

BUILDING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

by Ted Johnston

This paper provides articles which may be used for preparing presentations on family relationships. These articles seek to apply Biblical and psychological principles to marriage and parenting issues. Though these articles are not official WCG publications, they seek to uphold and illustrate the church's doctrinal positions and principles.

This paper focuses on an important theme consisting of three key words:

1. **Build:** To build means to work. The word is action oriented. And building reminds us of a key biblical concept, *reconciliation*, which is the action we are to take in building families. As Paul says in Galatians 6:10 (REB), *As opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially members of the household of the faith.*

2. **Family:** Here we are referring to the human family – husband, wife, children. But not all of us have this type of family. The values we will discuss and the ways of relating we will examine apply to all aspects of family: the family of man and the family of faith.

3. **Relationships:** The key word is *relate*. The essence of Christianity is *relationships*. God has not called us to be loners. We are called to be part of a body. We are called to a relationship with God that leads us to have spiritually directed relationships with others. Nowhere are relationship problems and opportunities greater than in the family.

Contents

• General family issues	
Family Priorities	2
Traits of a Healthy Family	8
Emotional Maturity	13
• Marriage	
Commitment	17
Commitment to Love	23
Filling Your Mate's Emotional Bank Account	29
Communication	32
In God's Image – Differences Between Men and Women	38
True Masculinity	42
True Femininity	48
Intimacy in Marriage – Becoming One Flesh	54
• Parenting/Youths	
Parenting – Overview: Teach Your Children Well	58
Parenting by Age Groups	62
Parenting During the Early Years	65
Parenting During Preadolescence	69
Parenting Teenagers	75
Raising Children Who Care	80
• Selected References	86

FAMILY PRIORITIES

We tend to focus on the things that are important to us, and how we use our time reflects those priorities. One of my favorite "philosophers," Erma Bombeck, wrote this about the use of time:

There Wasn't Time.

Time. It hangs heavy for the bored, eludes the busy, flies by for the young and runs out for the aged.

Time. We crave it. We curse it. We kill it. We abuse it. Is it a friend? Or an enemy? We know very little about it. To know it at all, to know its potential, perhaps we should view it through the filter called memories.

When I was young, Mama was going to read me a story and I was going to turn the pages and pretend I could read. But she had to wax the bathroom and there wasn't time.

When I was young, Daddy was going to come to school and watch me in a play. I was the fourth of three blind mice (in case one of the three got sick), but he was having his car tuned and there was no time.

When I was young, Grandma and Grand-dad were going to come for my birthday to see the expression on my face when I got my first bike, but Grandma didn't know who she could get to feed the dogs and Grand dad didn't like the cold weather and, besides, they didn't have the time.

When I was older, Dad and I were going fishing one weekend, just the two of us, and we were going to pitch a tent a fry fish with the heads on them. But at the last minute he had to fertilize the garden and there wasn't time.

When I was older, the whole family was always going to pose together for a family portrait. But my brother had ball practice, my sister had her hair up, Dad was watching the Colts and Mom had to mop the kitchen. There wasn't time.

When I grew up and left home to be married, I was going to sit down with Mom and Dad and tell them I loved them and would miss them. But Hank (he was our best man and a real clown) was honking the horn in front of the house, so there wasn't time (from Newsday, Field Newspaper Syndicate, 1971, pp. 288-289).

Time! It's a great asset (and we all have the same amount) but also a great problem. It's a great problem in *relationships*. Paul talks about time in Ephesians 5:15 (Amplified), *Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise--sensible, intelligent people, making the very most of the time [redeeming the time]---buying up each opportunity--because the days are evil.*

How do we make the very most of the time? Most think of becoming more efficient and more scheduled. Manage the time, they say. Yes, that is needful, but that's not what's most needful.

The real problem is not managing time; it is not that we just need to be more scheduled. The real problem is managing ourselves. We manage ourselves by managing our values and priorities. The way we spend our time reflects the way we see our time. It reflects our priorities.

"Well then," some might say, "we need to prioritize our schedule." There is a whole system of time management built on that theory. But that's not the whole answer at all. We don't need to prioritize our schedules as much as we need to schedule our priorities.

What is important to you? I don't really have to ask: I simply observe how you spend your time. What does Christ say about our priorities? *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.* (Matthew 6:33).

This is our basic priority which must direct ALL that we do. But what comes next? What is #2, #3, #4..? The answer also lies in Matthew 6:33: *His righteousness*. A Christian's priorities reflect what God says is right. With Christ in us, we have the fabulous opportunity to experience the transformation of our values – and that affects our priorities and how we spend time.

What does God say is right? What are the values he gives us that will dictate our priorities? Note the twin values of God's law:

1. Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Relationships above all else. Our relationship with God first, then our relationship with humans. This is the Great Commandment.

Putting God first motivates us to put our devotion to him first. But what about the other aspects of life: family, friends, service to the church, job, hobbies, recreation, education? Where do these aspects of our lives and our relationships fall in order of priority? What does God say? Again, we let God's values dictate our priorities. Let's note some of his statements about priorities:

1. Put the Spiritual before the Material

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

We emphasize the spiritual over the material. This obviously affects our relationship with God, but this should also direct our human relationships. We need to invite God the Father and Jesus Christ into our homes – our child rearing, our marriages, our jobs.

2. Put People before Possessions

Do not set your hearts on the world or what is in it. Anyone who loves the world does not love the Father. Everything in the world, all that panders to the appetites or entices the eyes, all the arrogance based on wealth, these spring not from the Father but from the world. That world with all its allurements is passing away, but those who do God's will remain for ever (1 John 2:15-17, REB).

Only God's values endure. Don't put money (material possessions) before human relationships. Relationships are always more important than "things." Notice how God's people demonstrated this value: *We must tell you, friends, about the grace that God has given to the churches in Macedonia. [God's values are a gift] The troubles they have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed. Going to the limit of their resources, as I can testify, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most insistently, and on their own initiative, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow-Christians. And their giving surpassed our expectations; for first of all they gave themselves to the Lord and, under God, to us (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, REB).*

Spiritual before material. People before possessions. The Macedonians demonstrated these values. They used "things" to glorify God and to build human relationships.

What is it that our mates need? What is it our children need? First and foremost, they need us, our minds, our time. You know, there has been some "progress" on that front. Did you know that U.S. fathers spend twice as much time with children as they did 20 years ago? But it's not really progress because that merely means that they have only increased from 6 to 12 minutes a day!

The result of putting possessions before people? Families in stress and turmoil. What are some of the symptoms?

- Continual sense of urgency and hurry; no time to relax.
- Underlying tension that causes sharp words and marital misunderstandings.
- Preoccupation to escape, to one's room, car, garage, TV, activities.
- Constant feeling of frustration about not getting things done.
- Sense that time is passing too quickly; children are growing up too fast.
- Nagging desire to find a simpler life.

Sound familiar? Our nation's shift from an agrarian to a computer society is a main reason why we have moved from a slow-paced, family-based culture to one of fragmented, stressed-out families. Notice that shift by decade:

• **30's:** The Great Depression. Families forced to focus on survival. The "healthy family" then was one that was fed, sheltered, and cared for by parents, but the parents had little energy left over to demonstrate it beyond providing mere sustenance.

• **40's:** World War II. Families gave up their members to the nation because the nation's need was greater. Men went off to war; women went off to work.

• **50's:** The post war boom. Families moved to the suburbs and began losing the battle with time. Two cars=lessons, youth leagues, commuting. The dining room gave way to the family room with TV.

• **In the 60's, 70's and 80's** it got worse and today we live with the results.

We are often over scheduled--caught between the clock and the calendar. The family's loss of control of its time is one of its most volatile and frustrating problems today. Society sends contradictory messages: "You should be at this meeting...You should spend more time with your family." Conflicting priorities.

What is the answer? Clarify your priorities and then live by them. Schedule your priorities. Learn to say no. Put the spiritual before the material and put people before possessions.

3. Put Home before the Job

Remember this: There is no success in life that can compensate for failure in the home. *Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred...A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live* (Proverbs 15:16-17, 27).

God's priority is to put our families before our careers. Would you be willing to take a cut in pay, to reduce your standard of living, in order to spend more time with your family? It's easier to measure success by the size of the house than by the quality of the home isn't it. But our children need our time – and that's particularly true of our teens:

Time is the biggest pressure fathers face in raising their teens. We all have the same number of hours in a day. Yet some men seem to make everything fit into their hours, while others always have more to do than time to do it in.

In the traditional home setting, a father is often working away from the home at least 40 hours a week. When a man comes home after working all day, he is usually tired and hungry. His evening is divided by eating, talking with his wife, church and community activities and trying to relax. Often it is hard to integrate the needs of children into the few unscheduled hours remaining. I think it takes a concerted effort to "make" time for teens. A father must make his children a priority, no matter how important his occupation is.

Often fathers tell me they feel out of touch with their teens and they don't know what the real issues are, but I wonder how much time those men spend talking with their teens,

trying to discover the issues.

I think it's a great idea to get alone with your teen for a weekend when he's about 13 or 14. Just talk through some things he can expect in the coming years. Pave the pathway to less pressure by opening the channels of communication early.

Too many fathers look back and regret not spending more time with their teens. The teen years only last 7 years with each child; compared to your total life-span, that's not much time....

Someone once said, "Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend"

(Charles Swindoll in Parents & Teenagers, p. 100).

Time is the greatest gift you can give! You know what I remember from my childhood? It's not the gifts my father's job allowed him to give me; it's the time he spent on hikes with me or throwing the football in the back yard.

Controlling the work schedule is, for many families, the bottom-line factor in achieving time together. But what about those unforeseen work interruptions? God's values must guide you to set priorities, to make the tough decisions. The story is told of a man who had promised his son they would go fishing after dinner one night. During dinner, he was called away from the table by an associate who asked him to come in to look at something in the office. He declined pleasantly but firmly: *Somebody else can give you input on this, but nobody else can be a father to my son tonight.*

Yes, work is important, but it is not the highest priority. Sometimes you need to ask for some time off from work, but be prepared for your boss's answer! Here's how one humorist described one boss's reply:

A Day Off

So you want the day off. Let's take a look at what you are asking for. There are 365 days per year available for work. There are 52 weeks per year in which you already have two days off per week, leaving 261 days available for work. Since you spend 16 hours each day away from work, you have used up 170 days, leaving only 91 days available. You spend 30 minutes each day on coffee break that accounts for 23 days each year, leaving only 68 days available. With an hour lunch period each day, you have used up another 48 days leaving only 22 days available for work. You normally spend 2 days per year on sick leave. This leaves you only 20 days available for work. We offer 5 holidays per year, so your available working time is down to 15 days. We generously give you 14 days vacation per year which leaves you only 1 day available for work and I'm not about to give you that day off!

Yes, the challenges to put your home before your job are great, but the penalties for not doing so are even greater: *The rod of correction imparts wisdom [and that takes time], but a child left to himself disgraces his mother [and his father] (Proverbs 29:15).*

4. Put Your Mate before Your Children

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine...Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:1,4). Notice that it's husbands first, then children. We have a saying in our home, *Our children have come to live with us* – it's not the other way around. Does that mean I don't love my kids? No, it means my wife comes first. That gives the children a strong sense of security. You can't be a good father unless you are first a good husband. Don't ignore your mate in favor of your children. That means backing up the mate in

the children's eyes, never criticizing your mate in front of the children.

Marriage is the strongest and most important of all human relationships and should receive top priority.

5. Put Your Children before Friends, Hobbies and Entertainment

This includes TV, sports, other forms of recreation and it includes optional church activities. *Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is His reward* (Psalm 127:3).

Our children belong to God. How are we doing with God's property? Again, the words of Erma Bombeck:

I was reading a newspaper the other morning when a quote leaped out at me. Marty Friedman, editor of New Product News said, "Fast food is too slow. No one has time for fast food anymore."

It is important for you to know that at the time I was eating an 8 second bagel from the microwave over the sink.

All day I kept thinking about his prediction for food in the year 2001: oat bran popcorn, gas-flushed chicken pre-cooked without preservatives in a vacuum-sealed bag that needs no refrigeration, robot cashiers, fast-foods delivery and video shopping. He's probably right. We already eat breakfast from drive-in fast-food emporiums and lunch from street vendor and machines next to our desks. We allow 6 minutes for dinner from freezer to microwave to table, and if a pizza isn't delivered in 30 minutes, we don't have to pay for it.

Where are we going, and why are we in such a hurry to get there? I am a product of the "dinner hour" generation. Showing up for dinner was a command performance, and the only reasonable excuse for getting out of it was a death certificate signed by three witnesses. You were not permitted to leave the table to answer the phone or go to the bathroom.

The dinner hour had little to do with food. It was just something to do with your hands. The real purpose was to bring the family together at the end of the day. It was a combination therapy group, confessional, history course, critic's forum and supreme court.

Face it. A family is nothing more than a bunch of strangers thrown together by an act of birth. You sleep next to them for 20 years, but you don't know them. You share the same diseases and toothpaste, but that doesn't mean you know what they're thinking or feeling.

The whole world seems to be on fast-forward, but in Mexico, South America, Spain and other countries, there still is respect for the art of family dining.

A couple of years ago, my husband and I watched a family having lunch in a small Italian village. They laughed, discussed, argued, teased and shouted at one another. The children talked and the parents listened. The parents talked and the kids listened. They must have sat there for more than two hours.

Look at it this way: It's just time. What are you saving it for? Something important?
(*Kansas City Star*, Friday, December 1, 1989)

The value here is children before optional activities. Be ruthless in clearing the schedule so you have time in the schedule for your priorities. Prioritizing means we look at a potential activity and ask some crucial questions:

- Why do I want this activity? Is it because someone else thinks I should, or do I really

want to spend my extra time this way?

- How will the activity affect our family life? If I participate, will it mean I won't see the kids before their bedtime?

- Is it worth it? How will it affect the well-being of my family?

We have to live in the real world, and so we have to be flexible – adapt daily to new opportunities to build relationships. Limit the number of activities that separate your family. Yes, hobbies, recreational activities, are needed, but they don't have to break apart families.

Participate with your children if possible – teach them by being with them.

Let me give you a little quiz. I'm going to give you seven areas of life. Think about God's values and assign a priority number to each. Here they are, not in order of priority: Work, family, recreation, service in the church, education and self improvement, God, your personal health.

Let's talk about them in order of priority based on God's values:

1. **God** (your personal relationship with him). Put the spiritual before the material.
2. **Family** (probably higher in order than most of us actually place it). Put people before possessions.
3. Your personal **health** (as a tool to accomplish the other priorities).
4. Your **job** (for supporting the family, but put the home before the job).
5. Service in the **church** (this means optional church activities – they are less important than family and job, but they are still important).
6. **Education** and self-improvement (this should be a priority but not at the expense of more important things).
7. **Recreation** (it is important, but it comes last – it can often be structured so as to benefit more important values such as family and health and church). Put your children before friends, hobbies, or entertainment.

Yes, there are times when the order must be momentarily reshuffled, when, for example, we must give a higher priority to our health than our family, or work extra hours to get out of debt. But these should be short-term. God must always be first. And human relationships will not flourish if they are put on hold for long.

We have the great blessing to be able to share God's priorities. When we live by them our family relationships will have his blessing (Psalm 128:1-4).

THE TRAITS OF A HEALTHY FAMILY

The family is always the basic building block of society. But sadly the picture today is rather bleak: *Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path* (Isaiah 3:12).

The family is under siege. One psychiatrist named David Cooper called the family, *a secret suicide pact...an ideological conditioning device in any exploitative society* (Leo 1992).

Despite prosperity and access to God's truth, the family in Western society is disintegrating – and with that, all sorts of curses come: In 1989 in the U.S., 27% of all births were to unwed mothers. The result? Columnist William Raspberry says, *the greatest increase in child poverty in America is a direct result of the increase in the proportion of mothers-only households* (Leo 1992).

And the statistics bear him out, there is a 55% poverty rate in single mother families, and it is rising. Other stats: there are 1.2 million run-away children in the U.S. and in NYC, alone, 20,000 children under 18 live on the streets. In 1992, an election year when so much sloganeering revolved around "family values," yet it is evident that our society doesn't understand what the family is anymore.

But it will change. Notice a prophecy about the millennium: *As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God...Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts...Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God* (Psalm 68:2,29,31).

And notice in this millennial context a fabulous promise: *God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land* (Psalm 68:6).

The family is the wave of the future! And people know that; they yearn for real families, but it's slipping away from them. Is it slipping away from you? It need not – we have God's instruction and God's help to build strong families.

There is so much emphasis in society on troubled families. You see it in the literature and on TV shows like "Oprah Winfrey." But what is a good family like? I want to share with you nine characteristics that experts on families have observed in healthy families.

How important is family? A mid-80's Harris poll asked, "What is the most important thing in life?" 96% answered, "a happy family." It's that important to most people. I'm sure it is to you too. Peter Collier writes:

Your family is what you've got...It's your limits and your possibilities. Sometimes you'll get so far away from it you'll think you're outside its influence forever; then before you figure out what's happening, it will be right beside you, pulling the strings. Some people get crushed by their families. Others are saved by them (Curran 1983, p.1).

Which will it be for you, for your family? Dolores Curran put together a survey and sent it to doctors, ministers, family counselors and others asking them to identify the traits that in their experience characterize the healthy families they have observed. I'll share some of those with you. Now, let me say that a healthy family is not a perfect family. It does not mean that life in that family is all peaches and cream and free of conflict and problems. It does mean, though, that it has certain identifiable characteristics that keep it together and keep it growing and thriving. And interestingly (Stinnett 1985), these characteristics are universal – they are found in all societies, all cultures, all races. And these characteristics are simple. No exotic, difficult things. Why then are not all families healthy? *Understanding what we need to do to make our*

families work happily together is only the first small step....Achieving is a great leap that takes the rest of our lives together (Stinnett 1985, cited in Kroll 1987, p.19).

Here are those qualities:

1. Commitment

A healthy family is not healthy because it lacks problems, it is healthy because of how it deals with those problems. And the ability to cope is based first and foremost on that bedrock of commitment. It begins in the marriage where it is *until death do us part*. There is no question about the commitment to hang in there – and the commitment to work through the problems that arise. There is no question on any family member's mind that *this is MY family – for better or for worse*. And the commitment is to make it better.

One couple put it this way: *We give each other the freedom and encouragement to pursue individual goals. Yet either of us would cut out activities or goals that threaten our existence as a couple* (Stinnett 1985, cited in Kroll, 1987, p.19). Without commitment there can be no health in a family – if there is no commitment, there will soon be NO family. It's that simple.

2. Communication

One researcher has estimated that the average married couple spends 17 minutes in conversation each week. But healthy families talk to each other. And there's something about that talk – it is open. They talk about anything and everything. And so sometimes the communication gets rather lively – but it fosters openness where the family members feel able and encouraged to address any and all issues.

Often the primary opportunity for this communication is "table time." The dinner table. But you have to be there. You have to make it happen. Now the dinner table is not the place to bring up marital problems, it's not the place to do heavy correcting of your children, but it's the place to have lively discussions about feelings, beliefs, values, daily problems, hopes and dreams. Make it happen.

One thing you'll have to do is to get control of the TV. In 1981, the A.C. Nielsen CO. announced that the average American television set is on for 43 hours and 52 minutes a week. That's more than six hours a day! That doesn't mean you don't watch TV – but when you do, watch it together and talk about it, and minimize how much.

3. Constant Expression of Love and Encouragement

Love must be expressed. And let's remember God's example: *We love Him because He first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

In a healthy family, each member is willing to be the initiator. To express love in word and deed – verbally and physically. We tend to think, "Well, if I don't tell you I don't love you, just assume I do." That doesn't work. Our memories are short – children and teens in particular. They need to be told; they need to be shown. Give encouragement, show affection. To do so fosters bonding and a sense of well-being. A big part of it is the showing of appreciation. Healthy families talk *positively* about each other. They do so to each other and to outsiders. One husband answered a researcher's question in these words:

You asked what my spouse does that makes me feel good. Well, I'll tell you. She doesn't harp on my faults and shortcomings. Being a human, I have a few. She remembers my accomplishments, good deeds, and pluses. Sometimes I forget them and she reminds me I'm a pretty decent guy (Kroll 1987, p.19).

Sounds like a small thing doesn't it – but it is a powerful tool to build a healthy family. This is how you nurture the family members.

4. Respect

In speaking about family, Paul makes reference to the principle of the fifth commandment: *Honor your father and your mother..* (Ephesians 6:2). "Honor" means to respect. This is fundamental to the stability of a family. And it is what all members of the family are to give to each other:

- Husbands: *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with **respect** as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life* (1 Peter 3:7).

- Wives: *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must **respect** her husband* (Ephesians 5:33).

- Children: [speaking about the qualifications of minister, but this applies to all of us] *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper **respect*** (1 Timothy 3:4).

- And parents need to show the right kind of respect for their children.

To respect means to esteem. To recognize the value of each as an individual. To allow for and provide for individual differences. In fact, healthy families encourage members to be individuals, to express their own unique personalities and abilities. And they help each family member to find and develop his or her unique talents and interests – providing opportunities.

It's fashionable today to blame all one's problems on one's parents, but let me focus on one of my father's great positives as a parent – he really went out of his way to empower us to accomplish what we were interested in. And to help us develop our talents. Empowering each to grow – not focusing on getting power over each other. There is never a justification for showing disrespect.

5. Spend Time Together

Though there is respect for individuals, there is also the strong sense that we are one family. And to show that and build on that value, we spend time together. Time working and, in particular, time playing together. It is vital that families have fun together. And as family schedules get busy, as children grow up and have more and more interests outside the home, that time must be scheduled!

Part of this ability includes a sense of humor – being playful. Lighten up! According to Stella Benson (Curran 1983, p 117): *Family jokes, though rightly cursed by strangers, are the bond that keeps most families alive.*

Put the family high up on the list of priorities in how you schedule your time. And for every activity, as you evaluate it, ask these questions:

- Why do I want this activity?
- What activity will it replace?
- How will it affect our family life?
- Is it worth it?

6. Responsibility

Each member has a high level of accountability to the family, not just to himself. He sees himself as a part of the family, so the reputation of the family is important. To foster this, each member is given a high amount of responsibility. It starts for the children when they are young and more and more is given – thus allowing for and encouraging their maturing.

One of the mistakes many parents make is taking on the children's responsibilities for them. Quoting Curran (1983, p. 166):

I know mothers who take the responsibility upon themselves of getting their children to school on time, getting their children's library books back when due, getting their children's big homework projects in on time, making sure their Cub Scouts pay their dues, and generally taking upon themselves the little responsibilities of their children which are there for the purpose of forcing maturity.

These mothers are wrecks. They are always frenzied. They can't get anything accomplished in their own lives because they are so busy living the lives of their various children.

Each member of the family must learn to be responsible to all the others. And every member pitches in, in a meaningful way to help all others. It's not like the old "dumb men jokes":

- How do men define a 50-50 relationship?

You cook/they eat, You clean/they dirty, You iron/they wrinkle.

- What's a man's idea of helping with housework?

Lifting his legs so you can vacuum.

Perhaps the husband can pitch in and cook once in a while. But watch out ladies, you know what a man considers to be a seven course meal?: A hot dog and a six pack!

7. High Level of Morality and Religious Training

A healthy family is a family with values. It begins with the parents sharing the same values, and then there are very high expectations of all members of the family – not in the sense of preaching at one another, but high standards that all assume all will abide by – very positive peer pressure within the family.

One of the values that is encouraged is that of service to others. A healthy family is an unselfish family. They "do for others." That is simply expected.

8. High Level of Traditions

Alex Haley, the now deceased author of *Roots* wrote this: *The family is our refuge and springboard; nourished on it, we can advance to new horizons. In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future* (Curran 1983, p. 199).

The family is not viewed as an entity onto itself, but part of the continuum of family history and tradition. There is a lot of talk about the family history – the children see themselves as a part of a lineage – part of a clan! With a sense of belonging. Notice the example of the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35. These Rechabites were the descendants of Rechab who had lived during the time of David, nearly 400 years before. The credit goes to Rechab and to them. But it goes beyond obedience and morality and includes family traditions – Thanksgiving get-togethers, summer vacations, whatever.

9. Admitted and Sought Help for Problems

There are always problems in families. Even the healthy ones. As the old Chinese proverb says: *Nobody's family can hang out the sign, "Nothing the matter here"* (cited in Curran 1983, p. 258). All families have problems, but the healthy ones recognize that – they anticipate problems and have a strategy to deal with them. Hence, they have a high ability to cope with problems – to work on solving them together.

Problems don't just go away – they must be dealt with or they multiply and worsen. And so a healthy family develops problem-solving techniques: *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry* (Ephesians 4:26).

Here is a God-ordained strategy. There will always be moments when tensions arise, when anger is aroused. But in a healthy relationship it is dealt with immediately. This means a high level of initiative – to have the commitment and courage to take action quickly, to be resourceful.

Healthy families will be the hallmark of the World Tomorrow – let's be at the vanguard of that movement in our families today.

EMOTIONAL MATURITY

I want to direct your attention now to a wonderful blessing God makes available to us, his children. This blessing, if sought and used will have a profoundly positive affect on our relationships with others – particularly in the family. What is it? The answer is emotional maturity.

A large number of us have come out of backgrounds and circumstances that have affected us emotionally and have left us emotionally immature. That is a definite liability in our relationships. But God empowers us to change—to grow up emotionally – to develop *emotional maturity*. That is God's desire; that is God's gift.

One of the most powerful things we can do to build our marriages, to build up our children, to improve all relationships in life is to mature emotionally. And God wants to help us do that.

God has granted this life so that we can develop in four interrelated areas:

- The development of our bodies – we are to grow physically.
- The development of our minds – we are to grow intellectually.
- Spiritual development – this comes through God's spirit.
- And, we are to grow emotionally.

Our focus here is on growing emotionally. God empowers us to grow emotionally. We all need greater emotional maturity so that we can build our family relationships.

But what is emotional maturity? Let's begin by looking at what it is *not*. Psychiatrists and psychologists deal all the time with people who have not developed emotionally. It is one of the tragedies of our time. And there are many reasons: Children from broken homes, children of alcoholic parents, abused children, traumatized children – they grow up physically and intellectually, but their emotional development ceased at a young age. And so you have a 40 year old adult with the emotional development of a 10 year old.

Or you have the adult who through drug abuse or disease or some other trauma in life reverts to the immature emotions of a child. And then you have the reality that human nature is spoiled. Our sinful natures display the qualities of selfishness, self-centeredness and vanity that is characteristic of emotional immaturity.

And into the psychiatrist's office march people who are suffering because of their own emotional immaturity. Here is how a team of psychiatrists characterize the extremely emotionally immature – so immature, they would be classified as emotionally ill:

These people have mastered the art of irresponsibility. They pass the buck to other people....[they] are childlike, never having grown up. They must be taught to assume responsibility for their own behavior.

An identifying characteristic of the emotionally immature is irresponsibility – unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their own actions. Sounds a lot like our society at large doesn't it? And well it should, because emotional immaturity is a plague of our modern era. But you don't have to get a Ph.D. in psychology to know what the problem is or how to attack it. The greatest source of instruction and help with this problem is freely given in God's word. And by the Holy Spirit God holds out to us the spiritual help to overcome this debilitating problem.

Let's notice some of what God tells us: *He who is **slow to anger** is better than the mighty, and he who **rules his spirit** than he who takes a city* (Proverbs 16:32).

There are two key phrases here that have a direct bearing on emotional maturity as it relates to family relationships:

1. **Slow to anger.** Anger is an emotion. And an emotionally mature person accepts responsibility for his or her own emotions and gets anger under control. The emotionally immature give full expression to anger – in outbursts of wrath (turned outwardly) or (turned inwardly) in self-destructive behavior. But both expressions are immature.

2. But God says to *control* anger by **ruling your spirit**. He says to take responsibility for and control of your emotions. But, as God points out, this is no easy task. It is on par with conquering a city!

As a parent, how do you react when your child disobeys? Do you fly off the handle in a fit of rage, or do you take control of your emotions and take time to think through the situation and decide on an appropriate, intelligent course of action that is emotionally mature? *A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly* (Proverbs 14:29).

Uncontrolled anger in the home can have disastrous consequences. Between 1967 and 1973, 39,000 Americans died in VietNam. During the same period, 17,570 American women and children died on the home front from family violence – the result of emotional immaturity; people who had not learned to say no to themselves!

Now does emotional control mean we are to get rid of our emotions? No, there are correct emotional responses – ones that include very strong emotions, as Christ showed (see Matthew 23:37-39) when he looked out over Jerusalem, a city he knew would be devastated. And he showed deep emotions. But it was a correct, Godly, mature emotion of compassion, love and concern. It was emotional maturity – not emotionLESS maturity.

Christ is our model – including a model of emotional maturity. And Christ experienced a full range of emotions: joy, happiness, sorrow, sympathy. But he always was in control and always exhibited maturity. But how do we gain control of our emotions?

1. Realize where emotions come from.

Do you believe it is possible to control your emotions? Many people don't. They see emotions as almost a separate part of them that simply comes and goes with a will all its own. But that is not what God says. God says "Rule your spirit." But how? It begins by understanding what emotions are – where they come from.

Our emotions begin with our thoughts. Emotions are simply powerful amplifications of our thoughts. And our thoughts are the result of what has been programmed into our brains. They come from our childhood experiences. Sometimes ones we can't even consciously remember that float out of our subconscious and affect our conscious thinking. They come from human nature (our spirit) which is basically negative, selfish and lustful. And they come from all the input we allow into our minds through the media and other sources.

So the way we control the emotions is to accept responsibility for our own thinking and begin to bring it under control through God's power in us. To grow up emotionally, we have to get control of our way of thinking and begin to think in a more correct, more mature, more Godly way. That is precisely what God wants to help us do.

2. Realize that emotions are habits.

Most of the time, we react emotionally in very predictable ways. Every time your wife asks you to fix something, do you get irritated and snap back at her? If so, you probably do that without even thinking. It's a habit you LEARNED. You may have learned it from your parents. You may have picked it up unconsciously. But it is YOUR habit. And God holds you responsible and wants to help you gain emotional control.

One of the tragedies is that our bad habits get passed along to our children. Have you manipulated your children's behavior through bribing them? You know what you teach them? A habit. They learn to manipulate others – they learn to be emotionally immature from you.

But habits can be unlearned. We can begin to practice right emotional responses until they become habit. Paul tells us in Romans 13:11-14 that we need to change our way of thinking! Is that possible? Yes it is, with God's gracious help – through his word, his spirit, his ministry. God provides the power, the advice, the counsel. But we have our individual part as well:

3. Gain control of your emotions by training your will.

Or, we might say, "Learn to say no to yourself." It's a matter of training. In the book *Man of Steel and Velvet*, Dr. Aubrey Andelin writes about how to train our wills:

There are some effective means of training the will such as the following:

A. Do something you do not want to do and do it regularly; it may be something unpleasant, like taking a cold shower every day or getting at a job you have been avoiding. The purpose is to train the will.

B. Deprive yourself of something pleasant, like not watching your favorite T.V. program, giving up your favorite dessert, not snacking between meals, giving up candy, soft drinks, coffee, smoking, drinking, or other habits. Although you may have other reasons for giving up these habits, in this case the primary purpose is to train the will.

C. Demand definite quotas and performance of yourself, such as arising at 4:30 each morning, getting a certain number of jobs done at a particular time, exercising a specific amount of time each day, outlining a definite program of responsibility and following through consistently. Do this deliberately to train the will.

D. Do something difficult: Set a goal for yourself that is not out of reach, but difficult. Pursuing a difficult goal will train the will, whereas seeking an easy goal does nothing for it. Or engage in work or responsibility that is difficult. Children especially should be given difficult things to do if for no other reason than to train the will.

Does that sound a bit far fetched? It shouldn't. Notice Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; here Paul was talking to a congregation that had big problems with controlling lust – an emotion, rooted in a wrong way of thinking. Paul said get to work – train your will, discipline yourself.

Now, changing our inner nature can never be achieved by human will power – it takes a miracle from God and comes by the grace of God. But, we must exercise our will and effort as well to deal with wrong emotional habits, just as we do to gain strength physically or to grow intellectually by pushing and disciplining ourselves.

4. Gain control of your emotions by thinking before you respond.

The story is told about an old man who gave his secret for 70 years of happy marriage: "Driving home from our honeymoon," tells the old man, "the mare pulling our carriage stumble; 'That's once,' he noted to his wife. Then it stumbled again, 'That's twice,' he noted quickly. When the mare stumbled a 3rd time, he quickly pulled out his shot gun and shot the horse dead. Then his bride, no longer able to contain herself, let loose in a barrage of invective – she bawled her husband out, up one side and down the other. Her new husband just sat there quietly (perhaps counting to ten) until she was finished, looked over at her and said in a very calm voice, 'That's once.' He never had a bit of trouble with her again!"

Now, that's not the emotional control we're talking about here. We're talking about confronting our sinful emotional responses, wherever they come from, and replacing them with the Godly emotions and reactions of Christ. And that includes thinking before we act: *He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him* (Proverbs 18:13).

This takes patience. Resolve that you are going to take the time with your mate and children to get the facts before you react. And then act with the care, patience and mercy of God. Which leads us to the next point about getting control of your emotions:

5. Learn to be more tolerant of others.

Unfortunately, many of us have learned to be intolerant. And sometimes that leads to being confrontational where we think in terms of winning and losing in our relationships. We feel we must always have the upper hand, always be right, always win. That is the immature mind of a selfish child.

Emotional maturity is characterized by a desire to find agreement – a desire to accept others as God, by his grace, accepts us. This means that we make allowances for others' human limitations and differences. It's a matter of giving others the benefit of the doubt and forgiving their failures. It is a matter of submission (Ephesians 5:21). Submission means approaching others with humility and tolerance. And that takes emotional maturity.

Here's another definition of emotional maturity: *The art of living in peace with that which we cannot change, the courage to change that which should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Christ put it this way: *Blessed are the peacemakers.* Do you believe that? It takes faith in God to submit in our relationships and to make peace in the family. It takes faith to rid ourselves of a self-righteous, confrontational attitude and learn to be tolerant. But Christ says we will be blessed if we do. And our relationships will be blessed.

6. Get control of your emotions by learning to give.

One author defines emotional maturity as *development from the state of taking to the state of giving.* Emotionally immature people are generally preoccupied with self – they are self-indulgent, insensitive, inconsiderate, overly concerned with their own needs, easily offended, argumentative and intolerant. They are impatient, irresponsible and undependable. In short, they are focused on getting for themselves!

Instead, God commands us and empowers us to live the way of give. To love others is the highest expression of emotional maturity – and that takes God's spirit: *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:6-7).*

Stir it up – yield yourself to the Holy Spirit. If you're struggling and making no progress, get help – seek counsel. Often emotional immaturity is rooted in some deeply seated problems that can be helped with ministerial counsel.

Don't say to yourself, "That's just the way I am." Don't lay off your emotional immaturity on others – don't blame your parents, your mate, your children. Accept responsibility for yourself. When you do, you can, with God's help, begin to change.

We all need to grow up. We all need to grow up into the stature of the fullness of Christ. That means change, that means growth: *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me (1 Corinthians 13:11, NIV).*

Let's make one of our foremost goals in life to grow up emotionally.

COMMITMENT

It was a perilously foggy evening at sea. Part of the US Pacific fleet was on maneuvers. The flag ship Missouri was directing ship movements when word came from the bridge that a huge light was approaching. The Admiral quickly commanded the signal man to convey his message to the light now closing quickly on the Missouri: starboard – starboard. Turn right – turn right, but the light kept coming. They signaled again: Starboard – starboard. And then, finally, a signal in response: YOU TURN!

Well, the admiral was, by now, seething with anger. He shouted to the signal man, "You tell them who I am!" The message went out, "This is Admiral Charles C. Longworthy, turn right!" And immediately the message returned, "This is Tom Jones."

"What ship is that?" said the Admiral. "There's no ship in these maneuvers commanded by any Tom Jones."

Fearing imminent collision, the Admiral sent another message, "This is the mighty Missouri, the flag ship of the fleet, TURN RIGHT!"

The message came back, "This is the light house! YOU TURN!"

I want to bring one of life's light houses to your attention. As we sail through life, we have those key times when we come face to face with certain immovable, unchangeable, rock-solid beacons of light. We either recognize and adapt and change our course or we're headed for disaster. One of those light houses anchored on the solid rock of God's values and truth is that of commitment! And commitment is a great key in building family relationships.

Commitment begins in our relationship with God, expressed so well by Christ in a few simple words: *No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke 9:62). To begin is not enough – we must remain committed: *But the righteous will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him* (Hebrews 10:38).

Commitment begins in our relationship with God: *Love God with all your heart, soul and might*. And commitment is vital in building family relationships: *Love your neighbor as yourself* – this is a statement demanding commitment.

Within the family, commitment is the foundation of a successful marriage.

Quoting from Mr. Ron Kelly in the April, 1990 *Plain Truth*:

The most important key to marital success is commitment – commitment to the permanency of the relationship...and the lack of commitment is instrumental in the modern generation's steady march to the divorce courts.

Notice what Christ said about the permanence of marriage:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:3-6).

For God it's "till death do us part!" Commitment is the capstone of marital success. And commitment in marriage is not conditional, it is based on our relationship with God. Only for very narrowly defined scriptural reasons is separation justified. Even though your mate may not be as committed as you are, your commitment is needed to power you through the difficult times.

Our commitments are made on your knees before God. He will give the power to DO when your mate will not. Go to God – talk to him – make a commitment to him that you will stay with your marriage.

But is commitment simply determination to stick out a marriage? What all does commitment entail?

Commitment is not just something you say; it's how you act. Is your mate the most important part of your life or not? Is your family the most important thing, after your relationship with God, in your life? If so, then lots of other good things follow.

What are the actions of commitment? What does commitment mean?

1. Commitment Means Being There

Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain in their book *Secrets of Strong Families* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985), point out the results of a study that shows the importance of family togetherness. Some 1,500 school children were asked: "What do you think makes a happy family?" The most frequent answer was doing things together. Yet the average American couple spends only 17 minutes a week in one-on-one conversation.

One of the greatest tragedies there is is to achieve great success but have no one to share it with. Rabbi Harold Kushner tells the story of a Rabbi whose only true pleasure in life was golf. He had few opportunities to steal away to the links to enjoy this pleasure. One year on holy Yom Kippur, there was an hour break in the services. He knew it was wrong, but he snuck out and headed for the nearby golf course where he teed up at the first hole and let fly a hole in one – the only one he had ever made. The angels in heaven upon seeing this turned to God and asked, "How could you give this Rabbi, desecrating Yom Kippur, a hole in one? How could you bless him like this?" God's measured response was, "I didn't bless him with this hole in one; I cursed him, because he will never be able to share it with anyone else!"

The commitment to spend time together includes the commitment to communicate.

2. Commitment Means Working Through the Hard Times

We need to face the reality of marriage. Many of our ideas come out of the fantasy world of Hollywood romance. We need to come into the real world of marriage where real people through hard work and perseverance build real marriages that last.

Be realistic about marriage; it's no bowl of cherries. An insightful 23 year old man writes into Ann Landers (Kansas City Times, April 29, 1988):

Men as well as women are redefining marriage and commitment. Both are floundering around in relationships, doubting, cheating and ignoring their marriage vows because they are unhappy. The reason they are unhappy is that TV marriages are fun and easy. In the movies, spouses are made for each other. In the commercials, husbands have endearing flaws and wives "look cute" when they get mad. The message is that we need only to sift through the fish in the sea and we will find the perfect one. Just throw back the ones you don't like and keep looking. We have not been taught to work through problems that arise in relationships. Nor have we been given realistic expectations of what marriage is all about. No one tells us that patience, determination, trust and good communication must supplement love to make a marriage work. People my parents' age are questioning their marriages. People my age are witnessing the disenchantment of their married friends. I'm 23 and frightened of the attitudes I see in the men of my generation. They don't have the same values my father and grandfather had.

Committed people are realistic about marriage; they know there will be hard times. And it is through these hard times their commitment shines. I think of my mother who nursed my father day and night for 2 years and then moved into the hospital with him for the final weeks before

his death. Unfortunately, we too often think of commitment in marriage as simply staying in the marriage. What is needed is a commitment to working on our marriages.

Marriage was not intended to be like a bowl of cherries; rather, it's like a bed of roses. I am talking about a real bed of roses – you know the kind with beautiful, sweet smelling flowers and sharp, painful thorns. Marriage is meant to have anniversaries and adversities. That's the way God designed it – for it is through overcoming adversities that we grow.

Look at marriage as an institution of higher learning whose founder and chancellor is Almighty God. When he brought the first couple into his institution, he gave them the goal to achieve total oneness through learning from each other and a lot of hard work: *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24).

In the process (through the curriculum of marriage) we learn many lessons and have many tests. The goal is to teach husbands and wives the supreme lesson of the universe: oneness through selflessness – the essence of true love – God's love.

Love is basis of true spirituality and true happiness, and marriage is the foremost place to learn it. The deeper you learn that lesson of giving – yes, even the hard part of giving when your mate will not, the more you will grow and the happier you will be. And that takes commitment, commitment to love – I'll talk about that later.

Strong families are committed to each other. They value the family as a unit even above their own individual needs and desires. It's not that they don't have hard times. They don't live in a bubble, sheltered from all the problems that buffet all families. But they cope with troubles. These problems do not destroy their commitment to each other. They enhance and strengthen it.

3. Commitment Means Accepting

You could be making your own self frustrated and unhappy. How? By trying to make your mate over into your image, and that is impossible! A long time ago (even before you married), you formed a fanciful idea about what you wanted your mate to be. Maybe you still have expectations that your mate will someday fulfill those dreams. It will not happen! Your unrealistic expectations will only produce frustrations in your marriage.

Expecting your mate to be what YOU want is selfishness, and selfishness always leads to unhappiness. Think about this: You are probably not what your mate always dreamed of either! So stop putting this unnecessary pressure on yourself or on your mate.

Too often we foolishly believe that marriage gives us license to remake someone. We try to smooth out our partner's rough spots, even though in the process we may diminish the very qualities that endear that person to us. It won't work. Even when a mate seems willing, he or she will unconsciously resist the pressure to change.

Certainly, problems in a marital relationship should be negotiated if they are making life intolerable, but we would do well to remember the phrase: "for better or for worse."

Accept your mate the way he – or she – is, the good and the bad. In our wedding ceremony the husband promises to cleave to his wife unto death, to love her, cherish her, honor her and provide for her. His wedding vows don't say he promises to change her.

We say of the woman, she promises to be the wife for the remainder of her natural life, and to submit to her husband, to be subject to him and to deeply respect him. It doesn't say she promises to remake him into her fantasy of a perfect husband.

How do you follow through on the commitment to accept? By being tolerant, and doing so with a sense of humor. Anna Quindlen in *New York Times* (as quoted in *Readers Digest*), says it this way:

I have been married almost ten years to the same person. Neither of us was sure that any human being could be expected to live over the long haul with anyone as stubborn, opinionated and difficult as the other. Somehow it has worked. Many people seem to think that partners have to compromise and change a lot to stay married. Nothing is further from the truth. One touchstone of marriage is security. You feel secure when you know exactly what another person is going to say or do at any given time. If my husband just cut into a slightly pink lamb chop and scarfed it down – instead of holding up a piece at eye level. Looking at it as though it were a murder suspect and saying, "Is this cooked enough?" – I'd become pretty suspicious. There are all those times when I've purchased a new dress for a special occasion and my husband has glimpsed the telltale price tags in the trash. "Did you need a new dress?" he will always say, once again illustrating the sex-based distinction between necessity and desire. Or there's the ever popular "You look fine without makeup," usually uttered when I am applying eye liner five minutes after he has determined we should be in the car. The obvious answer is, "The only place I've ever gone without makeup is to the recovery room." I know all his little winning ways, and he knows mine. I believe this is the secret to a successful marriage. I like a certain reliability in a man, and I've got it. I put a plate of radicchio salad on the table, step back and count to five. "What is this stuff?" my husband asks suspiciously, poking it with his fork. It warms my heart.

Tongue-in-cheek, obviously, but an element of truth there. Happiness in marriage does depend in some respects on how we SEE our mates. How we interpret their behaviour, and how we respond to it. Acceptance is a key. Accept by concentrating on the good points of your mate. You were able to see those points before you married. Well, they're probably still there. Look beyond yourself and you will see them again.

Actively praise your mate for his or her good points. Build your mate up in your eyes and in the eyes of others. This kind of affirmation will make your mate feel good and make you feel good. Acceptance is not simply begrudging resignation – it means actively affirming. We all long for acceptance, for approval. Give it.

But what if they do wrong? What do you do when that "fight back" response wells up inside? You must do something, because you are about to explode. But what do you do? Do what Christ said to do: *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you* (Matthew 5:44).

When you do it in an attitude of genuine love, it works miracles. What miracles? First, they help you get rid of the stress and frustration. Love is the greatest stress releaser there is. Giving good for evil transforms your negative energy into positive energy.

When your mate rails against you with harsh words, still the troubled waters with soft and pleasant words: *A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger* (Proverbs 15:1).

Acceptance will help your mate to change. As a wife, if you accept rather than fight back, your husband will have to change the way he pitches, because you will not be hitting back anymore. Why pitch when nobody is hitting?

4. Commitment Means Respecting

In our wedding ceremony the bride promises to deeply respect her husband, and the love a man promises to give to his wife includes giving respect. The commitment to respect is central to a lasting, satisfying marriage.

In her book *Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce* (Bantam), author Francine Knagsbrun interviewed 87 couples who had been married 15 years or more. She wanted to learn the secrets of their success. Respect turned out to be a key ingredient. Over and over in interviews she would hear, "I respect him" or "I respect her."

What is respect? It's not the same as admiration. When you're originally attracted to someone, you admire him. You look up to him in a sort of idealized way, sort of the way a child idealizes a parent. This kind of romantic admiration is based on the illusion that he or she is "perfect for you." So you hear couples say, "We're so much alike. He's from Tennessee, I'm from Kentucky. We both like spaghetti. We both love dogs".

Romantic, idealized admiration – it doesn't last. After a while you learn that what really attracted you to the other person was the empty pieces of your puzzle he fills for you. You're weak – he's strong. You're shy – he's not. But you soon learn that the differences that really attracted you mean differences of personality, differences in approaches to life, different ways of doing things.

And when reality sets in, some try to change their mate into the idealized fantasy – or they learn to value the differences. They learn to respect them: *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3). Notice also Peter's admonition: *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers* (1 Peter 3:7). And Paul again, *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband* (Ephesians 5:33).

Let's say you love to play tennis, but your wife likes to go to the theater. She could simply say, "We have different tastes" and out of respect accept the differences. Or she could say, "How can he waste his time and money that way," and put him down.

In strong and healthy families there is a high level for respect of individual differences. There is provision for a wide variety of personalities and interests. One member of this family may be an athlete, one a scholar, one an artist. Instead of emphasizing differences, it emphasizes the richness of diversity. Instead of rigidly expecting absolute conformity in areas that are not a matter of sin or righteousness, it allows for and encourages development of individual talents and preferences:

Erma Bombeck was referring to rigid parenting when she wrote a column about letting go of children as they mature. In it, she asks parents how they view their children. 'Are they like a finely gilded mirror that reflects the image of their owner in every way?' On the day the owner looks in and sees a flaw, a crack, a distortion, one tiny idea or attitude that is different from his own, he casts it aside and declares himself a failure (Curran, 1983, p.85).

Respect should be a part of all family relationships: *Show proper respect to everyone* (1 Peter 2:17). And that includes our mates and our children.

The put-down is the chief symptom and weapon of a lack of respect. And what is a lack of respect? Contempt. Contempt is a very destructive emotion. It shows you feel the other has no worth. The opposite of contempt is respect and that is borne out of humility. Humility is seeing your own sins and weaknesses. And then I see you, and I look up to you, I respect you and value you. Can you do that for your mate? For your children? Or do you hold yourself in such high esteem you look down on all others?

Nagging is one expression of a lack of respect, an expression of contempt.

Sure, there are times when we might express humorous incomprehension of one another's preferences, but we should never make the other feel like an idiot.

Respect is expressed in words like, "I don't want to go to the concert, but you have a great time." And occasionally, "Sure, I'll come with you. Just don't be mad if I fall asleep."

Respect, then, is appreciation of the separateness of the other person, of the ways in which he or she is unique. These things take time to discover and accept. That's why respect is a quality of maturity in a marriage, not of the first heat of romance.

This doesn't mean, of course, that married couples who respect each other are simply saying, "You go your way, and I'll go mine." That's not a marriage. Respect pulls couples closer together. It helps you to learn from each other, to make your mate's outlook and preferences part of yourself. You become one flesh. It's the paradox of marriage; only by accepting each other with respect do you open the door to change. By giving a person respect, you give him or her the encouragement and the room to grow.

The root meaning of the word "respect" is "look at". The eye of respect sees what is really there, not some fantasy, and it values what it sees, and it sees the potential of what is there. Respect is the art of love by which married couples honor what is unique and best in each other.

5. Commitment Means Changing Yourself

Lest any of you leave here saying, "the minister says you need to get off my back and respect me and accept the way I am," let me remind us all, our commitment to each other includes the commitment to change. That commitment is to change ourselves, not try to change our mates.

Truly happy couples understand that love means accepting a mate's flaws. They know that a person's desire to change grows out of a sense of being accepted as he or she is. This also means having the degree of commitment necessary to follow through and get help (including ministerial counsel).

As we work to build family relationships, we let the light of God's word illuminate God's values and shine into our lives and thoughts. Is your commitment to your family, your marriage, your children rock solid? With commitment we build strong families. And one of the most important aspects of commitment is the commitment to love.

COMMITMENT TO LOVE

There was a husband who was deeply concerned about his wife's growing discouragement. He tried everything he could to help her – nothing seemed to work. So he called a marriage counselor for advice. The counselor recommended they both come in for counseling. The first appointment was to be an hour long – but it stretched into a couple of hours. The counselor was trying everything he knew, but nothing seemed to be helping the wife. Finally, in desperation, the counselor jumped up and pulled the woman out of her chair. He put his arm around her and kissed her. He then turned to the husband and said, "That's all your wife needs – about three times a week." The husband, looking downcast said, "Oh no! I can only bring her in on Thursdays!"

So often marital unhappiness can be traced to a lack of understanding of what our mates need. The world's literature on marriage gives all sorts of advice and instruction: How to communicate, how to have a more fulfilled sex life, finances, dealing with in-laws. These can be helpful, but what is needed most is generally missing from the literature – but it's what the Bible emphasizes. It's the missing dimension: Love! Sure, you hear lots about love. But the missing dimension is not the love portrayed in movies – not the kind understood by most marriage counselors. In English, love is a multi-purpose word, used in so many ways that it's easy to be confused. It can mean sex (I made "love"), it can mean romantic attraction, it can mean friendship. A marriage needs all of these. But what's missing is GOD'S LOVE. That's what we need most of in our marriages: *Husbands, love your wives*, says Paul in Ephesians 5:25. This is a command, and not just for husbands. *This is my command: Love each other*, says Christ in John 15:17.

The missing dimension in marriage is also the foundation of a happy marriage: Commitment to love. But not just any kind of love. The commands to love I just quoted are commands to learn and express a certain type of love.

In Greek there are several words for love.

- There is **eros**, meaning physical and sexual attraction. This is a necessary and legitimate aspect of marital love. But it is not enough.

- There is **philia**. It has to do with friendship and companionship. In a healthy marriage you will be best friends. That's philia.

- But you can have philia and eros and still not have the kind of marital relationship God makes available. There is yet a missing dimension – there is a third word for love: **agape**.

Agape is usually used in the New Testament to describe a love that is not natural – that does not spring from human emotion. Rather it comes from God. Agape is a matter of the will rather than of feelings: *But I tell you: Love [agape] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matthew 5:44), says Christ in the sermon on the mount. It isn't natural to love your enemies. It's not even natural to have agape love for your mate. Agape love is a key aspect to focus on – particularly if your marriage is shaky. Dr. Ed Wheat in his book *Love Life for Every Married Couple* says this:

Agape love is of particular significance to those of you who right now are trying to save your marriage and to restore the love you lost. Of all the loves, agape is the one you can bring into your marriage immediately, because it is exercised as a choice of your WILL and has no dependence on FEELINGS. It is a love of action, not emotion. It focuses on what you do and say rather than how you feel.

We need to learn what agape love is and how to use it to build our marriages.

1. Agape is not natural or human – it is from God and must be learned:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness...For this very reason, 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, brotherly kindness [philia]; and to brotherly kindness, love [agape] (2 Peter 1:2-3,5-7).

Agape comes only from God, and we must diligently seek it to receive it. To have a better marriage we need a closer walk with God – receiving agape from him and using his spirit to transmit it to our mates.

2. Agape is the work of the Holy Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love [agape], says Paul in Galatians 5:22. Agape is godly caring; it's God-like commitment to the well-being of the other person. Pure, unselfish, outgoing concern. And when we talk about this unusual kind of love, we're talking about the work of the Holy Spirit in us to produce something bigger, grander, and nobler than we ourselves are capable of. But it is NOT the result of the Holy Spirit forcing us to do something. It's not: "I stand around, and the Holy Spirit makes me love you despite me." It doesn't work that way.

3. Agape is the result of exercising our will, coupled with God's power – making a definite commitment

to give the love of God to someone, and to pursue loving him or her relentlessly. Agape, in short, is a word of action: *Love [agape] must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action* (1 John 3:18, REB).

To discuss agape is not to discuss theory – it is practical action.

4. Agape is not a matter of what you feel; it is what you do: *I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love [agape] you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first* (Revelation 2:4-5, NRSV).

We must do the WORKS of agape. If we've lost it in our marriage, we must start the works again!

5. What are the works of agape? What does it produce? Turn to I Corinthians 13. Some marriages have eros, some have philia. Both are needed, but what is needed most is agape. Paul, in this beautiful passage, defines what it is and how it works. Let's apply it to our marriages.

In Chapter 12, Paul talks about spiritual gifts – these were important to the Corinthian brethren. They were outward displays of spirituality. Paul says they are fine when rightly used and should be pursued. But notice that we are told in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to earnestly desire the best gifts of God's spirit, but there is something even more desirable and important: agape.

Now notice chapter 13:

- Verse 1: In Corinth, eloquent speaking was admired. But unless that speaking is motivated by agape, a caring for those spoken to, it's worthless.
- Verse 2: Prophecy=revelation. Mysteries=understanding. Knowledge=scholarship. These mean nothing to yourself, to others, to God, without agape motivating them.
- Verse 3: Giving all you have or giving your life seem to be the highest expressions of a giving attitude. But something might be missing. One might give without love – giving his goods or his body, but not his heart and mind and soul in love.

6. But what then is agape?

• Verses 4-8: These are actions, not feelings. Agape behaves; that is the key.

People enjoy the feelings of eros or philadelphia, but when feelings wear off, many behave badly toward their mates. Not so with agape. It is not a feeling. It is the love of God working in us through the Holy Spirit, enabling us to perform these behaviors from the heart.

a. Love suffers long. Agape is patient and tolerant. "Suffers long" literally means to "have a long mind." There is no end to it – no trial can exhaust it. It has no "last straw." It perseveres patiently and bravely through misfortune and trouble. It bears offenses and is slow to retaliate.

Do you see how unnatural this is? To love this way makes us vulnerable. We commit to love with no end. We lay ourselves open – we give of ourselves first, risking that the other won't give in return.

This love that suffers long expresses itself in patient efforts to bring peace. Not by forcing change, but through putting up with our mate's failings: *Live up to your calling. Be humble always and gentle, and patient too, putting up with one another's failings in the spirit of love [agape]. Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives* (Ephesians 4:1-3, REB).

b. Love is kind. This means tender, affectionate, compassionate and generous. Qualities that men, in particular, are not known for. So Paul says, *husbands, love [agape] your wives.*

How is this kindness expressed? By being generous with sincere praise and encouragement. An ability to do this comes as we become genuinely concerned about the well-being of our mate.

Being kind means doing little things that mean a lot. Even the things you find hard to do:

My husband, Duke, has just announced for the third time in 12 minutes that he doesn't feel well. You married him in sickness and in health, chides an inner voice, so I hurry to the living-room sofa, where he is lying in state.

"What's wrong, honey?" I ask, bracing for an up-to-the-minute bulletin on his battle with disease.

"I have the sniffles," he says in a sepulchral whisper, looking up at me like a grievously wounded mastiff.

This can't be the same man who once hurled a rattlesnake from our hiking trail. "Let me get you some aspirin," I say.

"Do you think vitamin C would help?" he asks.

Actually, I suspect nothing helps a sick man as much as the knowledge that a busy woman will drop whatever she is doing to care for him. "Lie still," I say--not that he has the slightest intention of moving. "I'll run to the drugstore."

"It's comforting to have you ministering to me," Duke says. With his last ounce of strength, he switches on the sports channel. I am tempted to remind him that Magic Johnson played in the NBA championships when he had the flu. But I know better than to spoil Duke's fun. For I have discovered that unlike women, men basically enjoy ill health.

Duke moans, "I don't know how I got the sniffles." I say nothing, knowing better than to suggest that he sat in a draft. Men like to believe their illness, like a war wound, was honorably gained. Duke gives me a news update: "My sniffles are getting worse." He sneezes twice to make sure I get the message. I get the message. I bring him a box of tissues, a quilt, a pillow and a cup of tea. "I'm very grateful," he says. "As you know, I have the sniffles."

There is a limit to how long even the most understanding woman can cater to a man who is too sick to take a shower, but not sick enough to see a doctor. "The only thing you

should ever do for a sick man is offer to drive him to the hospital," says my friend Clair. "Or drive yourself before he drives you crazy."

"My tummy hurts," Duke reports the next day. "Have you seen my medical manual?" "No," I lie. Reading a medical manual is guaranteed to prolong even the most minor ailment, since it details everything you never wanted to know about rare, fatal or merely life-threatening diseases. Here's an example of what happens when a man gets his hands on one of those bibles for hypochondriacs. Last summer, after Duke had mowed the grass, I found him reading about multiple sclerosis. "My hands keep trembling," he explained.

"Were they trembling before you did the lawn?" I asked. Duke shook his head. "Then why don't you assume they're vibrating from the mower?"

"I guess they could be," he said, sounding disappointed.

My friend Mary has learned how to use a medical manual to get revenge. She called her boyfriend, who was complaining about "intestinal heaviness," and said, "I think I found what's wrong."

Then she read him about 14 symptoms, to which he eagerly answered, "Yes! Yes! What have I got?" She really enjoyed telling him: "A tipped uterus." He hung up.

Here's another sure-fire way to heal a sick man in a hurry. I trudge slowly into Duke's sick-room. "I don't feel well, honey," I say with a groan. Duke bounds out of bed and throws on his clothes. "Excuse me," he says. "I've got to flush the cooling system in my car."

[*"For Better, For Worst; Why are men such babies when they get sick?" By Margo Kaufman – condensed in 2/89 Reader's Digest*]

But agape is kind – patient, compassionate and generous in giving care and concern. Even when the symptoms are a bit suspect!

c. Love does not envy. Love is not jealous – it does not covet. Now, there is a right kind of jealousy. God is jealous for his people. He watches jealously for them – protects, cares.

But envy is the wrong kind of jealousy. It's the kind that wants to command, to dominate, to possess.

It's where your ideas of what your mate should be or do are so consuming you won't listen to your mate's desires and dreams and goals. That's destructive possessiveness, the opposite of agape.

d. Love does not parade itself [is not boastful]. The language of boasting is the language of selfishness. It talks about "I, me, mine." But agape leads us to talk about "you, yours, ours." It's a spiritually mature, God-like concern for our mate.

But selfish people want approval and recognition so badly they seek to get it even at the expense of their mates. They exalt themselves by putting down their mates. Agape, on the other hand, is not boastful. It seeks to build up the other, not the self.

How often do you praise your mate – privately and publicly?

e. Love is not puffed up [is not proud, arrogant, conceited]. Pride is a powerful enemy – God says he hates it. Pride is the opposite of humility which is of great value in God's sight. In marriage humility is expressed in submission: *All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"* (1 Peter 5:5).

You can't submit to your mate if you're filled with selfish pride. In so many unhappy marriages you have two people totally committed to themselves instead of submitting to each other: giving encouragement, friendship, companionship.

Often those who want out of a marriage say they are "unfulfilled." The truth is, they are often simply self-absorbed. If you were to ask how their partners are doing, their faces would

probably go blank and their eyes glaze over. They've probably never considered the question.

Love is concerned with the other person, whereas pride is exclusively wrapped up in the big "I." *Do not use your freedom [your authority, your position, your marriage] as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love [agape] become slaves to one another [REB: "serve one another in love"]. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love [agape] your neighbor as yourself"* (Galatians 5:13-14, NRSV).

f. Love does not behave rudely. Rudeness despises people. The epitome of rudeness in marriage is Archie Bunker of the TV show "All in the Family," who called his wife Edith a "silly cow!" God is not amused.

Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount that whoever says to his brother (and that includes your mate) "you fool," is in danger of hell fire. Agape cannot possibly be rude, uncaring, abusive.

g. Love does not seek its own [does not insist on its own way].

Agape is not self-seeking – it is self-sacrificing: *Live a life of love [agape], just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Ephesians 5:2).

"Gave himself up" – that's the key. Love sacrifices for its mate's interests and priorities. It does not seek its own in the allocation of energy, time or finances. *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me* (Romans 15:3).

h. Love is not provoked [is not irritable].

As already noted, when you begin to love with agape, as you make yourself vulnerable – sooner or later, you're going to get hurt.

How do we handle the inevitable hurts in marriage? One way is to get irritable. Irritability can be mild, or it can explode in physical abuse.

Irritability cannot possibly be an expression of love. If I'm expressing agape, if my wife hurts me, I should be concerned about why. What made her act like that? Why is she hurting? I should seek to understand, to have empathy, to heal the hurts.

i. Love thinks no evil [is not resentful]. Or as it is translated in the Revised English Bible: *Love keeps no score of wrongs.*

Love never dredges up offenses of the past. Sometimes in counseling marital problems a mate (sometimes both) will raise hurts of the past– that's normal. But sometimes you're amazed to learn the hurt originates with an incident that happened years ago. They kept records.

When resentment is stored, it builds. But love FORGIVES. It cancels the debt (*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*). It keeps no records.

j. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

Human nature has a certain perverse pleasure in others' sins. So much so, that at times we begin to imagine evil in others – it makes us feel good to do that. They might have made a perfectly innocent mistake, but we imagine an evil motive – and then it's only a short step to the total assassination of their character.

But love is slow to impute evil motives. On the other hand, it is quick to assign good motives – it rejoices in the good it sees. It does not hold back praise and recognition.

k. Love bears all things [conceals or covers].

Above all, love [agape] each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Love does not seek to expose, to reveal the sins and weaknesses of others.

The NIV says *love protects*. It goes out of its way to give the partner the benefit of the doubt over and over again. Love never gossips – it never talks about its mate's weaknesses to others except in appropriate ways seeking help for that person.

l. Love believes all things. Moffatt says: *Always eager to believe the best.*

Do you do that or are you looking for faults and weaknesses? It is in large part what you choose to see.

m. Love hopes all things.

Even when it is evident that there is a fault or weakness, love hopes for change. It is positive and encouraging – thus creating a climate in the relationship that encourages change.

n. Love endures all things. The NIV has it: *Love perseveres.*

Love keeps on trying. It hangs in there, "for better or for worse."

This is why love is a commitment. And for that reason,

o. Love never fails. It never runs out because its source is not our emotions, our feelings, not even our human reason. Its source is God and it flows to us through God's Spirit.

What a remarkable check-list Paul provides. But how do we put it into practice? Take Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 and substitute your name for "love." Do these qualities describe how you behave toward your mate? How about toward your children? Toward your brethren?

This is where we need to grow. Here is prime ground to examine ourselves. Ask for forgiveness; ask for more of God's agape to give to your mate. Go to God and go to work.

Our marriages need an understanding of what true agape is and then a commitment to give it to our mates. Commitment to love your mate with God's love – with agape – is the bedrock of a happy marriage:

My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love...This is what love really is: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. If God thus loved us, my dear friends, we also must love one another (1 John 4:7-8, 10-11, REB).

FILLING YOUR MATE'S EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

When we married, each of us opened a bank account, not at a traditional bank, but with our mates. We don't deposit money there, for this is not that kind of bank. It is an *emotional bank account*. Each of us has such an account with our mates and we either deposit into or withdraw from that account. And based on our deposits and withdrawals, we leave our mates either emotionally full or empty. A huge key to marital harmony is to keep the emotional bank account you have with your mate full.

An emotional bank account is a metaphor that describes the emotional quality of a marriage relationship. We all have emotional needs, desires and expectations. Whether or not these are met determines, in part, how we view the relationship. The fuller the bank account, the more positive the feelings toward the relationship. If my emotional bank account is full, I feel more secure and safe with you.

If I make deposits into the account with you through courtesy, kindness, honesty, and keeping my commitments to you, I build up a reserve. You begin to trust me more, you feel more secure and safe, and I can call upon that trust many times if I need to. I can even make mistakes and that trust level, that emotional reserve, will compensate for it. My communication may not be clear, but you'll get my meaning anyway. You won't make me "an offender for a word." When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.

But if I have a habit of showing discourtesy, disrespect, cutting you off, overreacting, ignoring you, betraying your trust, or threatening you, eventually my account is overdrawn. The trust level gets very low. Then what flexibility do I have? NONE. I'm walking on mine fields; I have to be careful of everything I say. I measure every word. It's tension city.

If a large reserve in the emotional bank account is not sustained by continuing deposits, a marriage will deteriorate. Instead of rich, spontaneous understanding and communication, the situation becomes one of accommodation, where two people simply attempt to live independent life-styles in a fairly respectful and tolerant way. The relationship may further deteriorate to one of hostility and defensiveness. The "fight or flight" response creates verbal battles, slammed doors, refusals to talk, emotional withdrawal and self-pity. It may end up in a cold war at home, sustained only by children, sex, social pressure, or image protection. Or it may end up in open warfare in court.

What are some deposits we can make in our mate's emotional bank account?

1. Make Deposits by Understanding Your Mate

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:7: *Dwell together with understanding*. What is important to our mates must be important to us. We must accept and value what they do--we can't separate our mates from what is important to them.

The story is told about the business man whose son developed an avid interest in baseball. The father wasn't interested in baseball at all. But one summer, he took his son to see every major league team in the U.S. play one game. The trip took over six weeks and cost a great deal of money, but it became a powerful bonding experience in their relationship. The father was asked by an associate upon his return, "Do you like baseball that much?" "No," he said, "but I like my son that much."

But our tendency is to project our own values--our own preferences and ideas – onto our mates and think that what WE want and need is what they want and need.

It's not what WE think is a deposit that is important; it's what THEY think. The **golden rule** says, *do unto to others as you would have them do unto you*. This doesn't mean to do to them

what you want them to do to you--but rather to be considerate, to really understand them.

2. Make Deposits by Attending to the Little Things

The little kindnesses and courtesies are so important. Little discourtesies and unkindnesses, little forms of disrespect make large withdrawals. In marriage, the little things are the big things.

It's a matter of caring. Caring is the essence of love. Love does acts of caring, of kindness: *Love is patient, love is kind* (1 Corinthians 13:4).

How do I know you love me? By what you DO--in particular, the small acts of kindness, the little things that speak of CARING:

God has combined the various parts of the body, giving special honour to the humbler parts, so that there might be no division in the body, but that all its parts might have the same care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:24b-25 NRSV/REB).

Ask yourself, what little things do you do for your mates, or do they do for you, or things you wish they would do that would show their care for you? I suggest you put together a list of 20 or so and put 5 or so into immediate practice. And mates, as you see these being done – give praise:

Praise is like sunlight to the human spirit; we cannot flower and grow without it. Mark Twain once confessed that he could live for three weeks on a compliment, and he was not an exceptionally vain man. He was just admitting openly what most of us feel privately that we all need a lift from time to time. Yet, while most of us are only too ready to apply to others the cold wind of criticism, we are somehow reluctant to give our fellows the warm sunshine of praise. – Henry N. Ferguson

3. Make Deposits by Apologizing When You Make a Withdrawal

Saying "I'm sorry," and meaning it is one of the most important things you will ever do for the health of your marriage.

Great deposits come in sincere words: "I was wrong, that was unkind of me. I showed you no respect. I'm sorry." It takes strength of character to apologize quickly from your heart.

4. Make Deposits through Active Communication

What is active communication? It includes:

- Opening up and letting go.
- Cooperating, not competing.
- Being creative – getting out of ruts, which involves some risk:
 - Someone once defined creativity as jumping off a cliff and designing your wings on the way down.
- Being flexible, not rigid.
- Yielding (submit one to another).
 - We can always look to disagree, or we can look for ways to AGREE.
 - Disagreeing stops another's idea--it stifles creativity. The possibility of yes is quite exciting in communication.
- Being willing to be vulnerable, willing to look foolish.
- Shifting the focus from yourself to your mate.
 - Taking the emphasis away from me and putting in on you. This means being willing to look at something differently. Being open to the possibilities.
- Active listening.

Sometimes communicating is like a walk through a grave yard--there are lots of people around but no one listens.

We might ask, "What gets in the way of active listening?" Three things:

- When we're listening, what are we often thinking about? What to answer back. So we're not really listening, we're ahead of the speaker, planning our response.
- Or we're thinking, "What's that hunk of stuff between his teeth." We're distracted.
- Or we're thinking, "I know what he's going to say."

All these stand in the way of active listening.

COMMUNICATION

One of the great challenges we all face in life is that of COMMUNICATION. We may be able to talk or write, but to communicate is another matter.

Sometimes our efforts to communicate bring sorrow; sometimes they are quite humorous. Here's a letter from a mother that illustrates the point:

Dear Son,

I'm writing this slow, 'cause I know you can't read fast. We don't live where we did when you left. Your Dad read in the paper where most accidents happen within 20 miles of home – so we moved. I won't be able to send you the address as the family that lived here took the numbers with them for their next home so they wouldn't have to change their address.

It only rained twice this week – three days the first time and four days the second time.

The coat you wanted me to send you, your Aunt Sue said it would be a little too heavy to send in the mail with those heavy buttons, so we cut them off and put them in the pockets.

About your father – he has a lovely new job. He has over 500 men under him. He's cutting grass at the cemetery.

Three of your friends went off the bridge in a pickup truck, one man driving – the other two were in the back. The driver got out; he rolled the window down and swam to safety. The other two drowned – they couldn't get the tailgate down.

Not much more news this time, nothing much happening. Write more often.

Love, Mom

P.S. Was going to send you some money, but the envelope was already sealed.

Communication is a problem – particularly in families. Once in a while we laugh about it – but more often it leads to unhappiness, frustration and even broken homes. We all need to build the skill of positive communication. To learn and use this skill we need to understand seven aspects of positive communication in the family.

1. Communication is listening

We usually think of speaking when we mention communication, but speaking is NOT the most important part (refer to Psalms 116:1-2). Christ's most important job right now is High Priest – listening to us. Christ is the Logos – the great communicator. And he communicates by speaking to us through his word and through listening to us. Do we emulate him? Are our ears open to others? To listen well requires RESPECT for the one speaking – we've got to value what he has to say. Do we really listen to our children, our mates, to each other?

Here are two characteristics of a good leader or manager...First, consider the act of communication. God gave us two ears and one mouth. This ratio of personal communication instruments should give some clue about the proportion that each should be used. The hallmark of a good leader is the ability to listen to others, no matter what it is they want to say.

It's amazing how often this obvious truth still mystifies managers who think that their role as leaders means they should talk first and ask questions later, if ever.

Somehow, managers forget to be humble and recognize that they really don't know everything...

A second point concerns respect. I personally think this is a very important point to

remember. Specifically, managers should treat those closest to them as though they were strangers. Let me explain this statement.

Because of our familiarity with an individual, either at the working level or as a member of your family, it is very easy to slip into a rather casual attitude toward that person. The result is a seeming lack of respect or love which is expressed in how you speak or behave towards that person.

[And one of the biggest offenses is not listening.]

...Remember, the people around you deserve special treatment. Don't beat them up emotionally just because they're handy or because you assume they'll forgive you since they know about your swings in mood. Give those around you special treatment and I think you'll find that they will return the compliment.

[From "The Blanchard Report" by Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager*.]

2. Communication is caring

The best communicators are those who are genuinely interested in the other person – who really care about them. Notice Timothy's example (see Philippians 2:19-20). Yes, Timothy had his faults – he was timid and fearful, but he CARED. But a lack of caring – we call it SELFISHNESS – is a huge barrier to communication. Good communication begins with love for others.

3. Communicating means being positive

We are, by nature, critical – and so we have this critical problem with being critical. Being critical leads to communication all right, but as Paul says it is "corrupt communication" which has NO PLACE [Ephesians 4:29-32]. We need to get rid of it and stress the positive!

This is a lesson every good motivator knows.

The story is told of Lou Holtz, now Notre Dame's football coach. When he was coach at Arkansas he faced impossible odds in the Orange Bowl of 1977. His team was to meet the Oklahoma Sooners— one of football's giants. Two weeks before the game, Holtz learned that three of his players, including two of his best running backs, had seriously violated team rules. Holtz suspended all three. Then injury sidelined a fourth player.

Word was out that Arkansas no longer stood a chance against the Sooners. They were named a 21-point underdog.

The last days of practice before the game were awful. Holtz called a team meeting. "Men, we've had seven of the worst days of practice that have ever been – all anybody has talked about is that we've lost four of our players."

The coach told the solemn team he knew all the reasons they couldn't win. Now he wanted to hear why they could.

"In my family," Holtz continued, "when someone has done well, we try to make that person feel special. We let him decide what we eat for dinner and what we talk about. But the best part comes when everybody in the room one by one, tells that person something that is sincere and genuine. You say how much that person means to you, how much he has done to help you with your algebra, what a pretty dress she is wearing. You must be sincere."

Holtz paused. Now, he said, each member of the Arkansas team would do the same.

An offensive lineman got up first and congratulated the Arkansas defense, which had been nationally ranked all year long. Another player said how much it meant to the team that the field-goal kicker, Steven Little, was the best in America. And then, a small running back named Roland Sales stepped forward. "You know, I haven't practiced well

because I haven't felt well," he said. "But I want each of you to know what a tremendous thrill it will be for me to play this game. I've never started in a game at running back, and playing with people as fine as you means more to me than anything else in my life."
At that precise moment, mighty Oklahoma – the No. 2 ranked team in the country – didn't stand a chance.

...Arkansas beat Oklahoma, 31 to 6. Holtz had made a team into a family, and that family had beaten the odds. [From Chattanooga News-Free Press, 10/27/82, by Roy Exum]

How? By stressing the positive. That's the kind of communication that can transform marriages and whole families. What we say and how we say it has a dramatic effect on our children:

"Johnny is just like his Uncle Bob," Father said. "And he never amounted to anything." Johnny overhears this, thinks to himself, "I won't amount to anything," and follows through with his belief.

Mother said to Sally, "You are such a bad girl." Sally thinks, "I am a bad girl," believes it and acts on that belief, and proves that she's a bad girl by doing something else considered to be "bad."

Suggestive statements can be far more powerful for children than adults realize. Something that has been said within earshot, or only for the moment, can stick in the child's mind. The child can concentrate on this thought so much that he internalizes it and behaves according to the thought....A person is what he or she thinks all day long. [That's exactly the point Solomon makes in Proverbs 23:7: As [a man] thinks within himself, so he is]...From the earliest moments of existence, children have thoughts that are shaped by our input. So what children think about can be shaped by us. Their thinking will determine what their life will be. They will become what they think about.

*Adults can be either a positive or negative force for the way children think. Positive suggestions can be very powerful. For example, when Mother says to Jill, "I was never good at math, but you have a good mind and I know you will do well in math," Jill repeats this to herself and tries to do well in math. It is important to make positive suggestions and statements to children, so that they will think about themselves in the most positive way. [from *The Power of Suggestion* by Maribeth Littleton]*

The power of positive communication. It must be accurate, it must be sincere, but stress the positive! A real key in learning to be positive is to allow for differences – to realize that no one is perfect – including your kids and your mate. Allow for differences and then accept them, faults and all.

One benefit of positive communication through acceptance is INTIMACY – this is particularly true in a marriage:

*One of the key characteristics of intimacy is acceptance of the other person. Each partner can expose an inadequacy to the other, knowing that it will be accepted along with everything else about him or her. Acceptance is a prerequisite for intimacy and from acceptance grows trust. You trust your partner to accept you for yourself and not to betray that trust. [from July, 1988 *Readers Digest*, "Intimacy, Key To Lasting Love"]*

Now, does this mean we just live with problems, with no efforts to make it better?

We must learn to accept a given problem before we can solve it. Acceptance does not imply liking, but rather, seeing the situation as a fact, without hostility...It involves

raising the level of one's tolerance for frustration. There are human differences we must learn to live with. There are innumerable emotional incompatibilities in men and women. When one is faced with a problem of personal differences, obviously a compromise must be made. We cannot always bend others to our wishes. It is childish to assume that everyone should be "wired up" as we are, emotionally or temperamentally. Whether it is a matter of early rising, very late rising...which television show to watch, or personal preferences of any kind, one thing which always helps is to raise the level of our tolerance to frustration.

*Anything we do which makes us more tolerant of others is in the right direction. We are then more open to compromise solutions. [From p. 106, *The Art of Understanding Your Mate* by Cecil Osborne, Zondervan]*

Tolerance, acceptance – prerequisites to positive communication. The opposite? Negative communication:

- Being the critic.
- Being the psychiatrist. "I know what your problem is."
- Being the judge. "You got what was coming to you."
- Being the know-it-all. Having to give the final word on everything.
- Being the commander-in-chief. A little dictator, seeking control (often a sign of insecurity).

Let's make our communication positive!

4. Communication means being open

Now this is a hard one for many of us – but it is vital. "Every man walks about in an image," says David in Psalm 39:5-6. We all have a certain image we are trying to maintain. What is often the result? We're not honest, we don't express our true feelings, we're not OPEN, and that stifles our communication with each other.

To be open requires that we take some risks – it makes us vulnerable – because if you express your true feelings to someone and they are not well received, that's hard on the ego. But it is the only way that works – we must be open with God, with our mates, with our children, with each other – including being open with God's ministry [2 Corinthians 6:11-13].

Notice also Christ's example in John 18:19-20. Christ was like an open book. He showed his deep and true emotions openly. It says near Lazarus' tomb he wept openly. Christ was vulnerable. He was willing to communicate openly even if he risked his life.

Don't be hypocritical in your communication – express your true feelings. This is particularly important in your marriage:

One young couple, just beginning to experience the built-in frustration common to almost any marriage relationship, told...how they had worked out some of their conflicts. He was rather passive, and his wife dominant, but both were seeking to correct this imbalance. At home they had talked about the fact that neither was having their expectations fulfilled. They agreed that they would each write out a list of what they expected from the other, and discuss it a week later. He said, "I could see her making notes all week long. I almost panicked when I thought of the reams and reams of things she would demand of me. I just knew I could never fulfill all of her needs and expectations."

He made some notes, too, during the week, and when the time came for the confrontation, they exchanged lists. The young husband said, "I was flabbergasted to discover that she had listed only four or five things. I had expected hundreds! I feel I can gradually

learn to fulfill these needs of hers, and I know she feels competent to meet my list of expectations."

This was a creative form of communication, involving down-to-earth realism and honesty in revealing true feelings....deal[ing] not with intellectual concepts, but with feelings. [Osborne, p. 105]

Sometimes being open and expressing your true feelings means a confrontation – it may mean saying some things that are not all peaches and cream – what do you do then? A key is to speak the truth in love [see Ephesians 4:15-15, 25-27, 29].

So we need to be open – and there is another point very much like it:

5. Don't withhold information

In this society, we are taught to be secretive – but that's not the example God sets for us; God is a revealer, openly showing us what we need and we need to do that with each other:

Almost every serious marital problem begins with the withholding by one partner of information the other has the right to know. Deception breeds resentment, resentment hardens into hostility. Hostility drives a wedge between the couple – this is the melancholy sequence of events in almost every marital disaster. [Dr. David Mace, past director, American Assoc. Marriage Counselors]

We are, in effect, stealing from someone if we withhold information from him that he deserves to know. Don't be secretive, share everything with your mate.

6. Use non-verbal communication techniques

Communicating involves more than the tongue. Communication experts have estimated that in verbal communication the words spoken account for only 7% of the message. Tone of voice accounts for 38%, but nonverbal accounts for 55%

Consider these nonverbal communication tools:

- **The Eyes:** Eye contact! Look at people, face them, show your interest and respect for them.

- **Touch:** Consider this:

Most men fall in love and stay in love with women who smile at them, tell them often that they're wonderful and touch them a lot. This is the professional opinion of Dr. Malcolm Freeman, professor of gynecology. Freeman further states that a man can do four simple things to keep a woman happy: [and notice here several aspects of communication we are discussing]

- *Talk to her. Share thoughts, discuss plans, describe the day's events.*

- *Listen to her. Give proof of this by asking pertinent questions and commenting on her statements.*

- *Make her laugh occasionally. Be willing and able to relax and enjoy life with her.*

- *Touch her frequently. It doesn't matter whether it's on the hand, arm, or shoulder; the contact is what's important.* [from *Vibrant Life*, USA].

7. Communication means giving

There are many things that we can give to each other, but the most important is ourselves, and we do that through communication: *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to*

*enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, **willing to communicate*** (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

The Old English word "communicate" means to give, to fellowship, to share. Communication is one of the highest forms of sharing. Be sensitive to the needs of others, and then be willing to give of your own feelings – openly and honestly.

Be willing to talk with your mate and your children about anything and everything. Speak the truth – give the truth, in love. Be positive, be uplifting, no hypocrisy, no evil or hidden motives. But gentle, affectionate, loving – that's communicating.

IN GOD'S IMAGE – The Differences Between Men and Women

On the sixth day of creation God said, *"Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good* (Genesis 1:24-25).

And then came the crowning achievement: *Then God said, "Let Us make man [humankind] in Our **image**, according to Our **likeness**"* (Genesis 1:26a).

How are we to understand this? What does "image" and "likeness" mean? How are we created in God's image? How are we like God? There are several aspects to the answer. And they tell us a great deal about our obligations to God, including our obligation to build our family relationships.

How are we created in God's image and likeness? It has in part to do with genealogy. Notice a similar statement: *When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own **likeness**, in his own **image**; and he named him Seth* (Genesis 5:3).

We are in God's image because we came from him – we are his creation. But is grass in God's image? After all he created that too. No, it's a matter of image *and* likeness. Seth was in Adam's image, because he was like him. And in some way, we are like God. But how? Let's go back to Genesis 1:26 and notice the context: *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

Our "likeness" to God is presented in the context of the dominion God gives man over the creation. In a sense, we act for God on earth by exercising lordship over the creation: *What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas"* (Psalm 8:4-5).

What is man? He is like God, he resembles God insofar as his scope and sphere of rulership, but he is far beneath God in glory, power and honor.

But how else is man "like" God? In the way that the rest of the creation is not like God: Man's mind. Man possesses something that no other part of the physical creation possesses – a mind – intelligence, perception, self-knowledge. These are God-like capabilities. We have these abilities because we, unlike animals, have a mind that is comprised of spirit (spirit in man) and physical brain. That makes us "like" God – our minds are patterned after God's – but unlike God's mind which is pure spirit, our's can be perverted and corrupted as was the case for Adam and Eve when they took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: *And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever"* (Genesis 3:22).

But we do have a mind and with that mind comes the greatest aspect of our likeness to God – we have the capacity for free moral agency – the capacity to choose, to discern right from wrong. To make moral choices. And with this ability, God gives us the capacity to have a personal relationship with him, whereby we can become truly like him: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being **transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Now, as Paul shows, this transformation does not come from within the human mind. It becomes available to those who are "unveiled" – those who have had the spiritual blindness removed, *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

We, who as physical human beings do possess some likeness to God, fall far short of the true image of God. Only Christ is fully in God's image, but we can be changed--transformed--into Christ's likeness: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God [to be like God], in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:23-24).

And so we see that our physical dominion and capabilities are only a small part of what it means to be created in God's image and likeness--our calling is to grow fully into God's likeness. And notice that this is the calling of ALL humanity: *So God **created** man in his own **image**, in the image of God he created him; **male** and **female** he created them* (Genesis 1:27).

Some key words here. First of all **created**: We are reminded that even with our great destiny, our future inheritance, we are created. This distinguishes us from God who is eternal, and though we are to become like him, and though he calls us his children, though he has a family that we can be a part of, we will never be God. Our relationship to God will always be a Creator-to-created relationship--but what a marvelous relationship that is!

And further, we are created in God's **image** in the sense that we are to be like God--humans are God's appointed image-bearers on earth. We are to bear God's image, not our own. So many people focus on their own "self-image"--that is the focus of much of pop psychology.

But notice a very important point. Mankind, God's appointed image bearer, was created **male** and **female**: They together were created to bear His image. They each have special value. In-so-far as the ultimate sense of possessing God's image and likeness, there is no difference: *Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being **heirs together** of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered* (1 Peter 3:7). Peter notes that men and women as physical beings ARE different, and he tells them to "dwell together," that is structure marital relationships with an understanding of those differences.

Do you fully understand how men and women are different? I want to tell you about some of those differences. But before I do, let's ask the question why are they different? Why not just make them the same? The reason they are different is that God has different jobs for them, different marital roles to fulfill.

Notice: *Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair on her head dishonors her head--she is just like one of the "shorn women." If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man* (1 Corinthians 11:4-7, NIV, margin).

Is Paul contradicting Genesis? Is it only the man who is created in God's image? No, here Paul is establishing the roles that God gave to men and women in the marriage state in this life and in the church. The husband is to lead and in that respect he takes on an aspect of God's image. And the wife is to follow.

And to equip them for these marital roles, God created men and women differently:

1. Physical Differences

In some respects, men are physically stronger. They have a higher ratio of muscle to body

weight. They have more upper body strength, they throw better, jump farther, run faster. They have larger lungs and together with more red blood cells a man is better equipped for short bursts of intense activity.

But men don't have a monopoly in the strength department. Women have more endurance. Their higher ratio of body fat provides a store of energy for extended exercise; hence they make better long distance swimmers and survive longer in famine. Women have more acute hearing and better night vision and a higher tolerance for pain and heat.

And genetically, women are stronger. They have two X chromosomes, and since chromosomes are responsible for transmitting hereditary characteristics, if a male has a "bad" gene on his single X chromosome, the trait is bound to be expressed, whereas the cells in a female have a "choice" – which permits the effects of defective genes to be diluted or even corrected by normal ones.

And women have stronger immune systems, again because of their XX chromosome combination – the disease-fighting genes are carried on the X chromosome. And hence women outlive men by an average of eight years.

Another physical difference that is obvious but bears mentioning are a woman's functions of menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. These functions profoundly influence her behavior and feelings. She has more different hormones than does man. And even the glands she shares with man are different. For example, her thyroid is larger and more active, enlarging even more during pregnancy and menstruation providing resistance to cold and smoother, relatively hairless skin, and it also affects her emotionally – she laughs and cries more easily. Which brings me to another area of differences between men and women.

2. Mental/Emotional Differences

An easy way to summarize this area is: men are "do-ers," and women are "be-ers." As "do-ers" men are more aggressive and achievement oriented. Women do not lack the ability to achieve, but they do not have the same aggressive drive. It's a matter of what is important to them and that is a function, at least in part, of their biology, how their brains are wired.

A woman finds her fulfillment more in "be-ing" – in relationships, in being a helper and nurturer. Frankly, it is easier for a woman to seek some of the spiritual values. More women attend church; women are usually quicker to seek counsel. This is all part of her emotional and mental makeup.

Men, on the other hand, are risk takers and have a drive to assume responsibility. Emotionally and biologically they are predisposed to find identity in "doing" – in achievement and work. Women are built to find identity in relationships – particularly those of wife and mother. Women tend to be more personal than men. They have a deeper interest in people and feelings – building relationships, whereas men tend to be more preoccupied with practical matters.

Men tend to be logical and deductive. Women tend to be intuitive. Studies have shown that women are far better at picking up on the feelings and moods of others – intuition. Men want the facts while women infer the facts from feelings. Two different approaches, two different abilities that are complementary.

Women are more sensitive. If you were to ask a man where he got that steak he's cooking on the grill, he'd reply, "At the supermarket." If you asked a woman the same question, she'd reply, "Why, what's wrong with it."

It's not that women are more sensitive to criticism, but men and women are sensitive in different areas. It has to do with their identities. Women are vulnerable in areas pertaining to their feminine role: their children, other relationships, physical appearance, and home. Men are

vulnerable to criticism in such areas as their capacity to earn a living, sexual performance and other aspects of masculinity.

Women become much more intimately tied into their surroundings. A man may relate to people and situations, but a woman becomes "entwined" in them – they become part of her identity. That's why a woman views her house as an extension of herself. Because of her emotional identity with people and places, a woman needs more time to adjust to changes that affect her relationships. A man, with his "logical" orientation deduces the benefits of a change and gets "psyched-up" for it in a matter of minutes. Not so with a woman. Since she focuses on immediate consequences of relocating, for example, she needs time to overcome the initial adjustment before warming up to the advantages of it. So men and women are different. But God created these differences to help each fulfill their God-given roles. So the differences are not a matter of superiority or inferiority. Remember what Peter said: *Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being **heirs together** of the grace of life* (1 Peter 3:7).

Right now we are heirs. Even in this life, God views men and woman as having equal worth. But more importantly, in eternity, all men and all women can be joint heirs with Christ and can bear fully the image and likeness of God.

But we are to be God's image-bearers – all of us, men and women. And as we do, it will greatly affect our family relationships: *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is....Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:17,21). To submit means to be understanding and sympathetic. It means discovering the needs your mate has and then providing for those needs. It is a matter of giving. And by living the way of give we become God's image-bearers in the full spiritual sense; we become like Christ.

Are you like Christ? If I wanted to know, I wouldn't ask your minister. I'd ask your mate, I'd ask your children. The family is the primary realm where humans learn to take on the image of God. And for the benefit of the family, God says: *Male and female created he **them*** (Genesis 1:27).

God made humans to be social persons, designed to interact with God and each other. And to provide for what the human family needs he created them different, though compatible – with different capacities and abilities, intending that both take on his image. Let's all, men and women, be God's image bearers. And let's do that, in particular, by building our family relationships.

TRUE MASCULINITY

One of my favorite books on masculinity is *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*:

"Real men don't eat quiche," said Flex Crush, ordering a breakfast of steak, prime rib, six eggs, and a loaf of toast.

We were sitting in the professional drivers' section of an all-night truckers' pit stop somewhere west of Tulsa on I-44, discussing the plight of men in today's society. Flex, a 225-pound nuclear – waste driver who claims to be one of the last Real Men in existence, was pensive:

"American men are all mixed up today," he began, idly cleaning the 12-gauge shotgun that was sitting across his knees. Off in the distance, the sun was just beginning to rise over the tractor trailers in the parking lot.

"There was a time when this was a nation of Ernest Hemingways. Real Men. The kind of guys who could defoliate an entire forest to make a breakfast fire – and then go on to wipe out an endangered species hunting for lunch. But not anymore. We've become a nation of wimps. Pansies. Quiche eaters. Alan Alda types – who cook and clean and relate to their wives. Phil Donahue clones – who are warm and sensitive and vulnerable. It's not enough anymore that we earn a living and protect women and children from plagues, famine, and encyclopedia salesmen. But now we're also supposed to be supportive. And understanding. And sincere...

"And where's it gotten us? I'll tell you where. Just look around the world today. The Japanese make better cars. The Israelis better soldiers. The Irish better violence...All things considered, it's no wonder the rest of the world thinks we can't topple a simple banana republic without going to an encounter session about it first.

*"I mean, if you really want to see how bad things have gotten, just look at the products America is building today. We used to create things like the Panama Canal. The Hoover Dam. The 'fifty-seven Chevy. The interstate highway system. The front line of the Green Bay Packers. But now? We're building hot-doggers. Electric hair-curler. Fry-Daddy. FryBaby. Selecta-Vision. At least the pharaohs built the pyramids. It worries me no end that ten million years from now we'll be remembered as the civilization that created est, frozen yogurt, 'Eight Is Enough,' salad bars, cruise control, restaurants that spin, surf'n'-turf, and the 'Phil Donahue Show'" [from *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. Feirstein, B. New York: Pocket Books, 1982, pp. 9-10]*

We laugh because the author has picked up on a contemporary problem that leaves us a bit bewildered. What is true masculinity? What should a real man be like. The world today is confused – and God predicted it would be: *For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, [God removes the blessings]: the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. [God removes true, masculine leadership – and what is left?:] I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. [child-like, immature leadership; and the result:] The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor [breakdown of law and order]; the child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable [family breakdown] (Isaiah 3:1-5).*

Our society, and in particular our homes, are lacking in male leadership. Oh, this world has its ideas of what a man should be all right – we have various role models and many conflicting ideals. But what does God say?

• Men, are we masculine in a Godly sense? Do we lead our families with proper, Godly, masculine leadership?

• Wives, do you encourage your husbands to be masculine leaders?

How does God define true masculinity? In today's world, we see men falling into two extremes:

1. **The "macho man."** This is the Rambo model. Strong, silent, proving his masculinity by blasting away at life. This false image of manliness was satirized in the book *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* [p. 13-15]:

In the past, it was easy to be a Real Man. All you had to do was abuse women, steal land from Indians, and find some place to dump the toxic waste....[Today's real man is] interested in the Spartan, simple life. He still believes in "roughing it"; he doesn't own a shower massage, remote-control TV, or an electric blanket.

Real Men don't floss.

Real Men don't use ZIP codes.

Real Men don't have telephones in the shape of Snoopy.

Real Men don't drive Volvos because they're supposedly safer; they don't have special jogging shoes or telephone answering machines. (Real Men, after all, are secure enough to know that if it's important, people will call back.)

Real Men don't itemize their tax deductions.

Real Men still pass in the no-passing lane.

A Real Man would never use a designated hitter.

But this is only the tip of the modern Real Man's psyche.

Today's Real Man is intelligent and astute; he's nobody's fool.

Real Men know that things don't really go better with Coke; he's not really in good hands with Allstate; and weekends were – in fact – not made for Michelob....

But perhaps there's one phrase that sums up his very existence, a simple declaration that he finds symbolic of everything in today's world that's phoney, affected, limp, or without merit:

Real Men don't eat quiche.

Admittedly this may seem – if you'll forgive the pun – a bit hard to swallow at first.

But think about it. Could John Wayne ever have taken Normandy, Iwo Jima, Korea, the Gulf of Tonkin, and the entire Wild West on a diet of quiche and salad.

Funny – but sad in a way – isn't it that the only portrayal of a strong, dominating masculine man is lampooned, and caricatured in the tough-guy, soldier, football lineman, neanderthal image. This counterfeit image of true masculinity demeans and diminishes respect for true masculinity!

The other extreme:

2. **The effeminate man.** This extreme is probably more prevalent in today's society. He's the weak pushover who follows, rather than leads. The male image in the media, for example, used

to be Ozzie of "Ozzie and Harriet" or the Father in "Father Know Best." What is it today? Well, if there is a father at all, he is a bumbling idiot or a loser.

From *Time Magazine* in an article on the movie mogul Stephen Spielberg came this observation: *In every Spielberg "family" film since Close Encounters, the mother figure is the repository of strength and common sense; Dan is either absent or a bit vague.*

Since the time of Sigmund Freud, who hated and feared his father and was a mama's boy, the push in society has been to destroy true masculine leadership in the home with boys growing up in a woman dominated world. But notice what Paul says: *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **effeminate**, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, KJV).

That's how serious true masculinity is! The stability of society depends on it, as does a man's spirituality. Men, we need to learn to be truly masculine. And ladies, you need to know what God expects men to be like and encourage that in them – in your sons and in your husbands, irrespective of the confusion in society.

So it's not Rambo, and it's not some effeminate, shrinking, weak wristed wimp either. But what is it? **What does Christ say? Four things:**

1. The first characteristic of Godly masculinity: LEADERSHIP.

The effeminate man of today's society is not prepared to assume the leadership role. He is indecisive, hesitant, and unsure of himself. He shirks responsibility and authority because he is too timid to use it.

But God created men to be leaders: leaders in the home, leaders in society and leaders in the church.

God intends that man should be a leader – and when the man defaults in this God-given responsibility, there is automatically going to be trouble. Notice: *This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work....[his qualifications?]...one who **rules** [leads] his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)* (1 Timothy 3:1, 4-5).

God intends the husband and father to lead the government in the home. If the man doesn't, and thus leaves it to his wife and children to do what he won't, then unhappiness will automatically result.

I visited the Harry Truman library in Independence, MO. Full scale mock-up of the oval office as it was during his presidency. On the desk in plain view, a plaque: *The buck stops here!*

In the family, it stops with the man. God holds the husband responsible. Men, don't shirk that responsibility. Develop a Godly, masculine mental attitude. Be decisive: Make decisions; don't be passive, always hesitant and unwilling to give your attention to the real issues, the real problems.

Notice Paul's example recorded in Acts 13:1-13. Here Paul is first mentioned as merely one of the group. This was his training, and he devoted himself to preparation. Then when he was prepared, and when the situation arose, Paul stepped forward. He used his authority, was decisive. He was willing to stand up and be counted. He opposed the false prophet with strength of personality and masculine dominance – traits of a leader. Acting boldly and decisively, not whimpering, hesitating or "wondering" what to do!

Many men are afraid to stand up and be the leader because they are afraid people won't like

their decisions. But brethren, leadership is not a popularity contest. Leadership is preparation coupled with action. Standing up and doing what is right.

That begins in a man's own personal life. He first leads himself. Conquers himself. Learns to say no to his own nature and yes to Christ in him. And then as the opportunity arises, he rises to the occasion and leads.

But be careful, because many men abuse leadership. They're like the caricature in *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* (p.17): *Among Real Men, there has always been one simple rule: Never settle with words what you can accomplish with a flamethrower.*

So before any of us goes blasting away in Rambo-like fashion, remember that a truly masculine man is a leader according to Christ's model. It was he who said: *Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave* (Matthew 20:27).

A Godly leader leads by serving. By caring, sharing, communicating, nurturing. But the man leads!

2. The second characteristic of Godly masculinity: STRENGTH.

If you study the history of masculinity in our society, you find it began to decline rapidly after WWII. In the Korean war, fully 1/3 of all the Americans captured collaborated with the enemy. A letter written to the Chinese Chief of Intelligence stated:

The American soldier has weak loyalties to his family, his community, his country, his religion and to his fellow soldier. His concepts of right and wrong are hazy. Opportunism is easy for him. He feels himself frightened and insecure. He underestimates his own worth and his own strength and his ability to survive.

Indeed, the American male is weak. And that includes physically, but what is even a greater problem is mentally and spiritually. Men, we have been reared in a permissive society with no definite sense of right and wrong. No absolutes, not total commitment to a cause or to anything!

Such weakness is responsible to a great degree for our loss of national pride, for our broken homes, for juvenile delinquency. We were not reared to have and display real Godly strength of mind, character and spirit.

We need to develop masculine strength in three areas:

• Develop strength *physically*.

The sluggard will not plow because of winter; therefore he will beg during the harvest and have nothing (Proverbs 20:4).

A man needs strength to provide for his family. Be willing and able to work despite hardship. Learn to enjoy working hard, and pushing yourself physically.

• Develop strength *mentally*.

Just after Dunkirk, as the Germans sent the British fleeing back to England, tail between their legs, Winston Churchill stood up and proclaimed:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight in the seas and oceans. We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches and landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

When faced with adversity, many men cave in. But to be truly masculine, like Christ, means to be mentally tough, resourceful and courageous. Able to face troubles and then think one's way around them.

A real man has a well tuned mind. He is knowledgeable, educated. Knowing and then willing to face the facts. Don't short change your family, men, because you're too mentally lazy or cowardly to get educated, to become informed. Even as a young teen, Christ amazed the learned Rabbis at his knowledge and insight. He was highly educated.

A real man has **BIGNESS OF MIND**. Notice David's example in 1 Samuel 26:1-11. David had the opportunity to kill Saul. But rather than acting impulsively and with brute force, David saw the **BIG PICTURE**. He acted with wisdom and discretion, not like a bull in the china closet. David had both physical and mental strength. He worked *smarter* not just hard.

• **Develop strength *spiritually*.** Our society often presents an effeminate approach to religion. It sees religion as a woman's concern. But look at Christ's example: spiritual strength, a spiritual mind. Never afraid or embarrassed to talk about spiritual things.

Notice Joshua's example: *And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15)

Joshua did what was right and led his family that way. He did not bow down to what was easy, popular or convenient. He did what Paul advises: *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong* (1 Corinthians 16:13, KJV).

3. The third characteristic of Godly masculinity: WHOLEHEARTEDNESS.

*When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou **perfect*** (Genesis 17:1, KJV).

"Perfect" means **WHOLEHEARTED**. And that's what Abraham was above all else. He was a real man, a man's man.

This world is full of ambiguities, half truths. Don't you be, men. Be open and clear with what you say and what you stand for. Stand up and be counted and be committed. Go all the way: *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

All the way – not half way. **Be zealous** – have drive. Concentrate on what you're doing. Focus your efforts.

But so many are "wishy-washy." You can tell it in their speech. To be "eloquent" is not so much being a great orator; it's a matter of believing deeply and wholeheartedly in things. And that is reflected in your speech. As William Jennings Bryan stated:

Eloquence may be defined as the speech of one who knows what he is talking about, and means what he says. It is thought on fire! Knowledge is of little use to the speaker without earnestness. Persuasive speech is from heart to heart, not from mind to mind

4. The fourth characteristic of Godly masculinity: LOVE.

To paraphrase 1 Corinthians 13: *"though I have leadership and strength and wholeheartedness and don't have love, I am nothing."*

History is full of strong, wholehearted leaders who were despots and brought misery to millions because they were motivated by greed and personal ambition rather than love.

But we must lead in love, exercise strength with love, and be wholehearted in giving love to others.

Men, we have been reared to squelch our emotions. Yet Jesus, the most masculine man who ever lived, was a man who had and appropriately expressed deep emotion [see for example, John 11:30-36]. Christ felt things deeply – he loved deeply, and as a strong, dominant, wholehearted

leader he openly showed that love.

David, a man after God's own heart, was a man who showed great emotion. For example, when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David was not so pompous and full of self-righteous "dignity" that he was unwilling to express his deep emotions and love for God (see 2 Samuel 6:12-16, 20-23). Love, including love for God, must be expressed. To do so is being masculine in a Godly way. Men need to express love more openly – to their wives, children and for each other. To show emotion in a proper way is not weakness; it is a great strength.

Men, we all need to realize that there is a great lack of true masculinity in the world today and it has affected us all. Let's learn to be more masculine after the model of Jesus Christ! And ladies, pray earnestly for all of us that as men we would develop the masculine traits of leadership, strength, wholeheartedness and love.

Any man who learns to exercise these characteristics will be more capable of building family relationships as God intends, and will be preparing to take his place in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

TRUE FEMININITY

The movie "My Fair Lady" tells about the transformation of Eliza Doolittle – from an uncultured Cockney pauper to a refined, cultured English lady. But it was a painful journey for her and often frustrating to her male patrons, who in one scene look at each other in exasperation and ask the question: "*Why can't a woman be like a man?*"

Indeed – why did God not create women to be like men? Did God make a mistake? Was it some kind of joke? Or perhaps the woman was simply an after-thought. After all, there was Adam in the garden alone, observing the animals traipsing by in male-female pairs. Did God simply decide to create the woman because of Adam's loneliness?

No! When God created the human-kind, he was following a plan to create man in his image – an image to be expressed in both man and woman – but in distinct and complementary ways. And to each God gave certain abilities, talents, and characteristics. And God said of all this creation: *It is good.*

We just saw God's definition of true masculinity. But what is God's conception of true femininity? Perhaps we should begin with what it is not – with the way society at large often mis-defines femininity. In the world today, there are two trends:

1. Women's Liberation

This movement has been, in part, a reaction against certain abuses from men. But two wrongs don't make a right. And the women's liberation movement seeks to exert certain female rights and in so doing some of the more radical feminists have preached that the role of a woman as wife, mother and homemaker is demeaning and unnecessary.

2. Androgyny

The second trend is related and has become particularly popular among the young, where distinctions between the sexes are purposefully removed: in hair styles, clothing, makeup, etc. Androgyny is the ultimate conclusion to a lack of clearly defined sexual roles. And you end up with neither a man nor a woman, what you get is a blended "it." Does God want to eliminate the sexes? Satan does.

But how does God define true femininity? Godly femininity is expressed in three areas:

1. **A woman's relationship with God:** We're interested in *Godly* femininity.

2. **How a woman feels about herself:** Femininity is a state of mind. It is how a woman thinks. A feminine woman wants to be a woman. She enjoys the capacities and opportunities that God has established for her. She knows God made her different from men, both physically and emotionally. And rather than trying to negate or deemphasize these differences, she seeks to emphasize them.

3. **A woman's relationship with others:** If a woman has a close relationship with God and accepts her role as He ordained it, then she has a powerful basis on which to build right relationships with others.

But what are the specifics of femininity? There is no better place to go to find God's perspective than Proverbs 31 where we find eight characteristics of femininity.

The first characteristic is revealed in God's design of a woman to be:

1. Wife and Mother

This does not mean a woman who is not a wife or a mother cannot be feminine. But a woman is uniquely equipped for these roles by God's design. A single woman should develop these qualities even if she will remain single, because as we will see, these qualities transcend any specific role.

In talking about the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 we generally start with verse 10, but notice how much we learn from verse 1-10 as we see a real woman at work.

It is generally understood that King Lemuel was Solomon. His mother, of course, was Bathsheba, David's wife. Here Bathsheba is giving motherly advice to the wisest man who ever lived. Now the world says that for a woman to reach her true potential, she needs to take her place with men. Yet God holds out the model of a mother and a wife as the epitome of femininity.

Notice how God extols this role: *Jotham [King of Judah] was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done* (2 Chronicles 27:1-2).

Mothers of Kings are seldom mentioned, but here she is — associated with a righteous king. Now Uzziah started out good, but then went bad, yet Jotham was good. Why? Because of the Godly influence of his mother. But notice, despite being a good King, Jotham, reared a bad son [2 Chronicles 28:1]. And notice, no mention of the mother. But notice, Ahaz had a good son: *Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zachariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord* (2 Chronicles 29:1-2) And notice, his mother Abijah is mentioned.

Let's go a bit further into Judah's history — along comes Josiah: *Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left* (2 Kings 22:1-2).

Josiah became king so young because his evil father Amon was murdered. So Josiah was raised by his mother — a single parent. And he became one of the most righteous kings ever. There is hope for single mothers!

To be a mother is one of the highest expressions of femininity — a sacred calling that only a woman can experience, and one that God highly prizes. And so in the discussion of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, it is introduced first. But it is not all there is to femininity.

2. Reliability and Dependability

A wife of noble character [virtue] who can find? She is worth far more than rubies (Proverbs 31:10). This type of woman, with true womanly character — virtue — is priceless. And interestingly, there is only one woman in the Bible called virtuous and that is Ruth, so perhaps Bathsheba is holding out to Solomon the example of his great-great-grandmother Ruth. You see, a virtuous woman can have a beneficial effect on her family for multiple generations! Having the qualities of femininity God spells out here is so much more important than what the world tells you, ladies!

Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value (verse 11). She can be trusted and thus gives to those around her that which is of more value than anything

else – rock solid dependability. She can always be counted on and this is a big part of her husband's success. She is true to her word and keeps her promises and commitments. Loyalty is one of her great strengths – others have great confidence in her, they can trust her. She is not a gossip, or flighty, but rock solid.

She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life (verse 12).

Many women do not realize what a powerful influence they have on their husbands: *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives* (1 Peter 3:1-2).

When I read this I think of a wonderful woman who died in Kansas not long ago. Her name was Grace, and that name perfectly fit her character. When she came into the church, her husband was a non-member. But because of her sterling example, particularly during the period of suffering as she died, he became a member. A good example is of tremendous influence! And the influence God wants a woman to exert is her inner beauty: *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight* (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Gentle and quiet! Now this is not what the world values. It says *assert yourself*. But God says: *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome [contentious, assertive] wife* (Proverbs 21:9).

Back to 1 Peter 3:4: *Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*

A truly feminine woman is teachable and willing to change – and so she is not assertive and stubborn like so many radical feminists. She seeks counsel and advice – first and foremost from her husband. She does not debate, argue or insist on her own way. *For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear* (1 Peter 3:5-6).

Ladies, you can either inspire your husbands or undermine his confidence. A wise, virtuous woman inspires her husband to want to lead, rather than causing him to doubt that he is able to lead.

But if a woman is to be meek, does that mean being utterly helpless?

3. Diligent and Resourceful

She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar (Proverbs 31:13-14).

God's model woman is prepared. She is educated and resourceful. She strives for quality – for excellence in all she does. That is her character.

She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls (verse 15).

She is diligent and hard-working. And she has a high sense of priority--she sees to the care of her family.

She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard (verse 16). This speaks to ingenuity and creativity. She is able to contribute to her family's wealth by investing it and, most importantly, preserving it.

She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks (verse 17). She is a hard worker!

She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers (verses 18-19).

This speaks to a woman's contribution to the family wealth. For some women that may mean working outside of the home. But if she does, the purpose and focus of doing so is the support of the home: *Admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, [good managers of the household (NRSV)] good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed* (Titus 2:4-5). This does not mean that a woman must only work inside the home. What it means is that a wife must have as her priority the care of the home. A Christian wife is one who does not neglect the care of her home, husband and children. The home is her primary responsibility. And in some cases the care of the family will take her outside the home:

If a wife is fulfilling her responsibilities to her family and obeying God, it makes no difference whether she works outside the home or not. But she and her husband should be in agreement on the matter. And except in unusual circumstances she should not work outside the home as long as she has preschool children [Joseph W. Tkach, Feb. 1, 1988 *Worldwide News*].

And so a Godly woman is a diligent worker. She does not sit at home eating bon-bons and watching soap operas. Rather she is active, dynamic, hard-working. And all she does is directed toward making a contribution to others---her husband and children first. But it doesn't stop there:

She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy (Proverbs 31:20).

She finds ways to use her personal and family resources to serve others--she is a light to the whole world. To do that, a woman must grow out of self-centeredness. Ladies, develop yourselves so you can enlarge your circle of influence and caring. Husbands, encourage them to do so.

When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple (verses 21-22).

She develops talents that equip her to serve her family and others. And notice the powerful impact that has:

Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land (verse 23). Why? The point here is that it is because of his wife's diligence and resourcefulness. Not in pushing and nagging her husband to do so, but in giving him a secure family base from which to lead and achieve. She does this through her resourceful, diligent example expressed in a quiet and meek way – a way that inspires him.

She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes (verse 24).

4. Inner Strength

She is clothed with strength and dignity (Proverbs 31:25a).

This speaks to inner, emotional stability and self-control. She doesn't overreact to failure, disappointment or frustration. Hence she has an optimistic view of the future:

She can laugh at the days to come (verse 25b).

5. Wisdom and Understanding

She speaks with wisdom (verse 26a). This is referring, in part, to discretion. Even though she may have a strong opinion, the feminine woman knows when to express it and when to pass over a matter. She is not impulsive--she thinks before she acts. She doesn't monopolize conversation. She is cautious and tactful.

But she has developed her mind and character so that she does have insight and wisdom to give to others. I well remember a lady who had this wonderful quality. She died many years ago.

But when I entered Ambassador College as a freshman in 1969, her wisdom had a profound influence on me that has lasted until this day. At the freshman reception she learned that my Pastor back home was her brother. I suppose this fact was her opening to give me some sound advice. She said, "Ted, at Ambassador you will undoubtedly see some things that don't seem right. You may see some Seniors making mistakes. You may even see some faculty members and ministers doing what is not right. But you remember one thing: Keep your eyes on God, not men!" I have never forgotten that advice and I have had to draw on it on more than one occasion. Here was a truly feminine woman, and one with much wisdom to give – and with the discretion to know when and how to give it.

6. Kindness and Patience

On her tongue is the law of kindness (Proverbs 31:26b). She is understanding and tolerant of others' short-comings. She is quick to overlook mistakes and forgive and think the best about others.

She expresses empathy and concern toward those with problems in an encouraging way. And she is especially gentle, kind and sympathetic toward the sick.

7. Initiative, Leadership, and Drive

She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness (Proverbs 31:27). She is self-disciplined, highly motivated and acts early--plans, directs, leads in the appropriate ways. She is responsible and capable without being hard and demanding.

And she is proactive; she doesn't just clean up after disasters – she builds her house [Proverbs 14:1].

And notice the powerful influence she wields: *Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her* (Proverbs 31:28). A word here to children and husbands. Do you want a Proverbs 31 mother and wife? Then rise up a praise her, respect and honor her!

8. Conversion, Faith, and Courage

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting (Proverbs 31:30a). Does this mean God cares nothing about a woman's charm and beauty? No, God wants women to cultivate a right kind of charm: *A gracious woman retains honor* (Proverbs 11:16a). A feminine woman is cultured and refined. She understands proper etiquette; she dresses in an attractive manner, but always modest, never seductive, or showy in a vain way. God says that her hair is her glory, so she takes care of it and wears it in a feminine way. But physical beauty is fleeting, so she concentrates on what is important: *A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised* (Proverbs 31:30b).

A feminine woman will recognize God's sovereignty, being obedient and responsive to his will. A Godly woman will study what God says about women and seek examples of Godly femininity: Sarah, Ruth, Hannah, Mary, and in particular Proverbs 31--the virtuous woman.

Even in the face of trials, disappointment and persecution, she has uncompromising character and upholds God's principles. Pressures and crises don't cause her to crumble. Circumstances such as a sick child, the loss of a job, a death in the family or a crisis in the church do not shake her faith. She has God's strength deeply imbedded in her. And she seeks out and cultivates that strength.

And so God rightfully gives her this high commendation: *Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate* (Proverbs 31:31).

To be a Godly, feminine woman is a high calling – and a great challenge in a godless world. But God's women are up to the challenge. Embrace the model God sets for you ladies and aspire to the high standard of the virtuous woman.

INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE – Becoming One Flesh

Here is a story about intimacy in marriage:

In the weeks before my mother-in-law died, my husband and I visited her every night. We stood at her hospital bedside and helplessly watched her life ebb away as the cancer she had fought for five years won complete mastery over her body. We found her especially fragile one Friday night. My husband propped her in his arms and fed her from a cup she was too weak to hold herself. Dutifully she opened her mouth to receive bits of nourishment from the son she had once nurtured. Finally she turned her head to him and whispered, "Good-by." That would be the last word we heard from her. She died a week later.

*My husband and I left the room together that night. Suddenly I became aware that I was walking alone. I turned and saw him leaning against a wall, head in hands, sobbing uncontrollably. I walked back to him and slipped my arm into his. I had seen him cry before, tears of sadness or joy on various occasions, but never had I seen these body-racking sobs. I knew, without his saying, what he was thinking and feeling, and he knew that I knew. We left the hospital arm in arm and drove home silently. Since then we have never discussed that incident in the hospital, have never even talked about the sadness we both carry within us since his mother's death. There has been no need to. Everything that could be said was said without words that night. It was a moment of total honesty, of complete understanding, of INTIMACY. [Condensed from *Married People* by Francine Klagsbrun].*

Among all the components of a healthy, happy marriage, intimacy is one of the most elusive, yet it is one of the most important.

Intimacy is defined by John T. Gossett, the director of the Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation in Dallas as "the degree to which we share vulnerabilities in words." You are intimate if each of you "can say anything, no matter how silly or frightened or immature or helpless it makes you look, and the other person will treat it with respect, not use it against you."

But is intimacy some "modern" concept in marriage? Is it nothing more than psycho-babble? No, it is a vital component intended by the creator of marriage from the very beginning. In fact, it is the direct result of following the most basic instruction about marriage in all the Bible: *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a **helper suitable** for him"* (Genesis 2:18, NIV).

1. First of all we notice that man and woman were made FOR each other, perfectly complementary and suitable. But notice: *Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable **helper** was found* (Genesis 2:19-20). Why this interlude about naming animals? At first glance this may seem unrelated but, in actuality, it is God's pre-marital counseling for Adam. God was setting Adam up to understand some important things:

- That Eve was unique, created like Adam, not like the animals. A special creation.
- Adam had all these beasts for his service, to do his work, to provide for food; but what he lacked was a partner, a mate, a companion. He didn't need a wife to serve him, to be his beast of burden; no, he needed a "helper."

The word "helper" in Hebrew is never used in the Old Testament to designate a subordinate or

a servant. In fact, it is sometimes used of God Himself [Psalm 115:11]. Adam and Eve were created *for* each other. They were created equally to share life together; for companionship – partnership if you like: *"I will make him a helper as his partner,"* said God (Genesis 2:18, NRSV).

2. Yet though created *for* each other, they were also created uniquely different *from* each other:

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Genesis 2:21-22).

The man was shaped from the ground in the hands of God the Potter. But Eve was formed from the rib of Adam, secretly, by God the Father of the Bride. Why the difference? *For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head* (1 Corinthians 11:8-10).

Eve was created after Adam and differently than Adam to show, in part, that the creation of man as both male and female included the creation of marital role. And the husband is designated by God to be the leader in the family.

But that is not the only reason that the man and the woman were created differently. If man is to be the leader in the family, God wanted him to know that it is not a matter of superiority or inferiority. And so God put Adam to sleep and created Eve. Woman is NOT the creation of man. Man is inferior to God because God is creator. Woman is not the creation of man and is not inferior to him. God is the woman's creator and ruler, not man. And God has appointed the man to a position of leadership in the home.

This is further underscored by the part of Adam's anatomy used to create Eve. In 1158, the medieval poet and professor Peter Lombard observed: "Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his lord, but from his side to be his partner."

Man and wife are to have an intimate, close and affectionate union reflected in this image of woman coming from man's side. Yet we know they are separate creations, distinct parts because they were created different FROM each other.

Each is unique, each has different talents, capabilities, proclivities. And God put them together.

3. So God created Adam and Eve FOR each other, different FROM each other and now he gives them TO each other:

*The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." Therefore shall a man **leave** his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** unto his wife: and they shall be **one flesh*** (Genesis 2:23-24, NIV/KJV).

Now we've come to the most important part of God's marital instruction and it begins with two simple words: **Leave and cleave!** The essential message of "leave and cleave" is that the husband/wife relationship must be a couple's first and foremost priority:

• **Leave.** The word for "leave" is a very strong one, meaning to "abandon and forsake – to wholly give up."

Marriage must be without parental prying. It must be without interference from in-laws. God's plan and purpose for marriage is that husbands and wives leave their parents in order to cleave to one another.

But notice that the primary responsibility for this leaving is the husbands. It is often much

harder for the husband to subordinate his interests to that of the wife. However, this "leaving" applies to both man and woman – and this union is of a totally different nature from that of parents and children.

The point is, the marital relationship must take **PRIORITY** over all other relationships. It means putting others at a lower level and creating a new, binding relationship stronger than all other human relationships. Put your marriage above your children! Put marriage over in-laws.

Naturally, husbands and wives should love their parents and in-laws. Naturally husbands and wives should love and nurture their children. But if a husband and wife want to have a good and growing marriage, they will put a boundary around themselves and they will not allow anyone or anything to separate or divide them.

To do so will not hurt the other relationships, but rather strengthen them. This is particularly true of children. The most effective thing you can do for your children is to cleave to your mate: *Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your **partner**, the wife of your **marriage covenant**. Has not the Lord made them **one**? In flesh and spirit they are his. And **why one**? Because he was seeking **godly offspring**. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth (Malachi 2:13-15).*

Here God identifies what makes for good children a good relationship with your mate. To put your mate first is to bless your children. Notice in Judges 13 that God's instructions to Samson's parents about how to rear their son focused on the parents' behavior, not the child's.

Margaret Tresch Owen, Timberlawn's director of developmental research, talks about the impact of the marital relationship on parenting:

One of the most important things marriage may be doing is modeling ways of relating, setting the pattern for the way parents treat their child. And that, in turn, shapes the child's earliest experience of relationship... In general, the quality of a marriage predicts the warmth and sensitivity of early parenting--the new parents' pleasure in their baby and appropriate responsiveness to his or her signals.

• **Cleave.** In Genesis 2:24, "cleave" literally means "to adhere firmly to, to be strongly attached, closely united, firmly cemented." The Bible uses the same word "cleave" for our relationship with God [Deuteronomy 10:20, KJV]. To "cleave" speaks of a profound spiritual relationship--but it is one that has a place in human relationships. It is the example shown by Ruth, who's widowed mother-in-law Naomi, was leaving Ruth's country of Moab to return to Judah. And notice what it means to cleave: *"Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also tonight, and should also bear son; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth **clave** unto her. And she [Naomi] said, "Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law." And Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:12-16, KJV).*

To "cleave" signifies a strong sense of commitment and includes the idea of great affection. To "cleave" indicates the highest order of loyalty and devotion. That is what we are to show our

mates as Ruth showed Naomi.

• So we are to leave and cleave, but there is one more thing God says in Genesis 2:24 in this most important instruction on marriage: **We are to weave:** "*Become one flesh.*"

"Flesh" in Hebrew thought represents the entire person. And so to be one flesh in marriage means we are to weave a wholly new tapestry made of the threads taken jointly from each mate. This produces total unity of body, mind and spirit – unity of interest and purpose. The couple is to be one flesh, one spirit, one person.

Becoming "one flesh" also means giving up certain separate or independent rights, privileges, cares and concerns. We become equally interested in all things that concern the marriage.

And so, to become "one flesh" means a marital partnership. Notice how Christ uses this message: "*Wherefore they are no more twain [two], but **one flesh**. What therefore God hath **joined together...***" (Matthew 19:6, KJV).

"Joined together" literally means "yoked together." Christ uses the analogy of two oxen yoked together in plowing. They are equally involved and it is imperative that they pull together. If one stops pulling, the other suffers. A good team of oxen is one unit – one flesh.

And so to weave together as one flesh produces unity: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be **united** to his wife, and the two will become **one flesh**. So they are no longer two, but one* (Mark 10:7-8).

But how is this unity to be created? By a dictatorial style where one imposes his will on the other and demands submission? Notice: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband* (Ephesians 5:31-33).

No, unity is created in a marriage by patterning itself after the model of Christ's selfless service to the Church. In this way, one flesh is created in a marriage through mutual submission, respect and sharing.

Perhaps one of the simplest ways to describe it is the way Christ addressed his church, his future bride: *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, **I have called you friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you* (John 15:15).

Friendship is a paradigm, a human model for the open, intimate relationship Christ wants with his people. That is the model for our marriages – to become best friends:

*Any survey of long-lasting and fulfilling marriages reveals that the central component that carries a couple through the tough times and allows them to benefit the most from the good ones is **friendship**.Love, in the absence of friendship, is only a hormonal illusion. One cannot desire another person over the long haul without really being **friends** with him or her"* (*Husbands and Wives* by Kinder and Cowan).

But creating and then sustaining "one flesh" friendship in marriage is no easy task. It takes work to overcome the barriers that stand in the way. Kinder and Cowan identify five barriers to friendship in marriage:

a. Looking outside of the marriage for your best friend. We need to look inside our marriages for friendship. Then outside.

b. Lack of sharing. Not being direct and honest and open destroys any chance of real friendship. Notice that it was open sharing of information that Christ pointed to as proof he was treating the disciples like friends.

c. Viewing your mate as inferior. The give-and-take of friendship occurs only when we approach our mate as an equal. This does not mean we ignore the hierarchy of authority God has placed in the family. But it is the way of looking at each other as "heirs together." Friends are able to give each other honest feedback--but a master/servant relationship does not allow for that.

d. Lack of acceptance. Friends are tolerant of differences. We don't expect our friends to be our mirror images, but admit to it or not, many of us expect our mate to be exactly that.

e. Holding grudges. Old grudges and resentments have to be set aside. Note I didn't say resolved. Most old conflicts will never be fully resolved, and attempts to do so are more often than not veiled attempts to win a final victory. We have to let go of certain conflicts and move on with our lives. Holding on to negative feelings blocks the possibility of friendship.

So *leave, cleave* and then *weave* by being best friends, by having fun together, dating, being companions. Leave your father, mother, children and spend time playing and talking and being friends. All of these elements tell us about becoming one flesh and that adds up to the one quality in marriage that we began with: intimacy. And there is intimacy in your marriage when:

a. Your mate feels he or she is important to you in a way that nothing else is. This means making your mate feel special. She knows she is the most important person in the world to someone: you. That means being aware of your mates needs, wishes and feelings.

b. There is intimacy in your marriage when there is open **sharing of secrets** and knowing that absolute confidentiality will be kept. Can you talk to each other about anything. I don't mean gossip, I mean openly expressing your innermost fears and longings, your secrets that you wouldn't dare risk telling anyone else.

c. There is intimacy in your marriage when you have the **ability to relax with each other**. To be yourself. When you feel safe with each other.

And so it is LEAVE, CLEAVE AND WEAVE: Become **one flesh**, become **friends**. This is God's basic marital instruction, confirmed by Christ and confirmed by Paul. And it is these three elements (leave, cleave and weave), that more than any others, create that vital element of **intimacy** in marriage.

PARENTING – OVERVIEW: Teach Your Children Well

We now leave the our discussion of husbands and wives and turn to another vital part of family relationships – parenting. I want to begin by pointing out that parents have many responsibilities, but none is more important than being teachers to their children.

As God states in Deuteronomy 4:8-10, the primary responsibility of a parent is to be a teacher. But how do you teach your children? I have five pointers to help you:

1. Realize that Children are a Gift from God

God tells us that, *Children are a heritage [gift] from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate* (Psalm 127:3-5). When you view your children from this perspective, it has a profound impact on your approach.

2. Love your Children

What a fabulous blessing it is to be a parent! To participate in the training and nurturing of a future heir of the Kingdom of God. But if we do it wrong, being a parent can be a tremendous burden: *The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother* (Proverbs 29:15).

3. Make your Teaching an Integral Part of Life

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes (Deuteronomy 6:4-8).

Our primary teaching of our children should not be sit-down lectures but day to day experiences.

4. What to Teach Them:

a. Teach them about God. Here is one child's concept of God:

Let me tell you about God. He fills up the whole world cause He's infinity. He makes you talk and He holds you all together. He's always inside your body, and when he wants babies born, he just gives mommies big round tummies so the babies can have plenty of room. When he wants people to die he just hocks them. He has a white beard and a white moustache and his hair is white. When you sit down he's right next to you and you can't see him cause he's invisible. He likes everybody even though they are bad guys. God made both good guys and bad guys and he made the same amount cause it's only fair to have the same amount. When there's wars the gooder guys have the gooder brains to make traps for the bad guys so they can win. God doesn't help them win the war; he just holds up the world so there's plenty of room to fight. He's the strongest in the whole world and that's why he can hold up the whole world. He never eats and he stays up all night and takes care of everybody. He can do all this and no one else can do it cause there's only one God.

God ought to be real to our children. He ought to be known by them – not on the basis of some fairy tale misconception but based on reality and truth! *For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments* (Psalm 78:5-7).

b. Teach them your values. So many people today fear to impose their values on their children, but teach them your values--don't just let them choose on their own. Give guidance! When? Take advantage of all opportunities, including the bad times. Combine teaching of values with discipline – why was what they did wrong? What effect did it have on others.

Reinforce good values--the most powerful tool you have. Do this even when they make mistakes. Praise for the good values they displayed (i.e. being sorry for doing wrong) – don't major in the minors. Let them learn values through the hard knocks of facing consequences for their own behavior.

5. How to Teach Them:

a. Emphasize the positive. The primary emphasis of teaching should always be the POSITIVE: to encourage, praise, help, support: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). Notice also Colossians 3:21: *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

b. Teach them by your example. Children learn from the very earliest ages by imitating: *By only a few months old, babies are already beginning to imitate the behavior of others who are important in their lives. In one study, conducted by University of Washington psychologist Andrew Meltzoff and his colleague Keith Moore, babies less than 72 hours old copied the actions of adults who stuck out their tongues or opened their mouths. Babies mimic emotional expressions as well: Some researchers have found that 2-day old infants imitate smiles, frowns and looks of surprise modeled by adults.* [From USN&WR, 8/20/90]

But the pattern of imitating continues. Notice the following poem:

Children Learn What They Live
*If a child lives with criticism,
He learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility,
He learn to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame,
He learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns confidence.*

*If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice.
If a child lives with security,
He learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval,
He learns to like himself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
He learns to find love in the world.*

All of us learn by imitating others--that's what we are to do with God: *Be imitators of God* (Ephesians 5:1). What are your children like? What are YOU like? Are you a good role model?

c. Spend time with them. Here are the words to a poignant song entitled "Cats in the Cradle." The words were written by the wife of Harry Chapin.

*My child was born just the other day
he came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
he learned to walk while I was away
He was talking before I knew and as he grew he'd say
I'm gonna be like you Dad--you know I'm gonna be like you
REFRAIN: And the cats in the cradle and the silver spoon
little boy blue, the man in the moon
When you c'mon home Dad? I don't know when--
but we'll get together then boy--
you know we'll have a good time then.
My child turned 10 just the other day
he said thanks for the ball Dad--c'mon let's play
Can you teach me to throw--I said not today--
I've got lot's to do--he said that's OK
And as he walked away his smile never dimmed--
it said I'm gonna be like him--you know I'm gonna be like him
He came home from college just the other day
So much like a man I just had to say
I'm proud of you---can you sit for a while
He shook his head and said with a smile:
What I'd really like Dad is to borrow the car keys
See you later can I have them please.
I've long since retired, my son's moved away
Called him up just the other day
I said I'd like to see you, if you don't mind
He said I'd love to Dad if I could find the time.
You see my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu
But It's sure nice talkin' to you Dad--
it's sure nice talking to you.*

*And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me--
he'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me.
And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
little boy blue, the man in the moon
When you c'mon home son?
I don't know when. But we'll get together then Dad--you know we'll have a good time
then.*

As adults, as parents, we have been given an awesome responsibility – what are we doing with it? Let's be sure we are fulfilling our most important obligation to our young people: To be their teachers.

PARENTING BY AGE GROUPS

The subject of parenting is often a confusing one. There is so much said and written about it. Over the span of human history it seems that every approach you can think of has been tried. But which is right?

- In A.D. 175, the Greek physician Galen described his approach to parenting:

The normal child is healthy in every way. His manners need no correcting...So, when they cry or scream or are upset, we should understand that it means something is disturbing them, and we must try to discover what they need and give it to them.

- In this country before the 1890's, children were required to perform major chores by age six or seven. They were often bound to an employer by age 11 or 12. Severe physical punishment was given at home and school.

- Between 1890-1910 the pendulum swung. Children were not looked at as property – they were protected and highly valued and in some ways indulged. But there was a strong emphasis on the development of moral character.

- From 1910 to 1930 there was renewed emphasis on discipline. Regimentation and sternness were key. Parents were told to minimize affection. Child psychologist John Watson wrote a book in 1928 advocating molding babies by scientific control with strict feeding and sleeping schedules, toilet training at 6 months, no hugging or kissing. "Mother love is a dangerous instrument", he wrote, "that can wreck a child's chance for future happiness". The only physical contact he advocated between parent and child was a brisk handshake each morning.

- From 1930-1950, the emphasis shifted to personality development. The thought was that children will become "self-regulating" if they are left to develop on their own. These parents did not want their children to suffer as they did.

An article written in 1950: "Sixty Years of Child Training Practices" by Celia B. Stendler in the *Journal of Pediatrics* (36 [1950]: 122-134) said:

The past two decades have witnessed a revolution in child training practices in America which has been tremendous in its scope and far-reaching in its effects. From an era where the mother was taught that the child must have his physical wants cared for and then be left alone, must be fed on a rigid schedule, must learn to cry it out, must be toilet trained early and must not be spoiled by attention, we have come to a time when exactly the opposite advice is advocated. Today the mother is advised to feed the baby when he's hungry, to delay toilet training until he's ready for it, to see that the baby gets a reasonable amount of cuddling and mothering, to let the baby initiate the weaning process.

- From 1950-70 personality was the strong emphasis. There was strong reliance on reasoning with a child and using guilt as a tool to affect his behavior. And then beginning around 1970 as both parents went out to work, parenting responsibility was turned over to institutions.

Why all the differences? In part because society's approach to child rearing is a function of culture and major historic events. If you were living in 14th century Europe, your concern for your daughter might have been that she not grow up to be a witch. If you were living in the early 1800's, and a pioneer crossing the plains, your concern for your children would have been their survival.

Times change. Parenting practices do too. They are, to some extent, a function of when and where you live. That is valid in part because we as parents must prepare our children to live in the world of this time and this place and in the world of the near future where they are going.

What issues are parents concerned about today? What must children become to function in this world?

- Sociable: We are a mobile society, and our culture and business world places a high importance on the ability to interact with others.
- Intellectual: We are a technological society.
- Independent: Our society values and therefore rewards autonomy--it is different in Japan where they value interdependence.
- Able to cope with stress: We live in a stressful society.

Parents have to prepare their children to take their place in a society that demands these and other qualities. But we must also be concerned about something more important: The eternal values that transcend culture, time and place – God's values. Our parenting practices must take those into account first and foremost.

So what is the right approach? What works? What doesn't? That is what I want to discuss with you in this section on parenting. We're going to look at how to parent the three major age groups: young children (birth to age 6), pre-teens (6-12) and teenagers.

The way we will approach the topic is in answer to a basic question: *What is the primary goal of parenting?* Is it simply to get them to age 18 alive? Or to get them there and remain sane as a parent? Yes, but, I'm sure you'll agree, there is more. Notice what Scripture says: *Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older he will remain upon it* (Proverbs 22:6, TLB).

One way to think about this is that we as parents are to raise children to choose the right way as we empower them to be able to live it. To do this, we need a proper way to think about parenting. Perhaps one way is to consider our understanding of the word "discipline." There are two ways to think about the word and each reflects a basic model of parenting.

One model sees discipline as *punishment*. It views children as basically evil and in need of measures to drive that evil out. It equates discipline with inflicting pain for crimes committed. It focuses on past bad acts.

But the other model, the one found in scripture, sees discipline not as simply punishment but discipline as *discipleship*. The word "discipline" comes from the same Latin root as discipleship meaning, literally, "to learn." Discipline is simply a way to say "teach."

First and foremost a parent's role is to teach. Discipline involves teaching the child to control himself rather than using punishment as a means to control the child. The focus is on teaching him what is good and empowering him to do it. We work to teach the child to become self-controlled – to be able to live the right way independently. In a very real sense, our job as parents is to prepare a child for a day when he will no longer need us. This does not mean permissiveness. The authority of parents is not diminished by the approach of discipline as discipleship.

It is the approach God uses with us. He nurtures us – he helps us to be secure in his love and acceptance and then he works with us so that we come under loving and nurturing internal control of his Spirit.

This godly model of parenting involves giving both control and support. Notice this principle illustrated in God's instruction to man about his stewardship responsibilities: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it* (Genesis 2:15, NRSV). Two parts of man's responsibility are highlighted here:

- 1) Control (*till it*).
- 2) Support (*keep it*).

These twin responsibilities of control and support apply to all aspects of man's dominion including his children. In considering the use of these two aspects of control and support, we can identify four basic parenting styles. They are the four possible combinations of these two factors:

1. **Neglectful parenting:** Low on both support and control. This is the worst kind of parent.
2. **Permissive parenting:** High on support but low on control. These parents send the message, "Do whatever you want." Might sound good to some children, but their children are the least self-reliant and curious about the world, and they take the fewest risks.
3. **Authoritarian parenting:** Low on support but high on control. They say, "Do it because I am the parent." Their children are likely to be discontented, withdrawn, distrustful and unable to function independently.
4. The best type is **authoritative parenting:** High on both support and control. They say, "Do it for this reason." They have children who are generally self-reliant, self-controlled and contented.

PARENTING DURING THE EARLY YEARS

What does an authoritative parent look like? How do they function in the real world of parenting today? That is what we'll examine now as we focus on parenting very young children.

As with any job, first we need to understand what we're working with. What are the factors that make young children what they are?

1. Heredity: It's like the film in the camera. The picture isn't all there, but the basic quality of the picture is set to a certain extent.

We are learning more and more about how much heredity affects who we are. A big factor influenced by our heredity is our temperament. If we were talking about dogs, we'd talk about the differences in temperament between breeds. The same is true, to some extent, in humans. Our temperament is greatly influenced by the composition of a complex fluid that our brains are bathed in. This fluid is made up of some 200 chemicals whose composition is basically inherited.

These chemicals influence the firing patterns of our brains – and tend to direct us toward one of the basic temperamental categories. (Keep in mind here, however, that most of us are "mutts"; we don't fit purely into any one of these categories). About 15% of healthy children are very shy and quiet – they hold onto Mom, and are inhibited. Yet 25-30% are very uninhibited, don't frighten easily, don't mind meeting strangers. But what they inherit does not predetermine what they will be. By age 6, some half of the shy ones will no longer be shy because of the effect of the environment on them. And by adult hood, 2/3rds of them will no longer be that shy.

The ones who remain shy don't generally become heads of businesses or salesmen who have to meet the public and interact with people. They often become bench workers, computer programmers, novelists. They are not less intelligent; in fact they are often very intelligent.

You can pick out the shy ones very easily by 4 months of age. You play music or make noise and they become agitated and aroused, start to thrash around, become tense and start to cry because they are very excitable.

The extroverts, on the other hand, often become investment bankers and politicians if they are middle to upper class. If they are lower class they sometimes become criminals because they don't get frightened easily.

2. Another major factor that makes children what they are is what happens in the womb.

This is the first place that environment comes into play. One of the tragedies today is the many crack cocaine babies being born – it's like opening the camera and destroying the film.

A fetus can see, hear, feel, experience, taste, and on a very basic level, learn in the uterus before birth. And what a child feels and perceives in the womb begins to shape his attitudes and expectations. Whether he ultimately is a basically happy or sad, aggressive or meek, secure or an anxiety-ridden person depends, in part, on the experiences in the womb.

The emotional well-being of the mother has a profound impact on the fetus. What are her persistent thought patterns? Is she chronically anxious? Does she despise being pregnant? Or is she generally happy and positively anticipating being a mother? The thoughts of the mind affect the body's bio-chemistry and impact the fetus in a powerful way.

It is important to talk to the baby in the womb--the fetus listens all the time from the 24th week on. Soft, soothing talk makes him feel loved and wanted. Not because he understands the words, but the tone communicates the message. Music is important. Researchers have shown that music by Vivaldi and Mozart cause the fetal heart rate to steady and kicking will decline. The music of

Brahms and Beethoven, and many forms of rock music, on the other hand, drive most fetuses to distraction.

3. Another major influence on a child is BIRTH ORDER: Statistics show that in middle class families with two children, generally the first born get better grades and are less often arrested. 63% of people in "Who's Who" are first born. Later born are more likely to be rebellious and to distrust authority. In stable families, the first born easily take on the values of the parents. If they see hard working parents, they become hard working. But it's different for the 2nd born. They see life through not only the parents, but also through the 1st born. They often see the 1st born as a predator – the one who takes his toys and hits him. The world looks unjust and unfair – the older child gets to stay up late.

The 2nd born is much more likely to question things. In science the revolutionary inventions have been made 80% of the time by later born. First born are more likely in college to major in the traditional areas like law or medicine. Later born are more likely to major in the visual studies and in non-traditional areas such as anthropology or theology. They are more likely not to go the standard track.

4. Another major factor that makes a child what he is, is HUMAN NATURE.

Human nature is like jello – it quickly conforms to the mold it is put in. It can be wounded or opened, hurt or nurtured. And it is at home with sin, for indeed our fallen nature (our 'human' nature) is sinful—sin-oriented.

And there is something else about us. God made us to be dependent on relationships. God created humans to need care givers. And how that care is given has much to do with how the human nature of a child, though oriented toward sin, is molded.

Science reveals just how needy a newborn is. Pictures taken of the brain at birth show the number of brain connections (neural networks) are very few – the newborn mind is indeed like a blank slate. But by age 2 there are more neural connections in one brain than there are telephone connections in the United States!

That shows how much development occurs between birth and age two. Up until age two, the brain is still being formed. A little child cannot think, cannot reason as we do. Our job is to give support and nurture – to create an environment in which they can thrive. It makes no sense to spank the day-lights out of children during this formative time. They don't know what they're being spanked for – they have no consciousness of right and wrong. Notice what Paul says: *Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults* (1 Corinthians 14:20, NRSV). Paul says infants possess a freedom from evil.

The only reason to spank during the first two years is to teach an association between pain and danger (eg: reaching for a wall socket). But if you spank a child for everything, it confuses him and retards his growth.

A 6 month old does not lie in its crib thinking, "If I cry loud enough here at 2:00 in the morning, I'll punish my mother for not changing my diaper quickly enough." The only tool a baby has to communicate at birth is its voice – it has no language skills. All it can do is cry.

But as the brain develops, this changes. And our approach needs to change too.

5. The final factor that makes children what they are is their ENVIRONMENT. The environment includes chance events (time and circumstances) such as who did you meet? What school did you go to?

Gregory Mendohl, the father of the study of genetics, was a problem child – an underachiever

failing in school. His parents, in frustration, tried to find a place for him. They looked for a monastery where he could go to be supervised and educated. The only one available in the area happened, by chance, to have an herbarium. In the herbarium Mendohl discovered genetics. If his father knows another Abbot, someone else discovers it. Time and chance. These chance events are often beyond our control as parents. But we should ask God to direct them and use them to help our children.

But for the most part, we as parents do have a profound influence on the environment our children grow up in – particularly when they are very young. During the first year the key issue we need to focus on in parenting is developing TRUST. If trust is not developed in the first year it may never be. So we need to create an environment that builds trust. We provide nurturing, coddling, breast feeding. This is the time to lay a foundation of support.

The bonding of the baby to the mother is of critical importance. A child's emotional development begins between 2 to 4 months of age. He begins to show warmth and pleasure toward parents and other significant individuals at this time. The ability to communicate those emotions – including curiosity, anger, pleasure and assertiveness develops gradually between 3 to 8 months. This is a particularly critical time for the parents to have continuous, face to face contact with the child to make him feel secure and loved.

Don't worry about spoiling a child at this age – you can never give him too much attention and affection.

By nine months, as the brain develops, a child passes up the family dog in intelligence. But so many adults give more attention to training the dog than their child. A child learns ½ of all he will ever know in the first year. This is a critical time.

The first temper tantrum usually comes along about now. How does the "authoritative" parent handle it? Remember it is high support as well as high control. Even at this early age, we seek to make the child responsible for his own behavior. The first thing to do, of course, is be sure the child is not in pain. The last thing you want to do is to lose control of yourself, shake him, or spank the daylights out of him – you'd simply be giving him the attention he craves but in a very harmful way. You might simply ignore it for a while. If it continues, tell the child that he's going to have to live alone with himself if he's going to be like that so you put him somewhere he can't be hurt and you let him live with himself. No scolding, no spanking, no control battles at this time.

But during the second year the basic issue is to get them under control. This is the time to teach them what one author calls "basic German shepherd": come, sit, go, no, stay.

This is the time to combine very high support with very high control. Give them very specific directions, guidelines and limits. Get involved and direct their behavior. A two year old with no limits becomes self-centered and immature. A child needs consistent, age-appropriate limits. They need to learn they can't have all they want.

Never lose a battle for control at this age. In fact, it is a good idea to set up some control challenges at this age and teach them to respond immediately. This works at age two, because the brain is developed enough that they can understand simple instructions. They have reached a point of accountability.

From age four to five, a powerful factor in a child's development is identification. A child this age looks around and begins to ask, "To whom am I more similar?" Humans have a mind that categorizes – that's how God made us. We want to know who we are; male or female, old or young. So the young child observes and decides who he is most similar to and then something very helpful or very hurtful happens – he concludes he's like the one he's most similar to. His characteristics are your characteristics.

This identification becomes a crutch. An insecure child who begins to identify with a secure parent can say to himself, "I'm a bit fearful here, but I'm Dad's boy and he is secure and confident." And that pulls him through. Or he might say, "I'm not doing too well here, but I'm a descendant of my great-grandfather so and so--I come from a lineage of success, I'll be successful too." That's what positive identification can do for you.

But turn it around. What if your father is an alcoholic? You ask yourself, "Why is my father this way? There's something in my family". Or you say this about your race. If you're a poor black you know as a young child that your group is not liked. You conclude there is something wrong with you! How tragic. And remember, these identification patterns happen very early.

In short, it's not so much what you say to your children, it's what they see. They see you read, they see you study and they identify and see themselves as studious. They see you as optimistic and happy and they see themselves that way. As parents we are teachers and the most effective way of teaching is by example.

For young children in identification, one thing is of primary importance – communicate to them by your words and actions that they are valued, wanted, and loved. This can be done in many different ways: Talk with them, read to them and interact with them – this makes them feel loved and it also promotes their intellectual development.

This interaction, this teaching by example also promotes their character development. As Horace Bushnell writes in *Christian Nurture*:

Let every Christian father and mother understand, when their child is three years old, they have done more than half of all they will ever do for his [or her] character.

Begin with high support, then as they progress on between age two to six, a parent must teach and train in the area of authority. The processes of imitation and identification are the tools – they are never again as strong as at this age. Children learn to identify good and bad in people. They are learning to make value judgments. This is an important time to teach them how to think – how to interpret their own feelings and behavior. Set guidelines – be specific.

PARENTING DURING PREADOLESCENCE

Remember that the goal of a parent is to raise children prepared to live independent and SELF controlled lives. We said that the way to do that is to teach children to choose the right way and empower them to be able to live it independently (Proverbs 22:6). The model of parenting the Bible presents is the authoritative parent who gives both high support and high control. It begins during the first two years when a parent builds a foundation of trust through giving high support: nurture, affection, cuddling, bonding. Then starting about age two it is 'basic German shepherd' time [come, sit, go, no, stay] – building a foundation of control – continued high support but now high control as well. At about age four to five is the period of identification – the child looks around and asks "Who am I most like?" and begins to identify with and mimic others.

And now we reach that wonderful age in a child's life often called pre-adolescence. It's wonderful because if you do it right up to age 6, this time is a real joy. This is the age often called *concrete operations*. Children in this period seem to be growing up quite a bit and are able to think much more independently. But a child this age is limited to thinking about specific things ("concrete operations"). They can absorb lots of information, but they do not think in terms of abstract principles until about age 13 or 14.

Here are some letters kids in this age group wrote to God, and notice how they think:

- "Dear God: My Dad thinks he is YOU. Please straighten him out.--Wayne" [age 11].
- "Dear God: Please help the Democrats and the Republicans to get along. That way we could get along with other places too. Like Russia and the Arabs and the Vietnams. Thanks--Clark" [age 10].

Direct and concrete – not abstract. The beauty of this age is that they are so easy to shape and train. During the grade school years they basically believe everything you tell them. This is a great opportunity, so use it! Notice Proverbs 13:24: *He who spares his rod* [a symbol of discipline – teaching] *hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly* [margin: "disciplines him early"]. Remember, the Biblical model of discipline is not simply punishment but discipleship – teaching. It must be started early and it must be consistent. So you build a foundation of trust and control when they are young and now with a child age 6 to 12 you have a mind that is like a sponge and is ripe for continued teaching and direction. But at this age, time is running out because a child's pattern of character is basically set by age 10. That pattern tends to persist through the teen years and remains fairly stable for most people throughout the rest of their lives. So as one author tells us, what we learn in kindergarten IS important:

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain but there in the sandbox at nursery school. These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you...

[From *All I ever really needed to know I learned in kindergarten*]

What are your 6 and 7 year olds learning from you? For good or bad they are learning character. There is an old saying that is very true: "You train a child until age ten; after that you only influence him."

If you don't spend the time and do the training at this critical time, you will greatly regret it later: *The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother....Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul* (Proverbs 29:15, 17).

At age 6-8 children enter a stage of development we might call "tit for tat." Rules dominate their games as they focus on what is required. Perhaps you've seen girls at this age playing dolls as they argue about the rules of their make believe household. That's what they think about, so use it – this is a time to define rules very clearly, to give specific guidelines.

Between age 9 and 11 the common complaint is, "It's not fair!" It is a time of reciprocity: "I do to you what you did to me." That is very immature and a parent must work with that so they grow intellectually and morally to where they begin to think in terms of, "I do to you as I want you to do to me." The golden rule.

At this age a child is easily influenced, but many parents abuse that by controlling their children with force and intimidation. Guess what? It usually works! But what are you producing? A child that is self-controlled, growing up to become independent and mature? No you're producing a time bomb. Here's an important principle: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). Intimidation works for a while but when they leave the stage of concrete operations and enter the time of conceptual thinking known as teenage, it will usually backfire on you.

What we want to do is use this important formative stage to teach our children self-control. To do that we must become consequential parents. That means training our children to think in terms of the consequences of their behavior and to make some choices for themselves and accept responsibility for their own behavior. So instead of rant and rave, it's choices and consequences.

The way to do this is to give them lots of opportunities, lots of choices and hope that they will make some mistakes so that they will suffer for them! Do it at this age when the consequences are relatively minor and the suffering won't be too lengthy or life-threatening.

For a mind in concrete operations you have to make the rules and expectations clear. Then show great emotion when they do it right. When they fail, you don't get emotional; you simply let the consequences do the teaching. Don't rant and rave when they mess up; don't argue with them. Simply clearly state the consequences.

To prepare them for life, make the consequences and rules "real-world." Say your son comes to you for some money to buy a skate board. Your response: "OK son, what do you have as collateral?" He responds, "Collateral! What's that?" Now he's learning about consequences in the real world.

When a problem arises, learn to ask your child, "Now what are you going to do?" The mistake parents make is asking themselves, "Now what am I going to do?" Children pick up on this and pretty soon they're asking you, "Now what are YOU going to do?" They will make YOU responsible for their behavior if you let them.

So we let them suffer, and we offer them love without rescue (consequences) no matter what. The mistake many parents make is they offer yelling, screaming (no love), and then they rescue the child from the consequences – it's exactly backward.

So you exercise high control by letting the consequences do the teaching, and you give high support by listening lovingly to things you'd rather not hear. Now there's a big difference between acceptance and approval. But this is giving unconditional love. Dr. Ross Campbell in *How to Really Love Your Child* calls it "focused attention." It is reassurance that you care.

An important skill for a consequential parent is the ability to discriminate between a child's wants and needs. Children cannot, at first, make this discrimination on their own, so you have to make it for them. If a child truly needs something, we are responsible to see he gets it. But if a child simply wants and can wait, do without, or do for himself – we are surely responsible for making the child wait, do without or do for himself. To the degree that we do a good job of separating needs from wants, we empower them to govern themselves and become independent.

This is impossible to do without making the child temporarily unhappy at times. As an adult, how much of what you want do YOU actually get in the real world? See to it that your children get no more than about the same. If adults must work and wait for what they acquire, parents should see to it that children do likewise. Prepare them for the world they will have to function in.

If we don't teach them, real life will. And real life is a harsh teacher: *Harsh correction is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates reproof will die* (Proverbs 15:10).

So to prepare a child for success, you must push a certain amount of unhappiness his way. Support the child's struggle with that unhappiness, but don't protect him from it. This is the hardheadedness of parenting. It isn't fun, but it pays big dividends.

And to be a consequential parent, make the consequences yours not someone else's. Say, "Son, these are MY rules – this is what you must do to make Dad happy – I don't care what others are allowed to do – these are the rules of our house."

A consequential parent sends these messages:

1. "I love you."
2. "If you want to know anything ask."
3. "Good luck in life."

The "good luck" message is powerful. It goes like this: "Honey, the way you study here in 7th grade, I just want to take the opportunity to wish you good luck." Don't do your kids' worrying for them! Don't over-protect and over-intervene. They must know it's their life, consequences THEY will have to live with.

A big issue here is consistency. What you don't want to do is raise a strong-willed kid by using the "Las Vegas technique". Like a slot machine your child keeps asking "*Can I have it daddy?*" This happens several times and each time your response is, "No!" But he keeps after you and finally your answer is, "yes" and it's the jack-pot! What does that teach him? To be persistent and strong-willed – he learns he can beat the odds against you. And you lose. That kid will become a compulsive hustler of you and others.

Respond consistently each time. And be sure to strive for 100% consistency between the two parents. What if you can't agree? I have a suggestion; always back the strictest one (unless one gets injurious). Have *one* set of rules.

How do you set the rules? Let's take music for example. Kids are less sensitive to loud noises – they like music loud. How do you handle this?

1. Never talk about a chronic problem while it's occurring. Pick a quiet time.
2. Ask the kid, "How do you feel about it?" Get his opinion. "How do you feel about your music and playing it so loud?" Then ask him for his answer – allow him to help set the consequences. But remind him who's name is on the mortgage – who needs to be kept happy.

That's high support and high control. But how do we often do it wrong? Here's how it goes. You're Mom walking into your ten year old daughter's messy room:

• **Act I, Scene I:** "*You call this a room? Now you listen to me, young lady, I'm coming back here in 10 minutes; this better look like a hotel room, OR ELSE.*" Threats, bullying. Guess what she learns about how she should parent. It will come back to haunt your grandchildren. And you.

• **Act I, Scene II:** "*I don't know what I did to deserve this. You know how hard your father and I work to provide this.*" Attempting to control. Threats, guilt trip, yelling. Why do we do this? Does it work?

But we can change; we can raise our children positively and productively. To do that we have to understand the first principle of parenting: The only person you can truly control is you!

But in that daughter's room was a parent out of control. A mixed message was being sent: "*I'm*

trying to get you to control your behavior by losing control of mine." It just won't work. Double messages make people crazy.

There is a better way. If you have people working for you, how do you treat them? If they make a bad choice, we tell them and we make a distinction between incompetence and a mistake. One who is incompetent we help find another job. To one who makes a mistake, we sit down and explain it; we don't read him the riot act. This is the positive approach and it is very powerful.

You've probably all had at least one teacher who taught you using this positive approach. Think now about that teacher – how did she operate? For me it was my third grade teacher, Mrs. Peterson.

First she always had a plan. She was prepared; she knew exactly what she was going to teach us and she had a plan to see we learned what we needed to. As parents, are we working according to a plan or are we constantly reacting – exploding according to the latest disaster?

Each day she wrote her plan up on the chalk board. A list for the day. Here is what she would say: *"Here are your 10 tasks for the day. Make a list for yourself. As you do each one, cross it out – you have learned it, it is yours."*

Simple – but powerfully effective. I am still a list maker.

So Mrs. Peterson had a plan – a system simple enough for a child to implement. The rules were clear, direct, understandable to a child. Mrs. Peterson knew that children in the period of concrete operations love rules – they crave rules. Any teacher knows that if children make up their own rules, they usually make up tougher rules than we would. Kids want to know their limitations--at age 2, 10, even 17.

But in dysfunctional families you have two extremes:

- 1) No rules---you make them up as you go along, no control, no consistency.
- 2) Or too many rules. You do 14 things right and two things wrong and they nail you for the two. If you have too many rules what will happen? Children are bright; they remember all the rules and they will see when you don't enforce them.

But you need only a few rules – say five. Now there may be 14 things you want to change about your child – forget it! If you have 24 hours a day to devote to that child you'll never change that many things. Pick the five most important. Make sure that both parents agree on the rules. This is the difference – if you can fully agree and approach the child as one united couple, you will automatically wipe out half of the problems you will ever have with that child.

But remember when you make the rules, kids need a way to win rather than the parent winning at the kid's expense. When they do right, celebrate – make a big deal out of it.

But what if they break a rule? Tone is very important. When they make a mistake, you don't rant and rave, you don't threaten, you don't insult. You do like Mrs. Peterson and in a controlled, calm way you say, *"You made a bad choice."* I remember an incident in her class when I was causing a disturbance. It wasn't the first time I had done it, so she calmly escorted me to the principal's office where I sat for a half-hour until I could get myself back under control. She wasn't out of control. As soon as you the parent stop taking emotional responsibility for your child's bad choices, you know what you do? You put that responsibility where it belongs – on the child. As soon as I am taking emotional responsibility for my child's wrong choice, she doesn't have to.

Example: Your 7 year old boy Brian calls your 4 year old daughter a *"scum-bag."* What do you do? The inner voice says, *"Get control,"* so your instinct is to grab that child, shake him, tell him in a screaming voice, *"If you ever use that word again, I'll shove this bar of soap half-way down your throat."*

But here's Mrs. Peterson's approach. Notice it: "*Brian, that was a bad choice. You get five minutes in the penalty box.*" Where is the penalty box? Perhaps in your dining room. Why the dining room? It's the most boring room in your house. Children hate to be bored. Don't you?

The penalty box is not a place of shame; it's just a place to relax. We're not trying to harm him, mortify him, or reject him – just show him the consequences of a bad choice. If he learns this lesson at age 7, he will not need to ingest an LSD cube at age 17 because he will have learned to think in terms of the outcome, the consequences of his decisions.

Some of you may be thinking, "*Well, you don't know my 7 year old. He'd say 'I'm not going in there; you know what you can do with that chair.'*" What do you do? Of course he does do this because what is he used to? The wrong way of parenting. He wants you to be out of control. He wants you to go around yelling and struggling to control him. Children like an emotional response – children love to control their parents.

What has he learned about you? He's learned you can be had. He's learned not to respect you, Mom. He's learned that you don't mean what you say and say what you mean. He's 3 years old and says, "*I hate you, you're a bad mommy.*" And you say, "*Oh darling, that hurts my feelings, don't do that to me.*" Terrific – the 3 year old is some day 19 and rapes his date because he doesn't respect women because the first woman in his life was a human doormat – that's sad.

So what do you do with that defiant 7 year old who refuses to go into the penalty box? Listen to Mrs. Peterson's voice: "*Brian, I see you're having a bad day. And you've made another bad choice; you've chosen to lose Nintendo for the rest of the day.*" This is not a new rule but part of your plan, part of a well-crafted, reasoned response. So he knew it up front. So just like life, the stakes get higher.

A big part of it is teaching them to understand and monitor and therefore control their feelings and emotions. Many parents make the big mistake of denying a child's emotions. You hear them make statements like these: "*That doesn't hurt.*" "*You can't be hungry now--it's not time for lunch.*" "*You're too big to be afraid of the dark.*" "*It's not nice to be angry.*" "*There's no need to be sad.*"

If other people do our feeling for us while we're growing up, we have a difficult time distinguishing what's really going on internally. We don't learn to properly identify and evaluate our emotional responses. If you are four years old and afraid of the dark and a parent tells you that you are NOT afraid, you come to the conclusion that your feelings are not real.

Rather a parent should acknowledge the child's feelings as real and then help to interpret those feelings. Feelings (emotions) are amplifications of thoughts. So if they are angry, you acknowledge that and then help them identify the reasons why and ask if that is right. Remind them they have a choice as to how they will feel about something. Feelings do not have a life of their own – they can be controlled, but the answer is not to teach the child to deny their feelings or to bury them, but to deal with the thoughts behind them.

Have you ever received a traffic ticket? Traffic police are, these days, trained in techniques we could stand to use in parenting. Doesn't lose control. Never wins at your expense. Doesn't insult, doesn't rant and rave. Listens. Then doles out predictable consequences. Then he says, "*You drive safely; have a nice day.*" You have conflicting emotions. You actually like the officer, but what is in your hands? The price for a bad choice.

So these are some approaches to providing high control. But what about high support? One excellent way to give it is to catch your child being good. And then praise him in private! Give him private, positive time. Public praise (particularly with teens) often backfires. But praising in private includes recognizing that each child is different. So you praise him for his individual talents and accomplishments.

How do you build a positive relationship with a child? How do you do it with anyone? You GIVE! And what does God show you to give a child? High support and high control. With 6-12 year olds in the period of concrete operations you're running out of time. But it is a time of marvelous opportunity. Work with a plan, be a consequential parent and the results will be very positive.

PARENTING TEENAGERS

We now leave the age of "concrete operations" (age 6 to 12) and enter the time in a young person's life when an amazing thing happens. God looks down from heaven and says, "Let them think!" Teenage brings on a rush of hormones and changes in brain function and "poof" – it's a new ball game! TEENAGE!

For the first time they can think conceptually – and if we haven't taught them about consequences they now think, *"Well, if that's what you want Mom, I want the opposite."* And so Republicans now have Democratic kids. Rather than thinking about the consequences of their own behavior, they're thinking about your reaction and seeking to do the opposite of what you, the parent, wants. Teenage is often an age of rebellion, but it doesn't have to be if we are "CONSEQUENTIAL PARENTS."

Teens need a few good, "I mean business" rules. What rules? What you're working toward is having them by age 16 or so fully ready for the rules where they'll be going when they leave you. Where will they go? Will it be to the marines? Will it be to a university? At Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO, where I lived for 12 years, they have coed dorms where the only rule is no sex in the rooms. There are no other rules. Would your 18 year old be ready to handle that?

You arrange consequences which we might call "prices" ahead of time in an ascending order of severity. Will this work with teens? Of course. *"You're not home at 11:00 which was the deal; you choose to stay home next Saturday night."* Notice the words: *"You choose."* But they respond, *"Dad, that's not fair!"* They want to reason with you; they want to engage you in a debate. What happens when you join in? You lose. Mrs. Peterson would say, *"There is no discussion."* The rules stand. It's OK to negotiate some of the rules before hand with your teen. But once set there is no negotiation.

So your 17 year old comes in late with dirt all over his hands. *"The car broke down; I'm late because I had to fix it."* What do you say? *"Do you know how I've been suffering and worried? I had you dead and buried."* That's using guilt. But is that consequential talk? Here is a more effective response: *"Mark, I'm so glad you're home and safe"* [high support – love and concern]. He says, *"I don't know what to do with that car."* Your response? *"Well, you've got next Saturday night to fix it."* He says, *"But Dad, it wasn't my fault – that's not fair."* Here's a great response: *"Son, you're learning. Life isn't fair."*

It doesn't have to be fair but it has to be consistent. Remember, you set them up to win. But that doesn't mean you bail them out. Research shows that children from families that make less than \$10,000/year and over \$75,000/year are more than twice as likely to become addicted to drugs and alcohol. The problem on the upper end? Parents giving their children too much with no responsibility--bailing them out so they never have to face reality so they learn to look for ways to escape the reality they must confront. Another problem is that in these wealthy families the expectations are often too high--there is no way they can win.

Problem at the lower end? Too much hardship and frustration and too few opportunities. Sometimes neglectful parents.

And so it's choices and consequences. It's preparing them for the real world where they are going. The teen years are, hopefully, the transition into adult independence. It is a time for parents to prepare teens to manage themselves. What can parents of teens do to see that happens? Three important things:

1. Help them develop an independent identity. To develop the art of independent actions and responsibility, a teen must first learn how to get approval from those who count, learn to feel comfortable with his or her own body, and know where he or she is going in life.

When children are younger, identity is adopted from the most significant adult or adults in their lives. A study at Wheaton College showed that incoming freshmen perceived themselves the way they saw their dominant parent. If they saw Dad as warm, outgoing and hardworking, they tended to see themselves that way, too. As teenagers grow, they gradually develop their own independence. That is what God wants and expects.

And so as parents, we are working from the time they are very young to train them to be properly independent. How is that training done? We might describe it in three stages: shape up, pull up and lift up.

- In stage one, the parent exercises control. Young children are totally dependent on us. With love we say to them, "*Shape up or I will punish you.*" Simple and direct. It is effective for preschoolers.

- As children become more responsible, we can use the "pull up" technique: "*I will create goals for you, and I will help you achieve them. When you do them, I will reward you.*" In other words, "*Make your bed every day and we'll put stickers on the refrigerator.*" Direct, simple, concrete.

- As children move into the teen years, only a few years away from the time when they must be ready to live independently, we should use the "lift up" technique: "*I will get behind you and help you.*" This technique is a bit risky. We lose some of our parental control as we entrust our teens with more independence and more responsibility. Rather than seeking to control them as we did when they were younger, the emphasis now is on helping them develop the art of becoming independent from us.

What do teenagers need as they develop independence? Peer acceptance is important. Even a minor rejection can seem of major significance. Part of teens' development is how they feel about their own bodies. Physical differences of any sort can cause anxiety and uncertainty. This situation is made even worse because of the wide differences in rates of growth during the teen years. Too tall, too short, too skinny, too plain, etc.

Learning to exercise independence can be a scary and painful process. Teens need caring parents who will give support and show concern — adults who will lift them up.

What can parents do to help teens develop independence? First, give teens time to adapt and grow. Be realistic. Don't expect flawlessness. Give recognition and honest approval. Lift them up! Encourage! Avoid doing things that will lock a teen into independence too early. Avoid using labels: "You're no good at math." Help teens avoid hasty conclusions before they've had enough experience to discover their interests and strengths. Help them prioritize their talents. Some can lead to a career; others should lead to hobbies.

And help them get to know adults with similar talents so they can see the many positive ways of living and making a living.

The crux of becoming independent is self-discipline: *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city* (Proverbs 16:32).

Let's look at a teen's development of independence through the eyes of a young person, Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 2:40-52):

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it;

Jesus' parents had prepared him, and Jesus had earned a great deal of latitude and responsibility. The goal is to prepare teens for as much latitude and independence as possible. Freedom should come as they demonstrate responsibility.

But supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.

Jesus had a strong sense of identity -- at a much younger age than we would expect for most. We have to treat each child as an individual.

So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Jesus obeyed his parents. The point here is not his age; it is his level of maturity – his willingness to obey his parents and be responsible.

Some teens can be given a great deal of freedom. Others need more supervision. The level of control and trust is adjusted both up and down during these years.

The ultimate goal is for our teens to develop independence as godly adults. But they can't learn to be independent unless they have practice. It's like learning to swim; they have to get in the water and practice. Like a swimming instructor, we need to be with them -- standing by to help, encourage, lift them up. But we can't do the swimming for them.

2. Help your teen develop decision-making skills. One of the great tragedies is to see adults who have never learned to make decisions. They seem to be in a perpetual state of limbo. Never going anywhere, never able to focus their efforts. Perhaps their parents never gave them the responsibility and the opportunity to make decisions as they were growing up.

Notice how God places emphasis on giving young people an opportunity to make decisions coupled with responsibility: *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment (Ecclesiastes 11:9).*

In essence, God says: *"Make decisions, make plans, go for it! But remember you will be held responsible. Count the cost – consider the consequences of what you decide."*

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! (Deuteronomy 32:29) – Consider the result! Play the tape on out to the end.

It can be painful for parents to allow their children to make decisions. They want to prevent the pain and suffering that can result from bad decisions. The parents may want to step in and make decisions for them, but that would slow down their maturing.

Making decisions tests teenagers' ability to think. It tests their courage and it tests their values, just as it does for adults. Teens learn to make good decisions by being tested in these areas. Adults need to help them – not by making all the decisions for them, but by being a resource and guide:

- Be an example – they need to see you making good decisions. They need to hear you explain why you made the decisions you did. They need to be involved with you in the decision-making process. Let your teens see you handle responsibility. It is a mistake to hide all family problems from teenagers. They learn values from your example. How will they learn to solve their financial problems if they never hear about yours? What are you facing? How are you solving it? What have you tried? Why did or didn't it work? Share these with your teens!

- Clarify issues. Help teens sort out the factors.

- Provide information – explore intent and purpose. Help them get the facts.

- Provide options. Because they lack experience, teens fall prey to what might be called "the fallacy of perfect choice." This approach pictures one choice as perfect and excludes all others even before examining them. In making a decision about college, for example, the teen might rate one school as the school to attend and hence close off and fail to prepare for other options. That can happen in many areas of life. Teens need to learn that in the physical aspects of life, every option, every decision has limitations. There is almost always more than one option. But the options teens choose must be chosen with care.

- Provide a spiritual focus. What are the values, what are the spiritual principles that should be considered in this decision? There's a saying, "When one bases his life on principle, 99 percent of his decisions are already made." That is why teaching the underlying principles and values of God's way is so important.

The common element in all these areas is good communication. It takes time and it takes commitment for a parent to be a good teacher and example. And for teens, it takes a willingness to listen and to give feedback.

3. Help your teen develop a personal relationship with God. Teens begin to question things that children accept without question. One area is God and their relationship with him. The teen years present some natural roadblocks to developing a personal relationship with God. We need to understand these roadblocks and help teens around them. Let's note some of the roadblocks:

- Time is on my side. To a young person, it seems life goes on and on. They usually don't think about death. Hence they feel they can put off getting serious. God is for old people. We need to teach them that God is for young people, too.

- I can't wait. The flip side of the time issue for teens is impatience. Most people want fun and privileges now. Yet teens are told to wait: wait to drive, wait to date, wait to marry, wait, wait, wait! As a result, they can hardly wait until they're at the next milestone. In high school, able to drive, in college, married, away from home. Therefore, we need to help them focus on what they need to do now to be successful, and what is needed spiritually now to prepare for their future.

- Most adults are out-of-touch. Because time seems like an eternity, older people seem much older. Though many teens have a good relationship with a few adults, it is harder for teens to relate to adults in general. Statements from adults like "when I was your age" are nearly meaningless. Our communication with them – and especially about God – must relate to them and their perspective.

- Pain is unpleasant. We generally try to avoid pain – both physical pain and psychological pain. Teens especially seek to avoid the painful and the unpleasant. Many teens – but by no means all – have experienced little pain or grief. (Unfortunately, many teens have suffered tragedies, or know teens who have suffered severe financial or family problems, drug addiction, violent crime or suicide.) But some teens have not realized that pain is a part of life in this world. And so they naturally tend to seek and expect pleasure, and they tend to avoid difficult situations and hard work. They tend to avoid thinking about suffering, conflict and tension. We need to

help them face the unpleasant, serious questions of life that lead to seeing the need and the relevance of God.

- I am the center of my world. Western culture often teaches us to be self-centered. It is no wonder that teens, like adults, resist commitment to God, because that means making God the center of their lives, rather than their own desires.

- God is a concept. To many teens God is a vague concept. Young people need to be shown what difference his existence makes in their day-to-day life. Solomon tells us: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Help teens see the reality of God – not just the theory. Help them develop a personal relationship with God now. Set a meaningful example.

In all our efforts at parenting, whatever the child's age, our goal is to rear the next generation as responsible, successful, independent adults.

RAISING CHILDREN WHO CARE

Picture yourself lying in bed – you can't sleep because you're deep in thought about your children's future. As you play out this scene in your mind, what do you find yourself thinking about? What dreams do you have for your children? What do you want for them to become?

You might think about a certain vocation: "I want him to grow up to be a doctor." Or certain qualities of life: "I want her to grow up to be happy." Or "successful." Or "productive."

We need dreams for our children. We need a vision of where we want them to go and what we want them to become – and we need to work to make those dreams come true. And I want to encourage you to have the biggest and most important dream of them all: *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8).

Of course we want our children to be successful, to have comfortable, rewarding, productive lives. But here is a more important goal for them: to become GOOD!

But what is good? God tells us through Micah. Christ paraphrased this in Matthew 23:23 and called these three qualities the "weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith." God wants these for us because these are his qualities: *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy* (Micah 7:18).

God's mercy is basic to his character. And he wants us to be like that, and we want that for our children. And with this basic goodness will come all the other things we want for our children: *He who pursues righteousness [justice] and love [the Hebrew word is "cheved" which means mercy or caring] finds life, prosperity and honor* (Proverbs 21:21). Perhaps we understand pretty well how to teach our children righteousness – the right and just way of living. But what about "mercy" or better translated "caring"? Do you want your children to grow up to be caring people? If so, how do we as parents help them become that way?

When I think of caring people in this world, I think of the Florence Nightingales, the Mother Theresa's, people who have sacrificed their comfort and security to care for others. Such people are a tremendous example to us.

I also think of a whole group of people in this category. As you know, during World War II, Hitler and his Nazis murdered some six million Jews and many other ethnic and racial minorities in the holocaust. It was an act of barbarism beyond belief. But in the midst of that horror, there arose a whole group of heroes, a whole group of caring people who risked their own lives to rescue tens of thousands of Jews and others.

In the book *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* the authors attempt to answer the question, "What led ordinary men and women to risk their lives on behalf of others?" Quoting from the book:

World War II brought a new dimension of evil to the world: suffering, misery, and dehumanization were its hallmarks. Millions perished. Millions of defenseless Poles, Yugoslavs, Russians, Gypsies, and other noncombatants were killed. But Jews were its special victims. Defined by the Nazis as outside humanity, Jews were collectively targeted for death. Six million of them were murdered – more than 60 percent of all Jewish men, women, and children living in Nazi-occupied Europe. The grisly extermination process proceeded very rapidly and with great efficiency...Its success was due to the relentlessness with which the Nazis pursued their prey and the collaboration of native populations, as well as to the fact that the majority of the world's citizen's simply stood by.

Yet, in the very midst of this catastrophe, there were exemplars of great humanity. Outstanding among them are those non-Jews who committed themselves to helping Jews despite the awesome personal risks. This group, whom we call rescuers, refused to abdicate their responsibilities to Jews even while the majority of their neighbors abandoned them. They undertook their task without monetary compensation and with full cognizance that detection might result in death to themselves and frequently to their families as well....What enabled this group to choose its markedly divergent path? They seem to defy what we think we know about human nature....If we can understand some of the attributes that distinguished rescuers from others, perhaps we can deliberately cultivate them (Oliner, 1988, p. xvii ff).

So starting in 1982 the authors together with many researchers, undertook a study to find out what makes rescuers different from other people. They interviewed hundreds of rescuers and others who had the opportunity to rescue Jews but did not. And what they found is amazing.

We might think it was time and circumstances – because the opportunity presented itself. But here's what the researchers found:

*Rescuers did not simply happen on opportunities for rescue; they actively created, sought, or recognized them where others did not. Their participation was not determined by circumstances but their own personal qualities. Chance sometimes provided rescuers ..with an opportunity to help, but it was the **values learned from their parents** which prompted and sustained their involvement (Oliner, 1988, p.142, emphasis mine).*

How they were parented made the difference – and more than any other value learned from their parents, the one that caused them to reach out to rescue was a sense of caring for others.

This attitude was quite different from others who had opportunity to rescue Jews, but stood by and did nothing. According to the researchers, these people's ...*reactions to the need were quite different. They expressed greater equivocation, passivity and accommodation...Despite their hostility toward Nazis, [they were] overcome by fear, hopelessness, and uncertainty. These feelings, which encourage self-centeredness and emotional distancing from others, provided fertile soil for passivity...How one perceives the victims is an important element in making a decision to help, and...parents play a major role in shaping such perceptions (Oliner, 1988, pp. 146, 149).*

Which are we raising? Fearful, passive, uncertain children, or children who will grow up to be caring adults? How do you raise a caring person? We find guidance in the way the parents of rescuers raised their children.

1. They had different priorities. First and foremost, rescuers' parents had different priorities than non-rescuers' parents:

- They put others before self. Rescuers brought to the war a greater receptivity to others' needs because they had learned from their parents that others were very important. As Paul says in Philippians 2:3: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

- They put more emphasis on people than on things. They did not have a materialistic view of life, and hence, as these children grew up they were able to see rescuing of people as more important than the economic hardship it would cause.

2. They emphasized childhood bonding. To establish a close, affectionate, nurturing relationship with a child from birth is not only important to the parent-child relationship, it has a big impact on how that child will view others outside the family. Rescuers generally felt secure in their family relationships. Because they had supportive and nurturing parents, they were free to express care and develop obligations toward others.

3. They had a different approach to discipline. One of the primary ways parents interact with children is through discipline. Some researchers estimate that beginning at age two, children are commonly disciplined by their parents in one way or another once every six or seven minutes! The reasons for this discipline and the way in which it is handled communicate long-lasting messages to the child.

We talked earlier about discipline and noted that God's model of discipline is "discipline as discipleship" – not as adversary but as teacher. But unfortunately, we have not all learned that approach in our families. I conducted a survey of the Grand Junction and Craig congregations on the subject of parenting practices. In answer to the question "*What do you feel has been the greatest influence on **your** approach to childrearing?*" fifty percent of the respondents noted the example of their parents or grand-parents.

And what was it they saw, what did they learn by example? Seventy-six percent of their mothers spanked them – and that practice was spread uniformly across the generations. Sixty-two percent of their fathers also spanked. Now spanking itself is not the problem; it is how it is done and why. Nearly thirty percent of them view their parents' discipline as being abusive at times.

Of those who cited abusiveness, seventy-five percent are women. For fifty percent of those who experienced abuse, the abuse was physical – beatings, excessive spanking, hitting, etc. For the rest the abuse was emotional – use of excessive guilt, put-downs and tongue lashings. Several noted the devastating affects of this abuse including feelings of insecurity, worthlessness, guilt and fearfulness.

And most of them have followed their parents' example. Of those who cited being abused as children, thirty-three percent felt that they, as parents, had been abusive parents themselves. Those who are abusers have often been abused themselves. But it doesn't have to be that way: sixty-three percent of those abused did not feel that they were abusers. The chain can be broken!

So how we were parented has a big impact on how we parent. But whatever our parental example, our discipline is to be discipleship – teaching, nurturing, caring; not discipline that is abusive punishment – hitting, screaming, shaming.

The discipleship approach takes more time. Of those of who cited abusive parents, they noted that their mothers spent only an average of forty-eight minutes with them each day, and the father, if there was one, almost none. This time included eating meals, but most of it was time spent in disciplining the child, with almost no time spent in nurturing or instructing. By contrast, in families who were not abusive, mothers spent an average of eight hours with the children per day, and fathers three hours per day.

What are the impacts on the children? Abusive and neglectful parents produce angry and self-centered children. But parents who see discipline as discipleship, who are what we have defined as "authoritative parents," who exercise high control but also high support, produce children who are more likely to be kind and generous. Children who are helpful and respectful to others – caring children.

Rescuers' parents saw discipline as discipleship – they focused their children's attention on the consequences of their behavior on others. If their children would do something wrong, rather

than yelling at them, or hauling off and hitting them, they would carefully draw their attention to others' feelings, thoughts, and welfare.

Here is how one of the rescuers recalled how his father had disciplined him:

He would discipline me rationally – I am not sure that the word discipline applies. Moral questions, inter-human relations – he would say, "It's this way; you are wrong when you consider it that way." When I came home from school full of criticisms of some friend, he would bring up both sides. "Moral education" is the best expression.

Another cited the example of her mother:

My mother talked with me, pointed out mistakes to me...She told me when I did something wrong. She never did any punishing or scolding – she tried to make me understand with my mind what I'd done wrong (Oliner, 1988, p.182).

Parents of rescuers depended less on physical punishment and more on reasoning. This does not mean that rescuers' parents let them get away with murder – in fact, most remembered their parents as being rather strict, and many did receive corporal punishment.

The key was how they perceived the punishment they did receive. Rescuers perceived it as in some way related to their behavior. The punishment was not out of anger, it was not a way for an angry parent to vent his frustration. If corporal punishment was used, it was used as a follow up to a verbal admonition.

Rescuers' parents relied principally on reasoning and explanations. They focused on the wrong the child had done and helped him to see how his wrong impacted others and then they focused on how to make up for the wrong. And often, after the explanation, the parents would help the child correct the wrong rather than punish further.

As it says in Proverbs 22:6, *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.* How do you do that? By reasoning, by explaining, by teaching him why wrong is wrong and what the consequences of that wrong are on others.

4. They taught empathy with responsibility. Through this approach to discipline rescuers' parents taught their children an ability to be moved by other people's pain. We call that empathy.

And empathy is then coupled with a sense of personal responsibility to do something to help – a willingness to get involved in another person's problems. Non-rescuers felt unable to do this – they saw the pain, they were concerned, but they were not moved enough or they did not have the sense that they were responsible to help. They were able to say "that's not my problem." But people with empathy are more likely to get and stay involved.

Part of being empathetic is having the ability to identify with others – to see yourself as a part of all people. God leads his church to widen its focus in this regard: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). We need to teach this approach to our children.

5. They focused on parental example. How do you raise a person who has a sense of attachment to others and a feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others, including those outside his immediate family or circle of friends?

*It begins in close family relationships in which **parents model** caring behavior and communicate caring values... Parents set high standards they expect their children to meet, particularly with regard to caring for others. They... communicate the obligation*

to help others in a spirit of generosity, without concern for external rewards or reciprocity. Parents themselves model such behaviors, not only in relation to their children but also toward other family members and neighbors. Because they are expected to care for and about others while simultaneously being cared for, children are encouraged to develop qualities associated with caring. Dependability, responsibility, and self-reliance are valued because they facilitate taking care of oneself as well as others...Because of their solid family relationships, such children tend to internalize their parents' values, increasingly incorporating standards for personal integrity and care within their own value systems...They provide an organizing framework for their life activities and assessments of right and wrong. Even minor infractions distress them, and fundamental violations threaten them with a sense of chaos. It is no accident that when the lives of outsiders are threatened, individuals with this orientation are more likely to initiate, or be asked for help. More sensitive than others to violations that threaten their moral values, they may seek out opportunities to help...Already more deeply and widely attached to others, they find it difficult to refrain from action (Oliner, 1988, p.249-50, emphasis added).

On the other hand those who are resistant to helping have been reared in a home that is more constricted – exclusivist in its orientation. A family centered on itself and its own needs – paying little attention to others. They are suspicious of others – wary of neighbors and peers. They avoid risking attachments by isolating themselves emotionally.

6. They taught self-control. Rescuers' parents taught their children to control themselves, to discipline themselves – this gives children an important sense of internal control. What's that got to do with caring? When you have learned to say no to yourself, you are able to say yes to others. That's why Christ says: *"If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself** and take up his cross and follow me"* (Mark 8:34).

To care for others often means making personal sacrifices. People who lack internal control can't do that very well. They have a feeling of helplessness. They feel victims of circumstance, victims of their own minds and weaknesses. Their perspective is inward, but to care requires self-control to deny oneself and look after the needs of others.

7. They put emphasis on relationships. The bottom line of all these qualities taught by rescuers' parents was an emphasis on relationships. To risk your life to help another is largely a function of how you interpret the need to help – and that is largely a matter of how you see others – how you relate to others.

Unfortunately, our culture encourages and values individualism and materialism. This way of thinking sees relationships in a selfish and abstract way. Why should I help you – you're responsible for yourself, and besides, what can I really do? And if I do help, what's in it for me?

God's emphasis is on personal responsibility, yes – but responsibility to enter into relationships with others to care for them: *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2). Notice, it is "carry" not just applaud from the sidelines. In means getting involved. And notice in that same context Galatians 6:10: *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Now constricted people will say, "I don't have much of an opportunity," but rescuers' parents helped them to see that life itself was both an opportunity and an obligation. Relationships are

what matter – caring people know that, and are willing to take risks, willing to pay the price to reach out to others – to rescue others.

Are we talking about raising super-human kids? No, according to the authors: "*...rescuers are not saints but ordinary people who nonetheless were capable of overcoming their human frailties by virtue of their caring capacities*" (Oliner, 1988, p.239).

Those who rescued cared and were able to turn that caring into action. Rescuers related to others and took their needs personally. And for the rescuers of the Jews in World War II, it was not just a one shot thing – what they did was a consistent way of life. After the war, for example, more of them were involved in community service activities than non rescuers. Their most frequent activity was caring for the sick and aged. This illustrates the value they placed on human relationships and their sense of connectedness to humanity.

I tip my hat to the remarkable individuals who rescued many Jews and others during World War II. But we, brethren, are rearing an even more important generation of rescuers: *See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse* (Malachi 4:5-6).

This speaks to the restoration of relationships, and that will produce children who care. Let's raise our children to care – the whole world needs them.

Selected References

- Adams, J. (1986). *The biblical view of self-esteem, self-love, self-image*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
- Adams, J. (Ed.) (1968). *Understanding adolescence*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Campbell, R. (1988). *How to really love your child*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Campbell, R. (1988). *How to really love your teenager*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Cline, F. & Fay, J. *Parenting with love & logic*. NAV Press.
- Crabb, L. *Men & women, enjoying the difference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Curran, D. (1983). *Traits of a healthy family*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goethals, G.H., Hayes, L.R. (1994). *The joy of raising our kids in the 21st century!* Langley, WA: Bruit.
- Guarendi, R. (1990). *Back to the family, how to encourage traditional values in complicated times*. New York: Villard Books.
- Johnston, T. (1993). *Determinants of altruistic behavior*. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Kesler, J. (Ed.) (1985). *Parents & teenagers*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Kinder, M. & Cowan, C. (1990). *Husbands and wives*. New York: Signet Books.
- Books.
- Kroll, P. (1987). Six qualities of a strong, happy family, *Plain Truth*, May issue.
- Leo, J. (1992). *U.S. News & World Report*, Sept. 14, issue, p. 24.
- Oliner, S.P., & Oliner, P.M. (1988). *The altruistic personality*. New York: Free Press.
- Osborne, C. (1970). *The art of understanding your mate*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Richards, L.O. (1972). *Youth ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Smalley, G. (1988). *For better or for best*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Smalley, G. (1988). *If he only knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Stinnett, N. & DeFrain, J. (1985). *Secrets of strong families*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Verny, T. & Kelly, J. (1981). *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*. New York: Delta Books.
- Wheat, E. & Perkins, G. *Love life for every married couple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.
- Books.
- York, P., York, D. & Wachtel, T. (1982). *Tough love*. New York: Bantam