith. I pray that like Joshua they will declared, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

"Lord, I pray that they would be like Daniel who could have avoided the lions' den, but chose instead to be faithful to God (Daniel 6:10-16). I pray that You will give them Your Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). I pray that they will be strong and courageous and not be afraid, but to stand for You at all times (Joshua 1:9). In Jesus' name, Amen."

The Power of a Praying Mother

Allow me now to return to the story of Larry, the ex-Hells Angels gang member whose mother prayed him back to God. After several suicide attempts and hearing the voice of God, Larry finally gave in to the voice and went to church in San Francisco.

The church was full so Larry sat in the last pew at the rear of the church. Because he was living on the streets with no access to a shower or basic hygiene, he smelled so bad that everyone sitting within a 5-pew radius got up and left the sanctuary. The pastor soon stood up to preach. He put his Bible and notes on

the pulpit and looked out at the congregation. Larry caught his attention. The pastor leaned forward, staring at Larry for about a minute before going back to his notes. But he could not preach. Once again he leaned forward to stare at Larry and once again he unsuccessfully went back to his notes.

Now the whole church began to focus on Larry. Still unable to preach, the pastor left the pulpit and started walking to the back of the church. He headed straight for Larry. He fell at his feet, embraced him, hugging and kissing him and crying for joy. Larry had been his roommate in college. Of all the churches for Larry to go to, he came to one where God had prepared a reception of unconditional love.

One month before Larry gave up his suicide attempt and went to church, the pastor and his wife hosted some of their college friends who were traveling to Yosemite Park. That evening after supper the group reminisced about their college days and pulled out a yearbook. Flipping through the pages, the pastor's wife saw a picture of Larry and wondered aloud what had become of him. They spoke about what they knew of his life—far from God, into drugs and gang life. After a moment they stopped their conversation, feeling convicted to pray for Larry.

The following day, when their friends went home, the pastor and his wife made a commitment to pray every day for Larry in hopes of seeing him again. A month later Larry showed up at their church! No sermon was preached that Sabbath. Instead, the pastor shared this story and the church celebrated.

The evening I met Larry, he and his fiancé rose to leave the dinner table where several people were eating. A few minutes later a couple in their 60s left. Then another guy left. I was curious, so I rose and followed them to see where they were going. They had gone out to a side room. The people who rose to leave, I later learned, were the parents and brother of Larry's fiancée. Larry was giving them Bible studies. Now I understood why this special man was the head deacon.

The faithful prayers of Larry's mother and the prayers of his former classmates did not return void. They were answered in an incredible way. Larry did come back to his family, to the Lord, and to the Church.

Conclusion

As you pray for your children: pray through Scripture; start a prayer journal in which family and friends write prayers for them; form a prayer circle; turn your worries into prayers; develop a prayer war room (putting prayers and answers to prayers on the wall); pray big (intensely, defensively, and offensively with your children and with your spouse). Our children need our persistent Bible-based prayers. When we form our prayers from the Scripture, we are speaking God's own will for them (Hebrews 4:12). We must make a commitment to pray for them all their lives. It is the best gift we can give them.

Being a parent is tough, but God calls us to persevere in this endeavor, fixing our eyes upon

Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). It requires patience, humbleness, selflessness, and truth. Our love for our children must protect, trust, hope, persevere, and never fail (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). My desire is that we will continue to pray for our children and grandchildren until all of us are safely home with Him.

Notes

- ¹ Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Christ (John 1:40-42). He also brought a small boy with his fish and loaves to Christ (John 6:6-9). We also read that he helped bring Greeks to Jesus (John 12:20-22).
- ² There are over 200 verses referring to joy in the NIV translation of the Bible. http://www.faithgateway.com/25-bible-verses-about-joy/#.WWzqTBS_tII. Accessed July 19, 2017.
- ³ Prayer adapted from <http://www.cfaith.com/index.php/article-display/105-featured-c5-articles/21626-prayer-to-stand-in-the-gap-for-your-children>. Accessed July 17, 2017.

31 Days of Prayer for Our Children

1. Salvation—“Lord, let salvation spring up within my children, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” (Isaiah 45:8; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 3:5)

2. Growth in Grace—“I pray that my children may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

3. Love—“Grant, Lord, that my children may learn to live a life of love, through the Spirit who dwells in them.” (Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:2)

4. Honesty and Integrity—“May integrity and honesty be their virtue and their protection.” (Psalm 25:21; Proverbs 10:9)

5. Reliance on God—“May my child grow to trust You with all of her heart and not lean on her own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5; Psalm 3:5).

6. Love for God’s Word—“May my children grow to find Your Word more precious than much pure gold and sweeter than honey from the comb.” (Psalm 19:10)

7. God’s Protection—“I praise You for You are faithful; You will strengthen and guard my child from evil.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

8. Mercy—“May my children always be merciful, just as their Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36; Luke 1:50)

9. Respect (for self, others, and authority)—“Father, grant that my children may show proper respect to everyone, as Your Word commands.” (1 Peter 2:17)

10. Biblical Self-Esteem—“Help my children develop a strong self-esteem that is rooted in the realization that they are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:10)

11. Faithfulness—“Let love and faithfulness never leave my children, but bind these twin virtues around their necks and write them on the tablet of their hearts.” (Proverbs 3:3; Proverbs 14:22)

12. Courage—“May my children always be strong and courageous in their character.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

13. Purity—“Create in them a pure heart, O God, and let that purity of heart be shown in their actions.” (Psalm 51:10)

14. Kindness—“Lord, may my children always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

15. Generosity—“Grant that my children may be generous and willing to share, and so lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19)

16. Peace—“Father, let my children make every effort to do what leads to peace.” (Romans 14:19; Isaiah 26:3)

17. Joy—“May my children be filled with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 1:6; Psalm 92:4)

18. Perseverance—“Lord, teach my children perseverance in all they do, and help them especially to run with perseverance the race marked out for them.” (Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 15:58)

19. Humility—“God, please cultivate in my children the ability to show true humility toward all.” (Titus 3:2; Proverbs 22:4)

20. Compassion—“Lord, please clothe my children with the virtue of compassion.” (Colossians 3:12; Psalm 145:9)

21. Responsibility—“Grant that my children may learn responsibility, for each one should carry his own load.” (Galatians 6:5; Colossians 3:23)

22. Contentment—“Father, teach my children the secret of being content in any and every situation, through Him who gives them strength.” (Philippians 4:12-13; 1 Timothy 6:6)

23. Faith—“I pray that faith will find root and grow in my children’s hearts, that by faith they may gain what has been promised to them.” (Luke 17:5-6; Hebrews 11:1-40)

24. A Servant’s Heart—“God, please help my children develop servant’s hearts, that they may serve wholeheartedly, as if they were serving the Lord, not men.” (Ephesians 6:7; Romans 12:11)

25. Hope—“May the God of hope grant that my children may overflow with hope and hopefulness by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

26. Wisdom— “When my child lacks wisdom, help her understand that she should ask You. You give generously and without criticizing.” (James 1:5).

27. Passion for God—“Lord, please instill in my children a soul that ‘followeth hard after thee,’ one that clings passionately to You.” (Psalm 63:8; Psalm 42:1; 1 Lamentations 3:25)

28. Self-Discipline—“Father, I pray that my children may acquire a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair.” (Proverbs 1:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6)

29. Prayerfulness—“Grant, Lord, that my children’s lives may be marked by prayerfulness, that they may learn to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

30. Gratitude—“Help my children to live lives that are always overflowing with thankfulness and always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 2:7; Psalm 107:8).

31. Obedience to God— “Remind my child to obey You rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

CHILDREN'S STORIES

Answered Prayer for Mr. Top

DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

Biblical Principle

“WHEN I WAS IN TROUBLE, I CALLED
TO THE LORD, AND HE ANSWERED ME.”
PSALM 120:1, ICB

Props: A bag of tops/shirts

Mr. Top lives in Bangkok, Thailand with his family and his business was not doing well. Do you know what kind of business Mr. Top runs? He sells shirts. (Take the shirts out of bag and show to the children) That's why he named his business Mr. Top. His house was full of shirts, which he took to the market and sold to earn enough money to feed his family. But what happens when no one buys Mr. Top's shirts? (Allow time for children to respond)

When Mr. Top's sales continued to go down, he became very discouraged. If he could not earn enough money, he would not be able to feed his family. This is why Mr. Top became very sad.

Right about this time, the Thailand Adventist Mission bought a building right in Mr. Top's neighborhood. Pastor Sudakar, a Bible teacher who also taught English classes, moved into the mission's building. He then began offering Bible classes and English classes

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to the community. They also began to have Sabbath worship at their little center in the mission building.

One day as Pastor Sudakar was visiting people in the neighborhood when he knocked on Mr. Top's door. Pastor Sudakar invited Mr. Top to church and asked him if he could pray for him and his family. Mr. Top was a Buddhist and he did NOT want Pastor Sudakar to pray for him. In fact, he wanted Pastor Sudakar to leave his home. He wanted nothing to do with Christians. Pastor Sudakar left, but he continued to pray for Mr. Top as he returned home.

That night, Mr. Top had a dream about his visitor that day. In his dream he saw Pastor Sudakar, and the little church which he pastored, surrounded by light. In his dream he also saw that he was surrounded by darkness. Mr. Top became scared because he did not want to be surrounded by darkness. The next morning, he went to see Pastor Sudakar and told him about the dream. He explained that he wanted to know more about his church, and now he wanted Pastor Sudakar to pray for him so that he could be surrounded by the light like he saw in his dream. Pastor Sudakar prayed with Mr. Top and he left feeling at peace and happier than he had felt in a long time.

When Mr. Top went to the market the next day to sell his shirts, guess what happened? He

sold one shirt, then two, then five, then 10. By the end of the day, all the shirts that Mr. Top had brought to the market were sold. Mr. Top was ecstatic! He had sold more than enough shirts to earn the money needed to feed his family and care for them. As soon as he could, Mr. Top went to see Pastor Sudakar to tell him how God had answered Pastor Sudakar's prayer.

Through that experience Mr. Top learned an important truth—God wants to bless us in unimaginable ways. He wants to provide for our every need and fill us with His love, but sometimes we get in the way because we do not trust in Him, listen to Him, or we do not ask Him to help us. Mr. Top did not even know Jesus, but He recognized how the God of the universe answered the prayer of Pastor Sudakar. He saw how Jesus blessed him and worked in

his life. Because of this, he wanted to get to know Jesus for himself!

Mr. Top did get to know Jesus. In fact, he accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord. He is now a baptized member of the little church near his home in Bangkok, Thailand. He has not missed attending church ever since the first time that Pastor Sudakar prayed for him. He continues to sell his shirts and every day falls more and more in love with the only God who can answer prayers. He now tells everyone about God.

You too can pray for someone who doesn't know Jesus, just like Pastor Sudakar prayed for Mr. Top. When you do, watch God change their life through the power of His love.

A Sunbeam For Jesus

LINDA MEI LIN KOH

Biblical Principle

“I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST
BECAUSE HE GIVES ME STRENGTH.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

Props: Small zip-lock bag of white flour or powdered sugar

Fourteen-year-old Carlos lived in Cuba. One day he was leaving school through the front gate when he caught sight of Juan, Diego, and Sofie ducking stealthily under the bushes behind the school. This was the third time that he had seen these three friends hiding in the bushes behind the school.

What are they up to? Carlos thought to himself. *I hope they don't get in trouble!*

This time around, Carlos was too curious to simply walk away. He had to see what his friends were up to. He quietly followed them from a distance, creeping closer and closer to with every step. To his dismay, he saw Juan, Diego, and Sofie dipping the fingers into a white powdery substance and putting it in the mouths. (Hold up bag of white flour or powdered sugar.) Sometimes they even put the substance in their nose. This looked like the drugs Carlos had sometimes seen on TV.

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“What are you guys tasting?” he asked rather boldly. “You know it's against school rules to try drugs, right?!”

“It's not that bad,” said Diego. “It just feels like you're floating,” Sofie quickly added. Then Diego chimed in with a twinkle in his eye, “How about trying some?”

“Don't be a chicken, Carlos,” echoed Sofie, “Everyone is doing this!”

“Do you know you can get hooked on these drugs,” explained Carlos vehemently. “Why waste your life getting hooked on drugs when you can quit and have a better life?”

“Quit? I don't think so,” Juan added.

“Jesus can help you,” Carlos retorted.

“Who is this Jesus you're talking about? Is he some kind of doctor? Are you sure he's that powerful?” Sofia scoffed doubtfully.

“Oh, He's that powerful alright. He'll help you quit, but what He really wants is for you to live forever in heaven with him one day. Jesus loves you all and wants you to live with Him in heaven,” Carlos answered confidently!

“Would you guys come to a special meet-up this Friday night at my church? It's a really cool group of people and it's all about finding out who Jesus is,” Carlos said excitedly.

“Well . . . we’ll come just this once to see about this Jesus guy you’re boasting about,” echoed the three friends simultaneously, laughing and sneering at Carlos.

To their surprise, Juan, Diego, and Sofie came to their first Friday night meeting. They liked it so much that kept coming and studying the Bible with the other friends they made at the church. The three friends asked many questions as they learned about Jesus and the love of God. Of course, it didn’t hurt that there was always plenty of good food to eat there.

“Can I pray with you guys?” asked Carlos when he met his friends each day during lunch time at school. “You can always ask Jesus to help you say no to the temptation of taking drugs,” Carlos assured his friends.

Juan had more bad days than the other two, but each time he prayed earnestly and trusted in Jesus to save him and change him. Diego and

Sofie had their share of struggles too, but they slowly stopped using harmful drugs.

“Hey, our church is having a big series of meetings next month,” announced Carlos excitedly. “You guys are invited, okay?”

“Sure, we’ll be there,” they said excitedly

At the end of two weeks of evangelistic meetings, Juan, Diego, and Sofie accepted Jesus as their Special Friend and were baptized. Tears of joy filled their hearts that Sabbath in the baptismal pool as they called Carlos to the front to be with them.

“Thank you, Carlos, for never giving up on us. You were the one who for introduced us to Jesus. We can say no to Satan, who wanted us hooked on drugs for life. But Jesus changed our lives,” said the three friends joyfully.

“Carlos, you are a bright sunbeam for Jesus!” said the pastor, “Thanks for shining for Jesus!”

A Boy Named “W”

SAUSTIN SAMPSON MFUNE

Bible Principles

“THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAMPS
AROUND THOSE WHO FEAR GOD, AND HE
SAVES THEM.”

PSALMS 34:7, NCV

“I CALL TO YOU, GOD, AND YOU ANSWER
ME. LISTEN TO ME NOW. HEAR WHAT I SAY.”

PSALMS 17:6, NCV

Ellen White quote:

“NO MAN IS SAFE FOR A DAY OR AN HOUR
WITHOUT PRAYER.”

WHITE, GREAT CONTROVERSY P. 530

Prop: Rubber/Toy Snake

It is not certain how many people know his real name, but most simply call him “W.” “W” is thirteen years old. His family really loves to pray. “W’s” family prays for everything. Every morning before going to school, no matter how busy the family’s schedule, everyone gathers in the living room for worship and prayer. Each evening before going to bed the family gathers in the same place to worship God and close their day in prayer. But that’s not all. Everyone prays before meals and before driving off on a trip. W’s family prays all the time, it seems.

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But prayer is not all that this family does. They also read from the Bible and other Christian story books. Reading these books has helped “W” learn many great stories about the love of God and His care for people. In the Bible “W” learned how Daniel and his three friends prayed for the meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream when the king could not even remember his own dream. W read how Jesus prayed early in the morning and all throughout his day.

Not far from “W’s” home there is a little river. Scattered along this river are weeds, some sugar cane trees, and several vegetable trees. “W” has many friends who live across the little river. He loves visiting his friends and he is always excited when they come to see him. When the boys come they hop onto several big stones which serve as a bridge across the river. The boys get a kick out of balancing on the rocks as they cross.

During one rainy season, the vegetation around the river was vibrant green and beautiful. One evening “W” went with a friend to help him get across the river safely. “W’s” father had left for a faraway trip and he would not be back for seven days. After escorting his friend, “W” headed for home. He whistled and smiled as he approached the little river. Though the sun had set, there was enough twilight for “W” to see his way. As he walked toward the river, he could hear frogs praising their Lord, but the frogs suddenly grew silent as he neared the river. This wasn’t too surprising. Frogs get quiet when they hear other noises.

“W” stepped onto the first stone in the river, but as he prepared to reach his leg over to the second stone, he had the strange feeling that he was in danger. Have you ever felt that way? “W” felt as if a million ants were moving all over his skin. He began to feel a strange kind of heat in his body. Goose bumps rose on his arms and legs. The hair on his body seemed to stiffen as a strange feeling ran up and down his spine. His heart began to beat against his ribs, but “W” didn’t know why his body was reacting so violently to a danger he had not yet seen—that was until he looked at the waters flowing around the rocks near his feet.

When he focused, his eyes saw another pair of eyes looking back at him—and they were changing colors. At first, he did not know what to make of what he was seeing, but when he looked carefully he discovered the eyes belonged to a humongous snake. It was a python! Its head was raised up and the rest of its long body was coiled around the stone on which he was about to step. “W” froze in his tracks. He saw the dazzling and beautiful eyes of the huge snake moving closer and closer toward him. As it did he lost all the strength in his body and his voice disappeared. He felt as if his lungs were getting smaller and he could not breathe. He tried to move his legs but nothing happened. All he could do was stand there and watch. He was paralyzed.

In that moment of terror, a thought came to “W”—*pray*. “W” does not remember what happened next. He cannot even remember whether he did indeed pray or not, but after the thought crossed his mind, he saw the eyes of python suddenly stop and begin moving away from him. Like a movie, the eyes receded in slow

motion. The snake’s head then slowly lowered as the python uncoiled itself and slithered off into the cornfield beside the river.

From nowhere “W’s” strength returned. He took off like a bullet as he headed for home. When he got there he swung the front door open almost knocking down one of his relatives who was in the house. He collapsed on a chair and asked his auntie and everybody in the room to open the windows because he could hardly breathe. Confused, his family all began opening the windows. But then almost just as suddenly, he told them to close the windows

“I . . . I was . . . crossing . . . river,” “W” gasped, trying desperately get the story out. “There was a big snake there. He slithered off. I know he’s coming to get me. CLOSE THE WINDOWS!” he yelled. “W” was so frantic that his terrified family closed the windows, just as he had asked.

After catching his breath, “W” told them the rest of the story. When he finished, he phoned his father and told him as well. After listening to the story, the father’s voice filled with emotion. He was proud that his son had thought of praying when he felt threatened. He had always wanted “W” to know that he could depend on Jesus in any situation. “W’s” father concluded by telling him that he can always depend on Jesus. He, his earthly father, may be away, but Jesus would be with him at all times. “W’s” father prayed with him, thanking Jesus for protecting him and saving his life.

After speaking to his father, “W” and everyone in the house knelt down and thanked Jesus for saving “W’s” life.

SEMINARS

Becoming One Flesh: God's Plan for Intimacy in Marriage

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Introduction

“THEREFORE, A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.”

GENESIS 2:24

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It was during Creation week that a miraculous and extraordinary event occurred. The first man and the first woman were united in holy matrimony, a miracle where two are becoming one. This phenomenon of oneness is so incredible that it is referred to as a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32a). As grand and spectacular as today’s weddings are, not one can compare to this event. In a perfect garden, a perfect man and a perfect woman were joined together by a perfect God who had a perfect plan for their lives.

Oneness and intimacy is about knowing and being known; loving and being loved, hurting when the other hurts, rejoicing when the other rejoices. Oneness and intimacy deepen the marital bond, strengthen commitment and develop even deeper levels of intimacy. Spouses who are willing to take this journey to becoming one flesh will experience the fulfillment of God’s original plan for marriage.

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Toward an Understanding of Intimacy

Usually, when we announce that we are going to talk about intimacy in marriage, people automatically assume we will be speaking about sexuality. While sexual oneness is definitely one aspect of intimacy and plays a very important role in marriage, it is only one part of intimacy. The one-flesh experience as instructed by God does not only refer to the physical body but is also used to represent the “deepest harmonious unity that exists between people, which is the unity between husband and wife in all its dimensions, emotional, physical and spiritual.”¹

Webster’s dictionary defines intimacy as a “close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group, the quality of being comfortable, warm, or familiar.” We can say then that intimacy gives us a feeling of closeness, warmth, and security. In marriage, it is an experience of oneness where husband and wife can share their deepest thoughts, feelings, desires, dreams, goals, joys and disappointments in a safe environment.

This oneness is what God intended for marriage, and it is what drives most couples to get married. However, there is no such thing as automatic intimacy. Oneness and intimacy is a journey that every couple must be eager and willing to take. In our text, Genesis 2:24, the phrase “becoming one flesh,” infers that

the first couple was not instantly one flesh, but that they would become one flesh.² Then in verse 2:25, we see Adam and Eve enter into this experience of oneness, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve opened themselves up to knowing each other in all aspects without fear or the need to cover themselves.

God embedded in each of us the desire to have this type of intimacy, first with Him and then with one another, the ultimate human relationship of intimacy being that of marital intimacy. But this intimacy can only be achieved in an environment of safety and trust. This type of environment allows for the deepest sharing of our innermost selves, the best and the worst, all for the sake of intimate knowing.

Intimacy creates a sense of belonging and closeness and strengthens the marital connection in a profound and endearing way. When spouses share their deepest selves, it is because they want to be known and still accepted in spite of that knowing. They are honest, open and affectionate with each other. Each is cognizant of their weaknesses and are more understanding of the other’s weaknesses. There is unconditional love and acceptance of differences with no desire to exert power or control over one another.

Leaving and Cleaving

This critical instruction given by God (Genesis 2:24) is the key to sustaining a life-long marriage.³ Here, God gives a clear directive to leave the childhood attachment to parents/family and form a new attachment to one’s spouse, thus beginning the journey to “becoming one flesh”. This new oneness is the formation of a new identity called “We,” and a letting go of the “I”, a relationship that is so intimately tied that a separation would deeply wound each of the individual parts.⁴

The leaving does not imply that one should abandon one’s family of origin. However, contemporary psychologists and marriage and family experts agree that a healthy differentiation

from one’s family of origin is essential to a stable, satisfying marriage and intimate marriage. Loyalty to the new couple formation must take precedence over loyalty to family of origin. However, each person brings to the union the best (and worst) from both family systems and forms a new system of their own.

Leaving is essential if cleaving is to take place—in essence, cleaving is another critical step towards intimacy. Many people, including single adults and premarital couples, look to marriage to give happiness, affection, and love. They associate love with the feelings that come with receiving these elements. The truth is that marriage is not about what we can get but what we are willing to give. When each partner gives love, affection and an attitude of joy to the other person, this provides a fertile ground for intimacy to thrive and grow.

Our contemporary culture has misled many into believing that love is a feeling and that soulmates are found. To be sure, love is not a feeling; it is a decision. And soulmates are not found; people become soulmates, which is what intimacy is when couples are willing to make an effort to growing together. Ellen G. White shares in the *Adventist Home*, p. 105.

“HOWEVER CAREFULLY AND WISELY MARRIAGE MAY HAVE BEEN ENTERED INTO, FEW COUPLES ARE COMPLETELY UNITED WHEN THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY IS PERFORMED. THE REAL UNION OF THE TWO IN WEDLOCK IS THE WORK OF THE AFTERYEARS.”

Intimacy is God’s plan; it is not illusive. Intimacy is possible and highly probable for every couple who seeks an intimate marriage. Intimacy can be regained even when a couple believes they have lost it. Every couple is vulnerable to growing apart if they are not intentional about growing together.

Dimensions of Intimacy

Many marriage and family scholars have written extensively on intimacy and its

dimensions or categories. These dimensions of intimacy are not mutually exclusive of each other. Intimacy is multi-dimensional, and when couples nurture each dimension, they work together to create the deepest level of intimacy that couples can experience. We will briefly discuss four dimensions of intimacy: emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual.

Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy is when a couple can talk openly and freely about their feelings and desires. It is the sharing of personal values and beliefs; there is also warmth and affection. Too often, after the wedding and honeymoon, couples lose the motivation to stay emotionally close. They allow the daily activities and other competing commitments to consume their lives and schedules, leaving no time for each other. Marriage and family often appear to be postponable because there are presumably other activities that demand immediate attention.

patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, ESV). Sexual intimacy is inextricably tied to emotional intimacy. While most men have sexual intimacy as a primary need, most women have emotional intimacy as a primary need. If both emotional and sexual intimacy are nurtured, couples will experience mutual satisfaction in their relationship.

Spiritual Intimacy

Spiritual intimacy is not a dimension as much as it is a foundation for all the other intimacies. Spiritual intimacy is the sharing of spiritual beliefs, values, and experiences. It is a strong commitment of faith when couples submit themselves individually and as a couple to God. Spouses get to know each other and be known when they can share their spiritual journeys with one another.

Spiritual intimacy completes the picture of “two becoming one.” Couples who share their spiritual highs and lows form a closer bond and stay more in tune with each other. Spiritual intimacy helps the couple motivate each other to grow deeper spiritually. Even in times of crisis, couples who pray together are better able to cope and be of comfort to each other. There will also be times when one spouse does the praying because the other spouse is discouraged.

When couples are spiritually intimate, it makes it easier for confession and forgiveness to take place. The journey of marriage is a main path in our journey towards understanding God. We often say that a crisis in marriage is a spiritual crisis. The closer we move towards God, the closer we will be to each other in marriage. And vice versa. The more we isolate ourselves from God, the more isolated we will be in marriage.

Intellectual Intimacy

Intellectual intimacy is the sharing of thoughts and ideas. Marriage does not ensure that couples will always agree with each other; on the contrary, some people may disagree on most things. However, intellectual intimacy implies that a couple can rise above their disagreements for the preservation of their relationship. Couples can deepen their intellectual intimacy by listening to each other with dignity and respect and encouraging one another. Intellectual intimacy, or any kind of intimacy, cannot thrive in an environment of ridiculing, contradicting, and putting down one another.

Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy or sexual intimacy is the beautiful gift that God gave to married couples. It is clear from scripture that God intended for sexual oneness to be a part of the complete picture of intimacy. Sexual intimacy thrives best when unconditional love is present; *“love is*

Maintaining Oneness and Intimacy

Maintaining oneness and intimacy is the most critical issue in marriage. As with

everything else that God made good, Satan attempts to destroy. In Genesis 2:24, we see a perfect union of two perfect people. A couple committed to becoming one flesh with no barriers between them—no fear, no defensiveness, no sin, no selfishness. In Genesis 3, after the Fall, this idyllic situation changes dramatically, and now there is enmity between the first couple. They cover themselves up, blaming, and bickering ensues, and both refuse to be held accountable to God and to each other for what they had done. They became distant from one another, and they became distant from God.

This reality will be every couple's natural trajectory unless they intentionally strive towards maintaining oneness and intimacy. Sin affects our marriages. The post-modern culture we live in affects our marriages. Both are based on individualistic premises and being a servant to one's own desires. This is the opposite of marriage and marital intimacy and the notion of "two becoming one." Couples must be mutually invested in improving the quality of their marriage and moving their relationship towards the deepest levels of intimacy.

Ellen G. White offers in the *Adventist Home*, p. 106.

“THOUGH DIFFICULTIES, PERPLEXITIES, AND DISCOURAGEMENTS MAY ARISE, LET NEITHER HUSBAND NOR WIFE HARBOR THE THOUGHT THAT THEIR UNION IS A MISTAKE OR A DISAPPOINTMENT. DETERMINE TO BE ALL THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE TO EACH OTHER. CONTINUE THE EARLY ATTENTIONS. IN EVERY WAY, ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER IN FIGHTING THE BATTLES OF LIFE. STUDY TO ADVANCE THE HAPPINESS OF EACH OTHER. LET THERE BE MUTUAL LOVE, MUTUAL FORBEARANCE, THEN MARRIAGE, INSTEAD OF BEING THE END OF LOVE, WILL BE AS IT WERE THE VERY BEGINNING OF LOVE. THE WARMTH OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP, THE LOVE THAT BINDS HEART TO HEART, IS A FORETASTE OF THE JOYS OF HEAVEN.”

Marriage researchers suggest that the following relational elements should be present for couples to maintain intimacy:

Trust. Knowing and being known is a risky venture. While it sounds like a wonderful notion, it is not that easy to achieve. There are often many factors that keep spouses from sharing intimately with each other. It is scary to be transparent emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually when one is not sure one's sharing will be handled with care. When the environment is filled with conditional love, shaming, and controlling, it becomes easy for people to cover themselves up. Each person must make every effort to create an environment where trust and mutual respect is nurtured.

Attention. Couples must be willing to listen to each other not just with their ears, but with their eyes and their hearts. They must learn to respond to each other's sharing with acceptance, affection, understanding, and sensitivity. It also means being willing to hear how each can make adjustments in their own relational and communication styles that can enhance the quality of the marriage. Being responsive also means having the willingness to deal with hurts, bitterness, and resentment and push towards a process of forgiving and healing.⁵

Availability. Couples must be available to each other in all dimensions of intimacy. While it is not always possible to be 100% in all dimensions, when couples are open to listening and empathizing with each other, listening to each other's joys and pains, they are forming an essential foundation of friendship and companionship. Being available means being dedicated to the relationship, investing in it because you are interested in seeing it grow and develop into a strong marital partnership. It is about becoming intimate allies.

Conclusion

Nurturing oneness and intimacy brings rich rewards to married couples. When couples

choose to nurture and maintain oneness, they inoculate their relationship from the natural affliction of growing apart. It is impossible to grow apart if you are intentionally trying to grow together. And with God on your side, you cannot fail. This is God's plan—that married couples become a revelation of His immeasurable and unfailing love as two become one.

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Notes

- ¹ Davidson, Richard M. (2007), "*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*", p. 47.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ³ Oliver, W. and Oliver, E., "An Introduction: The Beauty of Marriage" in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, p. 9-10.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10
- ⁵ This workshop is geared towards couples who are in relatively healthy relationships where there is a basic assumption that no abuse of any type or infidelity is currently present. Individuals who are experiencing such trauma in their relationship are strongly encouraged to seek help from a professional Christian counselor or their pastor..

Building a Healthy Home

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

NOTE:

Please provide the handouts to those participating in this workshop. Download the printing file from: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2018>

The Text

FOR WHICH OF YOU, INTENDING TO BUILD A TOWER, DOES NOT SIT DOWN FIRST AND COUNT THE COST, WHETHER HE HAS ENOUGH TO FINISH IT LEST, AFTER HE HAS LAID THE FOUNDATION, AND IS NOT ABLE TO FINISH, ALL WHO SEE IT BEGIN TO MOCK HIM, SAYING, "THIS MAN BEGAN TO BUILD AND WAS NOT ABLE TO FINISH." LUKE 14:28-30, NKJV

INTRODUCTION

There are many different types of homes. [You may use pictures of different types of dwellings – a straw house, an apartment building, a two-story house, a mansion, a small house]

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Today we're going to help you build a home, not just a house. But to show you how to build a healthy home, we're going to use the model of a house.

I. SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

The best foundation for a healthy home is a spiritual foundation. Please read **Matthew 7:24-25** and **Joshua 24:15**).

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1. A Spiritual Family Worships Together.

The spiritual family chooses to attend and be involved in a church that teaches the Word of God from the pulpit, from each Sabbath school class, and from every platform of leadership.

2. A Spiritual Family Honors God's Word and Applies it in Their Home. The spiritual family teaches, reads aloud, discusses, and reveres the Word of God. They realize that nothing is more important than teaching God's Word in their home because it is alive, life-changing, and eternal. When should you talk about God's Word according to Deuteronomy 6:7?

3. Spiritual Families Make Prayer a Daily Part of Their Home Life.

II. TRUST & COMMITMENT

1. Commitment

Most people repeat wedding vows on their wedding day that include words such as:

"I, (NAME OF THE GROOM), take you, (NAME OF THE BRIDE), to be my lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, **until death do us part.**" We make these vows as a lifetime commitment. In their Book, "The Long-term Marriage," Floyd and Harriet Thatcher wrote: "This **commitment** cannot be a one-time affirmation, for buried within each of us is the deep psychological need for constant reassurance, to know where we stand with our partner in the relationship of marriage. It is the awareness that we are loved and accepted that builds our own sense of self-esteem and self-acceptance and makes it possible to give and **express** love in return."¹

2. Trust

Trust is strengthened when there is complete honesty. Complete honesty includes:

- Historical Honesty – There should be nothing in your past that your spouse, or future spouse, does not know.
- Emotional Honesty – You should be able to share your feelings with those in your family without fear.
- Present Honesty – There should be no secrets as to where you are, who you are with, what you're doing, etc.
- Future Honesty – What are your goals and plans for the future?

III. PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Many people never prepare for marriage. What should you do to prepare for a lifetime together with your spouse?

1. **Marry a Believer.** The Apostle Paul stated: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? – 2 Corinthians 6:14-15*

Someone said, "Love is like a pair of socks, you have to have two and they gotta match." (UNKNOWN) Many Christians – indeed, many Adventists – believe that once they are married, the unbeliever will be convinced to

become a Christian/Adventist. Does that ever happen? Yes, in some cases it does, but why take a chance on something this vital to the foundation of a Christian home? Yes, you may have deep feelings for the unbeliever, but this issue, above all others, must be settled before the wedding ceremony. If you're praying that the person you want to marry becomes a Christian, see that prayer answered before you even agree to marry them. God never intended marriage to be an evangelism tool.

2. **Inspect the Baggage.** Another element necessary to prepare for marriage is to realize that whether we admit it or not, we all bring "baggage" into a relationship. Our baggage usually consists of past experiences, negative memories, fears, or other issues. This baggage is rarely shared with our partners, and can eventually become the source of great pain and conflict. All baggage should be opened, inspected, and thoroughly examined before the marriage takes place. Do you know of any baggage that you are bringing, or have brought, into your marriage?

3. **Settle the "Leave and Cleave" Issue.** *"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) In the historical and cultural setting of the Old Testament, it was an understood fact that the woman would leave her parents' home to go live with her husband, so the wording here only includes a directive to the male. But today, in order to establish a healthy marriage, both partners must understand and follow those clear instructions from God's Word. What does this mean today?

First, Both Partners must Be Willing to Leave. Each partner must leave the "I" life to take on the "we" life. Leaving involves two kinds of surgery:

- **Severing the cord of dependency:** This means choosing not to rely on your parents for material or emotional support.
- **Severing the cord of allegiance:** Before the wedding day, your most significant relationships are with your mother and father, but during that ceremony your priorities change. You should continue to honor your

parents (Exodus 20:12), but your priority must now become your spouse. Your first and foremost loyalty is to your spouse.

What are some common ways that individuals fail to cut the cord of dependence after they are married?

Second, Both Partners must Cleave to Each Other. The word “cleave” means to lean toward, or be joined to your partner. To cleave to your marriage partner “means to choose your spouse above others, even yourself. You cleave, lean toward, or join to your partner by meeting their needs, hearing their words, understanding their feelings, and desires. **You cleave to each other alone for physical fulfillment and enjoyment.**

4. **Take Your Time.** The fourth step in preparing for marriage is to make sure you have spent enough time in preparation. As Shakespeare wrote in King Henry, “A hasty marriage seldom proveth well.” It takes time to know another person well enough to decide to spend your life with them. Proverbs 21:5 says it well, “**The plans of the diligent and informed will lead to abundance, but everyone who is hasty will only come to want and ruin.**” A wedding is a one-day event, but a marriage is a lifetime commitment. Take the time necessary to learn everything you can about the person with whom you plan to spend a lifetime.

The couple should focus on two key areas when taking their time:

- A. **Get to Know the Other Person’s Family.**
- B. **Get to Know as Much as Possible about Him/her.**

5. **Establish a “Covenant” Marriage.** Think about what a covenant, a promise, or a vow means to God. Read the following texts: Deuteronomy 23:21, 23.

6. **Seek Biblically-based Premarital Counseling.**

IV. NOURISHING THE FAMILY

There are two basic avenues for communication.

1. **Verbal communication**, that is, the use of words.
2. **Nonverbal body language.** We give each other non-verbal cues in relationships all the time. These may include posture, gestures, eye movement, or facial expressions.

Families Usually Exhibit One of Three Communication Styles:

1. **Aggressive Communicators.** This family communicates by being rude to one another. They are bossy overbearing people, and the words they use are selfish, accusing, and often volatile. Physical aggression may even be a characteristic of this nonfunctional family. Some members of the family never express their opinions out of fear of retaliation.
2. **Passive Communicators.** Communication is strained and rare in this family. Family members may be too shy or quiet and are often fearful of confrontation. Most often, there is apathy to the point that family members ignore each other or don't care to communicate with one another.
3. **Assertive Communicators.** This family makes communication a priority. Family members are free to express opinions and ideas. They are calm, confident, and want to understand what others are saying and meaning. They listen and respond to each other in appropriate ways. Each family member strives to respect the feelings and thoughts of the others.

Learning to Listen

The most overlooked skill in communication is the art of listening. Successful families have learned that communication only works when members learn to listen to each other. You've probably heard the adage, "God gave us two ears and one mouth, so He intended us to listen twice as much as we talk!" It's a good point. Most people only listen in order to answer, attack, or defend. In fact, families are made up of basically four types of listeners.

1. **The Judge.** The judge is the person in the family who believes they are always right. Their mind is already made up, so they see no benefit in listening to others. This person is usually negative and critical. They voice their opinion instead of listening. Psalm 115:6 refers to this type of person. Complete the following verse. "They have ears, but they do not hear."
2. **The Counselor.** The counselor listens only long enough to make a quick assessment and move on. This person is preoccupied with evaluating and offering advice that is usually not asked for. They accuse others of not listening. They only listen in order to dictate and tell others what should be done. Proverb 18:13 refers to this person: *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*
3. **The Inquisitor.** This person believes the way to listen is to constantly shoot questions at the other person or persons - something which can be tiresome and counterproductive. The inquisitor is prone to interrupt and is easily distracted. Asking questions in order to clarify understanding is important, but the inquisitor overdoes this tactic.
4. **The Good Listener.** By far, the most effective listener in the family is the person who listens not only to the words being said, but who also tries to understand the feelings of the person-speaking. The listener pays close attention to body language, nonverbal signs, and facial expressions. The good listener is not judgmental of what is being said or how it is being expressed. The good listener's desire is to understand and respond accordingly.

According to James 1:19, we should be quick to listen , and slow to speak , slow to anger.

V. STRENGTHENING INTIMACY

Outdo one another in showing honor. – Romans 12:10 NRSV

It should come as no surprise that because men and women are different, their emotional needs are going to be different. The key words are, "emotional needs." All humans have common needs. However, husbands and wives also have differing emotional needs.

The Five Basic Emotional Needs of Women

1. **A Woman Needs Her Husband's Affection.** She needs to be regarded as valuable, important, and worthy. The most romantic things a husband can do are those things that demonstrate how precious his wife is to him. In fact, that's how a woman would define "romance." Romantic moments, as well as romantic acts, are those designed to make a woman feel especially treasured and loved. – It's the little things that count!
2. **A Woman Needs Conversation.** Women connect at the emotional level through verbal communication. When she knows the facts and has all the details, a woman feels more secure. A woman needs specific words from her husband: words of affirmation, love, and encouragement that only a husband should provide. Her self-esteem and security are intact when she hears her husband express how he feels about her.
3. **A Woman Needs Honesty and Openness.** Neither men nor women want a spouse who can't be trusted; but for a woman it's imperative that she be able to trust her husband. A woman needs her husband to be a man of his word, respected in the community, and known as an honest, forthright man who will do what he says he will do. A woman needs to be able to depend on her husband to keep his word, and she becomes heart-broken if she discovers that her husband has been deceitful in any way. Another area in which a woman needs honesty is **regarding a man's feelings and his innermost thoughts.**
4. **A Woman Needs Financial Stability (or Support).** To her, financial stability means that her household will be clothed, fed, housed, and cared for. It's important to note that a woman doesn't need wealth or abundance in the form of new cars, the

finest clothes, or the most expensive home. What she needs is the feeling of safety that comes when her family's basic needs are met. 1 Timothy 5:8 labels a man who does not provide for his family as "worse than an infidel." When a husband meets his wife's need as a provider of financial stability, the wife has her own responsibility. She mustn't overspend or apply undue pressure on her husband for more than they can afford. She must be a partner in trimming costs and watching the budget.

5. A Woman Needs a Man's Commitment to the Family. A woman needs to know the family is her husband's first priority. She needs her husband to demonstrate his commitment to the family by making time for his family. Too many husbands seem to be more committed to their careers, friends, sports interests, or hobbies because those are the interests that consume their attention and time, and the family gets what is left – which is often very little. There's an old adage that is very appropriate: **Love is spelled T-I-M-E.** Fathers, your children will have many friends in their lifetime; they will have many teachers and others who will care for them. But absolutely no one can be your child's father but you.

The Five Basic Needs of Men

1. A Man Needs Sexual Fulfillment. It should surprise no one when we suggest that men are more sexually oriented than women. Women will often offer sex in order to receive intimacy (remember her need is to be treated as something precious), and men will feign intimacy in order to get sex. Many women dread the sexual encounter and avoid it, using excuse after excuse to postpone it. Of course, this attitude doesn't go unnoticed by the man. He begins to take it personally and his ego suffers. His wife's disinterest may make him feel undesirable. When his sexual needs are finally met, he often feels like he has forced himself upon his wife, and the experience leaves him frustrated and less than satisfied. For some women, sexual intercourse may not be pleasurable because of physical reasons. Certainly a physician can help you determine the cause and the treatment in those cases.

Don't go on for years without seeking help in this important area of intimacy.

- 2. A Man Needs a Wife Who Will Be His Playmate (Or Recreational Companionship).** It's not uncommon for women, when they are single, to join men in pursuing their interests. They find themselves hunting, fishing, playing football and watching movies they would never have chosen on their own. After marriage, wives try to interest their husbands in activities more to their liking. If their attempts fail, they may encourage their husbands to continue their recreational activities without them.
- 3. A Man Needs a Wife Who Cares about Herself (or an Attractive Spouse).** A man doesn't need a wife with a perfect figure or the most beautiful face. But a man does need a wife who cares about herself – the way she looks, her clothes, and her personal habits. In other words, it is important to him that his wife strives to be as attractive as she can be.
- 4. A Man Needs a Peaceful Home (or Domestic Support).** The peaceful home is sometimes noisy with the happy chatter of children. There might even be clutter in the entryway or on the stairs. The peaceful home can be made up of children, teenagers, and parents who have problems, but they are not out of control. There is a calm center, a focus. God rules this home, and it is bathed in love and prayer. Proverb 21:19 states it is better to live in the wilderness than with an angry, complaining woman. According to Proverb 27:15, a woman who is continually whining and complaining is like a continual dripping.
- 5. A Man Needs Admiration and Respect.** A man would rather be admired than loved. What do we mean? When a man is admired, he feels loved. That is the language of love for the male, words of affirmation and admiration. Specifically, the man needs his wife's admiration and respect. He may or may not have admiration from his boss, fellow employees, or other family members. He may be in a thankless job where there is little praise or recognition. Yet when he has a loving wife who bolsters his self-esteem by

finding things about him to admire, he feels successful (Ephesians 5:33). When the need for admiration is not met in the home, a young man will seek it outside the home — from gangs, unwholesome relationships, or any other source that will help satisfy that need.

Parents Meet the Needs of Their Children

1. **Children Need Unconditional Love.** We need to teach our children the principle of these words: *“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39 NKJV)”*
2. **Children Need to Be Trained.** *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverb 22:6)* Parents must realize that with children more is caught than is taught.
3. **Children Need to Be Nurtured.** The word “nurture” means “to provide nourishment and support during the fragile stages of development.” It is imperative that parents provide this nurture with words, with touch, and with their time.
4. **Children Need Genuine, Deserved Praise.**
5. **Children Need Parents Who Are in Control.**

VI. PROTECTING INTIMACY

A. KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT. *Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, (Ephesians 4:26 NRSV).* All relationships have the potential for conflict. Conflict is a normal, natural part of life. As strange as it may seem, a life void of conflict is not healthy. Just remember this important principle: **Not All Conflict Is Bad!**

There are four possible responses to conflict.

1. I win; you lose.
2. You win; I lose.

3. We both lose, and no one wins.
4. Everyone wins, and no one loses.

Your goal should be that everyone wins and no one loses.

Principles Of Constructive Conflict Resolution

1. **Practice The Prevention Rule.** *“The beginning of strife is like the letting of water. Stop the flow before it starts. Quit before the quarrel breaks out.” – Proverb 17:14.* Once begun, the evolution of the conflict is incredibly hard to shut down.
2. **Look For Areas Where You Are To Blame.** When you look for your responsibility in the conflict, it causes the other party to soften and often come to your defense. Ask yourselves these questions:
 - a. **Is it a Worthy Battle?** Proverb 19:11
 - b. **Am I Wrong?**
 - c. **Should I React or Respond?**
 - d. **What Difference Is this Going to Make in My Life in Three Days? What Impact Will it Have in Five Years?**

Here are a few suggestions as to how to say things more effectively to one another.

- **Use the Still, Small Voice.** (1 Kings 19:12). Lower your voice. Take a deep breath and speak in measured tones. If you're in a rage, step away and calm down. Watch your body language and eye contact. A certain demeaning toss of the head or look in the eye can make the hearer angry and defensive.
- **Maintain Your Sense of Humor.**
- **Don't Get Personal.** Don't say irresponsible things about each other with the intent to hurt and demean. That's attacking the person, not the issue at hand.
- **Don't Bring up the Past.**
- **Don't Get off the Subject.**

B. LEARN TO FORGIVE. *If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:15 NRSV)*

What Forgiveness Is

1. **Being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them.** Forgiveness is achieved

only when we acknowledge what was done without any denial or covering up – and still refuse to make the offender pay for their crime. Forgiveness is often painful. It hurts to kiss revenge good-bye. Forgiveness is not forgetting what the other person did. Forgiveness is no longer holding that person accountable for the transgression.

2. **Choosing to keep no record of wrong.** Love “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Why do we keep track of the times we are offended? To use them. To prove what happened. To wave them before someone who doubts what actually happened. Love is a choice. Forgiveness is a choice. When we develop a lifestyle of forgiveness, we learn to erase the wrong rather than file it away in our mental computer.
3. **Refusing to punish.** Refusing to punish those who deserve it – giving up the natural desire to see them “get what’s coming to them.” It is refusing to cave in to the fear that this person or those people won’t get the punishment or rebuke we think they deserve.
4. **Not telling what they did.** Anyone who truly forgives does not gossip about their offender. If you must tell someone, make sure that person is trustworthy and will never repeat your situation to those it does not concern.
5. **Being merciful.** “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). One difference between grace and mercy is that grace is getting what we don’t deserve, and mercy is not getting what we do deserve. So, when we show mercy we are withholding justice from those who have injured us, and that is one aspect of godliness.
6. **Forgiveness involves letting go.** Remember playing tug-of-war as a child? As long as the parties on each end of the rope are tugging, you have a “war.” But when someone lets go, the war is over.

VII. A FUTURE TOGETHER

Establish Positive Memories and Traditions.

2 **Thessalonians 2:15.** Traditions achieve three results in successful families.

1. **Traditions Bring a Family Together, Causing the Members to Know One Another Better.** Traditions will establish themselves if you simply allow yourself to be a part of your family. When you least expect it, a tradition will emerge with a great memory on its heels.
2. **Traditions Create Positive Memories Which Can Provide Encouragement and Stability.** Traditions are memories of memories. The memories which accompany our traditions can have a powerful impact. As recorded in **Psalm 137:1**, while the children of Israel were in captivity, what was their response regarding their memories?
3. **Traditions Are Cherished and Passed along to Future Generations.** Cherished traditions and memories give our families a sense of who they are, from whence they came, and where they are going.

PRAYER

As Important as a Spiritual Foundation is, we need to bathe our home in constant prayer. These two are related, like two bookends.

“His offering is complete, and as our Intercessor He executes His self-appointed work, holding before God the censer containing His own spotless merits and the prayers, confessions, and thanksgiving of His people. Perfumed with the fragrance of His righteousness, these ascend to God as a sweet savor. The offering is wholly acceptable, and pardon covers all transgression.”²

CONCLUSION

As you build your own home, which of these ingredients will you include? What other ingredients will you include besides the ones mentioned? Each home is different; therefore, your home does not have to have all these same ingredients. At the same time, some of these

are indispensable. A home without a solid foundation will fall. A home without protective boundaries (walls) is vulnerable. A home without proper shelter (roof) will be open to damage from climate changes. A home without heat (prayer) may cause illness and eventual death. These are indispensable.

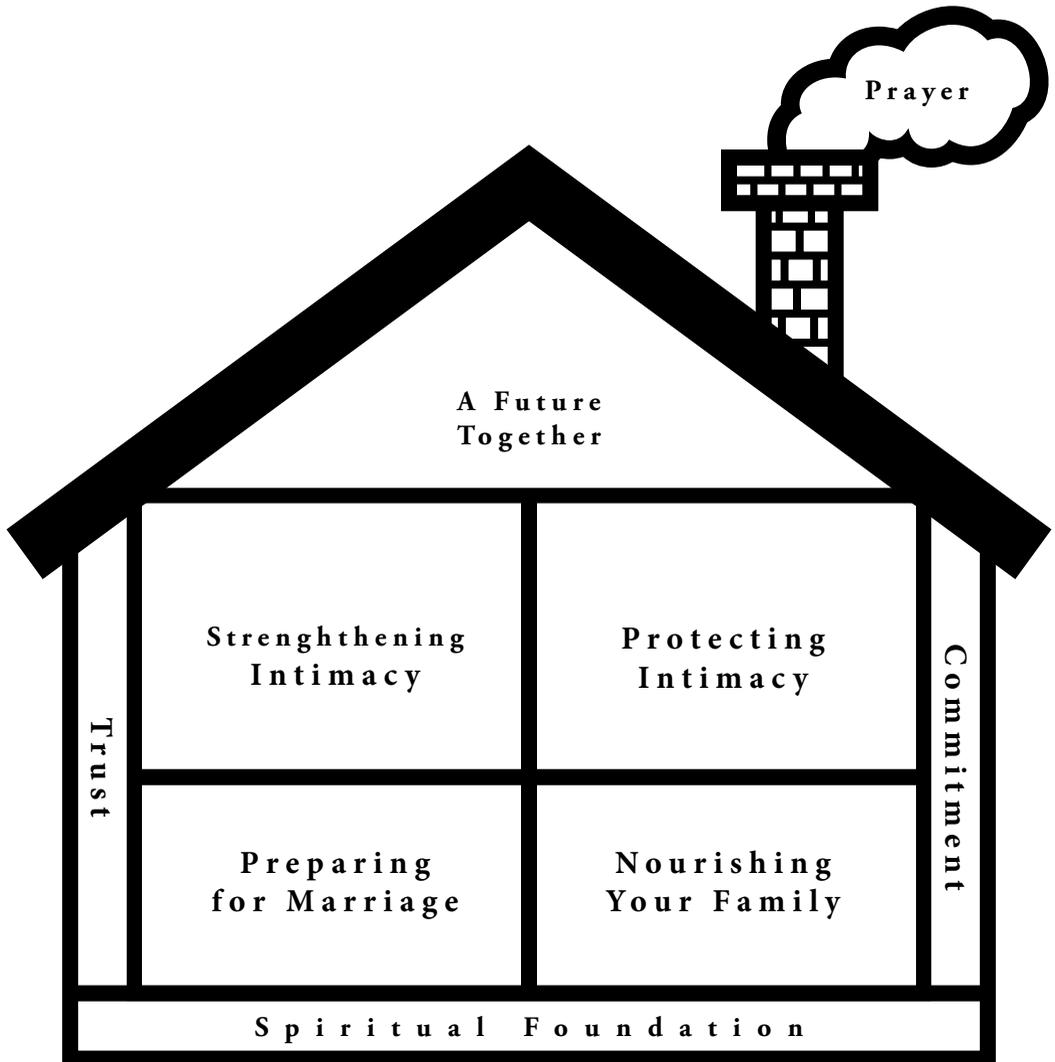
Other elements of a healthy home are very important, but may change from time to time depending on your current circumstances. If you don't have children, meeting the needs of your children is not necessary. Your own emotional needs and those of your spouse may differ and may not be the ones listed as typical

to most men or most women. Therefore, you need to think about which are your most important needs and which are your spouse's most important needs and then aim to meet each other's emotional needs.

The most important consideration is to think carefully about how you are or will be building a healthy home. "Count the cost" (Luke 14:28-30).

Notes

- ¹ Thatcher, F and H. *The Long-term Marriage*. World Books (1980)
- ² Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons*, p.156



Uplifting the Non-Custodial Parent

ALINA BALTAZAR

The Text

“AS A FATHER (THE NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT) HAS COMPASSION ON HIS CHILDREN, SO THE LORD HAS COMPASSION ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.”
PSALM 103:13, NIV

Purpose

The purpose of this seminar is to raise the awareness of the challenges and blessings of being a non-custodial parent. This seminar further helps to promote co-parenting between the non-custodial parent(s) and the custodial parent(s) as they seek to adjust to a “new normal” pattern of family living. Finally, this seminar seeks to present ways in which the church can be a safe haven for both the non-custodial parent and the custodial parent as they work together to rear their child and/or children.

Intended Audience

Non-custodial and custodial parents, church leaders, including but not limited to: Pastors, local family ministry leaders, elders, men’s and women’s ministries leaders, Sabbath

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School, youth and Pathfinder leaders, deacons and deaconesses, church school principals and teachers, school board, and church board leaders. All of these leaders should know how to support the non-custodial parent and the children for which he or she cares. This two-hour seminar can also be broken into two one-hour sessions.

Introduction

Though a majority of children live with both parents (69%), that percentage has been decreasing over the last several decades (US Census Bureau, 2016). In 1960 88% of children lived with both parents. The second most common family form is children living with a single mother (23%). That percentage has also been increasing, especially considering that just 8 percent of children lived with a single mother in 1960. In that same period of time, the percentage of children living with only their father went from 1 percent to 4 percent.

Why such a drastic change? Divorce rates increased dramatically in the 1970s, though they have stabilized over the last few decades to around 50 percent of all marriages. Another change is the increase of cohabitation, which leads to a higher percentage of never married parents. Thus, millions of children do not live with one of their biological parents. This situation can be devastating to both children

and parents. This seminar aims to educate and inform the church and surrounding community in order to aid children and parents caught up in this difficult situation.

Non-custodial Parent Defined

The typical custody arrangement between divorced or never married parents is for one parent to have primary custody and the other parent to be the non-custodial parent. This means one parent has physical custody where the child resides with the custodial parent on a regular basis. Usually both parents have legal custody so the parents can make legal decisions for their child. The courts usually arrange for the non-custodial parent to have pre-determined visitation times. If the parents reside in the same area, children usually stay with the non-custodial parent every other weekend and one evening a week. With school aged children, school holidays are often split between the two parents. When the parents live in different cities, children are flown as unaccompanied minors to the other parent's city to stay with them for a pre-determined amount of time. The out of town non-custodial parent may see the child in their hometown during visitation times.

Non-custodial parenting can take many forms. Traditionally the non-custodial parent has been a divorced father, but times are changing. With women increasingly entering the work force and pursuing careers, mothers are increasingly the non-custodial parent. There are also times when the mother is unable to financially provide or care for the children in her charge. In these instances a court may determine that the father can better provide for the children. With marriage rates decreasing, not all non-custodial parents were married to their ex. Each situation has unique challenges.

Struggles the Non-custodial Parent Faces

By definition, the non-custodial parent spends less time with their child(ren) than the custodial parent. The children live with the

custodial parent on a regular basis. The custodial parent gets to experience life's ups and downs in real time and enjoy spontaneous conversations with their child. The limited time that the non-custodial parent has with a child can harm the parent/child bond which negatively affects the relationship. This is particularly problematic when a child is very young. Many states do not allow babies to spend nights away from home with the non-custodial parent. Research has increasingly found that babies benefit from a varied environment, though consistency and routine are also important. Parent/child bonding happens in a relatively small window when children are babies. The more time the child spends with an adult, the more likely they are to bond.

Divorce has been seen similar to a death. There is a loss of a relationship and a grief over the future that they may have had together. One way that these situations differ is the public nature of divorce. When a spouse dies, their secrets are buried with them. Divorces are public affairs handled through the courts where records and transcripts are easily accessed by the public, but courts are not the only place where information is made known. Each spouse will reach out to their social network, often making negative statements about the other spouse in order to garner support. This can lead to public shaming that may follow the divorced parent for years.

The non-custodial parent is seen in a more negative light, especially non-custodial mothers—who are generally not the norm. Society sees non-custodial parents as dead-beats who are uninvolved in their child's lives. Non-custodial mothers fare even worse. They are judged as drug addicts or mentally ill. With women increasingly pursuing careers it may be better for the child to reside primarily with their father, either short or long term.

The non-custodial parent's family may not understand the situation. Grandparents want to be able to see their grandkids on holidays and birthdays, but that may not happen due to the custody agreement. This can lead to hostility and lack of support for the non-

custodial parent from their family support system. In addition, the custodial parent may cut off extended family members from even seeing the child.

Families aren't the only support system that get involved with custody arrangements. Church members and leaders also are caught in the middle. When there is a separation and both parents attend the same church, members often feel like they have to choose sides. Church members typically side with the custodial parent, who is usually the mother. It can be difficult for children to sit with their mother one Sabbath and then their father on another Sabbath. The child may feel like they are being disloyal to their custodial parent. Non-custodial fathers can feel pushed out of their home church because of the judgment and negativity from church members/leaders. Some non-custodial fathers may choose a different church or not attend at all. When the child is with their father every other weekend, he or she may not attend church, which could negatively affect their faith development.

Parenting Time Guidelines

States have predetermined the minimum amount of time non-custodial parents have with their children and how to balance holidays and vacation times. Parenting time guidelines are considered the "Bible" for non-custodial and custodial parents. Church leaders and school administrators should be aware of these guidelines when they get involved in custody disagreements. Even when children are over 18 years of age, these guidelines are often followed by the family. See examples of Parenting Time Guidelines (the title may vary from state to state) in the states of Michigan and Indiana.

Indiana Time Guidelines:

<https://secure.in.gov/judiciary/rules/parenting/parenting.pdf>

Michigan Parenting Time Guidelines:

http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/Resources/Documents/Publications/Manuals/focb/pt_gdlns.pdf

Parental Alienation

Preoccupied with their own distress, recently separated parents are often distressed and may badmouth their ex. This is normal. Estranged parents turn to sympathetic listeners. Children are inevitably drawn into these conversations. There are situations where this bad-mouthing is not normal and can lead to parental alienation. It may appear the child is choosing to reject the non-custodial parent for legitimate reasons and that may be the case, but often it is because the favored parent has manipulated the child into alienating the other parent.

Dr. Richard Warshak in his book *Divorce Poison* (p. 55-56) defines pathological parental alienation as:

- Unreasonable, persistent, negative attitudes (anger, hatred, fear, distrust, or anxiety) about a parent who was viewed more favorably in the past. Such attitudes are often freely expressed to the parent and others.
- No apparent guilt for treating the parent with malice, contempt, and utter disrespect. Accepts money and gifts without gratitude.
- Explanations for the hatred or fear that are trivial, irrational, inadequate, and out of proportion to the rejected parent's behavior (or false allegations of abuse).
- One-sided view of parents. Alienated parents are described in negative terms and the other parent is seen as nearly perfect.
- In conflict between the parents, the child always sides with the favored parent without using critical thinking or considering other perspectives. They want to testify against the other parent in court.
- The child uses words the alienating parent uses.
- Preoccupied with the favored parent while with the rejected parent. Including lengthy phone calls and texting.
- Declaration of independence. They say the rejection of their parent is their decision and they have not been influenced.
- Hatred by association: The child rejects the alienated parent's relatives, friends, and even pets despite having a history of gratifying relationships.
- This is done consistently over a long period of time.

The rejected parent may feel it is best for the child if they just pull away until the child is more accepting of a relationship. Unfortunately, time away from the rejected parent typically worsens the relationship and it may never be mended. The loss of the relationship feels like a death of a child to the rejected parent. This then leads to discouragement by the rejected parent and eventually more pulling away. The alienated child can then say they were “rejected” by the alienated parent.

Children who grow up without a relationship and involvement by both parents have poorer outcomes. When a father departs later in a child’s life it was associated with increased adolescent delinquency (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016). Boys with absent fathers were more likely to become absent fathers and girls who grew up without fathers were more likely to have absent partners (Pougnnet, et al., 2012).

Clinicians have found that there are better ways for the alienated parent to respond to the situation. Dr. Warshack offers the following tips:

- Communicate empathy to your child. The feelings your child has are real to them
- Use indirect communication by talking about a “friend” who has parents who are divorced with one parent being alienated. With older children you can talk about how other kids their age react to the same situation.
- Have your child “accidentally” overhear you speaking to someone else about the situation. Talk about what you and your child have lost, how sad you feel for the child, and how different things used to be. Talk about the past signs of a loving relationship. Speak of your confusion and puzzlement about the dramatic change. Tie the alienation to the divorce and your ex’s anger at you. Do not focus your anger on your ex.
- Discuss with children other ways people are manipulated. Talk about advertisements, then talk about how politicians try to smear their opponents, and finally how divorced couples can do the same.
- Wait until your child is in a receptive mood to talk about something your child may argue with you about. Stay away from hot topics.

- Third parties can serve as a bridge between you and your child (extended family member, teacher, or pastor). Have someone who is sympathetic to your plight, but who also has a good relationship with your child, try to build a bridge.
- Arrange for your children to see you with other people who hold you in high regard.
- Do activities that are fun for both of you. One may have to be creative to find something they are willing to do with you that they think is fun.
- Memorialize these fun times. Document, display, and frequently refer to positive times from the past and present. A third party could ask, “What old movies from the past give you positive memories?” The answer may then offer an opportunity to reflect on good memories together.
- Go on a nice vacation.
- Spend time alone with each sibling. Focus first on the child that is least alienated. Prepare that child for peer pressure from other family members.
- Introduce the idea of your child to countries that remain neutral in a war, ex. Switzerland. Hopefully, they will choose to not take sides in the conflict between their parents.
- You may have to agree to disagree with your child.
- Build on your faith’s focus on telling the truth and forgiveness to aid in change and healing.

What if Exodus 20:12 read this way: “Honor your (Non-Custodial Parent) and your (Custodial Parent), that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you”?

Dating and Remarriage

When the non-custodial parent starts to date, hostility with the ex can increase. There can be jealousy and fear could arise. Jealousy happens when the custodial parent believes that the non-custodial parent has a better life than they do or vice versa. With reduced parental responsibilities, the non-custodial parent can have a more active dating life, but an active dating life can also interfere with parental involvement child-related events that happen

at school, for instance. It can also get in the way of going to court to advocate for his or her parental rights in a given situation.

If the non-custodial or custodial parent gets married, a major adjustment has to occur for all involved. Blended families are particularly fragile, with higher rates of divorce. Experts say it takes at least four years for a blended family to adjust to their new roles and develop healthy relationships. Both biological parents need to be reassured of the importance of their role in the child's life. It helps if the ex gets to know the new spouse in order to increase his or her comfort level with the new spouse being a caregiver for the child. A vacation together with the new blended family can help, but parties involved must be aware that remarriage can bring an escalation of parental alienation. This should be caught early and resolved as soon as possible by listening to one another and then working on addressing the concerns raised.

Even though blended families are not God's ideal, there are many examples of blended families in the Bible whom the Lord has blessed. Abraham took a second wife and had a child with her in his attempt to fulfill God's promise of many descendants (Genesis 16-17). It led to jealousy between Sarah and Hagar, which in turn led to family disunity and rejection of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord still blessed and cared for Hagar and Ishmael.

Joseph and his brothers are famous for their jealousy of each other (Genesis 37-46). It started with Jacob marrying the wrong sister, then marrying the sister whom he loved. This jealousy led to the birth of twelve sons. Without that jealousy Joseph would never have ended up in Egypt, where he was in a position to save his family. Though they had their difficulties, the Lord made those twelve quibbling brothers the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Bible tells us that Jesus too had siblings (Matthew 13:55-56). We are told these brothers were probably from Joseph's first marriage. Some of them were involved in his ministry and others tried to discourage him (Galatians 1:19; Mark 3:21). His mother had concerns

about his ministry, but the Lord made sure his mother was taken care of when he was dying on the cross, calling John, his beloved disciple, Mary's new son (John 19:27).

Making the Best of It

There is a reason why Jesus had such a negative view of divorce. He famously noted that it was never God's intent, but allowed due to the sinful nature of humanity (Matthew 19:8-9). Divorce all too often leads to hostility on both sides, with children, family, teachers/school administrators, and church members/leaders caught in the middle. The non-custodial parent may not have filed for divorce and is saddened by not only the demise of the relationship, but also the regular contact with their child(ren). Unfortunately, according to the Barna Research Group, conservative Christians have a higher rate of divorce than other faith groups or even atheists (1999). Some researchers believe this is due to conflict between spouses over Christian beliefs where one spouse is more "liberal" and the other more "conservative." This can lead to negatively judging the other spouse, which contributes to the relationship's demise.

As hard as it is, the best thing to do is to make peace with the ex. There could be very legitimate reasons to be very angry at your ex for things that happened during the marriage or after the divorce. At this point, when the love is gone, divorced couples will not be as motivated to try and repair the relationship. For the sake of the children and your own sanity, forgiveness is the best way to go. Forgiveness does not excuse the other of their misdeeds; It allows you to let go of the hurt and anger the situation has caused.

Closely examine the mistakes you have made throughout the relationship and divorce. Asking forgiveness from your ex can help decrease hostility on their end. This self-reflection can also help in learning from past mistakes so as not to repeat them in future relationships. Whether or not you are able to decrease hostility with your ex, you still need to show them respect. Your child is

related to and loves your ex, so by showing respect for your ex, you are showing respect for your child. You may have to be intentional at first, but it can become more natural eventually. It is hard to maintain a hostile attitude toward someone to whom you show respect.

When there is lack of communication between divorced parents, it is tempting to interrogate the child about your ex's behaviors. This makes the child feel like he or she is being asked to spy on their parent. This is particularly problematic as it relates to Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and lifestyle. Since disagreement over religious beliefs puts relationships at risk, these issues can continue even after a divorce. When a child is with the non-custodial parent every other weekend, this time period includes the Sabbath. The custodial parent may worry how the non-custodial parent is observing Sabbath. This is one of the difficulties of divorce. When the non-custodial parent has custody of the child it is up to them on how to spend their time (within reason of course). Parents will just have to let go of the differences they have about parenting styles and try to explain why your parenting differs from your ex's.

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Parenting time guidelines guarantee minimum time with the child for the non-custodial parent. This does not mean that it has to be set in stone. If hostility can be decreased, the custodial parent may be more open and flexible for increasing time for the non-custodial parent, as long as it isn't too disruptive for the child.

Another way for non-custodial parents to be more involved in their child's life is through school. Non-custodial parents can request schools send a second set of materials alerting them to school events that the custodial parent may not have mentioned. Make sure to attend parent/teacher conferences, concerts, and sport events. This shows your child you care about their academic development. Children benefit from parents being involved with their school.

When there is hostility between divorced parents, custody exchange may be a time of conflict. This is particularly problematic for children who find these situations fearful and uncomfortable. Safety and entrapment may

also be a concern. Some parents have found exchanging the child in a public setting such as a restaurant, library, school, or police station can decrease conflict during these times. It may be appropriate the parents to arrange pick-up and drop-off through a third party in a public setting to minimize conflict.

When custody disagreements arise, as they often do, mediation may be a better route than court litigation. Research has found that when mediation has been used, the non-custodial parent sees the child more than their litigation counterparts (Emery, 2004). As a non-custodial parent, the odds of building a strong and long-lasting relationship with a child is stronger if the parent uses mediation instead of litigation. The custodial parent is more likely view the non-custodial parent in a positive light as well (Emery, 2004). Positive communication and a good relationship with the co-parents tends to build the relationship between children and their non-custodial parent.

Divorce hurts, but there can be healing. With support from the Lord, friends, family, and church members, the non-custodial parent can get through these difficulties. Life after divorce will eventually become the "new normal." The limited time with your child may make you feel that you really cannot be a parent. Make the best of the time you have with your children by not being too critical, controlling, or permissive.

Many non-custodial parents look forward to the time when the child is 18. This gives them an opportunity to rebuild a relationship with their child based on decisions between them and their child, minus court involvement. Young adult children still need guidance from their parents as they face real world problems they may feel unprepared to face. This offers opportunity to rebuild a broken relationship between parent and child.

Custodial Parent as Support

Custodial parents can be supportive in various ways. Though the primary custody

arrangement may have been the best arrangement at the time of divorce, it does not mean the parenting time guidelines have to be rigidly followed. For the sake of the child, custodial parents should try to encourage the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent by allowing as much face to face contact as possible. In cases where there that has been bouts of dangerous neglect and abuse. The child may have real issues with their non-custodial parent. The custodial parent can help them understand their estranged parent's behavior within context and explain how both parents contributed to the relationship demise.

Custodial parents may be concerned about an ex's parenting style and choices, the improved relationship between ex and child will outweigh most of those concerns. They should explain the parenting differences between them and their ex so that the child understand what is taking place. Custodial parents can also play a role in decreasing hostility between themselves and the ex. Forgiveness is the key! Forgiveness begins with understanding the other person's behaviors, focusing on the benefits of forgiveness, then letting go by allowing the Lord to speak to your heart to forgive the other person. Research has found that when the custodial parent has a good relationship with the non-custodial parent, the non-custodial parent is more likely to stay involved in their child's life (Castillo & Sarver, 2012).

Family as Support

The family of the non-custodial parent can be helpful as well. In some ways being a non-custodial parent has less day to day parenting responsibilities, but that does not mean that there will not be a significant investment of time. Every other weekend has to be devoted to the child. They may or may not be able to join in on family gatherings or holidays. It helps when families understand and just try to be supportive. Extended family can help to bridge the gaps between divorced spouses or alienated children. Family should try to stay in touch with the children as much as possible trying to make those times as positive as possible.

Church as Support

As mentioned earlier, church members can get caught in the middle and it is tempting to take sides. The Bible urges believers not to judge others (Matthew 7:1). Judging is not the role for humans; it's God's job! As a Christian it is easy to look at others' behaviors then measure them against God's standards. But all of us have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). What divorced couples need is support and encouragement. Kids caught up in this situation benefit from that support as well. In addition to support, church leaders should be aware of parenting time guidelines to help protect the parent/child relationship that can easily be infringed upon because of life events or hostility between exes.

Possible Discussion Questions

1. What are three (3) ways in which your parenting of your child has changed since becoming a non-custodial parent?
2. Share three (3) strategies that you employ to keep the exchange of your child peaceful?
3. Indicate various ways in which you as the non-custodial parent utilize the parenting time guidelines in parenting of your child.
4. If you used mediation, how was it helpful to you as the non-custodial parent in resolving custody matters with the custodial parent?
5. State some key ways that you utilize to continually communicate with your child when she or he is with the custodial parent?
6. Explain some of the ways in which family and close friends can be more supportive of you in your role as a non-custodial parent?
7. Discuss how being a non-custodial parent affects your professional work?
8. What could the custodial parent do differently to better support the co-parenting of your child?

9. List three (3) key strengths you possess which help you to be a successful non-custodial parent.
10. Discuss three (3) non-confrontational ways to share your thoughts with the custodial parent concerning the parenting of your child?
11. Specify three (3) ways in which the local church can be more helpful to non-custodial parents and their children.
12. Identify three (3) areas in which you need to grow to become a better non-custodial parent to your family, including to the custodial parent.

Additional Adapted Biblical Texts

- “As a mother [Custodial Parent] comforts her child, so I will comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13, NIV)
- “Fathers [Custodial and Non-Custodial Parents], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, NIV)
- Fathers [Custodial and Non-Custodial Parents], do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21, NIV).
- “[Non-Custodial and Custodial Parents] train a child in the way he (she) should go, and when he (she) is old he (she) will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NIV).
- “Older men [Non-Custodial Parents] are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women [Custodial Parents] likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women [Child’s Parent] to love their husbands [Child’s Parent], to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands [Child’s Parent], so that the word of God will not be dishonored” (Titus 2:2-5, NASB).

Which of you fathers [Non-Custodial and Custodial Parents], if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you [Non-Custodial and Custodial Parents] then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:11-13, NIV).

Additional Resources

Support for Non-Custodial Fathers

- http://fathersrights_movement.us
- <https://www.facebook.com/MensDivorce/>

Resources on Mediation

- <https://www.grainmediation.com/2011/08/mediation-is-best-for-building-maintaining-relationships-between-non-custodial-parents-their-children/>
- <http://www.mediate.com/articles/vestalA2.cfm>
- https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2016/09/shsconf_shw2016_00018.pdf

Songs That Can Bring Healing

- <https://youtu.be/4-G3IAu5vzI>
- I’ll Help You Cry
- <https://youtu.be/rRwQy2eQbJM>
- I Trust You
- <https://youtu.be/4Fx3l2DMDh4>
- I Almost Let Go
- <https://youtu.be/EHY2OIW5vo0>
- I Still Want You
- <https://youtu.be/7jsEfYm7S-8>
- Teach Me to Love
- https://youtu.be/U-UAP_LMpqc
- The Best In Me
- <https://youtu.be/7JXFg5KEoXg>
- Never Could Have Made It

- <https://youtu.be/kWe6A91dwTg>
- I Choose to Worship
- <https://youtu.be/LnaHTOUigJM>
- I Need You to Survive
- <https://youtu.be/mWFpj7S-Tbw>
- The Strength of the Lord
- <https://youtu.be/UlfGuQR4c2o>
- Broken, But I'm Healed
- <https://youtu.be/rFNHmA9a2gI>
- Encourage Yourself
- <https://youtu.be/5GwOrVpudXI>
- Healing
- <https://youtu.be/awtPSl6zFNU>
- The Storm Is Over Now
- <https://youtu.be/-pD2zIuiC2g>
- Break Every Chain
- https://youtu.be/6p_UPlfM71k
- I Can Begin Again
- https://youtu.be/W_KS0DBv8-o
- My Life is In Your Hands
- <https://youtu.be/1t8vjqGQhZI>
- Beyond What I Can See
- <https://youtu.be/OeZvzX218qk>
- God Favored Me

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Letting Go: Seminar on Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS)

MARIJA TRAJKOVSKA

Introduction

An empty nest! The feeling is strange. After so many years of constant watch-care and nurture, you feel not needed any more. After years of being dishwasher, diaper-changer, taxi-driver, teacher, cook, mentor, counselor, confidante, and best friend, you are robbed of all your parental duties. The strange silence overwhelms the home as you explore your new to-do list. The “birds” have flown from the nest.

At the beginning, you comfort yourself with the thought that your children are only temporarily absent. *Soon the school year will be over and they will return*, you tell yourself. The time from August to December will pass quickly and your child will be home for the holidays. The harsh reality is, however, that before you know it, semesters will give way to graduation, graduation to marriage, and soon a career. When children leave for college they are often leaving home for good, though they may return for short periods of time.

How can parents let their children go while remaining cheerful and sane? How can they avoid the inevitable feelings of emptiness, discouragement, and in some cases depression? Can anyone and anything prepare parents early enough and well enough to prevent empty

nest syndrome (ENS) from developing? This seminar will try to provide some tips and answers to these and other questions faced by many parents each year.

In a column titled “Saying goodbye to my child, the youngster”¹ published in *The Washington Post*, writer Michael Gerson wrote that dropping his eldest son off at college was the worst thing that time had done to him. “With due respect to my son’s feelings, I have the worst of it. I know something he doesn’t—not quite a secret, but incomprehensible to the young,” he wrote. “He is experiencing the adjustments that come with beginnings. His life is starting for real. I have begun the long letting go.”

If you are having the same feeling now or are dreading the day when you will face it, explore with me what is empty nest syndrome and why some parents experience it.

Definition

The phenomenon known as empty nest syndrome (ENS) takes its name from the practice in nature by which young birds fly away from the nest once they are strong enough and old enough to fly. They leave their parents behind as they try their new wings. The phrase was first introduced in 1914 by the writer Dorothy Canfield, but not to describe a

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clinical condition. It was not until the 1970s that the term was adopted and popularized by clinicians.

According to medical literature, empty nest syndrome refers to feelings of depression, sadness, and grief experienced by parents and caregivers when children grow and leave their childhood home. Empty nest syndrome often occurs when children go to college or get married.² Some researchers have shown that women are more likely to be affected by the absence of children in the home than are men. At the time when children leave, mothers are often going through other significant life challenges, such as menopause, retirement, illness, or caring for elderly parents. Men can also experience similar feelings of loss concerning separation from their children.

Signs and Symptoms of Empty Nest Syndrome

Behavioral symptoms. The feeling of uselessness can be very strong in parents when they have no children at home for which to care. The children are no longer their constant companions, so they miss being part of their everyday lives.

This is also a time when parents become intensely anxious about their children's safety and their ability to take care of themselves on their own. The struggle is even greater if the last child leaves home earlier or later than expected. The greatest feeling of loss occurs in homes where there is a single child, homes where the parental role has been strongly identified and concentrated in the service of a single child.

Parents know that it is their chief responsibility to raise children who will grow up and leave home. Part of the job is letting go of our children, but knowing this does not make it any easier when the time comes. We celebrate birth by showering new moms with flowers and presents, but the ending of hands-on motherhood is often borne in silent distress.

“The feelings of emptiness and loss are there even before children physically leave,

because throughout their teenage years they are relentlessly moving on from us emotionally, focusing outward into the world and away from the ties and security of family,” says Maddy Donaghy of London, mother of an only child whom she raised as a widow after the sudden death of her husband, Michael. “Our role as parents is to fade graciously into the background, which can feel painful and difficult. The empty nest became an aching, empty heart.”³

It is normal for parents to have feelings of emptiness, sadness and loss when their children leave home. But now when parents miss the companionship or daily contact they used to have with their children, they may experience a deep sense of distress and loneliness. However, if the feeling of distress is stronger than usual, if parents are worried that their lives have lost purpose and meaning, if they feel guilty, cry excessively and are so sad and depressed that they cannot continue with their regular lives, if they neglect their everyday duties, exhaust themselves at work, or withdraw from others, they should consider seeking professional help.

Parents with ENS may even have some symptoms connected with clinical depression, such as difficulty concentrating, inability to seek and derive pleasure, excessive worry or anxiety, indecision, or insecurity.

During an interview with the University of Utah's Health Sciences Radio, Dr. Kyle Bradford Jones, a family physician, answered questions on some of the serious signs and symptoms of empty nest syndrome. Bradford noted that parents with this syndrome “feel a lot of guilt,” especially if they had a strained relationship with their child or children. They may also have a hard time concentrating on things. They can have sleep problems ranging from lack of sleep to its excessive sleep due to the depressive moods.⁴

Physical symptoms may include hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue or lack of drive, irritability, changes in eating patterns and excessive time spent in the child's room.

Treatment

In cases of overwhelming sadness and grief over a child's departure, professional treatment is recommended. A general practitioner or therapist's advice can help parents, especially mothers, better understand and manage their feelings. In some cases medication may be necessary to help relieve symptoms of depression which can appear during this period.

During these times of stress and loneliness, social support can also be extremely helpful. Dr. Kyle Bradford Jones strongly recommends talking to someone about the problem. At the beginning, simply acknowledging that there is a problem can be very difficult for a depressed parent. Jones recommends making every effort to talk over one's feelings with his or her spouse and close friends, rather than avoiding the issue by engaging in tasks that divert attention and/or require a lot of energy and concentration.

This transition time is also the best time for parents to adjust to a new role and to adopt a new parental identity. Their relationship with the children now has to become more peer to peer, allowing children more privacy while affording parents more privacy as well.

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The Impact on Health and Behavior

Research done in the past has shown that many parents dealing with ENS experience a deep sense of loss that may make them vulnerable to depression, alcoholism, identity crisis, and marital conflicts. However, other research has demonstrated that empty nest syndrome can also be beneficial for parents, reducing work and family conflicts and giving them opportunities to reconnect, improve their marital life and renew the interests for which they previously did not have time.

Recent research also suggests that the quality of the parent-child relationship may have important consequences on both sides at this time of transition. Parents get the greatest benefit from this transition to the empty nest period when they have developed

and maintained good relationships with their children. Hostile attitudes, conflict, or disconnection in parent-child relations may reduce or even exclude the inter-generational support needed by young people during their early adulthood, and by parents facing the difficulties of old age.

Proneness to Empty Nest Syndrome

Barbara Mitchell and Loren Lovegreen, researchers from Simon Fraser University, interviewed more than 300 parents in Vancouver, British Columbia to learn more about the effects of Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS). Their findings were published in a 2009 issue of the *Journal of Family Issues*. Mitchell and Lovegreen first noted that more research on ENS was done in earlier decades when women had less opportunities to work outside the home than they do today. These were the times when children were leaving home earlier and were more clearly separated once they left, in contrast to today when children often take longer to leave the home and may "boomerang" back when their economic circumstances worsen. Moreover, much of the research on the ENS focused on North American parents who considered their children leaving to be a mark of parental success in preparing them for adulthood.⁵

Present research shows that mothers were slightly more likely to report ENS than fathers, but in general the percentages of depressed parents was very low, ranging from 20 to 25 percent in most of the studied groups. However, in cultures that emphasize continuing bonds between parents and adult children, such as Indo and East Indian groups, far higher rates of ENS were noticed—50 percent for fathers, 64 percent mothers—as compared to those among Chinese, southern European, or British parents.

Besides the role of culture, the Vancouver study identified seven key social and psychological factors that seemed to place parents at risk of experiencing ENS:

1. An identity found in being a parent (particularly for women).

2. Feeling loss of control over their children's lives (particularly for men).
3. Having few or only one child.
4. Lack of a social support network.
5. Feeling that the children's departure was too early or too late, compared to cultural norms.
6. Being younger when the children are launched, especially if the children don't completely leave home (i.e. "boomerang" children).
7. Worrying about the child's safety and well-being in the world outside the home.

However, the majority of parents interviewed in this study were able to adapt well to the empty nest transition. Many reported that they experienced personal growth, improved spouse relationships, enjoyed greater leisure time, and had feelings of success for launching their children into the adult world.

The researchers concluded that it is very important for parents to address both the cultural and psychological factors that might be influencing their well-being. Today parents can stay connected to their children through social media, even though they might be on the other side of the world. However, if they used to define their identity only in terms of their parental role, they will have to look for other ways to receive personal affirmation. They will have to look for opportunities to develop other qualities within themselves either at work, in their community, or in their leisure interests.

Understood and accepted properly, the empty nest transition period may be a rewarding opportunity for parental growth. Soon the parent role can be replaced with that of a grandparent, which often leads into yet more enjoyable and rewarding family experiences.

Coping with ENS

Empty nest time is survivable. It is therefore good to remind all parents facing an empty nest

that they can take several practical steps to help themselves cope more easily. They should:

- **Accept the timing.** Instead of comparing the children's timetables to their own expectations and experiences, parents should help them to become confident and successful when they leave home.
- **Keep in touch.** Parents can stay close to their children even if they are far away. They can keep in regular contact through phone calls, emails, text messages, video calls, and actual visits.
- **Seek support.** Family members and close friends are a good support network for parents who have difficulties experiencing the empty nest time. It is very important for parents to share and openly express their feelings and thoughts. In the case of depression, it is good to consult a doctor or mental health expert even when adverse feelings are mild.
- **Stay positive.** The positive thoughts of getting extra time to devote to their marriage or personal interests can help parents to adapt to this major change more easily.

In her book *The Empty Nest: How to Survive and Stay Close to Your Adult Children*, Celia Dodd suggests several coping strategies for the empty nesters:

- **Face your feelings.** Have a good cry, go through family albums and talk to someone you can rely on to be genuinely sympathetic, who won't just tell you to cheer up.
- **Practice being spontaneous.** It is not always easy to do so after years of organizing your life around other people. If someone suggests a last-minute outing, accept the offer and do not automatically say no.
- **Allow yourself time to adjust to the notion of not being needed on a daily basis.** It is okay to cling to comforting routines for a while at least. Find new things to nurture—but don't get a dog just yet.

- **Discuss plans for the future.** If you're married, don't wait until the nest empties completely before discussing plans for the future and doing more together.
- **Remember times without children.** Dig out a selection of photos that do not feature your children—friends and occasions you've enjoyed without your children. It's a good reminder that it is perfectly possible to have a good time without the children.
- **Redefine the child-parent relationship.** When your child comes home, acknowledge that the relationship is now on a different footing. You can no longer expect them to say where they are going or what time they will be home, although you can expect them to consider your feelings.⁶

Couples Coping with ENS

Sabine Walker and Pierre A. Lehu in "Taking a Look at the Empty Nest Syndrome" suggest that the victims of this syndrome are more likely to be couples whose relationship falls apart when they are alone. These researchers point out that ENS takes years to develop. It starts when a couple begins to drift apart but stays together because of the children. Though such couples may appear to have "the perfect marriage" from the outside, it's actually a façade, since the only level of their communication and connectedness involves their children. They are most likely no longer intimate. All of their conversations center on their children, as well as many of the activities done together. When they lose this connection, because their children have started lives of their own, they are left with an empty relationship. Very often in such marriages, anger takes the place of the emotions they spent on the children. These couples divide their time between not talking and fighting.⁷

Jon Beaty, a licensed clinical social worker and the author of the book *If You're Not Growing, You're Dying: 7 Habits for Thriving in Your Faith, Relationships and Work*, makes several observations in his article "How to Rescue

Your Marriage from Empty Nest Syndrome," He suggests the application of Dr. Gottman's Love Maps to improve marriage relationship during empty nest time.⁸ In his book *The Seven Principle of Making Marriage Work*, Gottman identifies a Love Map as the place in the brain where persons store details about their spouse's history, interests, fears, hopes, and goals.

In order to have and keep their marriage successful, couples have to regularly update this map and add details by asking questions, listening, and turning toward their partner in good and bad times. That is important because with the change of the life seasons always comes a change in the spouse's inner world. It is also true for the time when the children leave home and when spouses need to do special revising and adding to their Love Map to stay in tune with their partner. Happy couples use their Love Maps to understand each other, and to show fondness and admiration.

Shared meaning is needed in the empty nest period. Otherwise, each spouse goes their own way, and usually in opposite directions. Therefore, they now have to pay new attention to each other, to find time to sit and talk together, remembering how their love story actually began and the things that made them closer. They have to add a new spark to their old romance by listening to their favorite music, watching their favorite movies or going to their favorite places. In that way, they will start developing shared rituals, roles, goals, and symbols again and that will keep them close and united.

Single parent coping with empty nest syndrome

While two-parent homes may see the time of a child's leaving as an opportunity to reconnect and spend more time together, single parents will most likely face a different experience. As Dr. Sheri Jacobson, Clinical Director of Harley Therapy says: "Single parents can form intense bonds with their children as they can rely on each other more. And when the children leave home? There is not the support of a partner to

share the ins and outs of this time of change with, and there is the experience of suddenly living completely alone, which can be startling.”

But this time need not automatically become a time of sadness and loneliness for single parents. Jacobson says, “There are many positives, though, to this stage of life. For some parents, who have felt it unfair to introduce other person to their child’s life, it can be a time to fall in love again. For others, who have long put off dreams because single parenting left no time for them, it can be a time to reclaim their creativity, form a new career path, or take up a hobby long neglected.”

Regardless of whether the single parents are in a relationship or not, this is possibly the first time in their life that isn’t being dominated by their children. Many people, single or not, look at this as an opportunity to try new things; sports, travel, even voluntary work. Jacobson urges single parents do the following: focus on the positive, don’t expect a change in attitude overnight, accept changes in themselves, embrace their emotions, ask for help if they feel overwhelmed, and never forget that they are still parents.

Can empty nest syndrome be prevented?

In a word, yes! Parents who plan ahead and readily anticipate the time of children’s leave can prevent the heavy impact of the empty nest syndrome. If they look for new opportunities in their personal and professional life, if they keep busy, or take on new challenges they can cope with the time of departure and separation much easier.

Many experts suggest preparing for an empty nest should begin while the children are still at home. This is the time to develop friendships, hobbies, career, and educational opportunities. It is also time to make plans, while family is still together, to have family vacations, long walk and talks, spending quality time together and making special memories. This will make the time of departure easier for both parents and a child.

Shelley Emling, the author of “*Four Things They Never Tell You About Empty Nest*,” writes about *the things no one tells you in advance* to prepare you for the empty nest transition. No one will tell you how confusing shifting roles can be, how hard the absence of a child can be on remaining siblings, how important time with the family unit is—especially during a child’s last year of high school, or how imperfect parents will feel when they have to let their child go, having not imparted all that they had hoped to give them.⁹

But parents need not be alarmed by these realities. There is a way to prepare for ENS and even children can play a role in the process. Here is an experience that I had.

A Personal Experience

I will always remember September 4, 2015 when Pavle, our only son, left home for his Master’s studies at Newbold College in England. Months earlier we tried to prepare for this moment according to the book. We had special family meals, long walks and talks together, even some special holiday times to create lasting memories for all of us. But that Friday morning at the Belgrade airport was not any easier for my husband and me. We fought back tears then let them freely flow once our son went to his departure gate.

However, coming back to our empty home was much easier than we anticipated, thanks to Pavle. As I reached for a small bottle on a kitchen shelf to season Sabbath lunch for the soon-to-arrive guests, a small white stone fell on my palm with the inscription, “Your son loves you.” Before long we were finding such stones everywhere—in the mailbox, perfume cap, manicure set, clean sheets, towels, sneakers and Sabbath shoes. Pavle’s thoughtful gesture of love had us shedding tears again, but these were tears of joy. Pavle had spent almost all of the previous night hiding them in the most unexpected places in the house. Two years later we are still finding Pavle’s love rocks around the house. This act by our son made helped eased our transition into having an empty nest.

Life beyond parenting

When your child leaves home for college, work, marriage, or service, the reality of a major change in your parenting role sits with you in your now silent home. However, there is life beyond parenting. Child-centered homes can be very difficult to retrofit when a child is no longer the center of the home. Deeply committed couples should seize this opportunity to do three important things: Reconnect, Redefine their relationship, and Reinvest in new growth.

Reconnecting

Even in the best marriages and situations, it is difficult for married couples to stay connected and in tune with each other in the midst of parenting tasks and responsibilities. Their communication can suffer as they concentrate on daily activities and fail to connect on a level of intimate friendship. Taking time daily to talk about each person's ups and downs of the day is a good beginning. Some couples develop a habit of a daily walk together. Others sit on the patio after work. When spouses manage to communicate on a vulnerable level, sharing their important thoughts and feelings regularly, they reconnect and bonding occurs.

Redefining the relationship

Long time child-centeredness can inevitably cause damage to a couple's relationship. It is important for couples entering any stage of marriage to commit to keeping the relationship "partner-centered." In a "we-centered" marriage, the couple's love relationship is central in their daily lives. This allows their love to flow outwards to their children and others.

The Bible makes it clear that couples are called to love one another and support each other in good and bad times. We are to "love one another" (John 13:24) "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:3). Romans 12:10 says, "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving

preference to one another." "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). A good way for a couple to begin redefining their marriage is, for example, to revisit their wedding vows.

Reinvesting in new growth

Allowing time for grieving over the loss of particular roles enjoyed during parenting years is a healthy way to new growth. Discussing openly the strengths and the weaknesses of the relationship and setting new goals together is also helpful. Letting go of old hurts and resentments is a necessary step towards growing healthier and holier in the marriage. Sometimes even professional help may be needed.

Empty nest couples who have been too child-centered are now called to new choices, more freedoms, and new ways of loving each other in this grace filled stage of marriage. A good help for empty nesters seeking to make healthy adjustments to life without their children at home is *The Second Half of Marriage* by David and Claudia Arp.

Natalie Caine, author and founder of the Empty Nest Support services, gives some practical suggestions to help parents find purpose and sense in their after-parenting life. Here are some of her useful tips for creating a life beyond day-to-day parenting:

1. **Write a letter to yourself** talking about what you love about parenting, what you will miss, and what you won't miss. Read it out loud to yourself.
2. **Honor all feelings** that emerge in your emptiness. Past losses may arise. Allow yourself space and time to grieve for a role that is shifting. You have never been at this stage of life before.
3. **Delete the need to compare yourself** to how other parents are dealing with empty nest. You don't know what went on behind closed doors.

4. **Make a list of compliments** people have said to you over the years in order to get a glimpse of what you might want to do next, “You are so good at organizing. You are a great listener. You are always the one who gets us together for fun.”
5. **Consider carefully when to get in touch with the children.** Count to five before you text or email your children, asking yourself, “What do I really need now? Can my children give me that or do I need to let them be?”
6. **Be aware of the fact that your children lead now.** Now they decide when to call and connect. You also get to ask for what you want and negotiate. Learn to carry opposites by saying, this is true and that is also true. You are building self compassion and trust.
7. **Remember your old preferences.** What did you like to do after school, before marriage, and children? Were you an observer, leader, day dreamer, best friend, artist, collector, drummer, biker, etc. You could be a combination.
8. **Honor who you are.** You may be surprised at not missing the role you played and not missing your children as much as you anticipated.
9. **Allow yourself time to not decide what to do next.** You may choose something, like tennis or a book group and change your mind. You are an adult. You get to change your mind.
10. **Assess how you spend your time weekly.** Put yourself in the middle of a piece of paper and then draw a line out from you for each category showing what is near and far from you. For example, work is near to you, spirituality far from you, health a little closer to you, finances further out than work, relationships of all kinds are closer to you, intellect, creativity, fun...where are they in relationship to you and how much attention you give them in a week? This gives you a quick overview of where your time is spent and not spent.
11. **Awake old interests.** Think what part of you had to go dormant while parenting that you would like to awaken now.
12. **Add new meaning to your life.** What new meaning do you want to add to your life and what are you doing that does add meaning to you?
13. **Get to know the unknown.** Practice making friends with the unknown. “I don’t know what I want to do and that is ok for today.”
14. **Build a new community of friends.** You lost your school community. What ways can you build a new community?
15. **Discover what you and your life partner like and dislike.** Have fun finding out what you and your partner want to do together and not together.
16. **Find out what inspires you.** What you are good at and what inspires you may not be the same. Notice what lifts your energy and what depletes you.
17. **Get to know yourself better.** What are your gifts and your limitations? The more you know who you are and aren’t, the more you know what inner and outer skills you want to gather.
18. **Be open to what comes next for you.** You may be heading in one direction and then life brings you another that might be a good thing.
19. **Ask for help.** No one needs to go through changes alone.
20. **Play music** at home.
21. **Explore new possibilities.** What would be outside box for you? Acting, travel, etc? Try something.
22. **Be decisive and persistent.** What would “go for it” mean to you?
23. **Rediscover yourself.** What hidden talents have you never been able to foster or explore?¹⁰

Empty Nest--Crisis or Opportunity?

Each parent facing empty nest time decides whether it is going to be the time or crisis or opportunity. Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker, licensed psychologist and marriage and family counselor, the author of the insightful parenting e-book, *Tending the Family Heart*, in her article “The Empty Nest: Opportunity or Crisis?,” explores these two possibilities.

She says that it can be a crisis:

- **If the kids have been the primary focus of parent’s life.** Parents must be aware that “parenting is a stage of life, not the whole of it.” Those parents who have completely thrown themselves into parenting role at the expense of neglecting their own interests may now feel that their purpose in life has disappeared. But it is not so. They only reached the point when they have to redefine the relationship with the child, the spouse, if there is one, and with the self. However, if they have not been properly prepared for it, this period can truly turn into a crisis of identity, purpose and meaning.
- **If other parents were their only friends.** It’s easy for parents to think that they have a busy social life when around people all the time due to children’s activities. But sharing common activities doesn’t necessarily mean that they are sharing a friendship. Many parents can’t find the time to develop real adult friendships during the parenting period. When the children leave, they find themselves with few or even no meaningful and deep adult relationships. And it may create a crisis.
- **If the kids were a distraction from things going wrong in the marriage relationship.** Some couples bury themselves in work and children’s activities to avoid dealing with the fact that they are growing apart. When the children leave, they find themselves looking at each other as strangers. Now all the little irritations and big disagreements that have been left unsolved come into focus. Sometimes such couples need to go through painful but productive conversations in order to make changes needed to face the next stage of life together.

- **If you didn’t prepare the children to be independent.** Children who were over-parented do not want the parenting to stop. They want their parents’ monitoring, helping, bailing out, participating and protecting to continue. But that is only impeding their growing up and preventing them from moving to the next life stage.
- **If parents are depressed by the idea that they are no longer needed in their active role.** A need to be needed in order to feel worthy and important isn’t healthy at all. It means that such persons will always be dependent on having a “needy someone” to give them purpose and meaning in life. They will definitely need to find another way to relate to others and to feel good about themselves.¹¹

Parenting may be an amazing, pleasing, frustrating, humbling, and important stage of life, but it is only that—a state of life, not all of life. When that intense time of preparing our children for adulthood is over, it’s up to us to decide what we will do with the rest of our lives. Surely, staying in touch and relating to our adult children has to be part of the next stage. But our children must not continue to be the focus of our lives if they are to be healthy individuals with their own families. It’s their turn to be partners and parents now. It’s our turn to rediscover new possibilities for ourselves.

It is only up to us to decide whether this new life stage is going to be a crisis or an opportunity. One of the wonderful opportunities available to us as human beings is the ability to decide what we want to do next. Sometimes we have enough wisdom, insight and personal resources to do it on our own. Sometimes we may need some professional help to close one chapter of our life and start a new one. Whatever way we go, it will be a new chance for growth.

Empty nesters can remember the past and celebrate it while embracing the future and all it brings!

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LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Nurturing the faith of pastors' kids: Reflections on a pastoral family stress study

ELAINE OLIVER

Katy Perry. Jessica Simpson. Rick Warren. Jonas Brothers. Franklin Graham. What do these people all have in common? All of them are pastors' kids (PKs).¹ They all fit into one of the many stereotypes that abound regarding children of clergy. This includes everything from the model pastor's kid who does everything by the rulebook to the rebel child who has backslidden from the faith and everything else in the middle. Yet these stereotypes come with many underlying assumptions and expectations that, in many ways, can contribute to pastors' kids becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

Unlike many other professionals, pastors live their professional and, sometimes, even their private lives in a public arena. Their spouses and their children join them in this public spotlight that often comes with intense spiritual and moral scrutiny and the expectation to exemplify a "perfect" spirituality and commitment to the church. These expectations, or scrutiny, can be a challenge to children of pastors as they transition to adolescence and then to adulthood.² As these children of clergy experience these challenges and other normal developmental tasks of children their age, they are often labeled as having the worst reputation of all.

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Parenting pastors' kids

As a mother of now adult children who were raised as PKs, I have long been interested in the faith development and spiritual nurture of children. The passage found in the book of Proverbs: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, NASB) was a refrain I had heard my entire life, and it resonated for my husband and me as we raised our children.

Pastors and their spouses often wonder what they should be doing or could have done differently to nurture the spirituality or faith of their children. We often blame ourselves for not doing enough to foster their faith or for being too strict or for being too lenient. Did we spend enough time with them or live by example? My husband and I have often questioned whether we had done enough or too much—did we have enough family worship, did we have too many spiritual activities, were we too lenient regarding spiritual matters, or were we too strict?

During my early parenting years, I was fastidious as a mother hen in trying to protect my children from being caricatured as the proverbial "PKs." And I did my best to shield them from the barrage of unrealistic expectations from church members and even their own friends. Their dad and I tried not to put pressure on them to do things just because they were our kids but to do things only if they felt inspired to do so. Of course, there were times that they were

strongly encouraged to participate in certain religious activities and other activities because those were the “house rules.”

Influence on spiritual beliefs

All parents are aware that values, especially spiritual and moral values, are primarily transmitted from parents to children. For clergy parents, this transmission is especially important; however, when it does not happen, there can be a lot of pain, shame, and blame.

Parents, whether clergy or not, have the most influence on their children’s spiritual beliefs and practices, usually, through adolescence. However, while they may continue to influence them through their transition into adulthood, there are other socializing agents and normal developmental processes that influence their religiosity and spirituality.

Other adults. As adolescents transition to young adulthood, they will interact with adults other than their parents. This influence may come in the form of faculty and staff in their high school or university, youth group leaders at church, or other family members with whom they connect. Some researchers on spirituality of young adults have found that many students look for answers to their questions on faith and spirituality from their teachers.³

Peers. During their children’s transition from adolescence to early adulthood, parents have less influence on their children than do peers. A primary predictor of religiosity in young adulthood is having religious friends and role models during high school.⁴

Media. In today’s world, most of us find it nearly impossible not to interact with the media in some shape or form. Without a doubt, our lives are impacted by this interaction. Our children, adolescents, and young adults hear concepts that appeal to them, combine them with their previously held traditions and religious beliefs, and then construct their own religious identity. Many are exploring their faith while listening to music or watching the latest music video or movie.⁵

Spiritual struggle. Struggling spiritually is a normal part of human development and usually occurs when there is a clash between previously held worldviews and newly acquired experiences or information. As adolescents enter young adulthood, this “crisis,” or point of transition, is a contributing factor to spiritual development.⁶ Spiritual struggle can lead to spiritual growth or may lead to rejection of values held from childhood and may never be replaced with anything else.

Perception is reality

Personal spirituality and the struggle that comes with it seems to be a challenge common to most people of faith, and children of clergy may be no different from other children in general in their spirituality and religious commitment. Yet many pastors’ kids perceive there is an expectation that they would not have such challenges. In a study conducted at Andrews University on pastoral family stress, children of clergy who participated in the focus groups reported feeling there is an expectation from others that they should be more spiritually mature than their peers. One participant shared how difficult it was to deal with this expectation “starting at a young age, even though we haven’t developed that connection with Christ yet . . . and you don’t want to disappoint anyone, so you work harder to compensate for what you don’t have.”⁷

For pastors’ kids, the pressure of living their private lives on a public stage is one that does not allow much room for personal struggles and normal growth development, in contrast to other children, who often get to go through their development behind closed doors. This reality for PKs has a potential impact on their emotional health, including anxiety and guilt. One participant in the pastoral family stress study shared that “sometimes there is a sense of if I don’t meet these expectations of people, like they are all going to go to hell because of me.” For some, the emotional pressure leads to depression; for others, it creates an “I don’t care what the church people say, or what they think” attitude.

Another perception or reality that pastors' kids have is that they have no one to turn to in their spiritual struggle. When they are struggling with issues and make mistakes, there are things that they would want to perhaps share with their pastor, and not necessarily their parents, but the pastor is also their parent. Thus, they must keep it to themselves or go through issues alone. For many, it feels as if they are going to church without a pastor. Others, however, feel that these struggles lead to deeper spiritual growth.

Parents are still important

The well-known passage in Proverbs 22:6 mentioned earlier is not only a relational directive but also a promise. Per the Bible Exposition Commentary,⁸ Solomon, the author of Proverbs, reminds parents and instructors of children of their great responsibility in propagating wisdom and transmitting values, so that they do not die with them. Children are to be trained in the way that loving parents believe is the best direction for them to go, but it should be done with tender care. And when they are old, even if they depart from their early teachings as Solomon did, this early training may be a means of recovery. That is the promise—parents can be comforted that they did their best with their children.

During adolescence, parental support serves as a protective factor against certain risk behaviors and is associated with increased commitment to God and church. It appears that the same is true for pastors' kids.⁹ Familial support appears to enhance a positive spiritual experience and increased commitment to the church. Many parents falsely assume that once their children enter adolescence or young adulthood, they no longer need them or want them interfering in their lives. During this stage, they are trying to differentiate from their parents and gain a better understanding of their role at home, school, church, and in society at large. However, this does not mean they no longer need or want their parents. The contrary appears to be true; they certainly need us, even if they need us to enter their world in a nonjudgmental and sincere way.

Strategies for nurturing the faith of pastors' kids

Put first things first. Schedule family time. Many pastors' kids perceive that their pastor parent is often absent or unavailable. Make time for the people who are most important to you. This seems like a good way to model to the congregation healthy family boundaries. Our kids feel special and appreciated when they feel that they are most important to us.

Be warm, loving, affectionate, and authoritative. The results of the pastoral family stress study suggest that pastors' kids whose parents establish a warm, loving relationship with them, spend time with them, and are consistent in their spirituality will more likely be religiously committed in adulthood. Parental bonding (or attachment) pertains to the level of closeness between a parent and child and is critical for healthy child development. An *authoritative* parenting style means one in which parents provide a warm, loving, nurturing environment, where clear boundaries are established and open communication is encouraged.¹⁰ This is not to be confused with an *authoritarian* parenting style, which sets boundaries without warmth, where parents are strict and inflexible and have high expectations without providing support. Authoritative parenting is also not *permissive*, where there is much warmth and affection but few or no boundaries are set. Our children know we love them when we show them love and set healthy, age-appropriate boundaries.

Provide a safe environment for their spiritual struggle. Remember that spiritual struggle comes as a normal process of faith, and spiritual development takes place during adolescence (and possibly earlier) and their transition into early adulthood. Do not panic! Remain calm. Remember that creating a safe space for open dialogue about their doubts, fears, and questions about God's existence and the relevance of the church will keep the lines of communication open now and in the future. Parents should consider reading books or attending seminars on how to better understand their children as it pertains to their lives in the pastorate and regarding their spiritual journey.

Encourage peer support. Many of the participants in the study said they benefited from the opportunity to express what they were experiencing as pastors' kids. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, we can suggest that they felt validated. Their individual and collective voices had been heard, and they realized they were not alone on their journey. Many requested that more forums on this topic could be regularly held. The Seventh-day Adventist world headquarters has a committee for pastors' kids, and several successful "PK" conferences have been held in various parts of the world.¹¹

Protect your children. Be sensitive to the pressures that uniquely affect your children. The pastor and spouse can protect their children when the congregation or other well-meaning individuals set unreasonable expectations for them. Pastors should defend their children when necessary and educate their parishioners on how to relate to their children, encouraging them to be more understanding of their children and family's life in a "stained-glass fishbowl." Also, allow your kids to make mistakes. Use those mistakes as an opportunity to exhibit grace and forgiveness. Hopefully the children will learn from their mistakes.

Pray, pray, and keep praying. Parenting, known as a huge blessing, comes with many challenges. We should approach it with humility and in reverence to God for giving us the opportunity to prepare His children for the kingdom. In the book *Child Guidance*, Ellen G. White says, "Build a fortification of prayer and faith around your children, and exercise diligent watching thereunto. You are not secure for a moment against the attacks of Satan. You have no time to rest from watchful, earnest labor. You should not sleep a moment at your post. This is a most important warfare."¹²

The fight is with the enemy and not with our children. Our kids need us to be on their team.

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Pastoral marriages: A contemporary challenge

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

We have been married and in ministry for 32 years. Staying married to each other and still in ministry after all this time has everything to do with the providence and grace of God. God's grace, to be sure, does its best work when we accept the gift He offers and allow this gift to germinate and grow in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit, whose promptings we choose to follow.

Let's face it, marriage is difficult. Yes, we know marriage to be fun and all those wonderful things we often speak about. Nevertheless, despite our best intentions, the reality of differences that invariably loom large in most marriages keeps us on our knees. The truth is, this kind of reality we find based on a decision bathed in prayer and on being intentional about giving honor and glory to God in our marriage.

The pastoral marriage

Pastoral marriages face many of the same challenges as other marriages, and most busy professional couples replicate similar competing commitments experienced by many pastoral couples. The principal difference comes when pastoral couples have the added pressure of

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living in a fishbowl and with high expectations from their parishioners and employers to be all things to all people. This includes the role of spiritual champions in every situation—especially in the way they disciple their children to be true followers of Jesus Christ. In addition to the ever-present challenge of not having enough time to accomplish all that lies on their plates, pastoral couples often deal with short tenures and frequent moves, which take them away from close connections with family and friends, thus upsetting their emotional equilibrium.

This experience is often compounded by financial constraints, since we are in a world where living on one salary has gotten increasingly difficult. Especially in the developed world, the pastor's spouse is often left having to find a new job, which may include many weeks and months with an interruption in wages, adding anxiety, tension, and trauma to an already stressful situation. It is in times like these that pastoral couples, like all Christian married couples, need to recognize that marriage is God's idea and was created for our good. "Instituted by God, marriage is a sacred ordinance and should never be entered upon in a spirit of selfishness. Those who contemplate this step should solemnly and prayerfully consider its importance and seek divine counsel that they may know whether they are pursuing a course in harmony with the will of God."¹

While marriage was designed by God to bless the human family, Satan has tried everything to denigrate, depreciate, and defame this important institution. As such, expect your marriage to naturally move toward a state of alienation. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”² This simply reminds us that there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. However, since God is more powerful than Satan, every marriage can thrive when the partners are intentional about connecting with each other every day through the power and grace of God.

A quote from an unknown author we often like to share says, “Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult.” Staying happily married for a lifetime would be considered among the fine arts. This is true of every marriage and especially true of pastoral marriages that experience so many expectations from within and without.

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To be sure, expectations surge from within because of the need to represent Jesus well. The concept may often be seen as the need to pretend to have a perfect marriage when you do not. Of course, the more pastoral couples feel compelled to present to the public an image that is not real, the less likely they are to accomplish that goal because of the stress generated internally, given the reality of our human frailties. The pressure from without comes from others, often church members, and sometimes from our families, friends, colleagues, and employing organizations, which tend to hold pastors and their families to a higher standard than they do *regular* human beings. In order to transcend these insufferable burdens, pastoral couples must spend a lot of time in prayer, seeking a genuine relationship with God and with each other.

Speaking about the need to stay in prayer, Romans 12:12 offers: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” Yet Isaiah 65:24 declares: “ ‘Before they call I will answer; / while they are yet speaking I will hear.’ ”

And Ellen White reminds us in her little book *Steps to Christ*: “There is no chapter in our

experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”³

Digital harassment

On the matter of time as a commodity in pastoral marriages, the proverbial tyranny of the clock has never been more real than what we are experiencing today. Email, Facebook, and text messages, along with countless new apps that emerge every day, give ubiquitous access to our time for anyone, everywhere, at any time, creating an expectation for receiving instantaneous responses. Each day has only 24 hours in which pastors must have time alone with God, visit parishioners, study, write sermons, attend organizational meetings, blog, give Bible studies, respond to email, engage social media, sleep, eat, exercise, have family worship, and connect with relatives and friends. After we attend to all of these things, not only is there little energy left for anything else, there is no meaningful time to share with one’s spouse. And if we are really honest with each other, there is actually very little time to spend with God in prayer, which means we end up with very little fuel to have the wherewithal for an effective ministry and real satisfaction in one’s life.

Boundaries

So how does a pastoral couple create more time in the context of living in the third millennium in order to have the quality of relationship that makes life really worth living? The truth is, for this to happen, healthy boundaries must be established in order to

survive and thrive. And healthy boundaries are found in the context of emotionally intelligent people, who have a high level of self awareness, knowing what they want to accomplish in the process. On this matter, Daniel Goleman suggests: “Self-awareness is the first component of emotional intelligence. . . . Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives. . . .

“Self-awareness extends to a person’s understanding of his or her values and goals. Someone who is highly self-aware knows where he is headed and why. . . . The decisions of self-aware people mesh with their values.”⁴

The self-awareness and emotional intelligence we speak about here does not just come because we have more education or are smarter than anyone else. It comes because of an intimate relationship with God and our desire to honor Him in our most intimate relationship with our spouse. This becomes the kind of emotional intelligence that brings peace.

On the issue of prioritizing and making the most of time, Stephen Covey suggests that “one of the worst feelings in the world is when you realize that the ‘first things’ in your life—including your family—are getting pushed into second or third place, or even further down the list. And it becomes even worse when you realize what’s happening as a result.”⁵

The truth remains that we cannot add hours to our day, but we can add order and priority to those hours so that we are able to maximize the time we have with our spouse each day, each week, each month, and each year to have the kind of relationship that will stand the test of time and give honor and glory to God. In order for things to change, if this has not been the priority of our lives, we will need to develop a new and improved framework to live by.

To be sure, we will need to shift the paradigm of our lives. This means we will need to see things differently and to do things differently in order to get a different result. In contrast to other relationships, which are constantly

changing, marriage is meant to be permanent, and understanding that the responsibilities in marriage are not postponable will help us to *carpe diem* (“seize the day”) so that we can make our marriage a high priority *each day*. This means scheduling meaningful time to spend with each other *each day*.

Moving from one place to another in the course of ministry becomes a reality that cannot be easily altered and is seen as the nature of the proverbial beast of ministry. I (Willie), as a pastor’s son, moved several times during my childhood and as a missionary’s child lived in at least three countries before I got to my teens. As a couple, we have lived in four different states in the United States, in eight different homes, and have had eight to ten different ministry assignments in three decades.

Each move has been challenging, though some were more traumatic than others. But in every move we have experienced the hand of God and blessings we would never want to do without. As the apostle Paul declares in Philippians 4:11 “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”

The money factor

Of course, when it comes to money, we can always do with more. And, while pastors in certain parts of the world enjoy a middle-class or even upper-middle-class lifestyle—especially if their spouses have good professional jobs—in other areas of the world pastors suffer with meager resources and salaries, and their spouses do not get paid to work. And yet, the same God that we worship we must learn to trust in if our lives in ministry are going to be a blessing to others. We must follow our Master’s example of self-denial.

Financial stability, to be sure, depends as much on our philosophy of stewardship as it does on our habits of consumption. As mortals entrusted with the privilege of handling God’s Word to inspire and lead people to Him who is life eternal, we, too, must believe that God

keeps His promises. As pastoral couples, we must claim the promises God made in the past to His people, which are still good for His disciples today. The message of Malachi 3:10 is still operative, which declares: “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” God promises no lack of blessings if we are faithful to Him. In Matthew 28:20b, Jesus promises: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” In John 14:27 Jesus promises, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” And last but not least, in Philippians 4:19 the promise is, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Conclusion

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As we take another look at the reality of pastoral marriages, we must do so mindful of the fact that sometimes it is more difficult than it needs to be, because we approach this highly spiritual work without the corresponding spiritual values that must be present for it to work. As we stated, “Too many people today enter marriage with an individualistic notion of personal fulfillment rather than focusing on relationship fulfillment. While in healthy marriages couples need to strike a balance between both, there must be a sustained and intentional consciousness of otherness as a part of our daily reality. There is no other way to survive and thrive in such a close and intimate relationship such as marriage, without adopting a perspective that includes the feelings and opinions of others, at the very least the feelings and opinions of the person we have chosen as our spouse.”⁶

As you commit to nurturing your pastoral marriage today and in the weeks, months, and years ahead, we encourage you to remember Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 10:31 “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

May your relationship with God grant you the patience and kindness needed to give honor and glory to God through your marital relationship. More than hope so, we pray so.

Notes

- ¹ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2001), 70.
- ² All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.
- ³ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 100.
- ⁴ Daniel Goleman, *What Makes a Leader: Why Emotional Intelligence Matters* (Florence, MA: More Than Sound, 2013), 10, 11.
- ⁵ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997), 113.
- ⁶ Willie and Elaine Oliver, “The Beauty of Marriage” in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, ed. Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 6.

Leadership and Personal Integrity

ALANZO SMITH

Leaders are expected to live and perform their duties with integrity. Unfortunately, deception is often practiced among and between leaders. For some it is not just an action, but also a mindset, an orientation. If one takes a cursory look at leaders in sports, politics, religion, business, family, etc., one would quickly find leaders who are lacking personal and professional integrity. Christian leadership and professional integrity should be synonymous, yet society is often disappointed by their compromised behaviors. This article will explore the relationship between leadership, deception, and personal integrity in the context of Jacob's family experience

The story of Jacob and his family is a story about leadership and family deception. Every family member seems to be a participant. Father Abraham the visionary leader and faithful patriarch requested that Sarah, his wife, deceive the king of Egypt and tell him that she was his sister (Gen 12). Abraham's son, Isaac, was also a faithful leader and patriarch. In an era when polygamy was accepted, he remained faithful to one wife, Rebekah. When his wife could not bear children, he prayed to God and God answered his prayer. However, to avoid death by the Philistines, Isaac lied and said Rebekah was his sister instead of his wife (Gen 26).

Rebekah was a godly mother and a spiritual leader among her tribe, a role model, if you please, yet she asked her beloved son Jacob to deceive his father by pretending to be his brother, Esau. She advised him to take the bowl of soup Isaac requested so he would receive the blessing that Esau was about to get. It was Rebekah's idea that Jacob participates in the elaborate deception. These sordid examples are not recorded for mere narration, but are shocking accounts of otherwise faithful leaders compromising their personal integrity. Many in this family were willing to deceive either to cover up or to gain advantage over another.

Recurring Themes

Misrepresenting the truth: Both Abraham and Isaac misrepresented the truth by lying and denying, or misrepresenting their relationships with their wives. The milieu of the time makes it easy for leaders to distort the truth on committees, in meetings, giving reports, or even when preaching sermons. Elaborating on a story to underscore a point or to draw an object lesson is quite different from lying or misrepresenting the facts. To be outspoken and candid is not synonymous to being deceitful, hurtful, and fabricating. Personal integrity in leadership requires high moral, ethical, and spiritual behavior.

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Forming alliances: The alliance formed between Rebekah and Jacob was an alliance to deceive for personal advantage. Leadership alliance has to do with the way leaders join or coalesce to oppose or scheme against others with an opposing view, in order to achieve their end or to sabotage the plans of another. These alliances emerge when forming boards, establishing committees, or selecting leaders and officers. This is unprofessional, unethical, and ungodly behavior, and speaks to the character and integrity.

The world is collapsing with fake alliances that are designed to undermine, backstab, or to advance professional jealousy. Sadly, sometimes Christian leaders fall for this model.

The Bold Faced Lie

Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the Lord your God brought it to me” (Gen 27: 20). Not only did Jacob lie to his father’s face, but he had the nerve to include God in it. That is called a *boldfaced* lie, and some leaders have mastered the art of using it. Lying is a disorder, a pathology that needs psychological and spiritual interventions. Leaders who indulge in this practice should seek professional help and spiritual awakening. But the malady of this disorder is that leaders, who behave this way, think that they are entitled to lie or that they can justify the reason for being deceptive. Which begs the question, is one ever *entitled to lie or deceive*?

- What if you made bad financial investment for your company, should you try to cover up the act by falsifying the reports and misrepresenting the outcome?
- What if you are having an extra-marital affair and your employer or your spouse becomes suspicious or aware, should you lie to save your job or your marriage?
- What if you consider it necessary to lie to close a business deal for your organization, which might give you the needed promotion? Should you lie?
- What if as an attorney you think you must lie in order to free your client?
- What if in forming a relationship you lie in order to secure the friendship?
- What if you are applying for immigration status and you lie to gain your papers?
- What if you are filing your income taxes and you lie to decrease your liability?

Is lying ever justifiable? Is a “white lie” justified? Many have argued that lying can never be justified. They say the situation should never determine the behavior. In other words, if the situation necessitates a lie for the larger good, lying is still not accepted. However, one may argue that this utopian position could constitute a danger to society in critical times. For example, one may justify lying to a wrongdoer in order to save one’s life or the life of an innocent person.

Here are some historical situations to consider. Was it justified:

- When Germans hid Jews from the Nazi’s evil rampage and lied to protect them.
- When a captured soldier misrepresented the truth to the enemy to save the lives of others.
- When the Hutus hid the Tutsis from their murderers and denied what they did.
- When run-a-way slaves were hidden from their masters and the rescuers denied it.

So, when Abraham and Isaac said their wives were their sisters in fear of their own lives, was it wrong or was it a moral dilemma? To complicate the concern, there are five glaring examples in the Bible of leaders deceiving or God endorsing it. For example:

- 1) When Ben-hadad king of Syria sent his servant Hazeel unto the prophet Elisha to inquire of him whether or not he would recover of his disease, Elisha told the servant to tell the king that he would certainly recover, even though the Lord had showed Elisha that the king would surely die (2 Kings 8:8-10).

- 2) When Jonathan told his father that David earnestly asked leave of him to go to Bethlehem, he lied because he knew David was hiding from Saul. However, he did so in order to save his friend's life (1 Sam 20:28-29).
- 3) When Samuel was to anoint David as king over Israel because the Lord had rejected Saul, he was scared to go because of Saul. God told him to tell Saul that he had come to offer sacrifice unto the Lord, instead of saying he had come to anoint David as king (1 Sam 16:1-3).
- 4) When the king of Syria sent his soldiers to Dothan to capture Elisha, Elisha prayed to the Lord and asked Him to smite them with blindness. After being smitten with blindness, Elisha told the blind men, "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria" (2 Kings 6:19).
- 5) When king Zedekiah inquired of Jeremiah whether or not he and the city would perish, Zedekiah was afraid that if the princes should find out that he had met with Jeremiah they would kill him. So, Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king . . . then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there." The princess did ask Jeremiah and he said exactly what Zedekiah had told him to say (Jeremiah 38:26).

As leaders, where do we go from here? Do these examples provide just cause for us to lie on the job, at home, or in society? While it might be difficult to find someone who has never lied, as a leader one's personal integrity and spirituality should be to speak the truth. Lies are socially harmful because they eat away at the very fabric of society. They are spiritually dangerous because they provide a cradle for creeping compromise.

It is not the intent of this article to argue the rightness or wrongness of these biblical cases.

Indeed, logical and theological arguments can be offered to justify the actions. Sometimes we as leaders can find ourselves caught in a moral dilemma and only the motive behind the behavior will, to a large extent, determine the consequences as far as God is concerned. However, a word of caution must be given to all leaders when it comes to lying. Lying is never right. It may be justified, but it is never right. Therefore, whether it was Rebekah inveigling her son Jacob to lie to his father, or it was Abraham and Isaac lying about their wives, it was wrong.

After listing six things that the Lord hates, the wise man Solomon went on to list seven others that are an abomination to the Lord. He says, "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue . . ." (Proverbs 6:16-17). Here we see that second in the list of seven is "a lying tongue." This, he says, is an abomination unto the Lord. Leaders, the decision will have to be yours to determine the justification or rationale for your situation and action, influenced by personal integrity and a consecrated conscience.

Blessing by Deception

Often we hear of leaders being elected to an administrative position and then someone adds, "its because of politics." We have known of nominating committees that were rigged with supporters of the leader who was elected, yet it was reported that after much prayer, the Holy Spirit made the choice clear. Was that blessing by deception? Isaac blessed Jacob abundantly (Gen 27:21-29). His provision yielded plentifully, the people served him and nations bowed before him. Even a curse was pronounced on those that did not favor Jacob. But did the end justify the means? Was his blessing by deception justified?

On Wall Street it is each man for himself, even if success is at the expense of others. Should Christian Leaders have the same mantra? In leadership, should the end justify the means? How far should one go to lead or succeed? We have heard countless stories of individuals

doing harm to their competitors in order to win. For example, athletes have taken steroids to boost their strength or endurance in order to perform better. Sprinters have been stripped of goal medals because they were tested positive with drugs. Brokers have been imprisoned for insider trading and CEO's have been given long jail sentences for bilking investors out of their money. Where has integrity gone? The slope keeps getting more and more slippery. We may gain our goal and ambition, but we also run the risk of jeopardizing our soul. Is it worth it?

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men” says E. G. White¹, *“men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”* While in the corporate world there might be a plethora of leaders lacking personal integrity, this should never be the case for Christian leaders. Indeed, the society is filled with deceitful people. They manipulate, distort, deceive, collude, and lie without remorse. There is no limit to their greed, no end to their deception. These traits and behaviors should not be a feature in the character of the Christian leader.

Conclusion

The family of Jacob was torn apart primarily because of duplicity and deception. From sibling rivalry to bitter enemies, Jacob and Esau must say thanks to a scheming mother and a biased father. The blessings that Rebekah craved for her favorite son became his ultimate nightmare. There is a tremendous lesson in all of this for leaders. Ill-gotten gain and ill-gotten blessings can become a noose around one's neck. Greed can turn to bitterness, covetousness can turn to condemnation, and deception can turn to dejection, depression and decay. It is the delusionary disorder of deception. Deception is not just a course of action for leaders; it is a state of the mind. Therefore, leaders who practice deception not only misrepresent themselves and their people, but they mislead or disown the cause of Christ. By God's grace may we pray for each other and adopt the mind of Christ, and seek to live with personal integrity.

Notes

¹ Ellen G. White, Education p. 57

REPRINTED ARTICLES

Teens and Depression

How you can help?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

“There once was a happy little girl, bright and fair. . . . Her mother and father enjoyed her greatly and often told her how much they loved her. They told her other things that they wanted her to know as well. They told her about God, how He was loving and kind; He made her and she was precious to Him. . . . Then they gave her a book of God’s words and told her, ‘These words will tell you the best way to live, God’s way, the way to become your true and whole self.’

“The little girl loved to please her parents, and she tried hard to please God, too. Her heart was tender toward God and generous toward people. . . . But as she grew older and fairer still, she began to build a place inside her heart and surround it with walls. She made this secret place to keep her worries in—worries about her beauty, which was so great and attracted attention that made her uncomfortable. . . . She did not tell her mother and father about the secret place in her heart.

“As the girl continued to grow more lovely, she began to see herself in two mirrors. One mirror contained God’s words, His love, and her family’s love for her. The other mirror was held by someone she could not see. In this dark mirror . . . she felt sad. . . . She believed she had to make a choice between the two mirror doors. . . .

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*“On the day that she was weakest, weariest, loneliest, she made a fatal choice. She created her own mirror-door. In it she put no altar, no things, no people, no places, only peace as she could imagine it, a rest from her struggles. And she walked through it.”—An excerpt from the prologue of the book *Goodbye Jeanine*, by Joyce Sackett, the mother of Jeanine. Jeanine was 20 years old when she died by suicide.¹*

Suicide has become a public health reality in all regions of the world.² More than 800,000 people die from suicide every year, and for every suicide that occurs, there are 20 more failed attempts. While suicide occurs throughout the life span, it is the third-leading cause of death for 10- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 24-year-olds, and the second-leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds globally.³ Undoubtedly, adolescents are considered to be at risk, and health professionals and parents alike are searching for ways in which to predict and prevent suicide.

Studies show that most teens who commit suicide have a mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, alcohol or drug abuse, or a behavior problem.⁴ Depression and other mood disorders (anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.) have been most closely linked to adolescent suicide and suicidal ideation (thinking about killing one’s self). Depression is also linked to other risk behaviors that teens engage in, such as alcohol and drug use and sexual activity.

Not all teens that engage in risk behaviors have depression or consider suicide; however, the risk of suicide is greater for those with depression and those who engage in risk behaviors. Teenage girls are twice as likely as boys to report being depressed, consider attempting suicide, or commit suicide.

When teens die from suicide, they most likely have been having problems for a long time. Once they decide that suicide is the best way to resolve these problems, they don't spend much time planning it; they just do it. Anything could trigger the decision: an argument with their parents, a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, a mean Facebook post or tweet, or even receiving a bad grade.

Family Support

Parents and family play a crucial role in helping to prevent teen suicide. Recent findings suggest that protective factors such as authoritative (not authoritarian) parenting, setting healthy and age-appropriate boundaries, parental monitoring (knowing what's happening in your teen's life), family dinners, encouraging certain religious behaviors, and teaching and modeling healthy coping strategies are useful in reducing suicide risk. It's also important to be aware of the risk factors, such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, family or parental history of suicide, previous suicide attempts, parental alcoholism, sleep disorders, and accessible firearms.

Signs of Depression and Suicide

While there may be warning signs of a person's intention to commit suicide (see also p. 32), sometimes the clues are so disguised that even trained professionals may not recognize them. Nevertheless, here are some noticeable signs of depression and suicidal behavior that parents can look for in their teens:

- Feeling sad, down, or irritable.
- Feeling guilty, hopeless, or worthless.

- Noticeable changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- Isolating themselves from friends and family.
- Lack of interest in school, church, or favorite activities.
- Having less energy or having more difficulty concentrating.
- Talking or writing about death or loss.
- Hinting about their own death or suicide.
- Speculating about what life would be like if they were not around.

Fighting Stigma

Some cultural and religious interpretations have led to a stigma about suicide and have resulted in many families not being able to talk openly about their child's suicide. This can be detrimental to parents and family members because it deprives them of talking about their child and may cause them to become isolated from those who can provide support.

To help dispel some of the myths and stigma, many helping professionals are encouraging a change in terminology when speaking about suicide. Using such expressions as "died from suicide" or "death by suicide" conveys more sensitivity and compassion and less stigma and moves us away from the harshness of the phrase "committed suicide." The new terminology is also less offensive to the parents and families of those whose children have died from suicide.

If you have a child or loved one who has died from suicide or if you have suicidal thoughts, please reach out to your friends and loved ones and let them know how you feel. It's also important to seek the help of a qualified professional to find helpful ways to cope with the challenges you are facing. If you are unable to do this yourself, ask for help from someone you trust.

God's Unconditional Love

Rainbows are a wonderful reminder of God's covenant and unconditional love. Promises such as the one found in Isaiah 43:2-4 can bring hope and healing for any situation: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. . . . Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you" (ESV).⁵

Our prayer is that everyone can look up and see God's rainbow even through their darkest cloud.

Notes

- ¹ Joyce Sackett, *Goodbye Jeanine* (Colorado Springs, Colo., NavPress, 2005), pp. 9-11.
- ² World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/.
- ³ Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-olds, according to WHO.
- ⁴ American Pediatric Association: healthychildren.org.
- ⁵ Scripture quotations marked ESV are from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

When We Get Surprised, Sharing Faith With Our Children

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The car didn't start after going through the car wash on Friday afternoon.

We had just arrived in Huntsville, Alabama, after driving about 20 hours, a little more than 1,100 miles, from South Lancaster, Massachusetts. We were in Huntsville to attend a relative's graduation from Oakwood University. Of course, I (Elaine) needed to stop at the mall to pick up a few things before Sabbath. And I (Willie) needed to get the car washed before Sabbath. Jessica and Julian, our children, were 6 and 3 years of age, respectively, and decided to stay with me (Willie) as we made our way to the closest car wash.

It was one of those car wash places where one drives in, turns off the engine, and gets out of the car, which then moves automatically through the wash. Jessica, Julian, and I watched our car through the big glass window as the suds and pressurized water performed a remarkable transformation. Once our automobile had gone through the wash and the dryers, we got back in it, ready to pick up Mom from the mall.

Nothing Goes

I turned the key in the ignition, but the engine did not fire. After trying three times

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unsuccessfully, Jessica spoke up from the back seat: "Daddy, the car isn't starting."

"Yes, Jessica," I said.

"Daddy," Jessica said again.

"Yes, Jessica," I answered.

"Can we pray?" she asked.

"Of course," I said. "Would you like to pray?"

"OK, Daddy." Then she prayed one of the most beautiful prayers: "Dear Jesus, please help Daddy to start the car, so we can get Mommy from the mall so she won't be afraid. Amen."

"Amen," Julian and I reprised.

I turned the key in the ignition, and the car engine roared to life.

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More Than Just Words

Listen to Moses as he shares this vibrant, distinct, unequivocal, and clear command from God with the children of Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut. 6:4-9).

This passage of Scripture, known as the Shema since Old Testament times, was the prayer every observant Hebrew knew by memory and recited twice a day, morning and evening, as part of their daily family worship. It was considered the essence of the revealed will of God.

These were, however, more than just words. They described the reality of God and helped children of God understand what God expected them to do to be in right relationship with Him. Most important, beyond the clear commands related to seeking God was the urgent reminder to impart such learning with one's children.

Intentional repetition of God's love and our response to that love was part of the divine strategy. The text is descriptive to a fault. The activity of sharing faith with one's children was to take place over and over: when talking casually with them, when walking with them, when getting ready for the night's rest, and when rising up in the morning. Passing on the values of God's love, care, and provision to one's children was essentially to be a full-time activity, an all-encompassing obsession.

Referencing the responsibility of parents to share their faith with their children, Ellen

White offers this insight: "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . There is no missionary field more important than this."¹

Our family has not been perfect. The truth is, there are no perfect families because there are no perfect people. However, before our children were born, we committed to share God's love with them. And since spirituality is more often caught than taught, it's the way we live each day that will most influence our children's lives.

That Friday afternoon at the car wash in Huntsville, dramatized as only God can, the values we had shared with our children in the course of everyday living were coming back to bless us when we least expected it.

Our hope is that parents, guardians, and others who are significant in the lives of children will purpose in their hearts to be intentional about passing on a faith in God that is vibrant and relevant. More than hope, however, we pray so.

Notes

- ¹ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 35.

Wholesome Relationships In a Sex-Crazed World

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

To enjoy wholesome relationships in a sex-crazed world, it is important to follow carefully the paradigm sanctioned by the Bible and to set healthy boundaries ahead of time to help you avoid dangerous and life-altering dilemmas.

We recently celebrated 32 years of marriage. Wow, that is a very long time. For many of you reading this article, that is longer than you have been alive. However, to us, it seems like just yesterday we were exchanging marriage vows on a lovely August afternoon at the Seventh-day Adventist Village Church in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, in the United States of America.

As we stood before the minister, promising to love each other “till death do us part,” we had no idea how challenging it would be to keep those vows intact. The words were relatively easy to utter, especially in that environment of excitement, flashing cameras, the beaming faces of family and friends, and our soaring expectations of finally living together in totally uninhibited and unbridled bliss. On the other hand, nothing could have prepared us for the remarkably satisfying life we have experienced as husband and wife, despite having to come to grips with the reality that there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people.

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Many Christian single adults wish they could be married and believe their lives would be easier to manage and to follow God’s will if this was their reality. Is this really true? Do married people have an advantage in this sex-crazed world that we inhabit? Or are married people also vulnerable as they negotiate the pressures of university life with its arbitrary deadlines and demands to succeed?

The truth is: Getting married is easy; staying married is not so easy. Staying happily married for a lifetime would be considered among the fine arts. So, what is a university or graduate student to do until he or she finds the right person to marry, given the very strong sexual urges and ubiquitous sexual messages that are a constant reality in postmodern life today?

As we explore this very important topic, it is essential to recognize that sexuality was God’s idea, and without a doubt it is very good; we can certainly testify to that after 32 years of marriage. Nevertheless, everything God has created for our good, Satan tries to destroy. Like Eve’s experience with the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the evil one continues to present alluring alternatives to God’s life-enhancing directives, hoping we will fall for his lies, leading to anguish and agony in the end.

At the very beginning God declared: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they

shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:24, 25, ESV).¹ So, there is a distinct context for sexual expression, according to the Bible, after leaving father and mother and decidedly committing to one’s spouse. This is the environment in which a no-shame-reality is fostered for sexual activity, given that one has taken a pledge of lifelong commitment to another human being and is now ready to enjoy the privileges inherent in such a dedication.

Just in case there is a chance that we believe we can disregard this heavenly charge, Scripture continues the charge throughout its pages. For example, Paul states: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:3–5). This passage makes crystal clear that should one claim to be a child of God, such an assertion comes with the prospect of being in control of one’s body and one’s passions in order to honor God.

Paul continues his pointed postulations about the appropriate framework for sexual activity with the clear cadence of the messages offered to the Corinthian believers: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman’. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:1, 2). To be sure, inspiration is not simply otherworldly but grounded in the reality of life on earth. Paul acknowledges that because we are hardwired by God to have sexual intercourse, we will have a deep desire to do so. However, this intense reality does not give humans who believe in God license to dispense with the conventions established *in the beginning*. Rather, the parameters are distinct; that for sexual expression to take place, it MUST—by definition—transpire between a man and his wife, or a woman and her husband. Let’s also not miss the apostle’s injunction, that if one is male, one then marries a woman, and if female, one marries a man.

Love: A high and holy principle

Walter Trobisch, a German missionary to Cameroon and prolific writer on marriage and family issues, once said: “Sex is no test of love, for it is precisely the very thing one wants to test that is destroyed by the testing.”² Ellen White wrote: “True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse, and which suddenly dies when severely tested.”³ These statements are antithetical to the conventions of our day, in which the *individual* is the highest value in society. We often hear people say, “Whatever the *individual* feels like doing, he or she has the right to do, as long as no one else is hurt in the process.” Such narcissistic and hedonistic notions, to be sure, could care less who is harmed. . The type of person who embraces this view is interested in what he or she can get, rather what he or she can give. True love always asks the question, “What can I give? which is dramatized in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world the He gave. . . .”

We hasten to suggest that taking your chances with the ethics of God who created us for His glory, contrasted with any other option available, is the best possible option. In Jeremiah 29:11, God reminds us: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.’” This is a good place to begin, when it comes to our sexual ethics, in order to have wholesome relationships in a sex-crazed world.

Speaking about a good place to begin, Stephen R. Covey in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*,⁴ identifies as habit No. 2, Begin With the End in Mind. In brief, this habit is like the flight of an airplane. Every time an airplane flies from point A to point B, the pilot has to file a flight plan with a clear destination in mind. This is extremely important, because there often are storms that develop during the journey, forcing the pilot to steer the plane over or around the turbulence. However, because a flight plan was filed with a clear destination in mind, as long as the pilot follows the flight plan, more than likely the

plane will land at that final destination close to the scheduled time.

The same is true with our lives. We must decide very early in our journey through life the clear destination for our marriage or family relationships, and create a mission statement that will keep us focused on that final destination. This “flight plan” is related to our choice of values. We must decide what values we will embrace as part of our flight, and what values we will exclude from that flight plan, so we can arrive safely at the clear destination we have chosen for our lives. Feelings and urges will undoubtedly develop during our journey as storms present themselves, as in a literal plane flight. However, if the flight plan of our lives is based upon the values found in God’s Word, we will be more likely to arrive at the destination we chose at the beginning of the journey.

One of the pitfalls that leads to sexual impurity is a person’s thought life. What one thinks has much to do with what one sees and what one listens to. Never before in the history of humankind has exposure to seeing and listening to impure content proliferated as today. The World Wide Web has made life easier in so many ways for university students, but at once has made being pure more difficult than ever before. With sexual content so widely accessible on computers, tablets, and smartphones, remaining pure is becoming an increasing challenge to all. What’s more, single people don’t have a corner on this kind of temptation, which is an equal-opportunity reality to every human being, married or single.

The wise man well warned: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Prov. 4:23, NIV). This probably takes back many of you who grew up in the church to your primary Sabbath school days, when one of the principal songs in your Sabbath repertoire was, “O be careful little eyes what you see. . . . O be careful little ears what you hear There’s is a Father up above And He’s looking down in love, So be careful little eyes [ears] what you see [hear].”

So, contrary to the prevailing convention of our day that we cannot do anything about taming our animal instincts, it is a very well-documented reality in social-science circles that the brain is the most important human sex organ. To be sure, human sexuality is worlds apart from the *birds and the bees*. Human sexual drive operates out of the prefrontal cortex of the brain—the part of the brain where all learning takes place and the center of judgment. Because God made us with a brain, we are responsible for our sexuality and the choices we make about it each day. We have the power to make choices, even when our biochemistry battles our brain. As humans, we get to use our highly developed brains to decide how, when, where, and whether we will give expression to our sexual urges—it is what separates us from animals.

Another lie being perpetrated in our society today is that having sex will bolster self-image by making us more desirable or more confident. Women especially want to be desirable, and often use sex as a barometer of worthiness and as a means to relational connectedness. Men, on the other hand, use sex to make themselves feel more confident and capable; it is really about power and performance, competition and achievement; and for many, it is all a numbers game to determine how many conquests they can achieve.

Unfortunately, premarital and/or extramarital sex will never validate you or your relationship. If you are a woman, it won’t make you more desirable. If you are a man, it won’t get rid of your insecurity; in fact, clandestine sex is more likely to have the opposite effect. It will end up making you feel more self-denigrated, desperate, alone, and insecure.

Making the right choices

So what is a sexual being to do? Glad you asked. There is a need to be aware of the choices you have and handle them, instead of allowing them to handle you. Here are a number of those choices now: the it-just-happened choice; the if-we’re-in-love-it-can’t-be-wrong choice; the

sex-brings-us-closer-together choice; the I'm-not-sexual-until-I'm-married choice; and the let's-set-boundaries choice. Married or single, all these choices are bogus except for the last choice. Unless you set healthy boundaries ahead of time, whether married or single, you will be in trouble; so, set those healthy boundaries now, before the temptation presents itself.

To enjoy wholesome relationships in a sex-crazed world, it is important to follow carefully the paradigm sanctioned by the Bible. For this to happen, you will need to set healthy boundaries ahead of time to help you avoid dangerous and life-altering dilemmas. One good way to remember your conviction is to think of the fruit called ackee, found in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands, which grows on a big tree. If you pick ackee and eat it before it opens naturally, it is poisonous and will kill you. However, if you allow ackee to fully mature, the fruit will open on the tree, which is your clue to pick it and eat it. Then it is good for food, and quite tasty and nutritious.

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Sexual intercourse is very similar. If you force it before the right time—marriage—it will poison and harm your life. However, if you allow it to fully mature—marriage—you can fully enjoy it without fear, and it will do your life good.

We have been married for 32 years, so it is relatively easy for us to talk about this topic in an almost-clinical way. However, we recognize how difficult it is to deal with this matter, especially as university students—many of you in your sexual prime—who are dealing with many other pressures. The answer to this predicament, nevertheless, is always the same. The promise of success is found in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” May your choice always be to have wholesome relationships in a sex-crazed world, despite the reality of temptation on every side. More than hope so; for your sakes, we pray so.

Notes and References

- ¹ All Scripture passages in this article, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from the English Standard Version.
- ² Walter Trobisch, *I Married You* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 99.
- ³ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1952), 50.
- ⁴ Steven R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997).

He's Outgoing. She's Not.

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q - My wife of more than 20 years uses our home as her personal space. This means that we are usually not able to entertain our friends or reciprocate dinner invitations. As a social individual, I feel stuck. I have even paid for home improvements she has requested in order to make her feel more comfortable entertaining, but nothing has changed. This situation is a recurring disagreement in our relationship. What options are available to us? (P.S. Providing hospitality to others would enhance our work and church responsibilities.) Miguel—St. Louis, Missouri

A - The situation you have shared with us is not uncommon among married couples. What is remarkable, despite the frustration you have shared, is that you are still married after all of these years and these concerns. This leads us to believe there must be good things about your relationship. The truth is, there are good things in most relationships.

This is the time to explore what attracted you to your wife when you first met. Because, while there is a level of stability in your marriage, you seem to not be enjoying much marital satisfaction right now. Going back to recreate what brought you together in the

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first place may help you bring into focus the qualities that drew you to your wife. And she probably still has them today.

Opposites Attract, At First

What we know about relationships is that opposites tend to attract before marriage, but often repel after marriage. So, what feels like a really good fit to “complete you” before marriage, often looks and feels very differently on the other side of reality. This is inevitable in marriage. Your question describes you as a very sociable and outgoing person while your wife appears to be more reserved and less interested in entertaining people than you are. Being tidy also appears to be more of an issue with you than with her. Like all married couples, you are very different from each other.

So, what are your options? Other than going back to explore what brought you together at the beginning, we encourage you to review God’s intent for marriage. Ephesians 5:25 states: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” If you are a Christian, the mandate is clear; God meant for husbands to love their wives—just like God loves the church. Our spouses are imperfect and different from ourselves, just as the church is made up of imperfect people. And yet, God still loves us despite ourselves. God promises to be with us always, as described in Matthew 28:20.

Because you love your wife despite your differences, you need to have a calm conversation about what is important to both of you. This will include possible ways to bridge those differences rather than building a wall between you. Since a very tidy house and entertaining friends or guests is your thing, perhaps you can take the lead. You can then invite your wife to help you instead of expecting her to lead. Explore possibilities you both can live with. This may include some compromise; occasionally your entertainment will need to take place elsewhere.

Feel Free To Pick Up The Slack

This area of concern may not be among your wife's strengths—which means you will be picking up the slack here. Still, we are pretty sure

she has strengths that show up in areas where you may have deficits. She might even take care of them every day without complaining.

We encourage you to stay focused on the purpose of marriage and to see your wife through the eyes of Jesus. If you think about it, you will realize marriage is to help you become your best self. You can give honor and glory to God as you become a more patient and considerate person. Moments of negotiating adversity and differences are catalysts for helping us to grow as individuals and as people as people trying to be like Jesus.

If you change your self-talk and take the time to see things through your wife's eyes, your perspective and attitude will change. And so will the trajectory of your marital relationship. Trust God for patience. We will be praying for you.

I Want to Be a Father to My Son

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q - I am a single dad of a five-year-old boy who is trying to stay involved in my son's life. My son lives with his mother, but I get him most weekends. I have a decent job, attend church regularly and try to live a life that my son can be proud of. My son's mother and I never married and have no plans to do so. We have a very strained relationship, and she is always threatening to keep me from seeing my son. When I go to pick up or drop off my son, she starts mocking me, curses at me or finds something to yell at me about. I feel so frustrated and angry about this. Sometimes I just want to smack her or give up on seeing my son so I don't have to put up with her craziness. What advice can you give me?

A - Our first counsel is, don't give up! Stay on course! You're on the right track. We recognize the difficulty of your situation. We want to affirm you for claiming and taking responsibility for your son.

While many studies have focused on the role of the mother, there are increasing studies on the significant role that fathers play in the lives of their children. Fathers are important socializers for their children. They help mediate negative external factors that affect their children. Especially in the

African-American community. When fathers are healthy—physically, mentally, and spiritually—they are strong role models. They also help build the self-esteem of their children. We applaud you for being a positive role model to your son.

If you haven't already established paternity, such as having your name on your son's birth certificate, we strongly encourage you to do this. Regardless of the parents' relationship history, research shows that establishing paternity leads to more positive child outcomes and other long-term benefits. There are legal benefits as well, such as being able to file for legal custody, child support and public assistance benefits, if needed. If your name is not on your son's birth certificate, you may have to pursue some legal motions through your local court system.

Research also shows that a good relationship between the mother and father of the child, regardless of marital status, provides a more positive context for a child to develop. Since it sounds like your child's mother may not be that interested in building a positive relationship with you, you will need to take responsibility for your own behavior and response to her attitude toward you.

It is natural for people to become victims of their upbringing and default to unhealthy and harmful coping mechanisms learned in their families of origin. However, human beings have the capacity to make different choices.

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You will have to practice the skill of being proactive rather than reactive to your son's mother. This is easier said than done, but you can learn it! Tell yourself that you can only control yourself, not anybody else. The more in control you are, the more influence you will have on your son—and even on his mother.

To be proactive, Dr. Stephen Covey in the book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, recommends three steps:

1. Pause and stop what you are doing and allow yourself to calm down.
2. Think about what you should and should not say.
3. Choose the best response that would most likely give you a positive outcome.

The Bible also gives great counsel on how to be proactive, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19. NIV).

We strongly recommend that you seek the help of a Christian counselor and/or take an anger management course. Don't see this as a failure but as a proactive measure that will yield long-lasting benefits for yourself and for your son.

We pray that God will give you the wisdom and peace you need to be the father He wants you to be. You're on the right track. Keep moving forward.

RESOURCES

Altogether Wonderful: Exploring Intergenerational Worship

KAREN HOLFORD

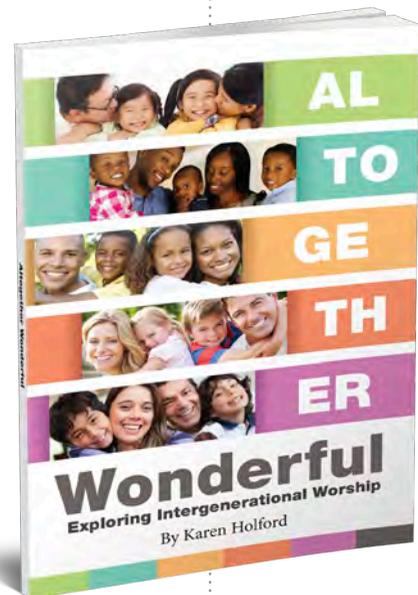
General Conference Department of Children's Ministries, 2017

164 pages

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Think about the children in your church who struggle to be there. What did they experience in church last Sabbath? What do they think about coming to church? What decisions have they already made about whether they will continue to come to church when they are old enough to walk away? What would make church the best place for them to be on Sabbath morning? What might your church need to do differently to save even one of these children? How could you help them choose to stay in the church, by involving them and their family, and caring about their happiness?

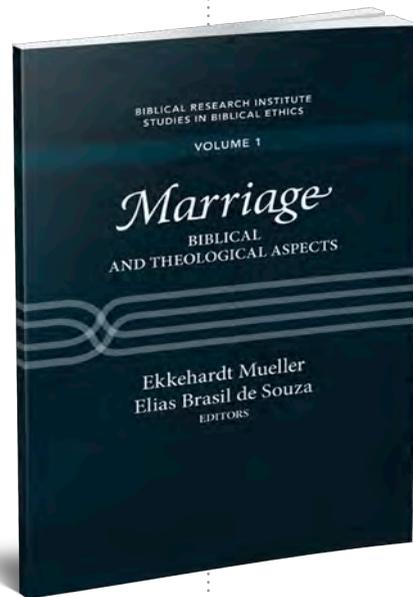
Every Sabbath is an opportunity to reach our children, or to push them away. What are you and your church willing to do to help your children feel welcome, wanted, included, and loved? This book may help you to make an eternal difference in their lives.



Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects, Vol. 1

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS
Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2015
290 pages

This book offers thoughtful and detailed studies on several areas of concern for pastors, church leaders, and members. After showing the beauty of marriage and the relevance of Scripture to a sound understanding of marriage and sexuality, this volume tackles crucial topics such as singleness, gender and roles in marriage, sexuality, religiously mixed marriages, and divorce and remarriage.



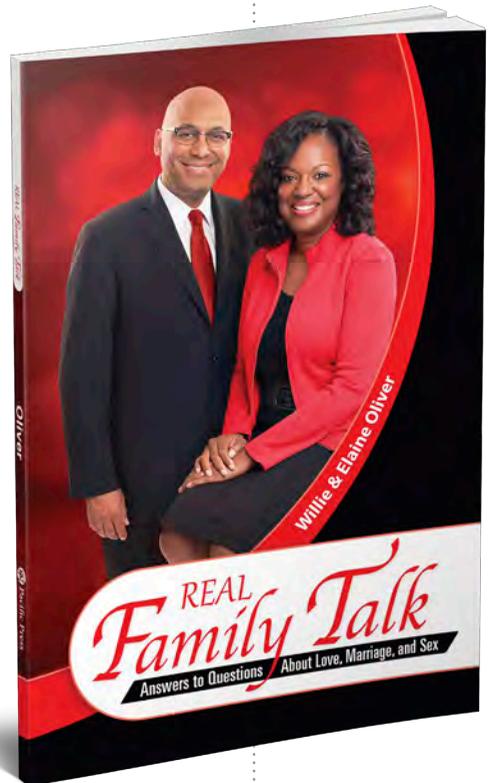
Real Family Talk

Answers to Questions About Love, Marriage and Sex

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER
Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho, 2015
127 pages

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This book is a compilation of selected columns on relationships written by Willie and Elaine Oliver for the *Message* magazine in response to questions from real people. The authors provide expert advice, based on biblical principles, for questions about marriage, sex, parenting, being single and other real relationships issues. In their counsel, the authors remind us of the reality that we all face challenges in our relationships and in our homes. Their discerning answers direct us to seek God's guidance, reminding us that God's plan is for us to have healthy homes and relationships where each person seeks the harmony that God desires for us to experience.





Any time is the right time to have a...

REAL Family Talk

with Willie & Elaine Oliver



Strengthening Families, Inspiring Hope

Real Family Talk gives us a place to talk about family dynamics and share tools to strengthen our marriages and families. Our discussions are family friendly, biblically rooted, and designed to enrich your life spiritually.

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*Sleep and Relationships • Why Opposites Attract • Questions from Singles
Marriage Preparation • Wedding Woes • Preparing for Parenthood
Sharing Faith with your Children • Boundaries with Misbehaving Children
Failure to Launch • Managing Conflict in Relationships • When Illness Joins the Family
Coping with Grief • Forgiveness in Relationships • The Refugee Crisis • 5 Tips for Success in Marriage*



HopeChannel

Sundays, 8 pm EST, or anytime online at realfamilytalk.hopetv.org

APPENDIX A

FAMILY MINISTRIES

IMPLEMENTATION

Please use these documents as part of your work in Family Ministries. The contents are the result of working with families in our church around the world. You can find each print version of these files in the disc that comes with this book.

Note:

Some of the recommendations listed in these forms will need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws of the territories in which this resource is to be used.

Downloadable Material

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2018>

A Family Ministries Policy and Purpose Statement

The congregation and staff of the

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Church are committed to providing a safe environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of this congregation to prevent any form of child abuse physical, emotional or sexual and to protect children and those who work with them.

Churches with programs for children are not insulated from those who abuse: therefore, this congregation believes that it is vitally important to take decisive steps to ensure that the church and its programs are safe, providing a joyful experience for children and youth. The following policies have been established and reflect our commitment to provide protective care of all children when they are attending any church sponsored activity.

- Volunteers who work with children and youth are required to be active members of this congregation for a minimum of six months, and must be approved by appropriate church personnel before they may begin working directly with children, unless there has been previous documented clearance.

- All NAD employees and NAD volunteers who regularly work with children must complete an application form (see NAD's Children's Ministries website: <http://childmin.com/files/docs/VolMinScreeningForm.pdf>). References must be obtained from potential volunteers. Appropriate personnel or staff must check those references. Other divisions are encouraged to follow this procedure.
- All workers with children should observe the "two person" rule, which means that workers must avoid one-on-one situations with children whenever possible.
- Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. Individuals with such a history must discuss their desire to work with children and youth with one of the staff in a confidential interview prior to receiving approval to work in these areas.
- Individuals who have committed physical or sexual abuse, whether or not convicted, may not work in church –sponsored activities or programs for children or youth.
- Opportunities for training in prevention and recognition of child abuse will be provided by the church. Workers will be expected to participate in such training.

- Workers should immediately report to the pastor or administration any behaviors or other incidents that seem abusive or inappropriate. Upon notification, appropriate actions will be taken and reports made in compliance with the operating procedure of these policies.
- Guidelines for volunteers who work with your and children will be provided to each volunteer.
- Children shall not be allowed to roam around the church without adult supervision. Parents are responsible for supervising their children before and after Sabbath School.
- No child should be released to use the restroom unless accompanied by a parent or older sibling.
- A responsible adult shall be designated to circulate in and around the church, including parking areas to provide security. This is critical when only one adult is present at some activities for minors, such as a Sabbath School division.
- Any discipline shall occur within the visual contact of another adult. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.
- All meetings for children or youth must have the approval of the pastor and/or church board, especially overnight activities. Minors must have signed parental permission for each trip, including emergency medical treatment release.
- If there is a known sex offender attending a church, a deacon or other responsible adult shall be assigned to monitor the person while on the premises or at off-site church activity. The offender shall be informed of the procedure. If a sex offender transfers to or attends another church, the leadership of that church shall be notified.

The Family Ministries Leader

The family ministries leader designs a ministry to families that will meet the specific needs of the congregation and community. This section provides planning support for family ministries leaders. Planning is critical for ministering to the individuals and families in the congregation. Family ministries is also an excellent way to reach out to families in the community. The family ministries leader is a member of the local church board and integrates family ministries activities to the whole church program. Listed below are responsibilities and activities.

1. Develop and chair a small family ministries committee that reflects the distinctiveness of the congregation. It may include a single parent, young married persons, mid-life families, retired, widowed or divorced persons. People who serve on this committee should be carefully chosen as visionary people reflecting the grace of God.
2. Be a family advocate. Family ministries is not merely program-oriented, but must look at the whole church program with sensitivity to its impact on families. In some situations the family ministries leader may need to advocate for family time. In other words, there may be so many programs going on in a congregation that people have little time to live their own lives as families.
3. Survey family needs and interests in the congregation. The needs assessment survey and family profile sheet may be used to help determine the needs of the congregation.
4. Plan programs and activities for the year that may include video presentations, retreats or special speakers who present workshops and seminars. Plans should also include simple activities that may be suggested to families through the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Work with the pastor and church board to be sure plans are included in the local church budget.
6. Make use of the resources available from the conference family ministries department. These can save time, energy and serve to keep costs down for the local congregation. When planning for special presentations, the conference family ministries director is able to assist in finding interesting and qualified presenters.
7. Communicate with the congregation. Family ministries should not be perceived simply as an annual event. Keep the importance of good family skills alive by use of posters, the church newsletter and/or bulletin throughout the year.
8. Share your plans with the conference family ministries director.

What is a Family?

One of the tasks of a family ministries leader is to define the families to whom they minister within their congregations. A ministry only to married couples with children, for example, will benefit only a small percentage of the people in the church. Families of all sorts may need guidance as they move toward healthy relationships. The work of coping with the daily tasks of sharing a household and managing conflict is never easy when people share space and resources or come from homes with differing values. Here are some of the ways families today are configured.

- Families are nuclear – with Mom, Dad and children who were born to this Mom and Dad.
- Families are stepfamilies – sometimes called blended. Stepfamilies are formed when parents divorce or are widowed and remarry. Some become stepfamilies when an unmarried parent marries someone not the father/mother of his/her child.
- Families are single – sometimes just me and the cat – living alone. They may be divorced, widowed or never married, but the household is a separate entity. Some singles may live with other singles in one household.
- Families are single parent – This may occur when a parent is divorced or widowed and has not remarried, or is a parent who has never married.

- Families are empty nest families – Mom and Dad when the kids leave home.
- Families are re-attached – When adult children come back to live with Mom and Dad – usually a temporary arrangement. A family is re-attached when an older parent lives with the family of a son or daughter or grandchild.
- Families are a part of the family of God. Many consider members in their congregation as family and may feel closer ties to them than those related by birth or marriage.

Beyond the usual family demographics one can also stimulate people to think about their important relationships, including those in the church family, by posing questions like these:

- If an earthquake destroyed your town, who would you be most desperate to locate to be sure they were okay?
- If you were moving a thousand miles away, who would move with you?
Who would be the ones you'd stay in touch with, however difficult it might be?
- If you developed a long-term illness, who could you count on to take care of you?
- Who will be your family from now until you or they die?
- From whom could you borrow money and not feel like you had to pay it back right away?

Committee and Planning Guidelines

Family ministries leaders who are either new to the position or have never served as a leader wonder where to begin! This section is to help a leader get started. It is often helpful to select a small committee with whom one can work well—people well oriented in the grace of Christ and who don't have the proverbial ax to grind. A family ministries committee, more than any other, should seek to model family. What follows are some ways to accomplish that. While these ideas are not the only way to work, they can help a group work together more smoothly. (They may be helpful to other committees as well).

- Select a small number of persons with similar concerns for families. They should represent the variety of families found in the congregation. This committee might have a single parent, married couple, divorced, retired or widowed persons, and reflect the gender and ethnic profile of the church.
- The committee should not be too large—five to seven persons are ideal. Individuals may represent more than one family category.
- Especially for the first meeting, gather in an informal setting—perhaps at someone's home or a comfortable room at the church. Begin with prayer for God's blessing.
- Provide light refreshments that include water or hot or cold drinks, something light too much on like fresh fruit, cookies, or nuts. Make it attractive, but not fussy or involving great effort.
- For the first meeting, spend time telling each other your story. This is not a therapy session so let people know that they should tell only what is comfortable. A few guidelines will help: confidentiality is to be respected and seen as a gift to one another. It might be good for the leader to begin—starting with sentences like, “I was born in..., raised in a (Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic or whatever) home.” Include other things like where you went to school, children's names or other pertinent information. Include how you became a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist or a pleasant or funny story from childhood. This may seem like a waste of time. But you may be surprised to hear the story of someone you thought you knew for a long time. The telling of our stories is how we connect and bond with each other. It will make your work together go more smoothly. It will also make it easier for committee members to be sensitive to the needs of one another.
- For all subsequent meetings, spend a portion of time—perhaps 10 or 20 minutes in re-connecting with your committee members. One might be rejoicing over an important event. Another may need support with a special need. Here are some questions you could ask to start your meetings:
 - Who are the people you consider to be your close family?
 - How do you live your faith together as a family?
 - What do you think the church could do to help your family?

- What do you like best about your family?

Then move to the agenda. Remember that you are modeling family.

- Review results of the Interest Survey.
- Talk about goals. What do you wish to accomplish? Will it meet a need? Who are you trying to reach? How can you accomplish your goals?

- Pray for God's blessing, plan wisely so that people do not burn out and ministry is soon underway.

An important resource for Family Ministries leader is the Family Ministries Planbook. A new edition of this resource book is published every year and includes programs, sermon outlines, seminars and much more that can be used as part of your yearly program.

A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things

1. **Inform** – People should learn something they did not know prior to attending your presentation.
2. **Entertain** – People deserve not to be bored!!!
3. **Touch the Emotions** – Information that only informs the head never makes a change in attitude or behavior.
4. **Move to Action** – If participants leave your presentation without a desire to DO something different –you have wasted your time and theirs!

Handouts

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience

shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.

- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

Introduction

- Find out who will introduce you.
- Write your own introduction.
- Contact the person at least two days before and give them the introduction.
- Pronounce any unusual words– check accuracy of all information.
- Don't make assertions that are not true.

The Ten Commandments of Presentations

1. **Know Thyself** – Body language and tone of voice make up 93% of your credibility. Would you be interested in you?
2. **Be prepared** – Know your presentation, your equipment and be ready for mishaps. Projectors always blow bulbs in the midst of important presentations so keep a spare, and know how to change it.
3. **Examine Your Speech** – Use direct expressions, and don't seek to impress—you're there to communicate.
4. **Arrive Early** – Your guests might be waiting. Be there at least a half hour before the presentation to make certain that everything is set up the way you want it to be.
5. **Tell Them What to Expect** – Tell the meeting attendees specifically what they will learn in the course of the meeting and how they will be able to apply their new knowledge. Clear goals keep attendees focused on their own responsibilities as active participants.
6. **Less Is More** – Your audience can only take so much, so limit your main points. Seven main points is roughly the maximum your audience can take in and fully contain.
7. **Keep Eye Contact** – Use note cards instead of a completely scripted speech, so you can look up and keep eye contact with your audience. Avoid the urge to READ a presentation. Your audience response will be thanks enough for sticking your neck out.
8. **Be Dramatic** – Use bold words and unusual statistics. Your presentation should be filled with simple, hard-hitting statements to keep your audience intrigued. Laughter never hurts either!
9. **Motivate** – End your presentation with a call to action Tell your audience exactly what they can do in response to your presentation.
10. **Take A Deep Breath, and Relax!** – Don't huddle over the lectern. If you are standing behind one, stand up tall. Move around. Use gestures for emphasis. Remember how you say something is as important as what you have to say.

Family Life Profile Survey

Name Date of Birth

Age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

Gender: M F

Address

Telephone (Home) (Work)

Baptized SDA Yes No

If Yes, local church membership

If No, what is your religious background/present affiliation?

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Marital status:

Single, never married

Single, divorced

Single, widowed

Married—Spouse's name Date of Birth

Spouse is SDA—Local church membership

Spouse is not SDA—Present religious affiliation

Children whose primary residence is with you:

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Children whose primary residence is elsewhere:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Other family members living with you:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Family Relationship

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Family Relationship

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What is the most significant thing the Family Ministries Committee could do this year to address the interests/needs of your family?

.....
.....
.....

I am interested in Family Ministries and am willing to help by

- Telephoning as needed
- Participating in planning sessions
- Providing transportation
- Preparation for events
- Help with meals/refreshments
- Child care
- Advertising
- Other

Presenting lectures/classes/seminars/workshops or other presentations Your interest area(s)

.....
.....

Family Life Profile

Church Date

Family Category

Active Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Never Married

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Inactive Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Non-member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Divorced

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Family Ministries Interest Survey

Your age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+
 Gender: M F

From the topics below, please select the five that are of most interest to you.
 Place a check in front of each one you select:

- Preparation for marriage
- Family finance
- Discipline in the home
- Parenting teenagers
- Preparation for childbirth
- Divorce recovery
- Single parenting
- Sexuality
- Enriching your marriage
- Grief recovery
- Understanding temperaments
- Other (Please list):
- Worship and devotional life
- Communication
- Single adult living
- Improving self-worth
- Resolving anger and conflict
- Television and media
- Preparation for retirement
- Chemical dependency issues
- Blended families
- Death and dying
- Coping with widowhood

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Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name

Address Telephone

Area(s) of specialty

What time of the day and what day of the week is best for you to attend a 1-1/2 - 2 hour program on one of the above topics? (Check the appropriate periods.)

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Community Family Life Education Survey

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?

.....

2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area?
(Select as many as you wish.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to Handle Conflict | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce Recovery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication in Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage Enrichment or Encounter | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming Loneliness Weekend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> Grief Recovery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management and Life Priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with Teenagers | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning Retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childbirth Preparation Class | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) | |

3. What time of the day and what day of the week is best for you to attend a 1-1/2 - 2 hour program on one of the above topics? (Check the appropriate periods.)

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>						

4. It will help strengthen this survey if we could obtain the following information about you:

Sex: M F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

17 or under 19-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

Do you have children under 18 years of age in your home? Yes No

Are you:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never married | <input type="checkbox"/> Married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separated | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed | <input type="checkbox"/> Remarried after divorce |

Sample Evaluation

1. What inspired you most about this workshop?

.....

2. What did you learn that you didn't know before?

.....

3. Were the concepts in this workshop presented in a clear manner?

.....

4. Which activity/section was of least value to you?

.....

5. How could this workshop be improved?

.....

6. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being generally dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, how would you rate this workshop? Circle one.

- 1
Generally Dissatisfied
- 2
Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 3
Somewhat Satisfied
- 4
Generally Satisfied
- 5
Very Satisfied

7. Who made this evaluation?

Your age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

Gender: M F

Marital Status:

- Never married
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

How long have you been married, divorced, separated or widowed?

.....yearsmonths

Thank you for your honest comments, they will help us in planning future workshops!

APPENDIX B

VOTED STATEMENTS

An Affirmation of Marriage

Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.”

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Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God’s self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. In the divine purpose, procreation springs from and is entwined with the same process whereby husband and wife may find joy, pleasure and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in a deep sexual bond that a child may be entrusted. Their child is a living embodiment of their oneness. The growing

child thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity in which he or she was conceived and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression. However, the estate of marriage is not God’s only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage.

To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. Because marriage has been corrupted by sin, the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant.

Statement on Home and Family

The health and prosperity of society is directly related to the well-being of its constituent parts—the family unit. Today, as probably never before, the family is in trouble. Social commentators decry the disintegration of modern family life. The traditional Christian concept of marriage between one man and one woman is under assault. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in this time of family crisis, encourages every family member to strengthen his or her spiritual dimension and family relationship through mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility.

The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 22 states the marital relationship "is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. ... Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity.

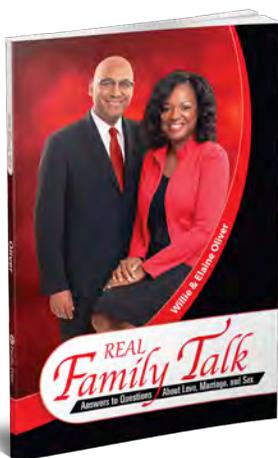
Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God."

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the church, stated: "The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are the 'issues of life' (Prov.4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences." -*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana.



This resource also includes free presentations of the seminars and handouts. To download them please visit:
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G I V E A W A Y

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GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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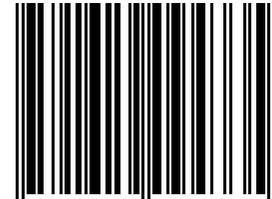
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