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# SEMINARS

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# Leaving a Legacy of Love

ELAINE AND WILLIE OLIVER

## The Text

THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS  
FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED  
TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BECOME  
ONE FLESH.  
GENESIS 2:24

## Theme

Marriage is one of the most challenging and rewarding of relationships. If couples are to experience the full joy of oneness God intended, they must fight daily for their marriage. In doing so, they will leave a legacy of love for themselves, their children, their church, and their community.

## Introduction

Marriage is one of the most challenging and rewarding relationships human beings will ever enter into. Many people today want to believe that if they are “in love” and they have a perfect wedding that’s all that matters. The truth is: Good marriages take work!

Couples getting married always hope their marriage will be happy and will last for a lifetime. However, with today’s divorce rate

of about 50 percent<sup>1</sup>, many people wonder if this is a realistic expectation. In reality, all marriages will encounter conflict. Having conflict is not the real problem; how we deal with conflict is going to determine how healthy or disastrous your relationship will be. Furthermore, when couples are experiencing conflict or distress in their relationships, many perceive their relationship is not good enough to survive. This is simply not true: many marriages that end in divorce are “good enough” to be salvaged.<sup>2</sup>

God, the Creator of marriage, has given us very clear instructions on how to make marriage work. The problem is that many couples are not consulting God’s manual and are willing to give up at the first sign of trouble. It’s like buying a new car and never reading the manual, then when the car has some inevitable mechanical problems, leaving it by the roadside. What a ridiculous thought! Unfortunately, too many marriages end in much the same way.

The good news is that marriages can survive and thrive, but couples will have to fight for their marriage. By God’s grace, couples can learn specific skills that will give them tools to maintain and enhance their oneness, intimacy, communication, and friendship and eliminate barriers that keep them from experiencing the joys of marriage.

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### The Dilemma of Modern Marriage

God made humans male and female (Genesis 1:27). In marriage, God joins husband and wife in an inseparable bond. This bond is a higher calling than the parent-child relationship, for a man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife in a one-flesh relationship (Genesis 2:24). Therefore, what God has joined together people should not separate (Matthew 19: 6b).

In the table below, Balswick and Balswick (2006) share the following summary of the competing sides of traditional marriage, modern marriage, and biblical marriage.

As we examine the traditional and the modern (postmodern) view of marriage, it is clear that neither one is necessarily representative of God’s plan. That is not to say that there are not some positive aspects in those views. However, many people mistakenly push traditional values as biblical values, and they are not the same.

The dilemma in modern marriage is how does a couple become one without compromising individual distinctiveness? Couples today are struggling to balance personal fulfillment with relationship fulfillment—this is a task that must be mastered if marriage is to remain a viable institution in society.

Often, people tout traditional marriage as being the answer to this dilemma, boasting that only 10% of the marriages in our great-grandparents’ days ended in divorce. But a closer glance at this style of marriage will also reveal that the marriages of yesteryear had their fair share of challenges.

Perhaps it is time to change our lens and step back from the rigid traditional view which is more focused on the institution of marriage and from the modern (post-modern) individualistic focus on personal, and move towards a biblical understanding of covenant commitment and mutual responsibility.

God intended for marriage to be a place where both people experience trust, safety, and oneness. If two people are to become one, there has to be a mutuality that seeks that good of the relationship and not just the needs of the individual. When we base our marriage on a biblical foundation and live by God-designed principles, we will find fulfillment and satisfaction in the marriage relationship.

“AT THE VERY HEART OF MARRIAGE IS THE WILLINGNESS OF SPOUSES TO LET GO OF THEIR PERSONAL AGENDA SO THAT THEY CAN TRULY LISTEN TO WHAT THEIR PARTNER IS SAYING.” (JACK O. BALSWICK & BALSWICK, 2014, P. 93)

Traditional	Biblical	Modern
Commitment (to the institution)	Covenant (between husband and wife)	Contract (self-fulfilment)
Coercive	Cohesive	Disengaged
Dutiful Sex	Affectionate Sex (mutual pleasure)	Self-Centered Sex (personal pleasure)
Rigid	Adaptable/Flexible	Chaotic (no rules)
Male-Centered	Relationship-Centered	Self-Centered
Communication Style (pronouncement)	Discussion (negotiation)	Demand (stalemate)

## God's Plan For Marriage

The Bible presents the true picture of how human relationships should look. Human beings are created by a relational Triune God—The Trinity, God, being one, yet composed of three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jack O. Balswick & Balswick, 2014). First, our relational God created us to be in relationship with Him; then He created us to be in significant and fulfilling relationships with others. Hence, our relationships are to reflect the relationality within the Holy Trinity. In essence, God intends for all our relationships to be a reflection of Him!

Of course, God is perfect and as human beings we are not perfect. Hence, we must acknowledge our weakness and humbly seek God's guidance for grace and strength to reflect His glory to our spouse.

In the old and new testaments we find four basic elements that are essential to healthy relationships and will help us leave a legacy of love. These elements are covenant, grace, empowering, and intimacy.

**Covenant:** In the Bible, covenant is a word used to describe marriage, the most serious and compelling agreement known in the Scriptures (**Malachi 2:14; Proverbs 2:16, 17**). It is God's intent that the relationship between husband and wife be modeled after His endless covenant with His people.

Contrary to popular belief, marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. The covenant relationship in marriage is a 100/100 proposition. It is based on unconditional commitment to an individual based on our decision to love them, and not on that individual's response to our love. Paul, the apostle, in *1 Corinthians 13:5* states categorically, "Love keeps no record of wrongs."

In marriage, God gives us opportunities to understand His love for us and the plan of salvation. And it is especially a part of God's plan for the marriage relationship to develop into an unconditional two-way commitment.

**Grace:** God wants us to understand that grace is about forgiving and being forgiven—(**Matthew 6:15**). Marriage as designed by God is to be lived out in an atmosphere of grace, not law. Marriage based upon contract, leads to an atmosphere of law, while marriage based on covenant leads to an atmosphere of grace and forgiveness. In an atmosphere of grace, family members act responsibly out of love and consideration for one another. In a family based on law, perfection will be demanded of each other. This approach to relating adds guilt to the failure that is inevitable because of our fallen and broken human condition (**Romans 3:23-24**). Let's face the reality of life; we are all going to make mistakes in our relationships. There is no humanly possible way of getting around this fact, though many may be in denial of its existence.

Unfortunately, because of the legalism that often accompanies a fundamentalist approach to faith and religion, despite the grace-filled life of Jesus Christ and the message found in the parables He shared, we often fail to offer grace to one another in relationships.

Too often Christians experience emotional problems because of our lack of understanding of God's unconditional love and grace. If we do not understand this then, it is difficult or impossible for us to share His unconditional love, grace and forgiveness with others.

Ellen White says, "Love imparts to its possessor grace, propriety, and comeliness of deportment. It illuminates the countenance and subdues the voice; it refines and elevates the entire being" (White, 1948, p. 123). We offer grace and forgiveness to those we have decided to love and have determined to be in relationship with, because tomorrow we are the ones that will need to be the recipients of that grace.

**Empowering:** God wants us to know, definitively, that life is about service. That is, serving one another. Empowering is a biblical concept for the use of power, which without exception, is contrary to the common use of power in our families and this capitalistic

society of ours. It is an active, intentional process of enabling another person to acquire power. The person who is empowered has gained power because of the encouraging behavior of the other (**1 Corinthians 13:4-6**).

Empowerment is the process of helping another person recognize their strengths and potentials within, as well as encouraging and guiding the development of these qualities. When we empower people, we in turn are empowered, and our relationship is enhanced.

Empowerment is love in action. It is this characteristic of Jesus Christ that our family members must emulate most. If we can practice empowerment in our families, it will revolutionize the view of authority in Christian homes. Coercion and manipulation are the opposite of empowerment—it is a distortion of what real power is. Empowerment is about mutuality and unity.

**Intimacy:** Intimacy is, knowing someone and being known by that person in a covenant relationship. Human beings have the capacity, given them by God, to know each other intimately. The intimacy that Adam and Eve felt was an ability to be themselves without any pretense. They had no need to play deceptive games with one another, because they had respect for one another and didn't abuse one another (**Genesis 2:25**).

Shame, to be sure, is born out of fear of being known intimately. When shame is present, family members put on masks and begin to play deceptive roles for each other. By contrast, as we examine how Genesis describes the nature of the human family before the fall, we find an emphasis on intimacy--on the knowing of the other.

Many people are afraid to enter into relationships for the fear of being rejected by another. Thus, one who is afraid of rejection does not allow himself to be intimately known by another person. Never sharing their true feelings, there is no basis for a real relationship, and they grope in relationship darkness--hampered, handicapped, and hindered, by their lack of self-disclosure.

Couples who base their marriage on covenant love, grace and empowering one another, know each other deeply and intimately.

The unconditional love modeled by Jesus gives us a picture of the type of communicative intimacy desirable in marriage and other significant relationships. Forgiving and being forgiven will be an important part of renewal. There will be a need to confess as well as to receive confession. Where there is real intimacy, there is no need to be ashamed to admit failure or ask for forgiveness. In fact, it is only when we take the steps to understand what Jesus did for us and continues to do for us each day that we can get to the point of being able to achieve intimacy with another individual, and find satisfaction in the relationship.

### **Barriers to Oneness**

In the book, *A Lasting Promise*, (Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 2013) Scott Stanley and others share some barriers that keep marriages and other relationships from reaching their full potential and experiencing the blessings God intended for us.

#### **Self-Protection and the fear of rejection—**

After Adam and Even sinned they immediately covered themselves. Then they hid from each other, and they hid from God. They became aware of their differences, and feared they would be rejected by one another and by God. Oneness will not happen in an environment of fear and lack of acceptance.

**Sin and selfishness—** *“The fact is, a marriage brings together two imperfectly motivated people who strongly--and somewhat selfishly--desire intimacy and the other good things of life, but who fear being hurt”.* (p. 21) Both the traditional and the post-modern view discussed earlier will lead to sin and selfishness. Oneness in marriage only thrives when each individual is focused on serving the other person—it is other-centered not self-centered.

**Lack of Knowledge—**The ability to quote scripture doesn't automatically mean you know what to do to thrive in marriage. For example: do

you know how to listen to your mate, when you disagree, or you are in a heated debate? Do you know how to stop an argument before damaging things are said? Do you know how deepen commitment, problem solve as a team, work through the process of forgiving one another? Anyone can learn how to do these things.

### Building a Strong Marriage

A good beginning in marriage does not guarantee a successful marriage. Couples must be committed to applying God's word to marriage every day. Make the following commitments today suggested by Stanley and team in the CPREP Program<sup>3</sup>:

- Commit to tearing down barriers in your marriage and keeping them down. *Serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13.*
- Commit to focusing on what you can do to be a better spouse. *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19.*
- Commit to loving your spouse like God loves. *Love is patient; love is kind... it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:4, 7.*

### Exercise

Engage the group or each couple in a 15-minute discussion with the following questions:

1. How does the traditional and modern views of marriage compare to the biblical view of marriage?
2. What does it mean to be in a "good enough" marriage? How can a couple go from "good enough" to "great"?
3. What other relational scriptures can you think about that will enhance your marriage or other relationships? Choose two or three, write them down, and commit to using them in your relationships everyday.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Vespa, J. et al (2013). pp. 20-570. *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2012. Population characteristics*. US Census Bureau. Retrieved from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf>

The American divorce rate today is about twice that of 1960, but has declined since hitting its highest point in our history in the early 1980s. For the average couple marrying for the first time in recent years, the lifetime probability of divorce or separation now falls between 40 and 50 percent.

*Adventist Families in North America*. Center for Creative Ministry and North American Division Family Ministries (2010). Retrieved from [www.creativeministry.org](http://www.creativeministry.org)

More than one in four Adventist Church members in North America has gone through a divorce. Those over 45 years of age are more likely to have done so, as those from households with incomes under \$25,000 a year, those who are native-born and those who report their ethnicity as African American.

- <sup>2</sup> Most Marriages and Divorces Are Low Conflict. Retrieved from <http://www.divorcesource.com/ds/considering/most-marriages-and-divorces-are-low-conflict-483.shtml>
- <sup>3</sup> CPREP: Christian Preparation and Relationship Enhancement Program. <https://www.prepinc.com>

# Making Memories

CLAUDIO & PAMELA CONSUEGRA

## The Text

SO THEN, BROTHERS AND SISTERS,  
STAND FIRM AND HOLD FAST TO THE  
TRADITIONS THAT YOU WERE TAUGHT BY  
US, EITHER BY WORD OF MOUTH OR BY  
OUR LETTER.  
2 THESSALONIANS 2:15

The dictionary defines traditions as “memories, customs, habits, and information handed down from one generation to another over the years, that become time-honored practices.”

Making memories and creating traditions!

## SEMINAR NOTE

Throughout this seminar you may illustrate each of the points being made with stories from your own experience, from your family, or from others you may know about.

## Three Results of Traditions in Successful Families:

### 1. Traditions Bring a Family Together, Causing the Members to Know One Another Better.

- Traditions often are unexpected. Establishing traditions begins with and is the responsibility of the parents. Traditions often begin as magical, miraculous moments. Many events which become lasting traditions were unexpected. We call them “magical, miraculous moments.”

One year when our oldest daughter was young, we created a treasure hunt of

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A family had tried unsuccessfully for years to save enough money to replace their ancient bathroom fixtures with new modern sleek ones. But each year as skiing time rolled around, the bathroom money went for a family skiing trip.

The children are now grown. The son recently wrote to his parents. He talked about the annual skiing trips and the wonderful memories he had of them. His father chuckled as he read the letter. He said to his wife, “Honey, I’m glad we spent the bathroom money for those skiing trips. I can’t imagine our son writing home and saying, ‘I sure do remember our wonderful bathroom fixtures.’” Our children are with us such a short period of time. What have you done with them lately to build some beautiful memories?

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sorts for her birthday. We bought a few small things (sugar-free chewing gum, a small toy, an apple, etc.), and we hid them throughout the house. Under each item we placed a clue so that she would find the next item. The final item was her birthday gift. We all had fun together going from place to place, finding the different objects.

We did that for several years, something she looked forward to. But in her teen years we thought she probably was getting too old and would not care to do that anymore, so we didn't do it. We simply presented her with her birthday present. We could see the dismay and disappointment in her face, so we asked her what was the matter. Almost with tears in her eyes she told us she had been looking forward to the treasure hunt.

That simple activity became a kind of tradition, one that we all still remember as part of her growing years.

### SEMINAR NOTE

Do you have a story of a tradition in your family that had an unexpected beginning? You may share that with the group. Or you can ask them to share one of their own.

- Traditions are often unplanned. They emerge on their own. These moments emerge as families talk with one another, play together, and have decided to love one another in complete acceptance. Traditions will establish themselves if you simply allow them to be a part of your family. When you least expect it, a tradition will emerge with a great memory on its heels.

I'm not sure when or how, but we started a food tradition that we would make and eat Mexican tostadas on Friday evenings. We did that probably through all the growing years of all

our daughters. The first Friday evening our oldest daughter was in a boarding school (Adventist Academy), she called us crying because they didn't have Mexican tostadas for dinner. The food, and the family tradition that goes with it, were very entrenched in her life. But it was not a tradition we planned to begin; it simply developed naturally.

### CONNECT

Do you have a story of an unplanned tradition in your family? You may share it with the group. Or you can ask them to share one of their own.

### 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?

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON – THERE WE  
SAT DOWN AND THERE WE WEPT WHEN  
WE REMEMBERED ZION.  
PSALMS 137:1

Traditions are usually small in monetary value – but PRICELESS!

### SHARE

Maybe you have left your home or your country and now live in a different land. Share some of the memories of your homeland that you have shared with your family and children. What was your experience like of coming to where you now live? Ask others in your group of their experience.

### 3. Traditions Are Cherished and Passed along to Future Generations

In the play, "Fiddler On The Roof," at his daughter's wedding, Tevye, (the father)

sings a song which echoes traditions and memories that move from one generation to another:

“IS THIS THE LITTLE GIRL I CARRIED? IS THIS THE LITTLE BOY AT PLAY? I DON’T REMEMBER GROWING OLDER, WHEN DID THEY? SUNRISE, SUNSET, SUNRISE, SUNSET, QUICKLY FLY THE YEARS. ONE SEASON FOLLOWING ANOTHER, LADEN WITH HAPPINESS AND TEARS.”  
SUNRISE, SUNSET

His words are all about tradition and the sweet memories they bring. Another memorable song from the musical is entitled “Tradition!” A portion of its lyrics include the following words.

“TRADITION? THE PAPA, TRADITION... THE MAMA, TRADITION... THE SON AND THE DAUGHTER, TRADITION... A FAMILY? TRADITION, TRADITION, TRADITION!”

of thoughts, feelings, and ideas and it is called “The Ungame.” You may also put some puzzles together (make sure they are age appropriate), or some game of soccer, basketball, softball, or whatever game that would involve both physical activity and as many members of the family as possible.

Plan on some special meal, although it does not have to be a major gourmet production every time. Sometimes a simple meal with popcorn, sandwiches, or ordering a pizza may be all you need. While you could occasionally watch a family movie, don’t make it a practice unless you spend time talking about it afterwards. Simply watching movies does not provide for the interaction that creates and builds memories.

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## CONNECT

Ask the group to share any other ideas of activities that the family could do together on family night.

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## Seven Practical Ideas To Build Positive Memories And Traditions

We’d like to share seven ideas your could implement to begin building life-lasting traditions in your home, for your family.

### 1. Family Night:

Choose one night a week in which the family determines to be together. It might include dinner at home or at a favorite restaurant. Allow your children to help make the decision as to what you will do. Turn off the television. Talk, laugh, and play together. Wrestle on the floor and do things that require talking to one another. Family night must be a commitment that is honored. Allow nothing to interrupt it or take its place. Remember, on family night the television, iPad, computers, cell phones, and video games are not allowed to be in the room!

We recommend that you play games that are not too competitive in nature so a great night of fun does not lead anyone to feel like they have lost or others to gloat that they have won. There is a great game to encourage the sharing

### 2. Date Night:

This is as much for the children as it is for mom/dad. You are modeling a behavior. One of the most important traditions in any family is an established date night for Mom and Dad. It creates a positive picture for the children as they see their parents choose one night a week to be alone together and to focus on their love for each other. Early in our marriage we could only afford to make our own sandwiches and take them to the park to eat or go on a quiet drive, but the goal was intimacy, not extravagance.

It is also important for parents to take their children out on dates. Fathers should take their daughters and moms should take their sons. If you have more than one child, only take one at a time. A simple, age-appropriate date is all that is needed. The important thing is to spend one-on-one time with your child in communication. Dads, you are modeling how a young man should treat your little girl. Pull her chair out for her and open the car door for her. Moms, you are showing your little boy

how he should treat his future wife. Be mindful of words used and the common courtesies. This simple date will have lessons that your little ones will take with them into future life as a husband/father and wife/mother.

A date does not have to be expensive, either. The key is to be intentional about making time to be with your spouse or with your child, one-on-one, as it provides an opportunity to exchange ideas, express feelings, share concerns, pray together, and build memories.

### CONNECT

Ask the group to share any ideas of activities that could take place on date nights.

### 3. Birthdays:

Everyone in the family should feel special on their birthday. Always remember that no one likes to have their birthday forgotten! It doesn't cost much money to celebrate that day with great importance and fanfare. The birthday person might get breakfast in bed to begin their day. Be creative. It is a special day loaded with opportunities to make family memories.

Take advantage of modern technology – send them a text message early in the morning, post your feelings on Facebook, send them an eCard. Gifts are a way to express your love as well. It is not the cost of the gift that matters as much as the meaning you give it and the time you spend choosing something appropriate for their age and interests.

Ever since our younger daughter began to show an interest for the medical profession we found several birthday gifts through the years that encouraged her to continue to move in the direction of her dreams. One year we bought her a toy doctor's kit complete with a stethoscope, syringe, and tongue depressor. Today she is a physician and a surgeon in training.

Each of our daughters asked for a birthday meal of their choice. Our oldest daughter preferred strawberry, while our youngest daughter chose

chocolate. What that meant was that mom usually baked a cake, or bought ice cream of those flavors for their birthday. As mentioned earlier, we also had a treasure hunt for our oldest daughter. Regardless of where they were living at the time, we always made contact with them and, if possible, we made arrangements to be with them during their birthday as well.

### IDEAS

Ask the group to share any other ideas of how to make birthdays special, memorable times for the members of the family, specially the children.

### 4. Mealtime:

What's the most powerful place in your home? The dining room table! Turn off the television and eat together. Do not allow a day to go by without sitting down as a family and eat around the dinner table. The conversation can be electric, hilarious, and invigorating. Some of the family greatest memories may be from those dinner-table conversations.

Do not rob yourselves as a family of this important memory-making opportunity by eating on a plate while watching the television. Sit down as a family and enjoy a meal together with no outside distractions.

Not only are meal times important memory builders, but they are also powerful tools to help and even save your children. Much research has shown that your child may be 35% less likely to engage in disordered eating, 24% more likely to eat healthier foods and 12% less likely to be overweight. Kids who ate dinner with their families at least five times per week were the least likely to take drugs, feel depressed or get into trouble.

The key of the research is that the family needs to share family meals at least five times per week. At the same time, forcing everybody to enjoy every single meal together seven days a week may not be realistic and may actually be detrimental as it may be too controlling.

Make each meal a positive, memorable time together.

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### SHARE WITH THE GROUP

Ask the group to share their memories and experiences during family meals.

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#### 5. Your Faith:

Spiritual traditions play an important part in the family. Saying grace before meals is one way for a family to connect with each other every day. Daily Scripture reading and prayer times will create wonderful memories. Worshiping together can enhance communication among family members.

In addition to attending church together, make it a point for your family to attend special events in your church such as candlelight services, special performances, or special Christmas or Easter services each year.

Your children will carry these memories and traditions with them into their future families. Do not be so hurried that you neglect prayer before a meal or the evening family devotional.

As always, make sure to make family devotional time age-appropriate. Younger children need a lot more activities, shorter time, and a lot less reading. As they get older, you can include more stories, sometimes videos, or other activities. Always try to not make this time about you but about your children.

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### CONNECT

Ask the group to share any other ideas of how to make daily family devotional times special for the members of the family, specially the children.

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#### 6. Family Vacations: car games, maps, planning

Circle the date on the calendar, get the camera ready, and don't let anything get in the way! Loads of great memories are created from time spent with your family on vacation.

The goal of a good, tradition-building vacation is not how much money you spend

or how many miles you log but how much fun you have in the process!

A much anticipated family vacation happened a few years ago. We had been saving flying miles on one of our credit cards for years until we finally had enough for four tickets to Spain. We had also saved enough vacation days so that we were able to spend three weeks traveling throughout southern Spain, Portugal, and Gibraltar. Even today, those several years later, we still talk about that trip and sometimes we even sit down to go over all the pictures we took.

But not all vacations have to be to a faraway land. Some of the most enjoyable things we ever did were road trips not far from home. Those one-day excursions at the drop of a hat were more fun than a day spent at any amusement park. Vacation together and make positive memories and traditions.

Be very careful and guard these dates in your calendar. There are far too many families that never take vacation. Do not let this be something you regret later on not doing when it is too late.

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### INTERACT

Invite the group to share a memorable experience during a family vacation.

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#### 7. Holidays:

Holidays are perfect for establishing traditions and making memories. They're the "mother lode" of opportunities. Everyone needs to belong somewhere. Even hardened gang members claim the reason they join a gang is because they need to belong. Perhaps the greatest benefit of traditions for your family is to provide members with a way to connect and identify with their family, to be a part of something greater than themselves. Traditions and the accompanying positive memories provide them with hope for tomorrow's memories.

Holidays are different around and every family celebrates them differently. For me (Claudio), growing up in Colombia, South

America, the centerpiece of Christmas was the Christmas manger or crèche, and the presents were distributed on the evening of December 24. For me (Pamela), growing in Virginia, in the United States, the centerpiece of Christmas was the Christmas tree, and the presents were distributed on the morning of December 25.

National holidays are also great opportunities for families to build memories together. Maybe you can go to one of the parades, or to a patriotic concert, or maybe to a national museum which may be open during the holidays.

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### BOUNDING MOMENT

Invite the group to share a memorable experience during a holiday.

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### Closing

Every family celebrates and builds memories in their own unique way. What are your traditions? What are some of your best memories? The point

is to establish those positive family memories and traditions. You may live in many different homes. You may move from place to place. Your children grow up. And, yes, we may even lose some of our family members to death until Jesus returns to take us to heaven. But, meanwhile, we have our memories of times spent together as a family. Nothing is so sacred as helping our children create those positive memories and experiences that will lead them to heaven!

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# Frequent Family Dinners Protect Our Children

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GARY HOPKINS AND DUANE MCBRIDE

## Theme

Frequent family dinners have multiple benefits to children and teens that aid in positive youth development.

## Introduction

Family gatherings around the table have been seen as a national pastime throughout human history. In this fast-paced generation, however, families are slowly drifting apart for many reasons: demanding jobs that require less time at home, extra-curricular activities in schools and conveniences of communication that do not need the family to be present while engaging in conversations; ability and access to drive or having easier transportation systems, as well as other activities – such as television viewing, sports, etc. – have trumped family meals. Yet research has consistently found that frequent family dinners can protect youth from a number of dangerous elements.

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## GROUP DISCUSSION

Have the group report what they think interferes with family meals in this modern world.

The following information is from an extensive review of the literature and from original research conducted at the Institute for the Prevention of Addiction at Andrews University on the topic of family dinners. Research has found that family dinners have multiple ways it leads to positive outcomes for youth. Family meals create an environment where there is an opportunity for the family to communicate to each other leading to lasting bonds between the parents and their children. They are a place to discuss problems and solutions and can create a form of tradition/ritual that promote unity, stability, and routine. In addition, parents can use family mealtimes to monitor the whereabouts of the children, get to know and hear about the friends and people that they interact with away from home and help give them advice and guidance for decisions in the future.

Family meals are also associated with better social and mental stability. Children and teenagers who engage in family dinners and spend time with their parents are found to have higher self-esteem, are less depressed and have lower rates of suicide ideation. Family meals contribute to better eating habits and nutrition

intake and eating meals together provide an opportunity to promote more positive food choices among adolescents.

Many think that young people these days do not enjoy these kinds of activities but studies have found that the vast majority still enjoy it. One study reveals that 79% of teenagers enjoy dining with their families. Another study reports that children enjoy the social aspects of eating together as a family and that family meals are considered pleasurable occasions; they become part of the day which they look forward to with 65% of teenagers and 75% of parents saying that they would be willing to give up a weekend activity if that would enable them to have dinner as a family.

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### GROUP ACTIVITY

Have the group reminisce about their positive memories around family dinners from their childhood. What did they enjoy about their family meals as a child?

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### Family Dinners as Protection

The adolescent and teenage years are a time of exploration and when they will decide what type of person they will be when they grow up. However this searching can lead to decisions that will result for them to engage in unhealthy and risky paths. The main threat to adolescents' health in the United States is the behaviors that put their health at risk due to the negative choices that they make. The risky behaviors that adolescents typically participate in include alcohol, tobacco, substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, eating disorders, and delinquent activities such as theft and being part of a gang. These risk factors harm the adolescent physically and psychologically and they affect their mental well-being as well. At this stage their thoughts on their self-value, body and/or self-image, depression, suicide ideation, and decision-making skills can present as major challenges in their lives.

Studies on family meals focus on the advantages of frequency on family dinners. Due to the advantages that family dinners offer, the increased number of times families have dinner together have shown decreased rates of risky behaviors and an increase of positive behaviors. Having frequent meals at least 5 times a week provide the opportunities to reduce the likelihood that adolescents/teenagers will participate in alcohol drinking, substance abuse, sexual activities (or early participation), and develop eating disorders. Family meals not only offer protection during the teen years, but extend to the first two years while kids are away at college. Adventist college students who are 18 and 19 years old and have 5 family dinners a week when home, are significantly less likely to use alcohol in the past year.

Family dinners not only reduce risky behaviors, but also increase the safety of our youth. Recent research found that the likelihood that one will become victim to any number of situations decreases the more frequent time one participates in family dinners. They were less likely to be bullied at school, be slapped by a boy/girlfriend, and date raped. In addition, they are even more apt to take safety precautions such as wearing a seatbelt and a bicycle helmet. This is a fascinating result because family dinner produces such a strong protective factor that it would increase the protection of an individual from becoming a victim to someone or something. Family dinners are packed with such strong influences that if the environment of the mealtime is positive and it is practiced frequently enough, many unwanted behaviors and practices can be avoided.

There are some important things to keep in mind when having a family meal; it should be a pleasant experience. If there is constant family conflict present, research has found that adolescent and teenagers think family dinners are more of a negative experience than a positive. The family table is not a time to criticize and attack one another. Of course, studies have also found that dislike of

food being served during family meals also can bring a negative attitude to the table.

With so many families being pulled in many directions, family meals at 6 p.m. five times a week may not be realistic. Family meals don't have to be at the traditional dinner time, it can be earlier or later on some days. If you can get up earlier, the meal can also be at breakfast time. Weekends can be a time of special meals where higher priority is given to family togetherness. The point is to have face to face time around an enjoyable activity where there can be a good solid conversation.

In order for that conversation to take place, there shouldn't be any distraction. So that means for kids and parents the TV should be off, phones and tablets should not be at the table, and let the phone go to voice mail. Get unplugged and enjoy!!

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### GROUP DISCUSSION

What are some ways that family meals can be more enjoyable for the whole family? When is a good time for your family to have more regular meals together?

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# Messy Church

CLAIR SANCHES-SCHUTTE

How did it all begin?

## The Background to Messy Church

The first Messy Church began in 2004 when a group of people became frustrated as they were not reaching any children with God's story. They had lovely buildings and facilities but were not using them enough. The church was filled with wonderful creative people and the community needed a community-building church, a place for families to come together.

There was a lot of sympathy towards church in general, but the church was not offering anything that really gripped the imagination of local families.

Initially, the thought was that something needed to be done to gather people of all ages together. This was partly based on the belief that a church grows best when different people journey together and especially when families grow together in their journey of faith.

And that was when the idea of Messy Church was born.

Messy Church meets once a month; this is a time when families come together. They create things together, eat together and

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celebrate God and his Word, through singing and music and through prayer. It's different from a Vacation Bible School, for example, where parents drop off their children. This is a day when parents and carers are together with their children throughout the church time.

With Messy Church we are aiming to be a worshipping community of all ages, centred on Christ and showing Christian hospitality. We want to give people a chance to express their creativity, to sit together, to eat a meal and have fun within a church context.

Our principles, in no particular order, are:

- To provide an opportunity for people of all ages to worship together.
- To help people of all ages to feel that they belong in church and to each other.
- To help people have fun together.
- To give people a chance to express their God-given creativity.
- To invite people into an experience of Christian community.
- To introduce people to Jesus through hospitality, friendship, stories and worship.

Usually we hear the following:

**Behave:** We want you to change; become like us.

**Believe:** We want you to think like us; believe like one of us.

**Belong:** Finally, because you have repented and now have faith and believe that God has forgiven you, you are a part of the family of God; welcome.

In actual fact, what we should be aiming for is the complete reverse.

**Belong:** Because God loves you unconditionally, we will do the same. Welcome.

**Believe:** We now invite you into God's truth.

**Become:** And as you believe, your life will be transformed from the inside out.

Now we should not proceed this way because we think we will attract more people into the church, but because we genuinely love unconditionally. People will see the difference. We are not into marketing strategies, but we are in the business of bringing God's love and grace to people because we love them.

The gospel focuses on Christ and his amazing grace. It focuses on who Jesus truly is, and what He actually has done for us and in us. The focus of this gospel is Jesus Christ, not our performance.

This gospel declares that we are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, apart from any effort or merit of our own. God accepts and embraces all humanity as his forgiven, dearly loved children because of what Jesus has done. We are included - we all belong. Now believe and your behavior will follow.

A Messy Church program could look like this:

15:30 - Door open	People arrive, play board games and have a drink and biscuits
16:00 - 17:00	Craft Time
17:00 - 17:15	Celebration service in church
17:15 - 17:45	Hot meal together

Now this is just an outline. You can play with the times so that it suits you. Also it can be run as a mid-week club, as a Sabbath afternoon program or any time you think would fit your church schedule and neighborhood.

### The Welcome

Do we realize how difficult it is for some people to enter a church building? The welcome needs to be genuine and encouraging. Show people where to go and don't leave them wandering around on their own or getting lost in the building. Plan for a time to relax. Mingle and talk to people, have a drink and biscuits, have things laying around for kids to do.

You need outgoing people at the door who make contact easily. The first thing people do is register.

### The craft time

The craft time allows for an hour for leisurely unhurried experimentation and enjoyment of the various crafts on offer. See below the number of crafts we advise. The crafts are all planned around the Bible's theme of the day. Try to stick to the theme as people can become overwhelmed with too much information especially if they are not familiar with the Bible. There should be a variety of activities. Especially remember to think of boys when planning and to remember the different learning styles. During craft time you could also do some games. Be creative.

The suggestion is the following:

- 0-3 years about 6 crafts (because they cannot concentrate for too long on one thing).
- 4-6 years about 4 crafts.
- 7-9 years about 4 crafts.
- 10-13 years 1 craft to really work on (because this age group needs to feel that it is worth doing).

### Celebration

This is a time when families will celebrate God together. This will happen through music and song, prayer and a sermonette. Many parents attending may not know anything of the Bible but will grow each month with their children in knowledge of God's saving grace and what Jesus has done for us. Journeying as families is what it is all about.

## The Meal

The meal does not only feed the body but it is an opportunity for church members to actually mingle and get to know people. Making friends and investing in the lives of visitors is what Jesus asked us to do. When people share a meal they are more open and this is a time we can show God's word in action and in words.

Don't have a meal as a buffet style. You need to sit and eat together at a table as families.

## What are the values of 'Messy Church'?

### Creativity – Genesis 1:1

Celebration – Psalm 150

Hospitality – Philippians 2:15,16

Christ-centred – 1 Corinthians 10:31

All-age – Nehemiah 12:43

Messy Church is not a program run by a few faithful people. Messy Church is something all members can take part in whether you do something in the background or whether you are leading out. In the church I go to there are over 50 people involved.

## Reference

Leadbetter, J. & Moore, L. (2012).

*Starting your messy church – a beginner's guide for churches.* Oxford, United Kingdom.

## Note

A clip from 4th quarter 2013 Adventist Mission DVD could be shown. This is a 4.23 minutes overview of what Messy Church is.

# And They Lived Happily Ever After

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

**WHEN YOUR MARRIAGE IS STRUGGLING, THE WORLD FEELS LIKE A SHAKY PLACE. BUT WHEN IT IS STRONG, YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN TAKE ON THE WORLD! MARRIAGE EXPERTS WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER SHARE THE PRINCIPLES THAT CAN MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE BETTER THAN EVER.**

after long year and seemingly managing their chaos demonstrates a high level of commitment. But for those of us who watch from a distance, it all seems highly stressful and quite dysfunctional.

On the other hand, it is a joy to watch families whose commitment to each other is characterized by a high level of kindness, compassion, patience, forgiveness, humility, and teamwork. In reality, even though the family seems like a well-oiled machine, they face as many challenges as the previous one. The difference is that they have practiced and learned how to handle life's daily stresses with a high level of grace, skill, and humor.

## **So which of these two options does your family most closely resemble?**

The truth is, there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. So, when we talk about having a marriage that feels connected, we are not talking about a marriage that has no problems. Rather, we are describing a couple that enjoys relatively high levels of satisfaction and stability in their marital relationship. In a connected marriage, the couple is intentional about fixing problems in their relationship and is committed to being kind, patient, understanding, and forgiving. To be sure, it takes commitment to remain connected in marriage and to build on the dreams each person brought to the marriage. But this kind of commitment is worth it: it contributes to the couple's happiness, health, and quality of life.

Do you have a great marriage with a few sad times, or a sad marriage with a few great times? Your response to that question will reveal whether you feel connected—or disconnected—with your spouse.

Most couples go into marriage expecting to have a terrific time. Why then are so many couples experiencing distress rather than the bliss they expected when they first got married?

All of us know families that appear toxic in their daily interactions. The parents are constantly arguing, while the children often ignore directives from their parents and seem to be doing their own thing. Notwithstanding, just staying together year

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To experience the joys that marriage was meant to bring, it's important to keep these time-tested principles in mind:

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**TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE YEARS, YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE DAYS—ONE DAY AT A TIME.**

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We recently celebrated 30 years of marriage. Our marriage has not been all fun and games, but celebrated is the perfect word to describe what we feel when we look back at all of the emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual experiences we've had together. As we look back, we know that our marriage has been an extraordinary and satisfying experience we would do all over again: it is the place where we have found the most emotional support, connection, and safety.

But, in order to make it through the years, we had to make it through the days—one at a time. A husband and wife must be intentional about connecting with each other in meaningful ways every day—listening to each other, holding hands, doing acts of kindness. It's through the little things in life that you convey to your spouse that they have special value to you.

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**TRYING TO GROW A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT HEALTHY COMMUNICATION IS LIKE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE APPLE JUICE WITHOUT APPLES.**

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Over the years, these small daily encounters add up, building a marriage that feels safe to the couple, a marriage that can withstand difficulties along the way. In their book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*, sociologist Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher describe the security that comes from a committed marriage:

“HUSBANDS AND WIVES OFFER EACH OTHER COMPANIONSHIP, SEX, PARTNERSHIP, BUT THEY ALSO OFFER EACH OTHER A TYPE OF INSURANCE THAT IS BETTER THAN ANY POLICY EITHER OF THEM COULD BUY TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST LIFE'S UNEXPECTED EVENTS.”

Trying to grow a strong relationship without healthy communication is like attempting to make apple juice without apples. It is simply impossible. Healthy communication is the principal skill in maintaining marriage intimacy. The more intimate the relationship becomes, the more sensitive and humble the communication must be.

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**MARRIAGE ISN'T JUST ABOUT RAISING KIDS AND SPLITTING CHORES.**

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Prominent psychologist John M. Gottman, author of *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, proposes: “Marriage isn't just about raising kids, splitting chores, and making love. It can also have a spiritual dimension that has to do with creating an inner life together—a culture rich with symbols and rituals.”

The Bible states, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11, NKJV). This is how couples create an inner life together—by treating words as precious and communicating as if giving gifts of gold and silver.

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**THE QUALITY OF YOUR MARRIAGE DEPENDS ON THE QUALITY OF YOUR COMMUNICATION.**

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The quality of your marriage will depend on the quality of your communication. Couples who communicate frequently and tenderly experience a level of intimacy that couples who communicate infrequently and harshly can never reach.

## YOUR SPOUSE HAS AN EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT. DEPOSIT MORE THAN YOU WITHDRAW.

The emotional bank account is like any other bank account: you can only make withdrawals from an account that has something in it. In a bank account, if you're making more withdrawals than deposits, pretty soon there will be no money available. The same is true of the marriage relationship. You can't expect to get, get, get without putting something into the account first. When you are kind to your spouse, you are making deposits in their emotional account. The more deposits you make, the more rich your relationship will be. The opposite—trying to get more than you give—leads to a relationship that is bankrupt.

So, how are you doing with deposits in your spouse's emotional bank account? Are you kind, patient, affirming, loving, and forgiving on a regular basis? Or, are you more commonly sarcastic, impatient, critical, demanding, and crude?

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## IF YOU DON'T LET THINGS GO, YOU WILL BECOME BITTER AND ANGRY.

Forgiveness is another essential element in your journey of enhancing your relationships. The ancient wisdom of Ephesians 4:31, 32 offers

this timeless counsel: "Get rid of your bitterness, hot tempers, anger, loud quarreling, cursing, and hatred. Be kind to each other, sympathetic, forgiving each other as God has forgiven you through Christ".

The problems listed in that passage—bitterness, hot tempers, anger, loud quarreling, cursing, hatred—can easily escalate, building one upon the other. So it's better to stop the cycle as soon as it begins—and that usually means letting something go before it sets off bitterness (and everything else that will follow).

Bitterness is an established resentment that poisons the entire inner person. Our spouse does something we don't like, so we harbor bitterness against them, and hot tempers start to boil. That leads to anger, which is the blast on the outside of the feelings on the inside. Anger invariably leads to loud quarreling or cursing. Sometimes we would do well to let things blow over instead of letting them blow up.

So then, how about your marriage? Have you been contributing to healthy or toxic interactions? Can you be honest with yourself about what you have (or have not been doing) to add to the distress or improvement of your marriage? Are you determined to do all you can to make your marriage a place where your spouse feels safe, cared for, and affirmed?

It takes effort to build a great marriage, but it's worth it. If you make the commitment to stay connected, your marriage will not just survive the years but will thrive in your daily life.

# Nurturing Healthy Emotions

KAREN HOLFORD

## The Text

“FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,  
DECLARES THE LORD, PLANS TO PROSPER YOU  
AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU  
HOPE AND A FUTURE.”  
JEREMIAH 29:11

## Overview of seminar:

### What is the seminar about?

This is an interactive seminar about emotions. We all experience positive emotions that fill us up and energize us, and negative emotions that drain us. We need to experience a healthy and balanced ratio of positive to negative emotions to flourish and be resilient. According to psychologist Barbara Frederickson in her book, *Positivity*<sup>1</sup>, the baseline ratio for a healthy emotional balance is three times more positive emotional experiences than negative emotional experiences.

This seminar explores our main negative emotions, and how we can help our children and ourselves manage them better. It also explores our positive emotions and how they can become more integrated into our lives.

Towards the end of the workshop there are ideas for helping families check in with each other emotionally.

### Why is it important?

We are often concerned about our spiritual and physical health, but we can easily forget that we need to

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take care of our emotional health, too. Jesus came that we might have abundant lives. Our emotional health contributes to the sense of well being, hopefulness, joy, peace of mind, gratitude, positive attitudes and caring relationships that make up the abundant lives He wants us to experience.

### Who is it for?

This seminar is for anyone. Children with their families can participate in many of the activities. Couples can work together and single people in pairs or small groups. Everyone can benefit from the information and activities in the seminar.

### When and where can it be used?

This seminar can take 2-3 hours depending on your chosen activities, and how long people spend talking together and participating in the interactive experiences. It can also be used as a community outreach event. The activity tables have been tried and tested at community events, on Sabbath afternoons, at camps, during parenting seminars and as workshops at retreats.

### Preparation

- Read through the whole seminar to have a complete overview.
- Select the sections of the seminar you plan to use.
- If children will be present, make sure you meet their needs and supply the children with the ‘feelings worksheets’ and coloring materials, etc.
- Print and copy sufficient handouts for your group.
- Print off the instruction cards and worksheets for the tables.

- Gather the other materials needed for the tables — if possible place the materials for each activity in a different bag or container to facilitate a quick and efficient set up.
- You will need a flip chart or white board and marker pens.

### Welcome and opening

- Thank everyone for coming to the seminar.
- Pray that the seminar will be a blessing.
- Describe what you will be doing and why.

### Introduction

Today we will spend time thinking about our emotional health. When we have happy and healthy emotions we are more likely to have happy and caring relationships, do well at school or in our work, and be physically and spiritually healthy.

Before we start let's think about why God gave us so many emotions.

Ask the group:

### Why is it important for human beings to experience emotions?

Gather their answers on a flip chart and make sure the list includes the following points:

- Emotions are gifts from God. (Imagine what life would be like if we didn't experience any emotion).
- Emotions are not good or bad. They are the natural way for our body to respond to events, and they help us to make sense of our experiences.
- Emotions help us to build and enrich our relationships.
- Our emotions can bring us closer to God and to each other.

### Sharing happy moments

- Find a partner next to you and spend a few moments sharing a time when you were really happy during the past week, or month.
- If you are here as a couple, share these stories with each other.
- If you are here as a family, listen to the stories of your children as a priority because we have a limited time.
- If you are on your own, find a friend, or make a new friend.

- Allow 5 minutes for pairs to share their stories.
- Ask people to notice how they are feeling after sharing their happy moments (peaceful, happy, good, warm, etc.).

### Paul's Positive Ideas

Let's explore Paul's ideas for experiencing more of these positive and happy emotions in our life. (Give the younger children a 'Feelings' worksheet to complete).

- Divide the adults and high school students into small groups of 3-4 people.
- Ask each group to turn to Philippians chapter 4 and to make a list of Paul's specific ideas for nurturing positive emotions and thoughts.
- After 5 minutes gather their ideas and write them on the flip chart.
- Ask each group to contribute one idea and then ask for further ideas.
- Add in any extra ideas from the list below if necessary.
- Invite feedback in response to the list of Paul's Positive Ideas.

### Paul's positive ideas in Philippians 4 verse by verse

- 1 Celebrate the strengths of other people.
- 2-3 Help the people around you sort out their differences and conflicts.
- 4 Rejoice! Focus on good things to celebrate, even in hard times.
- 5 Be gentle and kind to everyone you meet.
- 6 Turn your worries into prayers, and pray with thanksgiving.
- 7 Let the peace of Jesus fill your mind.
- 8 Think about positive, noble, beautiful, true, right, pure and excellent things.
- 9 Put your spiritual learning into practice.
- 10 Show kind concern for other people.
- 11-12 Learn how to be content whatever your circumstances.
- 13 Depend on God for your strength.
- 14 Support each other through the hard times, share your struggles.

### Feelings that drain us

As humans it's not possible to experience positive emotions all the time. We live in an imperfect world and it's important to experience some negative emotions too. Positive emotions are the ones that fill us up, and negative emotions are the ones that drain us, push us down, and deplete our health and happiness.

- Work together in 2-3's or in families, to make a list of 'negative' emotions and experiences.
- After a few moments stop the group and collect their ideas on a flip chart.
- Write one emotion in each group. Encourage each group to contribute an idea. If there are only a few groups, go around the group more than once to gather all the ideas.

Here are the main negative emotions. Make sure they are all listed:

- Shame
- Embarrassment
- Fear
- Stress
- Sadness
- Disgust
- Contempt
- Anger
- Disappointment
- Frustration

**Ask: "When do you think Jesus felt \_\_\_\_\_?" And invite ideas from the group.**

- Sad (When the rich young ruler rejected him, when his friends fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Lazarus died, when he wept over Jerusalem, when Peter denied him).
- Frustrated (When his disciples were afraid in the storm?).
- Betrayed (When Judas betrayed him).
- Angry (When he saw the market place in the temple).
- Disappointed (When only one leper returned to thank him, when his disciples showed lack of faith, when none of the disciples were willing to wash the others' feet).
- Abandoned (When his disciples left him, when he was dying on the cross).

Several of the negative emotions are helpful and protective. Frustration can encourage us to look for better solutions. Fear can help us to run away from danger and protect ourselves and those we love. Positive anger (righteous indignation) can give us the energy to stand up for someone who is being oppressed or bullied. Sadness can help us to grieve appropriately for someone or something we've lost, and to be comforted by those around us.

### Feelings that lift us up

- Work together in 2-3's or families to make a list of positive emotions and experiences that fill you up and 'recharge your batteries'.

- After a few moments stop the group and collect their ideas on a flip chart. Write one emotion or experience per group so that every group can contribute an idea. If you only have a few groups, do a few rounds to gather all the ideas.
- Distribute the handout, 'Happy, Healthy Emotions' which describes the top ten positive emotions as identified by Barbara Fredrickson, and includes supportive Bible verses.

Here are the main positive emotions. Make sure that all of these are on the list you have created:

- Joy
- Peacefulness,
- Love
- Hope/Optimism
- Fun and laughter
- Inspiration
- Being absorbed in something interesting
- Feeling good about a job well done
- Wonder
- Gratitude

**Ask: "When do you think Jesus felt \_\_\_\_\_?" And invite ideas from the group.**

- Love for others – all the time!
- A sense of wonder – when he saw the faith of the Canaanite mother. (Matthew 15:21-28).
- Thankful – when Mary poured perfume on his feet, when people shared food with Him.
- Peaceful – when He rested in the boat, or stayed with Mary and Martha.
- Inspired – when He spent time in prayer
- Joyful – when the Roman centurion believed and his servant was healed. (Luke 7:1-10).

Why do you think it is important for us to have these healthy emotional experiences, too?

### Emotions - invitations to connect

Our emotions are invitations for others to connect with us. Paul talks about this in Romans 12:15; "Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn."

**Say:** 'Think about a time when you experienced a moment of wonder on your own, such as seeing a rare bird, a wild creature, a rainbow, a sunset, the ocean, a butterfly, or even watching an ant or a bee.'

**Then say:** 'Think about a time when you experienced a moment of wonder with a friend or family member.'

How does a moment of wonder feel different when it's shared, and you can wonder together with someone else?

We love it when people laugh with us, and we feel more comforted when we're sad if there are people who stay with us and share in our sadness.

When we show fear, we're inviting others to protect us and help us to feel safe again. When we express disappointment we may hope that people will say something comforting and encouraging, or try to help us out.

In groups or pairs ask people to think about what they would like other people to do when they feel different positive and negative emotions:

- When we're angry we would like people to...
- When we're disappointed we would like people to...
- When we're frustrated we would like people to...
- When we're...

### Experiencing healthy emotions together

- Invite the group to move into the space where you have set up the interactive tables.
- It's helpful if families and couples visit the tables together, and any people without families can form groups of 2-3 people to explore the activities.
- The aim is for everyone to reflect on different healthy emotions, enjoy sharing them with each other, and begin to think how they could experience more of these positive emotions in their families and lives.
- Remind people how long they have for the activity.
- Remind them when they are half way through the allocated time, and when they are five minutes from the end.

### Positive emotion activity tables

This is an interactive part of the workshop, where people can experience some positive emotions in fun and simple ways.

The objectives of this section are to:

- Provide hands-on experiences about positive emotions.
- Encourage families and friends to talk about positive emotions and how to nurture them.
- Offer simple ways families and individuals can include positive and uplifting experiences in their every day lives.

### How to set up the tables

- Read through all the instructions below.
- Download/print off the activity table instruction cards.
- Gather the simple materials needed for each table – or delegate the different table preparations to various members of your team.
- If possible, set the tables up in a different room to the place where you will be presenting. But you can set them up around the edges of your room if you have one space to use.
- Set up the tables before the workshop to enable smooth transitions.
- Set up the peaceful area in a well-signposted but separate room from the main activities to preserve the serene atmosphere.

## 1. Nurturing Hope Making a hope candle

'FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,'  
DECLARES THE LORD, 'PLANS TO PROSPER YOU  
AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU  
HOPE AND A FUTURE.'  
JEREMIAH 29:11

### Needs:

- Stack of plain paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Paper scissors and marker pens
- Sample hope candle

### What you do:

- Take a sheet of paper and fold it in half vertically, to make a tall shape.
- Draw and cut the top of this tall shape to look like a candle by creating a flame and then rounding the top corners.
- Now you should have a folded card that looks like a candle.
- Fill it with Bible verses, experiences, encouragement and anything else that will give you hope when you feel discouraged.
- Keep it somewhere safe and add new ideas to it.

### Nurturing hope:

- What thoughts and memories keep you going when times are hard?
- How do other people help you to keep your hope nurtured and alive?
- Do you know anyone whose hope candle might be burning low? How can you encourage them?

## 2. Filled with Wonder

YOUR WORKS ARE WONDERFUL, I KNOW THAT  
FULL WELL.

PSALM 139:13,14.

### Needs:

- Beautiful natural items such as:
- Shells, stones, fresh flowers,
- Fruit and vegetables
- Feathers and safe seedpods
- Books of beautiful nature pictures.

### What you do:

- Choose an object from the table.
- Explore the object for at least 2 minutes.
- Find three things about the object that fill you with wonder.
- Introduce your objects to each other and describe the three things that fill you with wonder.
- Thank God for the millions of wonders hidden in His creation.

### Experiencing wonder everyday:

- Look for God's wonders wherever you go.
- Tell each other about the wonders you've discovered during the week.
- Keep a wonder journal.
- Share moments of wonder through your favorite social media channels.
- What other ideas do you have for experiencing more wonder together?

## 3. Feeling peaceful

PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU; MY PEACE I GIVE YOU.  
I DO NOT GIVE TO YOU AS THE WORLD GIVES. DO  
NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED AND DO  
NOT BE AFRAID.

JOHN 14:27

### Needs:

- Items to make a peaceful room
- Candles, pillows, Bibles, concordances, pens, index cards, peaceful pictures, soothing instrumental worship music
- Write peaceful Bible verses on index cards and leave them on the table before the activity.

### What you do:

- Enter the peaceful place quietly.
- Be still and remember that God is very close to you.
- Listen to what He wants to say to you.

- What helps you feel peaceful?
- What Bible verses fill you with peace?
- Write your favorite peaceful Bible texts onto index cards and leave them on the table for others to read and take away.
- Choose a Bible verse to take away with you. Read when you need to experience God's peace.

### Experiencing peace every day:

- Where do you go to find a peaceful place to be with God?
- What helps you feel peaceful?
- Which Bible verses do you find most soothing and helpful when you feel troubled?
- How can you find a place to be still with God for at least 5 minutes a day?

## 4. Appreciating each other

BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE. HONOR  
ONE ANOTHER ABOVE YOURSELVES.  
ROMANS 12:10

### Needs:

- Star-shaped sticky notes, large paper stars, or stars printed on plain copy paper
- Pens, pencils and erasers

### What you do:

- Pick up some paper stars.
- Write short notes of personal appreciation on the stars and give one to each person in your family or group.
- Think about the the kind and special things they do well. Think about their spiritual gifts and appreciate how they use them for God.

### Appreciating each other every day:

- Aim to say something specifically appreciative to each person in your family, or one of your friends or colleagues, every day.
- Make a list of some of the different ways you can show appreciation to each other, such as sending a text, writing a card, leaving a surprise message on a sticky note, giving them a tiny treat, telling them how much they mean to you.

## 5. Comfort

PRaise BE TO...THE FATHER OF COMPASSION  
AND THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT, WHO  
COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR TROUBLES, SO THAT

WE CAN COMFORT THOSE IN ANY TROUBLE  
WITH THE COMFORT WE OURSELVES RECEIVE  
FROM GOD.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

**Needs:**

- Small squares of colored paper, such as sticky notes, squares of craft paper, pages from a rainbow colored note-block, etc.
- Marker pens.
- Paper glue sticks.
- Plain copy paper.
- Optional - laminator and pouches.

**What you do:**

- Create a patchwork of colored paper squares. Do this on your own or with your family.
- Choose colored squares and write one comforting idea on each square of paper.
- Stick all your squares onto a sheet of paper to make a paper 'quilt'.
- Take your paper 'quilt' away with you as a reminder to provide warm comfort for each other when life is tough, sad and painful.
- You might like to laminate your 'quilt' or cover it with adhesive film.

**Experiencing comfort:**

- When did someone comfort you well?
- What did they do and say?
- How do you like to be best comforted?
- How do you know when someone in your family is sad and needs comforting?
- How can your friends and family tell when you are sad and need comforting?

**6. Gratitude**

GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THIS IS  
GOD'S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

**Needs:**

- 26 letter squares from a game, or a magnetic letter toy.
- A small fabric bag.
- Blank greeting cards, marker pens, collage materials and paper glue, etc.

**What you do:**

- Take turns pull a letter out of the bag.

- Think of at least 3 things to thank God for beginning with your letter. If you pick an 'X' think about words that begin with 'eX', as in 'excitement'.

**Optional:**

- If there are any card-making supplies on the table you can use to make a thank you card for God.
- Write Him a note thanking Him for all the things you are grateful for right now. Your card is like a prayer of thankfulness to Him. He sees and knows what you have written to Him.

**Experiencing gratitude everyday:**

- Talk about all the things you have to be thankful for.
- Say thank you to someone else every day.
- Keep a thank you diary and write at least three things you're thankful for every day.

**7. Inspiration Trophies**

FINALLY, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHATEVER  
IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS NOBLE, WHATEVER  
IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER  
IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE - IF  
ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT OR PRAISEWORTHY -  
THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

**Needs:**

- Plain paper.
- Marker pens.
- Pencils and erasers.

**What you do:**

- Think about someone who inspires you.
- It might be a family member, a friend, a famous person, a missionary, a Bible character.
- Design a trophy for them. Perhaps you could create a shape that expresses what you find inspiring.
- Write their name on the trophy, and the reasons why and how they inspire you.
- Show your trophies to each other and talk about the people who inspire you to develop your character and nurture your spiritual gifts.

**Being inspired:**

- What inspires you most?
- What have other people inspired you to do?
- How do you find inspiration when you need it?
- How can you help to inspire each other?

## 8. Interesting...

THE WIFE OF NOBLE CHARACTER IS ONE WHO PURSUES HER INTERESTS AND DEVELOPS HER SKILLS WELL.

PROVERBS 31:10-31

### Needs:

A variety of interesting and absorbing activities such as:

- Bible and nature puzzles
- Interesting photographic books
- Interesting books and Sabbath activities for children
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Appropriate crafts, such as cards and bookmarks, etc.

### What you do:

- Look at the puzzles, books and activities on the table.
- Choose something that you find interesting and explore it.

### Talk about it:

- What are the positive activities that you enjoy doing that make you lose all sense of time? E.g. Bible study, hobbies, reading, gardening, running, being creative.
- Why do you think it's good for us to learn new skills, be creative and do interesting things?
- What are the positive activities you do that make you feel better when you have had a tough day?

## 9. Being kind

BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE TO ONE ANOTHER. EPHESIANS 4:32.

### Needs:

- Plain paper
- Marker pens
- Pencils and erasers

### What you do:

- Draw around your hand on a sheet of paper.
- On the palm of your hand outline write about a time someone was especially kind to you. What did they do and how did their kindness make you feel?
- On each finger write one thing you could do to be kind to someone else in the next month.
- Make a specific plan to carry out these special acts of kindness.

### Everyday kindness:

- Apart from dying to save us, what are the different ways that Jesus showed kindness to others?

- How can you be kind to everyone you meet?
- How do you feel when you have been kind?
- Being kind to others is one of the best ways to experience the joy and peace that Jesus wants us to experience, and it helps other people to feel happy too.

## 10. Smiles and Laughter

THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING, AND A SEASON FOR EVERY ACTIVITY UNDER THE HEAVENS...A TIME TO LAUGH.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1,4

### Needs:

- At least 10 pictures of amusing animals

### What you do:

- Look at the pictures of the funny animals.
- Which one do you think is the funniest?
- Work together with your family or friends to arrange these pictures in order from the least funny to the most funny.

### Experiencing laughter

- What makes you laugh most – is it funny animals, funny stories, funny movies, being tickled, having a happy time with your family?
- Can you guess what makes the other people in your family laugh most? Or what makes your friends laugh?
- How can you help other people smile and laugh more often?
- Tell each other about something funny that happened to you.

## 11. Love

I CORINTHIANS 13

### Needs:

- Sheets of plain paper
- Marker pens
- Pens
- Pencils

### What you do:

- Draw a large heart on a plain piece of paper.
- Inside the heart write all kinds of things that people do that make you feel loved.
- Then circle them in different colors:
- Doing something kind and thoughtful – blue
- Saying kind things – red

- Giving you something – green
- Spending time with you – orange
- Hugging you – brown
- Making you feel very special – purple
- Something else – black
- Look at the colors you have used for circling and see which ones you used the most.
- Look at the loving actions that the rest of your family have circled most. What can you learn about showing love to each other from doing this activity?

#### **Talk about it:**

- Tell each other about a time when you felt especially loved by them or someone else.
- Complete the sentence... ‘The most loving thing anyone could do me for me this week would be to...’

## **12. Experiencing Joy**

A HAPPY HEART MAKES THE FACE CHEERFUL.  
PROVERBS 15:13

#### **Needs:**

- Large sheets of flip chart paper or wall paper
- Or a large white board
- At the top of the paper or board write the phrase, ‘I feel joyful when...’
- Marker pens or white board markers

#### **What you do:**

- Encourage everyone in your group or family to talk about the times when they feel happy and joyful.
- Invite them to write something that helps them to feel joyful on the paper or white board.
- Invite small children to draw pictures of the things that make them feel joyful.
- If you use paper you can create a joyful poster together that you can keep and pin on a bulletin board.

#### **Experiencing joy:**

- When have you felt really happy recently?
- What was happening?
- Why do you think you felt so happy?
- How could you experience more of these happy moments, and how could you share more of this happiness with other people, especially those who are sad and lonely?
- Thank God for every moment of sheer joy.

## **Balancing healthy emotions**

### **HELPING CHILDREN (AND OURSELVES) WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**

#### **Show by example**

The most important way for children to learn about feelings and how to express them is by watching their parents and other adults. We can help them to better manage their emotions by showing our feelings, talking about our own emotions, and managing them appropriately. If you're sad, tell your child you're sad, explain simply why you are sad, and then tell them what you plan to do to help you feel better. Or if you're angry with your child, calmly tell them that you are feeling angry, why you're feeling angry, and what you and your child can do together to mend the situation. This helps your child know how to name and express their feelings by talking rather than by having tantrums.

#### **Develop an emotional vocabulary**

You can help children to develop an emotional vocabulary even before they start to talk! But any time is a good time. When we have words to describe our feelings we can tell each other what we are feeling instead of sulking or throwing tantrums. Use words to describe what your child might be feeling. ‘You're looking sad. It's sad to say goodbye when we have to leave our friends.’ ‘It's very frustrating when your little brother pulls your train set to pieces. It can make you feel quite cross inside. Here, let me help you fix it again.’

#### **Respond to the feelings under the behavior**

Instead of ‘reacting’ to your child's misbehavior, respond to the negative feelings that are fueling their actions. Keep in mind that most of a child's behavior is an expression of their emotions. When they are calm and happy they will play peacefully and happily. When they are distressed, and don't know how to talk about it, they are much more likely to hit out, smash toys, kick, scream and yell. As a parent it is so easy to focus on the behaviors rather than the feelings. So we might become angry with the child, and that will only add to their distress and the complex emotions they are trying to manage, and make it more difficult for them to calm down and talk. But if you see Tammy throwing her toys around, or about to hit her little brother, ask yourself: ‘I wonder if Tammy is feeling sad, lonely, frustrated, hungry or tired?’ When you have

thought about why Tammy might be feeling distressed you could say something like: “Tammy, it looks to me as if you might be feeling a bit sad because your tower fell down? Is that right?” Tammy is more likely to calm down when she feels understood and when she feels close to you.

### **Asking and listening**

Ask people about how they feel and listen to what they have to say. Don't tell them they shouldn't have those emotions. Put yourself in their shoes, understand and accept their feelings. This can help them to manage their difficult feelings better. If they sense that you don't understand their feelings, or that you're critical, this can add to their distress and make it even harder for them to manage their emotions. So rather than saying to your child: 'Don't fuss about not going to Tommy's party. I'm sure there'll be other parties soon!' you might say: 'You're disappointed that Tommy didn't invite you to his party. I know how sad it feels when your friends leave you out of their fun.'

Invite people to talk when you think something is bothering them. 'It looks as if you might be worried about something. Would you like to talk about it?' Listen to them carefully, and then help them to find their own solutions. Ask them about their ideas for solving the problem and help them to think about what would work best. This teaches them to manage their fears and worries

### **A little understanding goes a long way**

It's important to let your child or friend know that you understand their feelings. Knowing their feelings are understood can help them to calm down a little. It can also help them to feel supported and cared for. Once they know their feelings have been accepted and understood, you may be able to lead them to think about another time when they managed their negative emotions well. 'I can see that you're beginning to feel a bit scared about going to your swimming class. Remember a couple of weeks ago when you felt scared, and then you stopped being scared when you remembered how much fun you had playing the ball game in the water? I wonder what fun things the teacher will do today?'

### **Catch them managing their emotions well**

Tell your child when you've noticed how well they are trying to manage their emotions. When you notice their efforts and give them positive feedback, they know they are on the right track and they feel motivated to manage their emotions well next time. Say things like, 'I noticed how still you were when the big dog bounced up to you. I

think you were trying really hard to be brave.' 'Well done for staying calm and not getting angry with your sister when she scribbled on your picture.'

### **Set clear limits**

Sometimes, however hard we try, children can become overwhelmed by their feelings, and they may hit out or yell, or behave in unsafe or inappropriate ways. When this happens, acknowledge their feelings but set clear limits. 'I know that you're really angry that we can't go to the park today, but it's not OK to throw your toys around.'

### **The power of distraction**

Help your friends, family members and children to distract themselves when they are bothered about something. Doing a puzzle, making something, reading a happy book, helping with the dinner, going for a walk with you, or even just having a drink of water can help them to feel calmer again and focus on something else. (Philippians 4:8).

### **No shame**

Never shame someone for having negative emotions, or tease them about being afraid. Treat them with respect and don't call them names when they are angry, sad or afraid, such as Hothead, Crybaby or Scaredy-Pants. It's very important that children don't grow up believing that negative emotions are wrong, because this will add extra guilt and shame onto their heavy pile of difficult and complex feelings. They will be less likely to tell you when they are struggling with their negative feelings if they have been teased or rejected when they expressed them in the past. If they don't feel able to talk about their emotions they may hide them and not let you know when they really do need your emotional support. (Romans 12:10).

### **Be honest**

When you know your child is going to experience pain (e.g. when having a shot or a blood test) tell them it will hurt. Otherwise they may experience more distress and an increase in negative emotions when they discover that you lied to them. They will also learn not to trust what you say about emotions, feelings and pain. Try saying something like: 'You are going to have an injection soon. I am very sorry that it will hurt a bit, but probably only for a little while. Because it will hurt, I am going to be here with you to help you feel better, and I'll hold you until the pain goes away again.'

### **Be aware**

Stay closely connected to each person in your family. Notice if someone is withdrawing socially, eating

differently, looking sad, struggling, becoming irritable, or behaving in ways that are causing you concern. It may be enough to notice, listen, care, support and help them to experience more positive emotions. But if you become increasingly concerned, or if they remain sad or stressed for more than a few days, it's important to seek help from your doctor, a counselor, a guidance teacher, pastor, etc.

## **Nurturing positive emotions**

### **Model happiness**

Show your child how to enjoy positive emotions by the way you live and speak and act. Express your thankfulness, look for the positive things in life, laugh and smile; take time out to calm down and recharge your energies, talk about your faith in positive and hopeful ways, share answers to prayer, be kind to others, share moments of wonder. Discover what nurtures your positive emotions, blend them into your life, and they will naturally spill over into the lives of your children and become part of their lives and attitudes.

### **Variety**

Give plenty of opportunities for yourself and your children to discover what nurtures each of your positive emotions. Everyone is different, and they need to explore a wide range of activities and hobbies to find what they enjoy the most and to discover their own unique gifts and talents. Help each person find the activities that inspire him or her and make them feel peaceful, loved, hopeful and happy.

### **Be kind**

One of the best 'medicines' for depression is to make other people feel happy too. Help your child think of different ways they can be kind at home, at school, at church and within your local community. When they have kind ideas, help them put their ideas into action. (Luke 6:35).

### **Laughter**

A cheerful heart is good medicine. (Proverbs 17:22). Laughter also opens our minds to new possibilities. So having fun helps our brains to learn more easily, to find creative solutions to our problems, to make friends, to create a happier life, and to build our resilience. Find out what makes each person in your family laugh, and get him or her laughing before you help them to learn something new, or before they leave the house in the morning. Create your own crazy, funny rituals to help distract each other from difficult feelings.

### **Happy memories**

Encourage your friends and family to remember happy times. Make the most of your happy memories by making photo albums, looking at photos together, making memory jars filled with things collected during a vacation, drawing pictures about happy times, writing stories about them, or creating a positive journal of happy memories. Happy memories can help us through sadder times. Thank God for the happy memories. (Psalm 105).

### **Peace and quiet**

Help everyone in your family find some quiet space and time where they can be still and think. Lives can be very busy today and we all need space to recover by finding a quiet place to pray and reflect on feelings and experiences. It can even help to plan a quiet time for everyone in the house. Perhaps it can be before or after family worship. Try to have one place in your home where you can sit and be still without being distracted by the media, or things that need to be tidied. Play soothing music, give each other hand or back massages, or even blow bubbles, because breathing in deeply, and blowing out slowly helps to relax the body, and bubbles tend to fill us with a few moments of wonder and playfulness too. (Psalm 46:10).

### **Be grateful**

Nurture thankfulness in yourself and your child. Find things to be thankful for as often as you can. You can look for things to be thankful as you drive or walk along the road, as you move from room to room in your home, as you think back on the day, or when you sit down to each together. Encourage children to say thank you as often as possible, to write thank you notes, and to make thank you cards for people. Try to thank one new person a week. Maybe it's the neighbor who has planted a lovely flower garden, or the nurse in the doctor's surgery, or the person who picks up the litter down your street. (Psalm 107:1).

### **Choose to be inspired**

Inspire yourself and your children by reading biographies or watching documentaries about inspiring people, such as David Livingstone, Dr. Ben Carson, and other famous missionaries, leaders, or people who overcame incredible challenges. If possible, take your children to concerts, science festivals, art galleries, and other places where they can be inspired by great human achievements. Study and explore the lives of great people in the Bible. Make this fun and creative and look for the faith and character strengths that enable God to use these people in amazing ways. (Hebrews 11).

### Make a positive list

List all the things that make you or your child feel positive and blessed, and blend them into your lives as often as possible. Pause to enjoy the positive emotions whenever they happen, and thank God for them. These positive emotions will help you live your lives more abundantly, and help you to be stronger, more hopeful and more resilient when you face life's challenges. (Psalm 103:2).

### Checking in

It's important to check regularly how you and everyone else in your family are feeling. This will help you to know if someone might be struggling, feeling sad, or feeling overwhelmed by too many negative and draining emotions. If someone seems to be staying at a low level for more than a week it's a good idea to keep a close eye on them, and help them to find positive ways to feel better.

- Some families check in every day around the dinner table.
- Some check in once a week on Friday nights.
- Some families prefer to do this at bedtime.

Find out what works best for you and your family.

### Lows and highs

Invite each person to describe the lowest moment of his or her day. It will usually be a time when they experienced one of the negative or draining emotions. After they describe this moment, invite each person, or one person, to respond to them in a kind, caring and understanding way. Then invite each person to describe the best or the highest moment of their day. This will usually be a time when they experienced one of the healthy, positive emotions. Celebrate and be happy with them! Share in their moment of wonder and joy!

### The Happy Scale

Draw or print a line with a scale from 0-10, where 0 is very, very unhappy and 10 is very, very happy. With younger children it may be easier to make the scale from 1-5 instead. Use the scale to ask everyone to measure how he or she is feeling. Then ask what they think will help them get to the next highest number, and how you could help them to move higher up the happy scale.

### W.W.W. or What went well?

At the end of the day, at bedtime, or during the evening meal, ask each person: "What went well today?" Then ask them: "What did you or other people do to help it go so well?"

You could also ask: "What didn't go so well today?" Acknowledge and comfort the difficult emotions, and then ask: "What did you learn from that experience? And what might make it work better next time?"

### Colors

Create a small collection of solid-colored buttons, paper or felt squares or circles, or even paint cards/chips. Include every color of the rainbow, plus black, white, grey, teal/turquoise, dark brown, tan, and even gold, silver and pearly ivory. Scatter them on the table. Let each person choose a color to represent how he or she have felt during the day. Invite each person to say why he or she chose that color. Respond to each person's story with interest and compassion.

### Daily Gratitude

At the end of each day ask person to say three things from the day that they are most thankful for. Write them all on a calendar or diary and encourage people to be grateful for small and unusual things, too.

## THINKING ABOUT IT

How do your family check in with each other emotionally, and which of these ideas would you also like to try?

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### Closing activity and reflections

- Distribute the handouts that help people to think about how to have more positive and healthy emotions in their own lives and families. Allow time for them to begin filling them out.
- Ask people to share a couple of key insights and inspirations they have had during the workshop with a partner or family member.

### Closing prayer

Close with a prayer thanking God for our emotions. Ask Him to help us nurture our own positive emotions as well as those of the people in our families, schools, churches, workplaces and communities.

### Reference

Frederickson, G. (2009). *Positivity*, New York, Crown Publishers.

## Healthy, Happy Emotions

These are the top ten positive emotions identified by Barbara Fredrickson and described in her book, 'Positivity'.

Emotion	Description and Bible verses
Laughter / Amusement	Enjoying the positive humor of funny situations and experiences, laughing with other people, not laughing at other people's distress. A cheerful heart is good medicine. Proverbs 17:22. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...a time to laugh. Ecclesiastes 3:1,4.
Awe and wonder	A sense of amazement at the beauty and intricacy of God's creation and artistry. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:13,14.
Thankfulness	Being grateful for the gifts we receive from God and other people, and for the good things in our lives. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thess. 5:18.
Hope	Believing that things can change for the better, especially when things are difficult right now. 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Jeremiah 29:11, NIV.
Inspiration	Being inspired by God's love and wisdom. Being inspired by the great and noble acts of other people. Being motivated to reach higher goals. Philippians 4:8. Psalm 104 (inspired by God's works).
Joy	Having a sense of pure delight and happiness. A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit. Proverbs 15:13.
Interest	Being curious and wanting to discover more about something, learning something new, or losing yourself in a positive or creative activity. Proverbs 31:10-31 The wife of noble character is one who pursues her interests and develops her skills well.
Feeling valued and appreciated	Knowing that you have done a job well, and that God and other people appreciate what you have done, too. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Eccl. 9:10 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Col. 3:23.
Serenity	Feeling still, peaceful, calm and content. Being free from stress, worries and fear. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 1 John 4:18.
Love	Feeling warm, safe and close to another person who cares about you. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

## Experiencing healthy and positive emotions in my own life

Healthy and positive emotion	I could experience more of this healthy and positive emotion in my life by...
Fun & playfulness	
Awe & wonder	
Thankfulness	
Hope/optimism	
Inspiration	
Interest	
Joyfulness	
Delight in a job well done	
Serenity/peacefulness	
Love	

### Experiencing healthy and positive emotions in our family

Healthy and positive emotion	We could experience more of this healthy and positive emotion in our family by...
Fun & playfulness	
Awe & wonder	
Thankfulness	
Hope/optimism	
Inspiration	
Interest	
Joyfulness	
Delight in a job well done	
Serenity/peacefulness	
Love	

### Children's Worksheet - My feelings

Write or draw when you feel happy, sad, angry and loved

I feel most happy when...	I feel sad when...
I feel angry when...	I feel loved when...

# Exceptional Families, Exceptional Needs: Creating Awareness of Members with Disabilities in our Church Family

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER WITH LUANA GREULICH

## The Text

“AND BEHOLD, SOME MEN WERE BRINGING ON A BED A MAN WHO WAS PARALYZED, AND THEY WERE SEEKING TO BRING HIM IN AND LAY HIM BEFORE JESUS, BUT FINDING NO WAY TO BRING HIM IN, BECAUSE OF THE CROWD, THEY WENT UP ON THE ROOF AND LET HIM DOWN WITH HIS BED THROUGH THE TILES IN THE MIDST BEFORE JESUS.”  
LUKE 5:18, 19

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## Theme

Many individuals with disabilities report feeling marginalized in their communities of faith. However, these individuals and their families also report that their faith and church community play an important role in their ability to cope with everyday life. Thus, pastors, members, and the church family as a whole need to develop awareness, compassion, and an accommodating spirit for the members who have disabilities in our church family.

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## Introduction

It is estimated that ten percent of the total world's population, approximately 650 million people, live with a disability. This number is expected to increase as the population ages. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (part of the United Nations) reports that approximately 75 million children are excluded from education due to poverty, gender inequity, disability, child labor, speaking a minority language, being an indigenous person, or living nomadically or rurally. As such, individuals with disabilities are often among the most disadvantaged in their own communities.

A disability can be classified as mobility, mental or visual impairment, speech limitations, deafness whether visible or invisible (Kaufman-Scarborough and Menzel Baker 2005). In other words, being disabled means your ability or capacity is challenged or the disability interferes with typical life activities. The more appropriate term is exceptionality due to the negative perception that an individual who has a disability is disabled; an individual with an exceptionality sounds more positive. Moreover, when one hears the word disability there is a tendency to think of someone in a wheelchair, a person with a guide dog, or other outwardly visible impairment. However, there are those who have disabilities that are not visible or not easily detected such as the person who is hearing impaired, legally blind, or is on the autism spectrum.

Although, people with disabilities comprise a significant group in society, we still tend to think it is an uncommon occurrence or we are uncomfortable with the notion. Of course there is a precedent for such thinking in society in general and in the church. Individuals with disabilities can be traced back to ancient civilizations (i.e. Egypt, Sparta, Rome, China, and the early Christian world), however, documentation of history spans only the last 300 years. Historically in society, people with disabilities have been

viewed as weak, outcast and stigmatized. During Bible times people with disabilities were often thought to have committed a great sin, seen as demon-possessed or “unclean”, needing to be separated from other humanity (Treloar 2000). Today, however, a socio-political perspective for disability emphasizes creating a more adaptive environment that is suitable for people with disabilities. Religious organizations, primarily the church, are well poised to establish such an environment for those who live with disabilities.

### Small Group Activity (10-15 minutes)

**Note:** Facilitator can do one or both activities (Language impaired or Hearing Impaired) as time permits.

#### “CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?” (Hearing Impaired Activity)

##### Materials Needed:

- Disposable Foam Ear Plugs
- 3x5 Note Cards
- Pencils/Pens

##### Activity:

Facilitator distributes a set of ear plugs, note cards, pencils or pens to participants. Participants are asked to put earplugs in ears. Facilitator turns away from participants and reads a list of 10 words for participants to write on notecards. Facilitator asks participants how many words they wrote on their cards.

**List of words:** • Base • Mess • Cause • Mop • Good • Luck • Wag • Rain • Love • Knock

**Debrief:** Participants share how they felt and what they experienced during the activity. Imagine how someone who is hearing impaired may feel during the worship service.

#### “WALKING IN EXCEPTIONAL SHOES” (Activity for Language Impairment or Learning Disabilities)

##### Activity:

- Write your name in cursive for 1 min.
- Now switch and write your name for 1 min with the opposite hand.
- How many times did you write your name legibly.
- Now look at the next slide\* and read the words on the slide, now read them as fast as possible.
- Now look at the same slide and read the color that the word is written in.

##### What can we do?

- What do we know about working with individuals with disabilities?
- They communicate differently.
- They learn differently.
- They see things differently.
- They cope differently.
- Be careful.
- Expectations are everything-just because individuals have a disability does not mean that they are disabled.

**Note:** Facilitator can access the slide :“Walking in their shoes Small Group Activity” in the disc provided with this Planbook.

## “Walking” In The Shoes of the people with disabilities — From Awareness to Compassion

In Luke 5:18,19, we see men finding a way to bring a paralyzed man to hear messages of hope being shared by Jesus. Several things come to mind when we read this text. First, the compassion and concern the men showed towards the disabled man. They seemingly put aside any negative stigma of associating with one who may have been seen as “unclean” or demon possessed and how it would compromise their social status. We also see incredible faith being displayed, on the part of the men and the paralytic man, “and when He [Jesus] saw their faith”

(v. 20), he forgave them their sins and healed the paralytic man.

Perhaps these men had already heard one of Jesus’ messages and were so transformed, they believed that Jesus could do the same for the paralyzed man. Their excitement must have been so palpable that a man who had been paralyzed, perhaps since birth, was given hope of the possibility of being healed. But the emphasis here in this seminar, is not solely on the faith and the healing of the paralytic, but the compassion shown by these men. As soon as we accept Jesus, we are called to be disciples, and the evidence of our faith is seen in our works—our love for one another (John 13:35).

### Small Group Activity (10-15 minutes)

#### “WE ARE THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT”

##### Materials Needed:

- Ball of Yarn
- Scissors

Divide participants into groups of 8-10 people and each group forms a circle. Facilitator holds ball of yarn and wraps one end of yarn around index and middle fingers. Instruct participants to give name and share a few things about self (eg. My name is Sally and I am from Singapore. I have been married for 20 years and have two daughters, etc.)—facilitator shares first. If another participant hears something that is the same as the speaker’s experience, they call out “me too” and the speaker throws the ball of yarn to that person (if two or more people respond choose one to throw yarn to). When the next person catches the ball of yarn, they tie the yarn around two fingers and then share name and experience. Continue until everyone in circle has shared at least once, but as time permits, participants could share a few times. At the end there should be a web of yarn connecting all the participants to one another. Have participants pull back on their end of the web or string and feel how connected they are to one another. Have participants move a few steps inside the circle in see how web is loosened or weakened.

Debrief possible themes:

- We are all connected in some way
- We are more alike than we are different
- We don’t need to be afraid of our differences—we are still united despite our differences
- Our connections make us more aware of our different needs
- We are stronger as a community when we recognize our responsibility to one another
- The community is weaker when we are not committed to one another

**Note:** If there are participants who are disabled and unable to participate without assistance, the facilitator can assign another participant to be a “buddy” or helper.

Individuals with disabilities and their families need the compassion shown by the men in this Bible story. Had the story been written today, more than likely it would have included women. As such, all who are a part of the church are called to come into an awareness of the needs of the those who live with a disability. Contemporary research affirms that faith is an integral part of the human experience. For many living with a disability, faith is elemental in their lives and they consider their faith tradition as a stabilizing force (Speraw, 2006). Many people with disabilities report using their spiritual beliefs as an adaptive resources and as a way of finding meaning for their disability. Like other believers, they too, want to glorify God with their lives and want opportunities to be of service within and outside of the church. People with disabilities are just like non-disabled people: “we are the same, but different”.

### Moving Beyond Compassion

“IF YOU JUDGE PEOPLE YOU HAVE NO TIME TO LOVE THEM.”

MOTHER TERESA

While people with disabilities and their families see the church as essential in the development and nurturing of their spiritual beliefs, many believe that the church is limited

in its ability and readiness to minister to their needs. Thus it is essential that the church move from compassion to finding ways to better meet the needs of the members with disabilities of the family.

We can approach this from a family systems theory perspective. A system can be defined by an identifiable whole that is made up of several interrelated parts (Balswick and Balswick, 2014). Looking at the church through a systems approach allows us to see the dynamics at work in the (church) family and how they influence others in the family. Families are best understood as interconnected and interdependent that cannot be understood in isolation. Every member has a responsibility to the “family” as a whole.

So how can the church family better meet the needs of our “family” members who live with disabilities and their families? How do we move beyond compassion and become more inclusive of all in the church family? We begin by following Jesus’ example of ministering to the disabled—He noticed them, prayed for them, and ministered to them.

Let’s visualize a framework of moving from awareness, to compassion, to ministry/family inclusion.

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Illustration 1



We start with acknowledging one another; become aware of our similarities and differences. Some people with disabilities believe that non-disabled people are afraid of people with disabilities—afraid of their differences and afraid of making a mistake in relating to them. Awareness allows us to step outside of our comfort zone and acknowledge others in our

surrounding. It is a fallacy to believe that we should ignore another person’s differences—that is not diversity sensitivity. There is nothing wrong with telling someone that they have on a pretty yellow shirt even though your shirt is white. It becomes egregious if we treat someone differently because they have on a yellow shirt or if we ignore them because

they are not wearing the same color shirt as one's own. In acknowledging others, we affirm them and begin to celebrate the similarities and differences between us.

From awareness, we are moved to compassion. Compassion does not mean pitying or feeling sorry for the other person. Compassion is feeling empathy for another person who is dealing with challenges along with feeling a deep desire to help alleviate their suffering. In some ways our compassion actually pushes us to awareness which in turn pushes us back to compassion. Ellen White says in *Acts of the Apostles*, "Divine love makes its most touching appeals to the heart when it calls upon us to manifest the same tender compassion that Christ manifested."

Our compassion then moves us to ministry or family inclusion. Once we become aware, and show compassion, ultimately we need to transition into ways in which we can accommodate members with disabilities in the family and/or better meet their needs. When Jesus healed the

disabled man, He told him, "rise, take up your bed and go home" (Luke 5:24). The newly healed man immediately did what Jesus told him and then went on to "glorify" God. He and those who brought him went on to share with others the "extraordinary things" they had experienced (v.25). The same should be true of those of us who profess to be Christians. When we have had an encounter with the Savior, we are thus propelled, not only to share the good news of God's healing powers and deepen our faith, but to put our faith to work

### Ministry to Members with disabilities of the Church Family

Our intention in this seminar is to create awareness, deepen compassion, and begin thinking about the special needs of members in our church family who are disabled in some way or another. We are not giving steps on how to start a disability ministry, however, this resource can serve as a precursor to starting a disability ministry in your church. Illustration 2 is a mind map that can serve as a launch pad for ministry to members with disabilities and their families.

Illustration 2



## Small Group Activity (10-15 minutes)

### “WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”

Divide participants into groups of 8-10. Select a recorder and/or spokesperson for the group. Have the group identify what disabilities each church has in its membership. Discuss/describe each disability while recorder is taking notes.

Display a powerpoint slide of the mind map in Illustration 2. Have each group brainstorm about what else should be added to the mind map. What changes or additions are needed at your church in order to minister to the needs of members who are disabled, especially those identified. What does the church need to do better to accommodate these disabilities? Ideally, there would be members with disabilities in attendance. Be sure to listen to their voices and let them assist in helping to provide better services for them.

Debrief with the entire group. Have each group spokesperson share ideas from group.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Oliver, W & E. (2015). *Real family talk: Answers to questions about love, marriage and sex*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, p. 32.
- <sup>2</sup> White, E. G. (1952). *The Adventist home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 105.
- <sup>3</sup> Stanley, S. M. (2005). *The power of commitment: A guide to active, lifelong love*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 23.
- <sup>4</sup> White, E. G. (1952). *The Adventist home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 15.

### Additional Resources

North American Division

Disability Ministries:

<http://www.nadadventist.org/article/1073742476/ministries-services/ministries/disabilities-ministries>

Real Family Talk with

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Season 4:  
<http://realfamilytalk.hopetv.org>

# A Christian Perspective on Watching Secular TV Programming

S. JOSEPH KIDDER & DAVID PENNO

## The Text

“FINALLY, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS NOBLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE--IF ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT OR PRAISEWORTHY--THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

influences how they view the world and shapes their perception of God. Although a few families have opted to eliminate the viewing of all TV programming, this is becoming more difficult with the proliferation of media. So Christian parents need to both manage TV program viewing in their homes, and teach their children how to manage their personal viewing habits. Parents can lead the way by modeling this in their own homes.

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## Introduction

This article is designed to help parents educate their children how to manage the viewing of television (TV) programming from a Christian perspective. We will address the viewing of TV programming through the various media available today. Although people use the traditional TV set less, research indicates that they watch more programming via a variety of sources (TV sets, iPads, internet, etc.). The principles addressed in this article also apply to movies in the theater, videos on YouTube, and other visual media.

Television programming has a powerful impact on the minds of children today. It

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## Research on Viewing TV Programming

According to research conducted by the University of Michigan Health System in 2010<sup>1</sup>, on average, children ages 2-5 spend 32 hours a week watching television broadcasts, DVDs, DVR recordings, videos, and using game consoles. Kids ages 6-11 spend about 28 hours a week in front of the TV. The researchers also reported that 71% of 8-18 year-olds have a TV in their bedroom. Media technology now offers more ways to access TV content via the Internet, cell phones, iPads and tablets; today 41% of TV viewing is through these alternative avenues. This has led to an increase in time spent viewing TV content, even though watching on a traditional TV set has declined. So there is an even greater need to manage the TV viewing of children.

The same study found that in “53% of households of 7th-12th graders there are no rules about TV watching.” Also, many parents encourage their toddlers to watch television as a pseudo baby

sitter. Yet TV viewing has been shown to hinder brain development, increase aggressive behavior, and lower school performance among children.

All of this would strongly suggest that Christian parents should manage TV watching in their homes, if they have young children. These children should not be exposed to such a powerful influence without responsible control and supervision. Parents who want to raise their children to walk with God will plan accordingly.

### **Biblical Principles**

When dealing with Christian moral and social ethics, it is not enough to evaluate the scientific evidence for and against something; we must also understand those findings in view of the biblical principles and values. Christians must have a commitment to examine the scriptures to identify the basic spiritual values that should inform moral and ethical situations.

Since the Bible does not mention television and its programming, we must search for some guidelines relating to the Christian lifestyle that can be helpful in determining what should be the Christian's attitude and behavior toward television programs. The Christian should be guided by these principles as they decide whether to watch a particular television program or not.

The Bible exhorts Christians to be careful about what enters their minds and thoughts. Paul encourages us to focus our thinking in what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good reputation. (Philippians 4:8). So any TV programing we choose should bring into our minds that which is pure and uplifting, and will aid in our spiritual development. The apostle also states that what we allow to enter our minds changes us. "But we all... beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed in the same image." (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christians need to be careful about what influences their thinking because they will eventually emulate what they watch.

Ellen White describes how Christians should focus their thinking on Jesus: "God desires men and women to think soberly and candidly. They are to ascend to a higher and still higher grade,

commanding a wider and still wider horizon. Looking unto Jesus, they are to be changed into His image. They are to spend their time in searching for the deep, everlasting truths of heaven.... And as they learn of Him, their motives and sympathies become firm and unchanging."<sup>2</sup>

So how should Christian families relate to secular television programming in the home? We will first explore if the worldview of secular television conflicts with the Christian worldview, and then we will describe some principles and practices that can help believers manage the impact of secular programs on their families.

### **Secular Worldview vs. Christian Worldview Television and Secular Thought**

William Johnsson, in *Meeting the Secular Mind*, indicates that a secular mind-set is a polar opposite of the philosophy of a Christian. He states that millions of Americans go to church, but that is rarely displayed on television. "Millions of people pray—but rarely on television. Many people make decisions based on Christian principles—but television overlooks them. On television, people seem to go to church only for a wedding or a funeral. Sometimes church provides the setting for comic interlude. Clergymen tend to be portrayed as inept, blundering, or 'prissy'—sometimes as cheats and liars."<sup>3</sup>

God is rarely mentioned in a positive way on television, although in actual life many people follow him faithfully. In fact, most of the people in the United States believe in God and turn to Him in prayer either regularly or occasionally. "Many will honestly and genuinely voice desperate prayers in situations of fear or extremity. But movies censor out this reflection of real life more often than not."<sup>4</sup>

The worldview and secular environment portrayed on television is influencing Christians; it is virtually impossible to avoid it. Without knowing it or even feeling it, spiritual values may be discarded to embrace those of the secular mind. People may be faithful churchgoers and follow the patterns of the Christian life; but within themselves they have become secularists.

People of influence in the TV industry are attempting to change the worldview of viewers. Ken Matto cites the following:

“If we can start changing attitudes in this country, we can start changing behavior” Grant Tinker, Former Chairman of NBC TV.

“Objectivity is a fallacy...there are different opinions, but you don’t give them equal weight” Robert Bazell of NBC News.

The Lichtman Rothman survey of media leaders concluded that “of today’s leaders...90% favor abortion...91% favor homosexuality...and only 14% attend any kind of church.”<sup>5</sup>

Constant TV watching can shape the Christian to think in secular ways. So we must manage what we watch because it influences our thinking.

### Television and God

Perhaps the biggest problem with television is not violence, profanity, or sex, but the absence of God. People on television seem to live, solve their problems, plan for the future, marry, and raise kids without reference to God.

One study published in 1994 assessed “the portrayal of religion on fictional prime time network television; they proceeded to determine the frequency and distribution of religious affiliation, the range of religious behaviors, and the valence (positive or negative), salience (importance), and context (humorous or serious) of the religious behaviors engaged in by speaking characters.”<sup>6</sup> The researchers reviewed 100 episodes over five weeks. They found that “the religious side of characters’ lives is not typically presented on television”. Analyzing 1,462 characters, the researchers found that 5.6% had an identifiable religious affiliation. “Religious activity was infrequently presented. When it was portrayed, it was rarely a central theme in the story-line and it was most often framed as a personal and private activity. This study concludes that the infrequent presentation of religion and spirituality tends to symbolically convey the message that religion is not very important because it is rarely a factor in the lives of the people on TV or the social setting in which they are portrayed.”<sup>7</sup> Though this study was

done in 1990, few would argue that today secular television offers a more positive or accurate view of religion. Indeed, it seems to be worse.

Others claim that TV alters how we perceive reality as Christians. Television facilitates a visual experience that is a highly reinterpreted experience from an artificial perspective. This simulation becomes our own new reality. We abandon the natural world created by God in favor of the one recreated by man. Negative emotions, violence, and carnage get the viewer’s attention faster and hold it longer than the positive, the peaceful, or the beautiful. Therefore, TV focuses on the former, making the latter appear as unusual and infrequent in real life.

Constant television viewing could contribute to Christians becoming people who are blown away by every wind of doctrine and unable to distinguish fact from fiction.<sup>8</sup>

### Television and the Myths of the World

Television programming portrays a certain reality and a version of life contrary to the Christian way of life. Television often tells us that happiness can be obtained primarily by material possessions, popularity, or power.

Adults and children see people on television that are beautiful, drive fancy cars, live in magnificent homes, wear the best clothes, and live every imaginable life style in full autonomy, and frequently without accountability for any behavior.<sup>9</sup>

Television and its programming suggest that certain human characteristics, such as being wealthy, good-looking, or physically strong, are the only ways to be successful in society. The Bible, on the other hand, affirms that what matters in life is to know God and to walk with Him (see 1 John 1:6). The message of the Bible is loud and clear: once a person receives God’s gift of grace and salvation, God leads believers to focus on eternal spiritual matters above transitory worldly attachments. Consequently the imitation and mastery of television behavior become the standard by which we can assess success and failure of where we are on our spiritual journey.<sup>10</sup>

Parents frequently work long hard hours at jobs they dislike to acquire luxury while they

drown in massive consumer debt. This workaholic syndrome leads to strained family relationships and divorce. Failing to achieve the computerized and synthesized beauty found in the television world is viewed as a tragedy so profound that young and old alike drift to eating disorders, develop neurosis, and practice self-medication in order to cope.<sup>11</sup>

As children watch television they become products of an image factory that tells them how to behave toward their parents and peers. They are also told what to want, what to ask for, what to expect, and even what to demand from others. It is no wonder that some young people have such a profound sense of entitlement. They come to believe the world should give them many luxuries as a birthright; that parents should pay for cars, clothes, and college; that the latest fashion is what is acceptable; that the beautiful people are more valuable than the average, that good Christians can look and act like Beyoncé, Miley Cyrus, Justin Timberlake, or “gangsta” rappers with no moral dilemma; that junk food is the primary food group for most people, or that a happy meal will make you happy.<sup>12</sup>

Gerbner and Gross, from the University of Pennsylvania, have discovered that heavy television viewers have opinions about the world that differ from factual reality. They see the world as having more professionals, athletes, entertainers and detectives than it really has. They think society is more affluent than it is. They see the world as more dangerous than it is and, as a result, are more fearful than light viewers or non-viewers.<sup>13</sup> This causes young people to desire the lifestyle of the rich and famous, while creating fear that controls important aspects of their lives.

### **Television and Christian Moral Values**

Jerry Mander, a former president of CBS television, in his controversial book *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, states that television does not lie sometimes, but all of the time. It lies in its portrayal of life, in its reporting of the news, in its solution to complex problems, and in its debasement of accepted moral values. On the one hand, television legitimizes prejudice, dishonesty, and selfishness; on the other hand, it glorifies perversion of sex, drugs, drinking, and smoking.<sup>14</sup> This constant

corruption of the truth will ultimately influence all and will have a profound effect on morality, way of life, and relationship with God.

Paul affirms that Christians are transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:1-2). Reinforcement is important in the process of developing attitudes toward right and wrong. Parents must know how to make competent ethical decisions based on Christian values and principles, and then teach their children to do the same. Parents must be aware that television is another authority figure that can work against this process.

### **Christians Management of TV Viewing**

Is there any place for television in the Christian home? Many see the potential for good in spite of the problems, yet for some Christians the answer is no. There is no simplistic and clear-cut answer to the problem. Moreover, many of those who object to the presence of television do it theoretically, while in practice they watch television programming and allow their children to do the same. So there is a need for guidelines to help families practice a Christian approach to watching secular TV programming.

### **The Control of Television**

Most Christians will continue to view TV programming in their home and elsewhere, and allow their children to watch it. Children must be taught to manage properly what they are exposed to. Television is no exception. It is important that when families choose to have a television, they show and teach children how to manage its viewing. When parents are involved in helping their children understand the nature of television and how to view it with a critical mind, children seem better able to differentiate between real people, realistic characters, and fantasy characters.

Here are some suggestions for those that keep a television in their home.

### **Limit Viewing Time**

An effective means of reducing television consumption among children is to limit its use. This can be done in two ways. One way is to

forbid all television viewing on school days. This removes the pressure on children to rush through homework to watch their favorite programs. Another option is to permit the children to watch television during the week, but restrict its use to a maximum of an hour or two a day. Parents can implement such a plan, provided they present their children with wholesome activities to fill the hours formerly devoted to television. In fact, for most children, a rich social life is more fulfilling and rewarding than television consumption.

### Evaluate the Television Content

Unless we want to leave TV as a medium that applies to our emotions, we must find ways to interact intellectually with what TV delivers. It is the Christian's responsibility "to maintain an informed, critical approach to all media while determining how best to use every medium for the glory of God."<sup>15</sup>

David Marc, an American Civilization professor, offers a provocative outlook by relating that the "distinction between taking television on one's own terms and taking it the way it presents itself is critical. It is the difference between activity and passivity. It is what saves TV from becoming the homogenizing, monolithic, authoritarian tool that the doomsday critics claim it is."<sup>16</sup> We must view TV with an active mind that responds with a Christian worldview. We are responsible for what TV communicates to us.

Here is a list of questions to help the Christian evaluate perceptions of the mass media. It would be helpful to all who wish to leave a television in their home to give some serious consideration to these questions.

1. Does the presentation contribute to the understanding of worthwhile ideas?
2. Does the presentation help to clarify issues of the times?
3. Does the presentation attempt to put the richest thoughts into the clearest language?
4. Does the presentation maintain a balance between emotional and intellectual appeals?
5. Does the presentation accurately portray normal life expectations?
6. Does the presentation draw upon elements of violence, substandard language, or sexual implications to make its point?

7. Does the presentation give evidence of being produced tastefully, thoughtfully, and with some finesse?
8. Does the presentation foster a greater understanding of others and encourage the viewer to treat them with kindness?
9. Does the presentation advance or perpetuate the spiritual values for which one stands?
10. Could the viewer recommend the presentation to a fellow Christian?

### Set an Example

No matter what restrictions parents put on their children regarding to television, they do little good unless the parents have learned to control their own desire to watch television. Children learn from example. "It serves no purpose for a parent to forbid his child from viewing television while he continues to watch without remorse. Such hypocrisy teaches the child to disregard other parental commands."<sup>17</sup> Parents must model for their children proper TV viewing habits.

Many of us need to decide prior to spending time with the medium. This should be done not only for ourselves, but also for our children and grandchildren. Perhaps a good rule for turning on the tube is to "map out" what may be worthy of our attention each day. This means that we will have to spend a few minutes to read about what is available. This will prove beneficial. Instead of automatically activating the power switch as part of a daily routine, regardless of what may be "on", selectivity should be routine.<sup>18</sup>

Here are some suggestions for managing TV viewing:

1. If you do watch, insist on good shows that cultivate good character and moral values.
2. If possible, have only one television set in the house. Do not keep it in a prominent place. When not being used, cover the set or put it away if it's portable.
3. Carefully select programs that will be interesting and informative to the whole family. Do this ahead of time to eliminate random, spontaneous selection. Don't rely on the set as a diversion too often as it will become habitual. Don't let younger children turn on the television without permission.
4. After watching a program, discuss what was

seen with the family. Encourage Christian discernment by asking whether or not the show would have been pleasing to God. Show your children that they have a right and duty to evaluate, not just passively accept, what the TV program offers them. Their standards are those of Jesus Christ and His church in all aspects of their lives.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

We have examined some of the biblical principles and challenges as they relate to the effects of television viewing. Since most Christians will continue to have a television and allow their children to watch it, we propose that parents should control and manage the viewing of television programming by their children. This can be done by limiting time, evaluating the television content, and setting an example.

A good place to end is with the advice of the apostle Paul to the Philippians, “And now, my friends, all that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable—fill all your thoughts with these things.” (Philippians 4:7-8).

## How to Use This Article

Below are some suggestions how parents can use this article:

1. Ask the child to discuss the pros and cons to watching TV programming.
2. Have children describe possible alternatives to TV that they would enjoy.
3. Discuss with children how what we allow into our minds will influence us for good and for bad.
4. Parents can discuss biblical principles presented in this article with their children.
5. Review the content of this article with their children.
6. For older children, have them write a review of this article.
7. Show benefit of controlling TV programming viewing.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Boyse, K. (2010) *Television and Children*. Retrieved from <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv.htm> Accessed 05/29/2014
- <sup>2</sup> White, E. (1958). *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, Washington, DC: Review and Herald, p. 172.
- <sup>3</sup> Johnson, E. (1985). *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives*, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 17-18.
- <sup>5</sup> Matto, K. (n.d.) *The Dangers of Television*. Retrieved from [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/dangers\\_of\\_television.html](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/dangers_of_television.html). Accessed 05/29/2014
- <sup>6</sup> Skill, T & Robinson, D. (1994). *The Portrayal of Religion and Spirituality on Fictional Network Television*, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 35, No. 3, March, p. 251.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Kappelman, T. (2002). Retrieved from [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217905/k.A431/We\\_Are\\_Television.html](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217905/k.A431/We_Are_Television.html) Accessed 05/30/2014.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>17</sup> Schwantes, D. (1979). *Taming Your Television and Other Media*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, p. 114.
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Signs of TV Addiction	
1	You record TV shows that are on the same time the one you are watching.
2	You watch a program with the anticipation of seeing a sinful act, and enjoy it when it comes.
3	You eat your dinner in front of the TV.
4	You neglect your spouse or family time for a TV show.
5	You look forward to a TV show, but you easily neglect spiritual activities.
6	Your conversation is replete with TV reviews and anecdotes.
7	TV replaces your Bible reading, devotion time, or family worship.
8	No one is allowed to speak while the TV is on.
9	You rush home so you will not miss a program.
10	You watch TV late into the night consistently.
11	When company visits, the TV remains on, and you wish they would leave.
12	You let TV do your thinking for you.
13	You turn the TV on the moment you enter a room, or when you awaken in the morning.
14	The TV is on when you are doing your chores.
15	You laugh at the very sin that sent Christ to the cross.
16	You begin to adopt ideas and attitudes contrary to Scripture.
17	You go nowhere but have become a couch potato.

# Building Your Marriage on the Rock

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

## The Text

THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS  
FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD  
FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL  
BECOME ONE FLESH  
GENESIS 2:24

44

## NOTE:

Use sermon by Olivers in this planbook "Rock or Sand builders" as a useful reference for this seminar

## Introduction

Weddings are beautiful, delightful and blissful occasions. When a couple stands at the altar, holding hands, gazing into each other's eyes, reciting their vows, they have so much promise and so much hope. Every couple believes their love is so special and their bond so strong, they will remain together "in sickness and in health".

The reality is that most couples will end up on one of three paths: couples who stick, couples who are mostly stuck, or couples who simply stop (S. Stanley, 1998). In the United

States and in many countries of the world, 40 to 50 percent of first time marriages will eventually end in divorce.<sup>1</sup> What happens to the vows of staying together "until death do us part"? Is it that those making the vows didn't take them seriously? Or is there a lack of true understanding of what the vows really mean. In addition, it seems that as couples hear about the high failure rate of marriage, they are watering down their marriage vows. Some vows now say, "as long as we both shall love" instead of "shall live". It would appear that some couples are setting their expectations lower just in case they are not able to live up to such a high level of commitment.

With this daunting reality, how does a couple stay married for a lifetime, and happily so? How does a couple in today's society build a marriage that is rock solid and not one that washes away with the sand?

## The Science of Love and Relationships

Most of us have heard about or have experienced first-hand *falling in love*. At least that's what it is called in contemporary society. That giddy, butterflies in the stomach, rush of feelings we get when we meet someone we are powerfully attracted to. The truth is that this is not really love it's just the body's natural response to the neurochemicals that are being

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pumped into the brain when we meet someone that we find attractive. We prefer to call it “*falling in like*” or infatuation. Another truth is that this response is not sustainable with the same person unless we are intentional about connecting positively on a daily basis. The powerful force that connects us at the beginning begins to wear off once we stop all doing all the wonderful things we did at the beginning of the relationship and we have to negotiate the daily cares of life. Because we are wired (by God) to intimately connect with another human being, when the romantic feelings dissolve, we believe we have fallen *out of love*.

In the article “*The Power of Love*”, Sue Johnson (Johnson, 2016) states that new science is revealing how essential romantic love is to human beings. Sociologists and psychologists are also finding how this love works, why it goes wrong, and what couples can do to make it last longer. Their findings reveal that from ancient times, humans have had the need to connect with someone and this need provides trust, safety and security. Its opposite is isolation, which is coded in our brains as dangerous. Furthermore, these findings on love reveal that a life partner is often our only or most reliable source of support, comfort, and intimacy. In this age of growing isolation and loneliness, even scientists agree that now more than ever, people need to be in “forever” committed relationships and evidence suggests that it is possible to sustain the romantic bonds for a lifetime.

## God and Marriage

At the end of creation week, after God had finished creating the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the animals, the man, He looked at everything and “behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:30). According to the Genesis account, everything was perfect—all but one thing—the man, Adam, was alone. Thus God declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). Earlier, we said that new advances in social science have revealed that loneliness and isolation are dangerous and

detrimental for our well-being. To be sure, it takes science a while to catch up with God, and it is very gratifying when it happens.

God created human beings to be in relationship with Him first and then with others. When He created Adam, and then Eve, He knew that humankind would need the kind of relationship where trust, safety, openness, and closeness could thrive. This is the definition of intimacy or the oneness that God talks about in Genesis 2:24, 25, “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” God also knew that this high level of intimacy would require a deep vulnerability that would be quite risky without a covenant, so he instituted marriage. Marriage provides the safety of a covenant, a mutually binding agreement that is not found in other replicas of this institution, including cohabitation and consensual partnerships.

Sadly, in Genesis 3, we see the effect of Adam and Eve’s sin on marriage and family relationships. The beautiful admiration, mutuality, and oneness of the first couple gave way to defensiveness, blame, hostility, separation and selfishness. However, God himself provided restoration, hope and healing for humankind through His son Jesus Christ, including restoring His original design for marriage. In the book, *The Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White says this:

LIKE EVERY OTHER ONE OF GOD’S GOOD GIFTS ENTRUSTED TO THE KEEPING OF HUMANITY, MARRIAGE HAS BEEN PERVERTED BY SIN; BUT IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL TO RESTORE ITS PURITY AND BEAUTY... THE GRACE OF CHRIST AND THIS ALONE, CAN MAKE THIS INSTITUTION WHAT GOD DESIGNED IT SHOULD BE—AN AGENT FOR THE BLESSING AND UPLIFTING OF HUMANITY  
WHITE, *ADVENTIST HOME*, 100.1, 2.

The feeling of *falling in love* is a beautiful thing. But relationships are dynamic and they are

always changing. Thus, in spite of how deep this love seems, is it based solely on a feeling and an extremely shallow level of commitment that will eventually fade or dissipate. However, with much effort, time, commitment and willingness to keep going, it is possible to grow and sustain (or reignite) a love that can be satisfying and stable for a lifetime.

### Covenant Commitment in Contemporary Times

As we study scripture, the bible consistently points us to a creator God who longingly pursues His children with an everlasting love (Isaiah 54:5). In the Old Testament God invites the children of Israel to be His people and covenants with them to be their God. This covenant love is a love that endures, renews, forgives, and restores (2 Chronicles 7:14). In the New Testament God speaks about His relationship with His people as a marriage—thus elevating marriage as a symbol of the union of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32). This is the biblical model for Christian marriage and family relationships. If we are going to do marriage and relationships the way God intended, then we must have a Christian worldview. We must understand and follow the ways of God.

In marriage, spouses have the capacity to mirror God's covenant love to one another. Commitment that lasts a lifetime requires this type of covenant love. We can love our spouse unconditionally because we experience unconditional love from God (1 John 4:9, 10). In the book, *A Model for Marriage*, Jack O. Balswick and Balswick (2006) posit that covenant love goes beyond loyalty to marriage as an institution and surpasses the need for self-fulfillment. Covenant love is a *"promise to sacrifice for the sake of the relationship"*. It is a commitment to care for the needs of each other, nurturing the relationship, and upholding the institution of marriage.

Covenant love and commitment requires an interdependence that goes against the individuality of our postmodern times. It also requires an egalitarian or mutuality that

challenges traditional notions of marriage which resulted in legalistic and inflexible relationships. It is a lifelong commitment to investing in the marriage and holding on to the investment in good and bad times.<sup>2</sup> When couples are intentional about spending quality time together doing joint activities, they learn to depend on each other, and this deepens their level of commitment.

### Rock and Sand Marriage Builders

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus shares the parable of the man who built his house on solid rock and the man who built his house on the sand.

THESE WORDS I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS TO YOUR LIFE, HOMEOWNER IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR STANDARD OF LIVING. THEY ARE FOUNDATIONAL WORDS, WORDS TO BUILD A LIFE ON. IF YOU WORK THESE WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A SMART CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT—BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK. BUT IF YOU USE MY WORDS IN BIBLE STUDIES AND DON'T WORK THEM INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A STUPID CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SANDY BEACH. WHEN A STORM ROLLED IN AND THE WAVES CAME UP, IT COLLAPSED LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.  
MATTHEW 7:24-27 MSG

This parable compares the building styles of two men, a wise man that built a house that was able to weather the heavy storms, and a foolish man who built a house that collapsed when the storm rolled in. Jesus then pointed out that those who only read His words but don't practice them in their lives will not be able to weather the storms of life. The analogy to marriage is clear—couples that obey God's word and apply them to their relationship will have a marriage that remains strong when the inevitable storms of life hit. Christian marriage is a marriage built on the Rock—the Rock Jesus Christ.

A marriage built on the sand is based on an immature covenant and conditional love. It is dependent on temporary institutions such as career success, materialism, personal fulfillment, partner performance, and other worldly values. If and when one spouse feels the other spouse or the marriage is no longer meeting their needs, or one loses a job, or there's a financial crisis, the marriage is so badly shaken by these storms that it eventually dissolves.

## Building Your Marriage on the Rock

When marriage is built on the Rock it provides a strong foundation for covenant commitment, trust, and intimacy to grow and thrive. This kind of marriage is based on a mature covenant and unconditional love and is fully possible through the power of Jesus Christ (Phillipians 4:13). God gives us His strength to remain faithful to our commitment in marriage and He provides guidance through His word to build a rock solid marriage. We offer below, five essential building steps for your marriage.

### 1) Build your marriage on covenant love

LOVE IS 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; IT DOES NOT REJOICE AT WRONGDOING, BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER ENDS. AS FOR PROPHECIES, THEY WILL PASS AWAY; AS FOR TONGUES, THEY WILL CEASE; AS FOR KNOWLEDGE, IT WILL PASS AWAY.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8 ESV

This is the kind of love that Christ has for us and it is how we are to love each other in marriage. Covenant love is unconditional love, it is agape love; it continues to love even when one feels like giving up. Jack O. Balswick and Balswick (2006) share this:

COVENANT LOVE AND COMMITMENT ARE WHAT GIVE SPOUSES THE ABILITY TO COUNTER THEIR HUMAN IMPULSE TO GIVE UP AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE. OUR COVENANT PROMISES THAT WE AS SPOUSES STAY ON EQUAL FOOTING AND PERSISTENTLY WORK OUT DIFFERENCES AND DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE.

Covenant love requires understanding each other's needs and being willing to sometimes practice self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Covenant love requires much energy and sacrifice but keeps us determined to creating the best marriage possible.

### 2) Accept each other's faults and imperfections

In marriage we must learn to value one another and accept that not one of us is perfect. We're talking about having a marriage filled with grace. The wonderful thing about grace is that it is undeserved, you can't earn it, but love and acceptance is given anyway. All of us have received grace from God, and it is through His power that we can offer grace to our spouse (Jack O. Balswick & Balswick, 2014). When there is grace in the marriage, it creates an atmosphere that goes beyond guilt and shame, and sets the stage for growth and renewed commitment in the relationship

IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE HAVE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS. BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
1 JOHN 4:9,10, ESV

LET EACH GIVE LOVE RATHER THAN EXACT IT. CULTIVATE THAT WHICH IS NOBLEST IN YOURSELVES, AND BE QUICK TO RECOGNIZE THE GOOD QUALITIES IN EACH OTHER. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEING APPRECIATED IS A WONDERFUL STIMULUS AND SATISFACTION  
WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME, 107.3

### 3) Listen, Listen, Listen to each other

Good communication in any relationship is like water and sunshine is to a healthy lawn. Good listening is like the fertilizer that will go deep beneath the surface to nourish and enrich the soil. In most relationships when there's a complaint it is because some needs are not being met—voices are not being heard. Couples who communicate well understand that active listening is an essential ingredient in their marriage.

Active listening means listening not only with your ears, but listening with your eyes and with your heart. It is the kind of listening that conveys to your spouse that you are more interested in hearing what they have to say than defending yourself and stating your point. In the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, Dr. Stephen Covey says, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood". Once again we see self-denial, another essential ingredient for marriage to last for a lifetime.

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LET EVERY PERSON BE QUICK TO HEAR,  
SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO ANGER.  
JAMES 1:19

When each person in the marriage feels heard and understood, the couple draws closer to each other, intimacy increases and commitment to one another and the relationship is strengthened

### 4) Forgive often

*The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) has this definition of forgiveness: 1) to stop feeling angry towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake; 2) no longer feel angry or wish to punish; 3) to cancel a debt.

Forgiveness paves the way for healing and reconciliation in every relationship.<sup>3</sup> In marriage, both individuals will inevitably hurt one another. When we forgive we give up our perceived right to punish or retaliate for the wrong that has been done to us. When we fail to forgive, bitterness and resentment increases in the relationship. Forgiveness

releases us from these feelings. Forgiveness in essence is for the forgiver more than for the forgiven (Smedes, 1984).

BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER AND,  
IF ONE HAS A COMPLAINT AGAINST  
ANOTHER, FORGIVING EACH OTHER; AS  
THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN YOU, SO YOU  
ALSO MUST FORGIVE.  
COLOSSIANS 3:13

It is only through God's power that we have the capacity to forgive.

Forgiving is a choice. When we choose to forgive, we honor God. Choosing not to forgive reinforces barriers between husband and wife, and it also builds barriers between us and God (S. M. Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 2013).

CHRIST WAS TREATED AS WE DESERVE  
THAT WE MIGHT BE TREATED AS HE  
DESERVES. HE WAS CONDEMNED FOR  
OUR SINS IN WHICH HE HAD NO SHARE,  
THAT WE MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED BY HIS  
RIGHTEOUSNESS, IN WHICH WE HAD  
NO SHARE. HE SUFFERED THE DEATH  
WHICH WAS OURS, THAT WE MIGHT  
RECEIVE THE LIFE WHICH WAS HIS.  
"WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED."  
WHITE, THE DESIRE OF AGES, 25.2

### 5) Hug more

Most couples can hardly wait to get married to enjoy the physical benefits of marriage. But as daily life takes over and the giddiness wears off, as we said earlier, we forget to do the things we did at first. Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily. When we hug or touch each other, the hormone oxytocin is released. Oxytocin is the hormone that increases our bond to another person; it also lowers blood pressure and reduces stress. So there are many benefits we can glean from a simple hug. We encourage couples to hug for a minute every morning before parting from each other, and every evening when they are reunited.

COME MY BELOVED, LET US GO OUT  
INTO THE FIELDS AND LODGE IN THE  
VILLAGES... THERE IT WILL GIVE YOU  
MY LOVE.

SONG OF SOLOMON, 7:11,12B

DETERMINE TO BE ALL THAT IS POSSIBLE  
TO BE TO EACH OTHER. CONTINUE  
THE EARLY ATTENTIONS. IN EVERY WAY  
ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER IN FIGHTING  
THE BATTLES OF LIFE... 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.  
WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME, 106.2

If couples integrate these building steps into their marriage, they will build a marriage on the Rock and fortify it to weather the storms of life. They will also experience the joy and satisfaction that God plans for every Christian couple. Ultimately God intends for us to be drawn closer to him; He wants to make us holy. Far beyond our own joy and personal happiness, Christian marriage is for us to glorify God and be representatives of His grace and love here on earth.

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM  
WHO STRENGTHENS ME.  
PHILLIPIANS 4:13

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Divorcestatistics.org, and Eurostats.org
- <sup>2</sup> This statement refers to people who are in relatively healthy relationships. It is not referring to people who are in abusive relationships or dealing with infidelity. Those who are experiencing such trauma in their relationship should consult with their pastor or a qualified Christian counselor.
- <sup>3</sup> We again reiterate that this seminar is for people who are in relatively healthy relationships. It is not referring to people who are in abusive relationships or dealing with infidelity. Those who are experiencing such trauma in their relationship should consult with their pastor or a qualified Christian counselor

## Downloadable PowerPoint®

To download the Microsoft PowerPoint® seminars and handouts please visit our website: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2017>

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# Growing Characters for Eternity

KAREN HOLFORD

## The Text

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE,  
JOY, PEACE, LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS,  
GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS  
GALATIANS 5: 22

Happy and simple ways to grow your child's character (as well as yours!). An interactive parenting seminar.

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## Materials needed:

- Bibles
- Flip chart paper or large sheets of paper
- Marker pens
- Pens or pencils for participants
- Copies of the Character Strength Bible Verse handout
- Copies of 'Exploring Character Strengths' worksheet – one per small group of 3-4 people
- Handouts of 'Creative ways to nurture your child's character' to give to parents at the end of the seminar

## Prayer

Open with prayer, praising God for His infinitely wonderful character. Invite the Holy

.....  
**Karen Holford**, MSc, MA is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in St Albans, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

Spirit to work in the space between your words and the hearts of the listeners, so that each person hears what God wants him or her to hear today.

## Introduction

We have often referred to character traits as if people are born with or without them, or as if we either have them, or we don't have them. It can be more helpful to describe character traits as 'strengths'. Then we can strengthen our characters, and the characters of our children. By finding ways to practice these different character strengths, develop them, and use them in different contexts, just as we would strengthen our muscles.

## What are character strengths?

CHARACTER STRENGTHS ARE DURABLE,  
FUNDAMENTAL QUALITIES THAT DESCRIBE  
US AT OUR BEST.  
EADES, 2008

Character strengths are positive qualities and values such as generosity, kindness, creativity, patience, humility, etc. It is encouraging to define character strengths as 'qualities that describe us at our best', because, when we think about our own characters, we often focus on the times when we have failed and messed up. So we tell ourselves: "I can't really describe myself as generous because of the time when I walked past a beggar in the

street and didn't give him any money.” We can easily use these challenging moments as evidence to disregard our character strengths, which can be discouraging. It is especially discouraging for children when we think and talk about them and their character strengths in this way.

But when we redefine character strengths as descriptions of ourselves at our best, and focus on what we have achieved in our most inspired and shining moments, then we can feel more encouraged to grow and nurture our strengths, and to become more like Jesus.

### Exploring God's Character

We will start by focusing on God's character, because then we will discover the kinds of character strengths that we need to develop to become more like Him.

#### THERE ARE TWO CHOICES OF ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOUR GROUP EXPLORE GOD'S CHARACTER.

Choose the one that will work best for your group and context. If there are lots of children present they may enjoy God's character alphabet. If you have plenty of time you can read Psalm 145 as a scripture reading, list the characteristics in the chapter, and then do the alphabet activity as a large group or in smaller groups.

#### God's character revealed in the Bible

- Invite someone to read Psalm 145 aloud to the whole group, as people follow along in their own Bibles.
- Then invite people to work in small groups, or families and to list all the character strengths of God that are revealed in this chapter, and at least three other character strengths that are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.
- Give them some examples to help them get started, such as loving, kind, trustworthy, gracious, etc.

- Allow a few moments for them to make their lists.
- Then invite each group in turn to name 1-2 character strengths that they found in Psalm 145 and 1-2 character strengths from elsewhere in the Bible.
- If possible, write this list of character strengths on a flip chart for everyone to see.

#### God's Character Alphabet

- Give each group a large sheet of paper and a marker pen.
- Ask them to write the alphabet down the left side of the paper, one letter per line.
- Then invite them to use the alphabet as a prompt to help them list all the characteristics of God that they can think of. It is even possible to find some character strengths for the more challenging letters: for X use words beginning with eX, such as eXcellent, for Q - Quieting or Questioning, Z - Zealous, Y - Yearning, etc. (One group of children found more than 200 words to describe God's character!).
- Allow 5-10 minutes for the activity.
- Then invite feedback. If there is time, ask groups to call out one character strength for each letter, rotating through the groups. So group 1 would call out a characteristic of God beginning with A, group 2 would call out one beginning with B, group 3 C, and so on till you have one for each of the letters.
- Take a few moments to reflect on what the group has discovered about God's character as this activity often fills people with a sense of praise and wonder.

#### Developing character strengths

Let's look at what Peter says about developing character strengths in 2 Peter 1:5-8.

MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ADD TO YOUR FAITH, GOODNESS; AND TO GOODNESS, KNOWLEDGE; AND TO KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL; AND TO SELF-CONTROL, PERSEVERANCE; AND TO PERSEVERANCE, GODLINESS; AND TO GODLINESS, MUTUAL AFFECTION; AND TO MUTUAL AFFECTION, LOVE. FOR IF YOU POSSESS THESE QUALITIES IN INCREASING MEASURE, THEY WILL KEEP YOU FROM BEING INEFFECTIVE

AND UNPRODUCTIVE IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE  
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. 2 PETER  
1:5-8, NIV

**ASK: WHAT DO THESE VERSES  
HELP US TO UNDERSTAND  
ABOUT CHRISTIAN  
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT?  
(INVITE THE GROUP TO  
REFLECT AND RESPOND WITH  
2-3 IDEAS.)**

**Reflecting on your own character  
strengths**

We all have character strengths. Some of our strengths will be less developed than others, but we all have them to some degree.

- What do you think are some of your top character strengths? If you are not sure what they are, ask yourself what your spouse or child might describe as your top character strengths.
- Write down three of your main strengths, and then think about the different ways in which they have been strengthened in your life.

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Perhaps they were strengthened by:

- Prayer
- Experiencing the transforming power of God in your life
- Everyday life experiences
- Unexpected and challenging life experiences
- The encouragement and nurture of other people
- Persevering towards your goals
- Other experiences...

What have you learnt about how your character has been strengthened that can help you to nurture other character strengths in yourself, and character strengths in children and others?

**Nurturing your child's character**

The main keys to nurturing your child's character strengths are giving your child small, fun and interesting opportunities to use their character strengths; exploring character strengths in family

conversations and worship times; noticing when your child is using one of their character strengths and responding positively to their actions; and having intentional conversations about character strengths.

Here are some ways you can put these into action:

- Create a list of character strengths. Use the list in the handout as a starting point, and add other strengths and values that you consider important.
- Once you are aware of a variety of character strengths you are more likely to create opportunities for your child to develop their strengths and to notice when they are using their character strengths. If you are not aware of these strengths then you could easily miss some useful opportunities to help you and your child to grow these strengths together.
- Help your child to choose one or two character strengths that they would like to work on. It's best to help them towards their goals rather than telling them what to work on.
- Pray that you and your child will grow more of this character strength.
- Use family worship to explore the character strengths in all kinds of ways. We will learn more about this later in the seminar.
- Help your child to make a list of things they could easily do at home, school, church and in your neighborhood to develop this character strength.

**Nurturing character strengths  
through intentional conversations**

It is also important to have intentional conversations about character strengths. It will help you and your child if you have these conversations regularly. Some families will do this every day and some will do it once a week.

Here is a sample outline for an intentional conversation about character strengths. Pick and choose different elements for variety, and to suit your child and your family context.

- Which character strengths did you use today?
- What happened when you chose to use your strength?
- Today I saw you use (name the strength) when

(describe what happened). I was so proud of you for choosing to do that/working so hard/being so patient, etc.

- Today I worked on (name the character strength you worked on during the day). And this is what happened... (by sharing your experience you are encouraging your child, and showing that character development is a lifelong process.
- Today I noticed (name a person) working on their (name a character strength). Who did you see working on their character strength today?
- Tomorrow I would like to work on (name a character strength) because...
- What character strength would you like to work on tomorrow?

### **Nurturing character strengths through family worship**

Character strengths make interesting, practical and inspiring topics for family worship times. Here are some simple ideas you can use in your family worships:

- Choose a character strength that you would like to develop as a family.
- Pray for inspiration and ideas about how God wants to nurture this character strength in each one of you, and in your family.
- Think of the times when God and Jesus used this character strength.
- Wonder about the other characters in the Bible who demonstrated this character strength. Research their stories, looking for clues about how they developed and nurtured their character strength.
- Search for Bible verses that speak about this strength or give positive illustrations of it.
- Think of creative and interesting ways to learn some of these Bible verses together.
- Search for inspiring autobiographies, video clips and short stories about Christians who have developed this character strength, including stories of Christians from around the world today. Read the stories to your children and show them suitable video clips.
- Make a list of all the ways you could practice this character strength as a family. Then choose at least three activities to do together that will help you all nurture this character strength.

- Design posters, bookmarks, and other objects that will encourage you all to use this character strength.
- Share some of the things you make with other people, to inspire them to develop character strengths too.
- Create a family journal together about the character strength. List the Bible verses and stories that inspired you, and the activities you did together. Include photos of some of your activities, and any themed artwork you have made.
- Encourage other families to join you, so that you can create shared worships and activities that will help you to develop your characters.
- In what other ways could character strengths be used to help you create positive themes in family worship?

### **Exploring a character strength**

We will explore some of the character strengths and create a rich resource of character strengthening ideas and activities for the families in our church and community.

- Form small groups of three to five people.
- Each group will be given a worksheet to help you explore a character strength, and to list ways to nurture this strength in children, young people and families.
- You will have 15 minutes to research, discuss and share ideas for nurturing your allocated character strengths through family worship activities, everyday experiences and practical family activities.
- Hand out the worksheets, and the list of character strengths and Bible texts.
- Allocate a different character strength to each group so that you receive a wider selection of ideas.
- Allow 15 minutes for group discussion and the gathering of ideas.
- Call the larger group together and invite each group to share their character strength and two to three of their best ideas.
- Gather all the worksheets together and find the best way to share the information with your wider group. Place them on a bulletin board, in a folder, or ask someone to type them up neatly so you can share the document.
- If there were some character strengths that were not explored by your group, you could

invite people to work on them at home and to return the ideas to you.

### Optional family activities

If you have children at the seminar, you might like to organize some family activities that will help to nurture character strengths. Some ideas and instructions for a few of these have been provided in this seminar pack.

If you plan to use these activities you will need to copy a few instruction cards for each table and gather the simple supplies needed for each activity. Arrange each activity in a different area of the room, or at a different table depending on the size of your group.

Invite families to find an activity that interests them and to try it out together. Allow families 20-30 minutes to explore the activities.

When you call the group together after the activities, encourage people to share feedback on the activities – what they enjoyed and what they learned together. If you have time, leave the activities so that families can try them after the seminar, too.

### Reflecting on the seminar

At the end of the seminar invite the participants to reflect prayerfully on their learning, asking God to show them what He would like them to take away from the seminar.

Then invite them to reflect on the following questions and to write down their answers for their private inspiration:

- The new things I have learned today about nurturing character strengths are...

- Three things I would like to do to nurture my own character strengths are...
- I will do this by...
- Three things I would like to do to nurture my child's/family's character strengths are...
- I will do this by...

### Wrap up

Invite people to share some of their insights, ideas and goals in response to what they have learned and experienced during the seminar.

If there are any questions, encourage the group to help answer them with their ideas and experiences.

### Closing prayer

Close with prayer, praying that each parent, child and family will nurture their character strengths and grow more like Jesus every day.

### References

- Eades, J. F., (2008). *Celebrating Strengths*. CAPP Press
- Habenicht, D., (2000). *10 Christian Values Every Kid Should Know*. Pacific Press.
- Moments A Day*. Retrieved from <http://www.momentsaday.com/100-kids-activities-to-build-character/>

### Downloadable PowerPoint®

To download the Microsoft PowerPoint® seminars and handouts please visit our website: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2017>

# HANDOUT #1

## Some Character Strengths And Related Bible Verses

Love	1 Corinthians 13:4-8
Kindness	Ephesians 4:32
Desire to learn	Proverbs 1:5
Humility	Matthew 23:12
Fairness	James 2:1
Thankfulness	1 Thessalonians 5:18
Forgiveness	Ephesians 4:32
Enthusiasm	Colossians: 3:23
Appreciating beauty everywhere	Psalms 104
Bravery	Joshua 1:9
Caution	Ephesians 5:15-17
Humor and laughter	Proverbs 17:22
Honesty	Philippians 4:8
Creativity	Ecclesiastes 8:10
Perseverance and patience	James 1:12
Self-control	Galatians 5:22-23
Friendliness	Proverbs 17:17
Spirituality	Micah 6:8
Teamwork and cooperation	Psalms 133:1
Wisdom	James 1:5
Generosity	2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Spaces for other character strengths


## Exploring a Character Strength

Character strength:

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Bible verses about the character strength:

---

Bible characters who demonstrated this character strength:

---

Contemporary examples of people using this character strength:

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Creative ways to explore this character strength during family worship:

---

Practical opportunities and activities for developing this character strength in children and young people:

---

Creative ways to use this character strength as a family to share God's love with others:

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Any other creative ideas or thoughts about this character strength?

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# HANDOUT #3

## Creative Ways To Nurture Your Child's Character

Here is a list of different character strengths. Each one includes Bible verses, Bible stories and practical activities to nurture that character strength.

### Appreciating beauty and experiencing wonder

This character strength enriches our lives, helps us to notice the amazing things that God has created, and inspires us to make beautiful things, too.

Bible verses: Psalm 104

#### Biblical character: Creator God, David

- Watch a sunset, gaze at the night sky, or explore a shell, a flower, a tree, or a seed-pod and ask children what they think is most beautiful or wonderful about it.
- Describe the most beautiful things you saw today. Or share photos of beautiful things that you have taken with your cell-phones.
- Go for walks in nature. Encourage your child to slow down and notice the beautiful things all around them. Take a simple camera so they can photograph the things they discover.
- Take your child to art galleries, old churches, parks, and places where they can see beautiful things that people have created, too.
- Send them on a 'wonder hunt' to find five amazing and natural things in the garden, the forest, or the park, etc.

**CAUTION** helps to keep us safe, and protects us from saying and doing things we'll regret later.

Bible verses: Ephesians 5:15-17

#### Bible character: Many of the prophets cautioned the people of God

- Teach your child how to look out for dangers and avoid them. Read books about keeping safe, and search for online games that help children identify and avoid dangers.
- Help your child learn how to avoid abuse, bullying and cyber-bullying by using age-appropriate materials available from local sources.

- When you are with your child in different settings make it a 'game' to stop, sit down, look around and identify as many potential dangers as possible. When you identify a danger (such as a dangerous road, or a fast-flowing river, or an overhead electricity cable) think about what you could do to stay safe.

**COURAGE** is facing up to difficult, challenging or frightening situations instead of avoiding them.

Bible verses: Joshua 1:9, Proverbs 3:5-6

#### Biblical examples: Joshua, David, Elijah, Daniel and his friends, Esther

- Help your child learn how to pray every time they feel afraid, and to trust in God to keep them safe and strong. Along with the prayer encourage them to breathe deeply and slowly, as if they are blowing bubbles, which is a natural way to calm the body down.
- Give your child plenty of reassurance and support, especially when they are facing a challenge such as performing on the stage, visiting the dentist, or taking a test. Ask them what you can do to help them feel calm and brave.
- Make a bravery award poster and write a message on it every time you see your child being brave.

**CREATIVITY** is not just about being artistic. Creativity is having an open mind about how things can be made and used, having a vision for an end-product, and the determination to overcome the challenges of making it.

Bible verse: Ecclesiastes 9:10

#### Biblical examples: God creating the world and planting the garden of Eden; making the tabernacle; Solomon's temple; Jochebed making a waterproof basket to keep Moses safe; Mary using a manger for Jesus' bed

- Find an everyday object, such as a brick, a bed sheet, or a coat hanger and think of at least ten interesting and practical ways to use it.

- Let each child create a new kind of sandwich, a fruit smoothie using at least four fruits, or a different kind of topping for a pizza.
- Give each child a large cardboard box, some scissors and a set of chunky felt pens. Help them make their box into Noah's ark. Wonder how Noah arranged the inside of the ship to accommodate a wide range of animals and their needs.

**ENTHUSIASM** is doing things with energy and excitement rather than complaining.

Bible verse: Colossians 3:23

**Biblical examples: Rebekah giving water to the camels; Joshua exploring the Promised Land**

- Create your own family version of a 'high-five' – and use it to inspire enthusiasm when someone is tired and reluctant to get going.
- Encourage energy and enthusiasm by setting a time goal on a challenging task. Work together as a team to tidy up a room or to fold the laundry before a timer rings.
- Reward your child's positive enthusiasm by letting them know how much you appreciate their cheerful energy.

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**FAIRNESS** is treating all people equally regardless of their differences.

Bible verses: James 2:1-5

**Biblical examples: Jesus; Peter and his dream of the unclean animals being lowered in a sheet**

- Play sharing games to help your child learn how to share generously and equally with others.
- Encourage your child to look around and find new and lonely children to include in their playground games.
- Make sure your family makes friends with other families from different cultures, and invite them to your home. Take the time to learn about their culture.
- Set a good example for your children by showing respect, courtesy and thoughtfulness to everyone you meet.

**FORGIVENESS** is being able to forgive those who hurt you, and knowing how to let go of your hurt and resentment.

Bible verse: Ephesians 4:32

**Biblical example: Joseph, son of Jacob, forgiving his brothers; Jesus forgiving Peter and those who crucified Him**

- Teach your child about God's complete forgiveness of them by using a symbolic act such as wiping chalk off a board, washing dirt off a stone, writing in a dish of salt and then shaking the dish so the words disappear forever.
- Teach your child that holding onto resentment and not forgiving someone is like holding onto something that is hurting their hand, like a stinging nettle, or a burning stick.
- Apologize to your child when you have hurt or upset them, and ask for their forgiveness. They will learn so much about forgiveness and apologies from your positive example.
- When your child has hurt someone else, or upset them, help them to say sorry and also to do something kind for the person they heard.

**GRATITUDE** is being thankful for gifts and blessings.

Bible verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Psalm 136:1

**Biblical examples: Paul is thankful in his letters; the leper who came back and said thank you to Jesus; Jesus' mother, Mary, when she sings her song of gratitude after the angel has told her she will be the mother of the Messiah**

- Let your child write and decorate 'thank you' prayers to make laminated placemats for the dinner table.
- Make an alphabet of gratitude together. Write several things you are thankful for, beginning with each letter of the alphabet.
- Make thank you cards together, and cookies or bread, and take them to people to say thank you for the different things they have done for you, however small.

**HONESTY** is telling the truth, even when it's hard, and being genuine and authentic.

Bible verse: Philippians 4:8

**Biblical examples: Elijah; Prophet Nathan and King David; Jeremiah**

- Do your part to create a safe place for your child to tell the truth. Respond warmly and lovingly when children

are honest about the mistakes they have made so they don't learn that telling the truth leads to punishment.

- Teach them how to tell the truth lovingly and considerately, and how to speak kind and encouraging words.
- Create a positive attitude of giving more than required, rather than cutting corners, skimping and giving less than their best at work.
- Teach your child about returning a generous portion of tithe and offerings to God. Help them to discover the joy in supporting God's work with their finances.

**HOPEFULNESS** is believing that the best things happen when you trust in God and when you work to achieve your goals.

Bible verses: Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28

**Biblical example: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Mary, Jesus, Paul**

- Make a hope book and fill it with Bible verses, positive comments, goals and ideas that nurture your child's hopefulness.
- Make a model of the heavenly city out of scraps and construction toys, and talk about your hopes for heaven.
- Find Bible promises that give hope and write them on homemade cards to send to people facing challenges.
- Make a simple card game, matching Bible characters to the things they hoped for. Shuffle the cards and then match them in pairs. Or use the cards to play a memory pairs game, by laying them face down on the table and taking turns to pick up two cards. If the two cards include the Bible character and the thing they hoped for, then the player keeps the cards, and he or she has another turn.

**GOOD HUMOUR** is about people laughing with each other and not at each other.

Bible verse: Proverbs 17:22

**Bible character: Solomon wrote some amusing proverbs**

- Enjoy having fun with your child.
- Tell each other the funniest thing you saw, heard or did during the day.
- Watch the funny antics of the animals in the zoo.
- Do some unusual, surprising and funny things occasionally. Wear your clothes backwards for an hour; serve breakfast in the bath; arrange slices of fruit to make a funny face; and hide treats in their bed or

lunchbox. These little things make special memories that will bring a smile to their face.

**KINDNESS** is being thoughtful about what the other person's needs, and then putting their needs before your own.

Bible verses: Luke 6:35, Ephesians 4:32

**Biblical examples: Rebekah, Ruth, Abigail, the boy who shared his lunch with Jesus, Mary who poured perfume over Jesus' feet**

- Involve your child in acts of kindness – bake a cake for someone, fill a basket with goodies for a sick person, pack a shoebox of essentials for an overseas child. Let them have fun choosing the gifts and experiencing the joy of giving.
- Make a kindness kit for your child to take to school. Include packets of fun tissues, BandAids with interesting and funny designs, a tiny fun toy, healthy cereal bars, etc. Encourage them to share these little things with other children who are hurt, sad, or hungry.
- Encourage your child to notice when others are tired, ill or sad, and to find ways to be kind to their family, teachers and friends.

**LOVE** is the other character strengths experienced within a caring relationship.

Bible verses: Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13

**Biblical examples: Ruth, Jesus, the Good Samaritan, the father of the Prodigal son**

- Ask your child when they feel especially loved by you. Find out how they like to be loved best with kind words, warm affection, thoughtful gifts and surprises, being helped and spending special time with you.
- Make a garland with a row of hearts cut from paper. Write and decorate a Bible verse about love on each heart, and hang the garland in your home.
- Find one way each week that your family can show love to someone else. Shop together for groceries for a hungry family; give needy children vouchers for a local toy-store; tidy up the garden for someone who can't manage it anymore, etc.

**SELF-CONTROL** is being able to wait for what you want, and to be disciplined about what you eat and what you buy etc.

Bible verse: Galatians 5:22-23

**Biblical example: John the Baptist**

- Teach your child to let others choose first, and make it fun for them to choose the smaller pieces of pie and cake by hiding little treats in them occasionally.
- Make it a game to see how who can wait the longest before eating a treat,
- Encourage your child to save up for something they really want, even if it takes a long time. It helps them to learn the value of money, hard work and patience.
- Plan a surprise for someone with your child and help them learn the self-control of keeping a secret.

**SOCIABILITY** is being aware of other people's feelings, as well as your own, and meeting other people's needs for comfort, encouragement, appreciation, hospitality, help, respect, etc.

Bible verses: Romans 12:9-21

**Biblical examples: Abigail, Jesus, Martha**

- Involve your child in welcoming guests to your home, and helping them to feel comfortable. Teach them by modelling, role-play, and your support, how to welcome people at the door, show them where to go, offer them refreshments, create a relaxing guest bedroom, etc.
- Sociability is being able to share in each other's feelings. Encourage your child to be sad with those who are sad, and to be happy with those who are happy!
- Some children prefer to be sociable with just one or two other children at a time, so let quieter children choose how they want to be sociable.

**SPIRITUALITY** is about believing that life has value, meaning and purpose. It includes helping children to learn about God and how to develop a positive relationship with Him.

Bible verse: Micah 6:8

**Biblical example: Many Bible characters**

- Learn about people who followed God. Discuss what helped them to stay faithful to God through the challenges they faced.
- Encourage your child to find enjoyable ways to pray, explore the Bible, and worship God. Provide the best resources you can afford to make the Bible interesting for your child's learning style. The more senses and actions

that are involved in their learning, the more likely they are to remember important truths, lessons and Bible verses.

- Children need to know that they are a gift from God to the world, that He loves them, and that He has special, exciting and happy plans for their lives.

**TEAMWORK** is being able to cooperate with other people in happy and supportive ways.

Bible verses: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,  
Psalm 133:1, Romans 12

**Biblical examples: Noah and his family building the ark; the children of Israel building the tabernacle**

- Find some projects that involve your whole family working together, such as camping, planning a picnic or barbecue meal with friends, flying kites, and being part of other team projects.
- Model teamwork by working alongside your child when they face challenging tasks like tidying their bedroom!
- Provide your child with plenty of opportunities to participate in group activities like sports, musical activities, Pathfinders, and group performances, depending on their interests.

**WISDOM** helps us to make good choices.

Bible verses: James 1:5; James 3:17,  
Ephesians 5:15-16

**Biblical examples: Solomon, Jesus, Paul**

- Choose some of your favourite wise verses from the book of Proverbs. Write them neatly on plain index cards. Shuffle the cards, take one each, and then discuss what the proverb means and how it applies to our lives today.
- Discuss the wise and foolish decisions made by people in Bible stories, news stories, films and books. What helped people to be wise? How did they make their decisions? How can we apply their wisdom to our own lives?
- Describe a life dilemma and then discuss possible solutions. Make a list of your ideas and then evaluate each one for its 'wisdom' on a scale of 0-10.

**Further reading**

<https://kids.usa.gov/play-games/online-safety/>  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources>

# Parents Can Help Teens and Young Adults Say "No" to Drugs

ALINA BALTAZAR

## The Text

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO; EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.  
PROVERBS 22:6 ESV

## Introduction

Illegal drug and alcohol use is a statistically normative process during late adolescence and young adulthood in the world today. About half of high school seniors in the U.S. have used an illicit drug once in their life. Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the U.S. and worldwide (Monitoring the Future Survey, 2013a). A vast majority (80%) of college students in the U.S. have used alcohol in their lifetime (Monitoring the Future Report, 2013b). Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) youths have lower rates of participating in these behaviors, but they are not immune to the culture around them. In a survey of 11,481 6-12th graders attending SDA schools in the North American Division back in 2000, 25% reported using alcohol in the last year, 10% had used marijuana, and 13% reported binge drinking (Five drinks or more in one sitting) (Gane & Kijai, 2015).

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This seminar will take about 60-90 minutes. Anticipated audience are parents of teens and pre-teens.

## Consequences of Adolescent Substance Use

There are three primary consequences to using substances. Most use is recreational, but there can be adverse health effects (even death) from one time or occasional use. Another consequence to recreational use is the tendency to have impaired judgement that leads to risky behaviors (e.g., driving while intoxicated, accidents, unsafe sex, and sexual assault). With prolonged substance abuse, research has found increased incidents of lung cancer, heart disease, liver disease, and breast cancer. With regular use there comes the risk of developing an addiction. With addiction the substance becomes one of the most important things in a person's life, causing problems at school, work, and with relationships. An addiction is hard to quit, even as consequences pile up (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016).

## Impact of Substance Abuse on Adolescent Development

Teens are especially vulnerable to substance use consequences. Adolescence is a very important time in human development. It is a time when teens are gaining more independence, are mostly physically developed, but executive functioning which dictates ability to be aware of long-term

consequences, is the last to develop in the brain. Adolescents are more focused on pleasure and overestimate their ability to handle consequences. When youth start abusing drugs, it actually stunts their emotional and even cognitive development. The age at which they start also has an impact on their development. The earlier they start, the most likely they will be addicted and suffer long-term consequences (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016). With these alarming statistics, what can parents do during a time when they feel they are losing control of their children?

### **Parental Bonding as Prevention**

The role a parent plays in preventing substance use starts in the very early stage. Bonding between parents and children begins at birth. It does not come naturally to all parents, but it has a significant relation to child development. Attachment is associated with the expression and recognition of emotions as well as interpersonal functioning (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Research has reported emotional regulation difficulties in substance use disorders and addiction has been considered an attachment disorder (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Bonding also helps improve behavioral outcomes. A close parent/child bond can help motivate the child to cooperate with their parent because they want to please their parent who they believe cares for them (Baltazar, 2015).

### **Parental Modeling**

Whether or not we want them to, children watch what family members do. It is hard to say “do what I say, not what I do”. If parents, older siblings, or even grandparents use substances, youth are more likely to use them too (Cubbins & Klepinger, 2007). It becomes the normal thing to do, part of the family identity. Of course, the opposite is also true. In a study of SDA college students, using focus groups, this is what was reported: “If my parents didn’t use, I guess I won’t either” (Baltazar, 2015). When family members have used, having an honest conversation helps, especially regarding consequences (Baltazar, 2015).

### **Sibling Relationships**

The sibling relationship is also potentially protective. Siblings offer one of the first and most important peer relationships in an individual's life (Heppner, 2014). Children spend more time with their siblings than with their parents. Siblings' bonds depend upon their culture. In some cultures siblings may have a close relationship, in other cultures it is not as important for a family unit (Heppner, 2014). According to the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longer we can sustain close sibling relationships in adulthood, the more it can benefit and protect us emotionally (Heppner, 2014).

### **Extended Family**

The importance of the extended family will vary from culture to culture. Grandparents and other family members such as aunts and uncles can play a significant role in both a family's economic and social function. In every culture the extended family can provide a protective role in providing support to parents by assisting with the care of children, monitoring teenagers, being positive role models, passing on values, and showing love for children and youth in the family. Grandparent substance using norms were one of the strongest predictors of intention to use substances, in a population of American Indian youth (Martinez, Ayers, Kulis, & Brown, 2015).

### **Religious Upbringing**

By raising children in a religious home, there are many protective factors that come into play. Youth raised in a home with a religious affiliation had lower rates of drug use (Cubbins & Klepinger, 2007). Research has found church attendance, close relationship with God, personal devotions, and being involved in church related activities decreased substance use (McBride, 2012). In addition, church is a good place to find positive peers who are less likely to use substances themselves, though not a guarantee.

Religion also teaches values that relate to minimizing or abstinence of substance use. Some religions teach about these values more than others. The Seventh-day Adventist church teaches the value of taking care of the body because it is the temple of the Lord. In a survey of Seventh-day Adventist college students, the statement, “God wants me to take care of my body by avoiding alcohol and drugs”, was reflected in the 25% of variance in last year alcohol use and actually decreased the chance of regular alcohol consumption by 60% (Baltazar, 2015).

### Ways Parents Can Aid in Spiritual Development

According to Habenicht (1994) there are steps parents can take to strengthen their child's relationship with the Lord.

- When there is a close bond between the parent and child, the child is more likely to believe in a loving heavenly Father.
- Similar to the benefits of role modeling temperance, modeling personal devotions, church attendance, and living a moral life are standards that children are likely to follow.
- When parents participate in religious communities it gives children a community they can lean on and a sense of security.
- Research has found many benefits to family worship. It is a time for families to spend time together, express their faith, and encourage spiritual development.
- Parents also should encourage individual religious practices in children (e.g. personal prayer and devotions).
- Since religion and spirituality can be complex concepts difficult for children to grasp, it is helpful to have an open dialogue to help answer any questions they may have.
- A great way for a parent to express their faith and help a child to internalize theirs is service to others.

### Parental Monitoring

Monitoring is the parent being aware of where the child is, their activities when they

are out, and communication of these concerns to the child. The National Survey on Drug Abuse of 2008 reports parents who monitor their children's behavior and help with their homework decrease illicit drug use by about 50%. Mother not knowing how I spend my spare time related to greater regular alcohol use among Seventh-day Adventist college students (Baltazar, 2015). For parental monitoring to be effective rules should be clearly stated, consistently enforced, and punishment reasonable, swift and sure.

### Parental Involvement and Conflict

Positive involvement is the parent's active participation in the child's life when it comes to activities and school work. Parental involvement has been found to decrease substance use in adolescents and college age young adults. In a study of adolescents living in rural Idaho, USA, this answer: “If I had a personal problem I could ask my mom or dad for help,” was statistically related to lower substance use (Baltazar, et al., 2012). If positive parental involvement is preventative in adolescent substance use, then the opposite is also true. Family conflict was significantly associated with an increased risk of substance use disorders (Skeer, et al., 2009).

### Communication

It is important to communicate clear expectations regarding substance use. Clear communication was the only statistically significant parental influence on adolescent alcohol use in one study (Miller-Day, 2010). In a survey of Adventist college students, feeling comfortable talking to mother about drugs and alcohol decreased regular alcohol use by 25% (Baltazar, 2015). A participant in a qualitative study of Adventist college students summarizes it best, “I think it comes down to, when parents give good reasons why we shouldn't be doing it, not just enforcing a bunch of rules that don't have any substance or background to them, so, actually having rationale for the rules, or the things that parents try to implement to their kids”.

## Parenting Styles

Maccoby and Martin (1983) proposed there are four main parenting styles. Authoritative parenting is a more modern style of parenting commonly practiced in North American and European countries. Authoritative parents typically are nurturing, affectionate, set boundaries, and have open communication with their children. Authoritarian parenting is a more traditional parenting style where parents are strict, inflexible, and have high expectations for their children. Permissive parenting is also a more modern style where parents are nurturing, affectionate, but have few or inconsistent boundaries. Permissive parents prefer to take the role of “friend” with their children. Uninvolved parents are generally emotionally detached, self-absorbed, and have inconsistent or no boundaries.

## Parenting Styles Influence on Substance Abuse

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Research has examined the role parenting styles has on youth substance use behavior. Children raised with authoritative parents usually grow up to be independent, socially successful, and respectful of authority. Though permissive parenting may help with parent/child bonding, teens follow easily into peer pressure of drug and alcohol abuse. They feel their parents do not care about their substance use. Authoritarian parenting style adolescents will give into peer pressure in order to gain positive validation, even if the adolescent is fully aware of the consequence (Wood et al., 2004 and American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015).

## Family Meals

Traditionally family meals have been a part of all human cultures. Research consistently shows that having four or more family dinners per week significantly lower rates of substance abuse, sexual activity, violence and suicide ideation, victimization, obesity, and higher rates of safety behavior (e.g. wearing a helmet and seatbelt) (Matthews, et al., 2012).

How do family meals work? They can be faith building. For example when prayer/grace is said at the beginning of the meal. The meal is an opportunity for a parent to role modeling healthy eating styles and self-control. It also provides an opportunity to monitor a child’s daily activities and upcoming schedule. While families are eating they are also communicating between bites, which is a benefit that was mentioned earlier. The family meal is another way to stay involved in a child’s life and show their parent cares about them. However, family meals only work if the experience is pleasant.

## International Perspective

There is some slight variation on the role parents play in preventing substance use around the world and among different cultural groups. The following are a sampling of such studies. Dutch and Norwegian parents feel it is their responsibility to be a good example and set rules regarding substance use (van der Sar, et al., 2014). Among rural African American adolescents having family members who did not use substances, being raised by parents, spending afternoons with parents after school, having parents who talk to youth about dangers of substance use, and having parents who disapprove of child using were considered protective factors (Myers, 2013). In a study of Mexican-American adolescents, having family obligation values is associated with less substance use (Telzer, et al., 2014). Though there are some differences, the role of modeling, parental involvement, setting rules, open and clear communication, and family bonding have been found to be a universal benefit.

## Hope for Single Parents

Family forms have been changing in recent decades with 40% of children who will live in a home without two parents. Because of high divorce rates and children born out of wedlock, the nuclear family of two parents and children is no longer the norm. Children growing up in single parent households have higher rates of academic problems, more likely to become

sexually active, commit illegal acts, and use illegal drugs at young ages. This is probably due to disrupted parent/child bonding and overwhelmed single parents which leads to difficulties with communication, involvement, and supervision. Family disruption is particularly harmful during adolescent years (Antecol & Bedard, 2007)

When parents separate, children still need exactly what they needed before the separation. They need a secure emotional base, routine, protection, encouragement to learn, and the support of a trusting, loving parent. Successful single-parenting tips:

- Make time for one on one time with their children
- Show an interest in the lives of their children and their exhibited behavior and attitudes
- Make good use of family networks and mentoring programs
- Have a positive co-parenting relationship

### Tips for Blended Families

Children don't necessarily stay in single parent households indefinitely. According to the 2000 census 67% of families are blended. There are many types of family that exists in today's society, each important to the upbringing of any children. Here are some successful blended family tips:

- Give it time – 4 years on average
- Take time to build relationships
- Be flexible with roles
- Start new traditions

Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper (1998)

### Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Drug use in teens frequently overlaps with mental health problems. These positive parenting strategies are also helpful in supporting good mental health. Sometimes it is hard to know which came first, the drug problem or the mental illness. Many use substances to self-medicate their symptoms of depression, mood swings, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and anxiety. Substance abuse itself can lead to mental illness,

symptoms of depression, insomnia, mood swings, and difficulty concentrating. Even when parents do everything they can, there is a strong genetic component to mental illness. Depression, anxiety, ADHD, bipolar, borderline personality disorder, and PTSD (trauma) are linked to substance abuse. If a child has symptoms of these disorders, seek professional help, your child's life may depend on it! Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website has a link to find resources near you. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> Pediatricians and local community mental health centers are a resource as well.

In conclusion, research has found the following roles parents play in preventing substance use/abuse in adolescents:

- Positive attachment/bonding
- Role modeling
- Religious upbringing
- Monitoring/supervision
- Parental Involvement
- Clear and open communication
- Frequent family dinners
- Authoritative parenting

There are no guarantees, but these can decrease the chances.

### Small Group Activity Application Questions (10-15 minutes)

- What do you believe your parents did that helped prevent your substance use?
- What could they have done better?
- What have you done as a parent to prevent your children from using?
- What could you do better as a parent?
- How can you be of support to other parents?

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# A Forever Friendship

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

## The Text

NO LONGER DO I CALL YOU SERVANTS,  
FOR A SERVANT DOES NOT KNOW WHAT  
HIS MASTER IS DOING; BUT I HAVE  
CALLED YOU FRIENDS...

JOHN 15:15

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## ICEBREAKER GROUP DISCUSSION

### 1. Remember

- Who was your best childhood friend? What made them so?
- Are they still your friends?
- What keeps your friendship intact, healthy, and strong?

### 2. Review

- Read the entire section of John 15:1-17. How are verses 9 and 12 related to one another?
- How is love the essential dynamic of the Christian life?
- How does our relationship with Jesus change once we understand and start practicing the principle of verse 13?

### 3. Reflect

- Do you feel more like Jesus' servant or His friend?
- What might help you to develop a closer friendship with Jesus?
- What would He have to do?
- What would you have to do?

## Overview

Our scriptural text reminds us that Jesus Himself calls us His friends. Think about what that means. Merriam-Webster (2013) defines a friend as “a person who you like and enjoy being with”. Think about that definition in terms of being friends with Jesus. According to the definition, if you are to call Jesus your friend then that means that you must firstly “like” Him and secondly “enjoy being with” Him. The only way that will occur is by spending time with Him.

When we first meet someone we do not call them friends but acquaintances. It is only as we spend time together that a friendship develops. In John 15, Jesus describes Himself as “The Vine”. Friendship is like the attachment that exists between The Vine and the branches. It is strengthened and nourished by time.

As we discuss the importance of introducing our children to a forever friendship with Jesus we will consider the following:

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- Modeling
- Family Worship
- Sabbath School, Church Attendance, and Sabbath Afternoons
- Daily Activities
- Benefits to Your Child of a Forever Friendship with Jesus

## Modeling

Perhaps you have heard the old adage, “Do as I say-not as I do”. We cannot expect our children to do what we are not doing. Instead, the old adage, “actions speak louder than words” seems to make a lot more sense. This has never been more true than in the area of parenting. Even very young children mimic what they see. They are the best reflectors of what they are exposed to. So, as we consider the topic of introducing our children to Jesus as their best friend, we must first look in the mirror.

Would your child say that Jesus is your best friend? What would make them answer the way they would? Do you speak of Jesus often in your home? Is He given a place of priority in your family schedule? Is He included in your family celebrations?

## GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer each question individually and then share your responses with the group.

1. If you could be a personal friend with anyone in the world who would that person be? Why?
2. What is the difference between knowing about someone and knowing them?
3. Do your friendships reflect your values? If so, in what ways?

If you want Jesus to be your child’s best friend then He must first be your best friend. This must be evidenced in all that you do. Jesus must be central to all that you do as a family.

Your child must know that Jesus is a treasured family member in the same way as grandma or grandpa. They will hold Jesus in the same place of priority in the family as the one you give to Him.

## Family Worship

Your family priorities are reflected in the way you spend your family time. What place does Jesus have in your home? Is the sum total contained in the few hours that you spend as a family in church each week? Or, is He a part of everyday activities?

As a family, you may readily recognize the value of proper nutrition, water, sunlight, rest, and other daily activities. Your bodies need those things in order to be healthy. In the same way you also need spiritual nourishment. Your family is nourished spiritually only through time spent with Jesus. He must be central to all that is done in your home.

Family worship should be a part of every day. It should be every day at a regular time. Be consistent and do not allow the busyness of your daily life to push it aside. Remember, it should not be hours in length. The point is to make sure that worship activities are age-appropriate for your child. A half hour of reading from the book of Revelation in the Bible may not be especially appealing to a two-year-old. Instead, try reading a short story from their favorite Bible storybook; play a Bible game; put a Bible puzzle together and talk about the story as you help your child put the puzzle pieces in place. Spend time in nature by collecting colorful leaves or bird watching and talk to your child about God as the Creator. These types of age-appropriate activities make family worship something your child will look forward to. Make it varied to keep it interesting. Have it indoors one day and outdoors the next when weather permits. Involve them in the planning when they are older, you may be amazed at what they will come up with.

As a parent, do you want your child to grow up to be an active member in your church? If so, consider this research. Benson and Eklin (1990) discovered that children who are most

likely to mature in faith are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life. Religious practices in the home virtually double the probability of a child growing up to be an active member of the church. In other words, what happens in your home affects their involvement in the church when they grow to be adults. The “normal ebb and flow of family life” today will affect them tomorrow. They must see Jesus in your everyday life at home in order to care about church attendance as they grow to make decisions on their own. This means that time spent in daily family worship as a child will set the stage for adult behavior later on.

### **Sabbath School, Church Attendance, and Sabbath Afternoons**

Scripture calls the Sabbath “a delight” (Isaiah 58:13). Would your child call it the same? It is far too easy to fill the Sabbath with a list of “don’ts” and things that “are not allowed”. Instead, make it a delight that it was intended to be not just for your children, but for your entire family. All week talk about how you look forward to the Sabbath. Talk about the special meal, the family outing in nature, or the opportunity to see a beloved friend again. Your attitude about the Sabbath will be contagious. If the day is a delight for you then it will also become a delight for your child. On the other hand, if you speak negatively about the day, so will your child.

IF YOU TURN AWAY YOUR FOOT FROM THE SABBATH, FROM DOING YOUR PLEASURE ON MY HOLY DAY, AND CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT, THE HOLY DAY OF THE LORD HONORABLE, AND SHALL HONOR HIM, NOT DOING YOUR OWN WAYS, NOR FINDING YOUR OWN PLEASURE, NOR SPEAKING YOUR OWN WORDS, THEN YOU SHALL DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE LORD; AND I WILL CAUSE YOU TO RIDE ON THE HIGH HILLS OF THE EARTH, AND FEED YOU WITH THE HERITAGE OF JACOB YOUR FATHER. THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN.

ISAIAH. 58:13-14

It may be very tempting to stay at home on Sabbath instead of going to church. Maybe it has been a tough week at work and you would relish the idea of sleeping in a few extra hours or lounging around the house all day. Have you noticed how Satan does everything possible on Sabbath mornings to create havoc in your home? The bathtub overflows, the toast burns, the dress shoes need polishing, and your little girl’s Sabbath dress is ripped. Oh, it is so tempting to stay at home! The extra effort of getting little ones up, fed, and dressed in nice clothes is exhausting before you even walk out of the door.

But, creating a habit of church attendance is important in raising godly children. A habit formed in childhood is often continued into adulthood. As a result, if a child attends church regularly, they will likely continue to attend when they grow older. You cannot expect teenagers to want to go to church if they have never developed a love for it as toddlers. Remember, your parenting efforts are not only for today’s challenges. Rather, you are training your children for tomorrow’s decisions also.

Perhaps one of a child’s favorite things about Sabbath is going to Sabbath School. It is there that they can sing the songs that appeal to them, listen to Bible stories told in age appropriate ways, ring the bells, and play with the colorful felt pieces. It also gives children the opportunity to socialize with a peer group that shares their family faith values. Now, this also means leaving the home even earlier than if you were only going to attend the worship service and listening to the sermon. But, put yourself in your child’s shoes when you are tempted to do this. In so doing your child would be missing out on perhaps one of the best parts of the day. If you were a toddler, wouldn’t you want to be in Sabbath School? That’s where the fun is!

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO, AND WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.

PROVERBS 22:6

Don’t forget that the Sabbath day does not end with the benediction after the church

service. You still have half of the day left. And, even though your little one may need to nap in the afternoon, that still leaves several hours in the day to fill with appropriate Sabbath activities. That is a great time of the week to plan a special outing for the whole family. Fill every second of it with quality time to reconnect to God and to each other as family members. Ask your child for ideas. Allow their input in to how to spend the time. Keep a stack of special toys or games reserved only for the Sabbath hours. In this way those toys are special and not something that they get to play with every other day of the week. Purchase a special container and fill it with Bible puzzles, games, coloring books, Bible story books etc.

One way to make the Sabbath a delight is to plan special meals. In our home this was the one day of the week when we had a special dessert. We called it our “Sabbath Treat”. We also had special candles on the table, reserved for Sabbath that our little girls got to light on Friday evening as the sun was going down. And, that special container came out that was labeled, “Sabbath Toys”. Those simple things made the Sabbath a delight for our little girls. Instead of it being a day filled with a list of things they could not do, it was a day filled with special privileges reserved just for the Sabbath.

### GROUP ACTIVITY

1. Read the following texts: Genesis 2:1, Exodus 20:8-11, and Mark 2:27. What do you believe are the benefits God intended for us as we rest on the Sabbath?
2. List specific ways that the Sabbath can be made a delight for each member of your family.

### Daily Activities

Making Jesus our child’s best friend is not something that happens if we only go to church on Sabbath. In reality, this happens by being intentional every day of the week. It happens through the small things that we incorporate into our daily activities.

Prayer is one of those things. Yes, it means praying at mealtimes, even if we are in a family restaurant, but prayer also should happen at other times during the day. You can intentionally teach your child to take all matters to Jesus in prayer. For example, if your child is having trouble finding a favorite stuffed animal or blanket you can kneel with them and pray to Jesus to help them find it. Then when it is found you can take a moment to kneel with them again and offer a prayer of thanksgiving. You can pause at numerous times during their day to help them pray about their joys as well as their frustrations. Soon, it will become a habit for them to talk to Jesus on their own. It takes those few extra minutes but when it is a habit instilled in them you will know that every minute you spent was priceless and nothing else was of more importance.

Keep an open eye for those “teachable moments” that will occur unexpectedly during your normal daily routine. When you are stuck in a traffic jam and your child is in the car seat crying, start singing a song to Jesus that they are familiar with. When you see the first flower bloom in the spring time, take a moment and talk to your child about what it must have been like for Jesus on that third day of creation when He made all the beautiful colored flowers. Those moments fill our day and all you need to do is to ask God to point them out to you and to help you share them with your children.

### GROUP DISCUSSION

1. If you lived in Jesus’ time, what would you tell your children about Him?
2. What are your favorite stories about Jesus that would make Him real to your child?

### Benefits to Your Child of Having a Forever Friendship with Jesus

What are the benefits of making Jesus your child’s forever friend? Studies show the beneficial consequences of religious belief and practice on physical and mental health and on relationships.

It appears that one of the most important things parents can do for their children is to have a Christ-centered home (Dollahite and Thatcher, p. 10). A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that a family's religious involvement directly benefits children in a variety of very significant ways.

In their survey of the research literature, David Dollahite and Jennifer Thatcher (2005) found the following benefits of a family's religious involvement:

- Divorce rates are lower and marital satisfaction and quality scores highest among religiously involved couples.
- Religious practices are linked with family satisfaction, closer father-child relationships, and closer parent-child relationships.
- There is less domestic violence among more religious couples, and religious parents are less likely to abuse or yell at their children.
- Religious involvement promotes involved and responsible fathering and is associated with more involved mothering.
- Greater religiosity in parents and youth is inversely related with many high-risk behaviors, all of which have potential to greatly influence current and future family relationships.

Yes, Jesus wants a forever friendship with you and with your child. The benefits to your child are numerous. Here are some ways a forever friendship with Jesus will benefit your child:

1. **It promotes their eternal happiness.** When your child has Jesus as their friend, they will discover joy in Jesus Christ. They will understand that true lasting happiness is not in all the "stuff" the world has to offer but in knowing Jesus.
2. **It helps them make sense out of life.** Your child will come to understand that God is the Creator, how sin entered the world, God's gift of salvation, and will look forward to their heavenly home that waits.
3. **It's their best chance to accept Christ.** Research has proven that children tend to be more receptive to the gospel than any other age group. Take advantage of those young years to introduce your little ones to Jesus.

4. **It can help counter balance worldly influences.** Children need positive influences to counter-balance the negative influences in this secularized world. A friendship with Jesus helps them focus on the spiritual rather than the secular.

5. **It can help them learn to love others.** The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor. We must teach them this truth till it becomes a way of life, because it doesn't come naturally. A love for Jesus flows out to others.

6. **It is something fun to do.** Do you know who invented fun? God did. Do you know why? For His own glory. While entertainment and fun-seeking activities can become an idol, we should not think God is against fun. Being friends with Jesus is fun and it is your responsibility as a parent to focus on the joy of service, the beauty in nature, and the happiness that comes from knowing Jesus.

7. **It helps them with their relationships/ friendships.** Exposing your child to those who share your family's faith values will assist them in their choice of friends. This is a key benefit to your child as you have the opportunity to guide them in establishing positive relationships.

8. **It gives children special memories.** Think back to when you were a child. Can you remember a special Sabbath School teacher or other church related event? Things like crafts made in Vacation Bible School and songs learned in Sabbath School can become a lasting memory. Or, perhaps it is a favorite family worship activity or the way that you said family prayers. When Jesus is your child's best friend you expose them to many memory-making opportunities.

9. **It allows them to make friends with adult volunteers in a safe environment.** In our culture child safety is a constant concern, and rightly so. But there is still great value in kids relating with trusted adults. Your practices as a family will expose them to adults in significant roles such as a pastor, Sabbath School teacher, or other family friend.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How long has been your longest friendship? What has kept you as friends for that long?
2. Has somebody else ever tried to come between you and your friend? What did you do to prevent that from happening?
3. What can you apply from your earthly friendships to your friendship with Jesus? What can you teach your children?
4. Think about some of the friendships mentioned in the Bible (Ruth/Naomi; David/Jonathan; Paul/Barnabas; David/Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). What can you learn from them? What do they have in common?

## Wrap Up

A forever friendship with Jesus for your child actually begins with you. Take some time for self-reflection. Would your child say that Jesus is your best friend?

Daily family worship may seem like another thing to add to an already over-scheduled day. Consider ways that you can enhance the experience for your family and make it something the children eagerly anticipate during the whole day.

Attendance to Sabbath School and church on a regular basis is important to the spiritual health of the entire family. Sabbath afternoons are a special time to enjoy each others' company and to connect with Jesus.

Common daily activities provide numerous opportunities to teach your child about Jesus. As a parent you need to be open and intentional in seeking those moments without fail. Ultimately, by having a forever relationship with Jesus Christ, your child will experience benefits that will last a lifetime and carry them through eternity.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the statement below. How does it speak to you, as a parent, about leading your child to a forever friendship with Jesus Christ?

THE WORK OF EDUCATION IN THE HOME, IF IT IS TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THAT GOD DESIGNS IT SHALL, DEMANDS THAT PARENTS BE DILIGENT STUDENTS OF THE SCRIPTURES. THEY MUST BE LEARNERS OF THE GREAT TEACHER. DAY BY DAY THE LAW OF LOVE AND KINDNESS MUST BE UPON THEIR LIPS. THEIR LIVES MUST REVEAL THE GRACE AND TRUTH THAT WAS SEEN IN THE LIFE OF THEIR EXAMPLE. THEN A SANCTIFIED LOVE WILL BIND THE HEARTS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER, AND THE YOUTH WILL GROW UP ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH AND ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN THE LOVE OF GOD.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE, P. 66

## GROUP ACTIVITY

List some specific ways that you can help your child develop a “forever friendship” with Jesus.

## Try this at Home

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1. Remember to continue the “Bible Promise Project” we started in chapter one. Find a promise in the Bible that you can apply to helping your child have a forever friendship with Jesus. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members.
2. Begin putting together some toys, games etc. that will be reserved just for the Sabbath. Label it “My Sabbath Bag” and fill it with various age appropriate items. Remember, if you allow your child to play with it during the week you will defeat the purpose.

3. If you are not having family worship start today. Keep it at a consistent time every day, keep it short, and remember to make the worship activity age appropriate, enjoyable, and exciting for your child.
4. Look for those “teachable moments” this week and use them as opportunities to talk about Jesus.

### **A Prayer You May Say**

Dear Lord, I want my child to have a forever friendship with You. I know that it starts with me. Help me to reflect You to my child. Help me to be faithful in being a positive Christian role model. Help me to be a spiritual leader in my home in the areas of daily family worship and prayer. Help me to be faithful in church attendance. May words of praise and love to You be spoken so often in my home that it reflects that You are a precious part of our family circle. And, help my child to see You as their very best friend. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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# 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

**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

- <sup>1</sup> Davidson, Richard M. (2007), "*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*", p. 47.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- <sup>3</sup> Oliver, W. and Oliver, E., "An Introduction: The Beauty of Marriage" in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, p. 9-10.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10
- <sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup>

## 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.”<sup>2</sup>

### 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

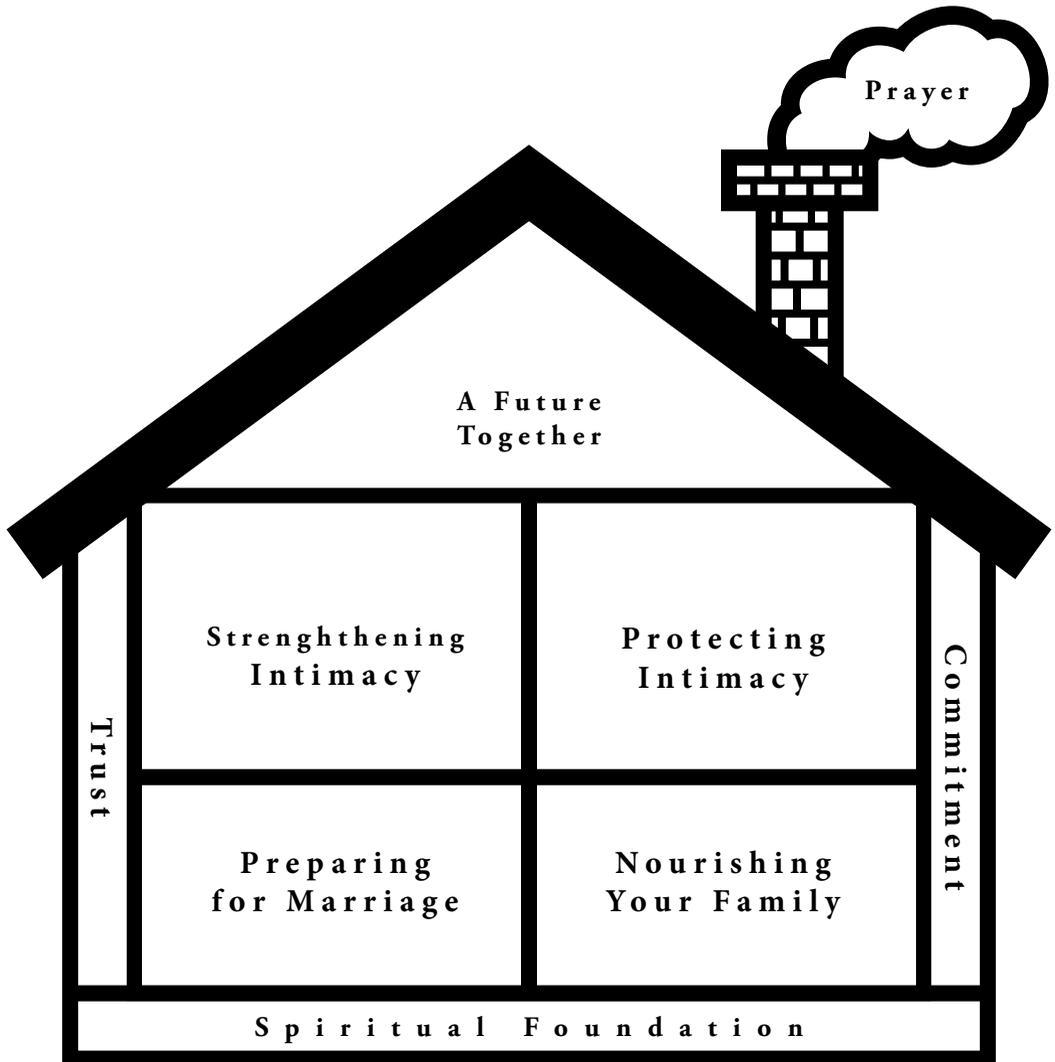
to most men or most women. Therefore, you need to think about which are your most important needs and which are your spouse's most important needs and then aim to meet each other's emotional needs.

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**

<sup>1</sup> Thatcher, F and H. *The Long-term Marriage*. World Books (1980)

<sup>2</sup> 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](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 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](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](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](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](https://youtu.be/6p_UPlfM71k)  
- I Can Begin Again
- [https://youtu.be/W\\_KS0DBv8-o](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”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

*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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

### 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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?<sup>10</sup>

## 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.<sup>11</sup>

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!

## Notes

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