

Expanded and Revised

The Christian Home

By God's Design

Ken Wilson, PhD



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Ken Wilson, Ph.D.

“The Christian Home by God’s Design”

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As has been true in other books I have written many of the thoughts and ideas in this book have been collected over an extended period of time. Some of this information comes from other sources originally, but I don't remember what they were. I am indebted to them, whomever and whatever, because they have contributed to my learning and this book.

I hope that all who read this book, will be challenged to look seriously at their families and realize that it takes hard work, conviction, commitment, and a constant belief in the authority and power of God's word to make a Christian home.

introduction

Many marriages today are like the house built upon the sand. When all the children leave home and the nest is empty, some parents have no idea who they are or what to do at this point. Their identity as individuals has been so tied up in parenting that they are struggling with this apparent vacuum in their lives. They then begin to realize that their marriage needs some shoring up in the *relating to one another category*.

They discover that their marriage has been built upon a weak foundation of dreams. Because in dreams the mind does not have to distinguish between reality and fantasy, one is able to create without restraint. Often, therefore, dreams are the starting point for successful endeavors; however, dreams not followed by adequate planning usually do not come true.

Marriages built on dreams are risky because dreams do not consider the disappointments that are inevitable in every marriage. When the rains of reality, and the winds of stress burst against such marriages, the relationship that holds them together crumbles. Much more is involved in fulfilling dreams than merely expecting them to come true.

The highest happiness on earth is in marriage. Every man who is happily married is a successful man even if he has failed in everything else. And every man whose marriage is a failure is not a successful man even if he has succeeded in everything else.

(William Lyon Phelps)

Someone has suggested that there are two basic causes for trouble in marriage: (1) not finding in marriage what one expected to find, and (2) not expecting what one actually finds.

As couples marry, they expect stability, security, and predictability in their marriages. *Stability* is freedom from change. The word stability actually means resistance to change. It is the element that causes something, when disturbed, to restore itself to the original condition. We do not generally like change and usually resist it.

Security is freedom from want. We want our needs to be fulfilled, especially by our marriage partner.

Predictability is being able to know in advance and therefore avoid surprises. Having the ability to forecast the future, at least in a general way, gives us a feeling of control.

There are periods of time in the lives of most couples in which one or even all three of these expectations are not fulfilled. One reason for unfulfilled expectations is that they may have been unrealistic from the beginning. Then you throw children into the mix and more complications arise in the marriage. The fact of whether or not it is a Christian home, will determine how problems in the marriage will be dealt with.

It may be assumed that, if both parents believe in Christianity, the home would be a Christian home. My experience as a counselor does not necessarily support such a conclusion. It is not true, that all parents, who claim to believe in the Bible, create a Christian environment at home.

The word *create* implies that someone has the ability to bring something into existence. Although Christian parents do not have direct power to create such an environment, they do have tremendous influence to develop such a home (Proverbs 22:6).

The most important principle in this book is: *God blesses a Christian Home*. A home is Christian when it is built upon faith in Christ and a never-ending dependence upon God's Word for guidance and authority in the lives of its members.

A Christian home is not a guarantee against problems, sin, or alienation of its members. It should be a model for problem solving and nurturing, and an anchor for supporting its members in a life based on God's absolute blueprint. A Christian home then becomes a safe haven for its members and a most powerful force for good.

It was the goal of this author to biblically define a Christian home, to explore its values and motivate those who read this book to make such a home their goal, realizing that such a task will ultimately bring God's blessings in their lives (John 10:10).

Ken Wilson, Ph.D.
Tacoma, Washington

chapter one

God's Pattern for Marriage

A man had been driving all night and by morning was still far from his destination. He decided to stop at the next city he came to, and park somewhere quiet so he could get an hour or two of sleep. As luck would have it, the quiet place he chose happened to be on one of the city's major jogging routes. No sooner had he settled back to snooze when there came a knocking on his window. He looked out and saw a jogger running in place. "Yes?" he said. "Excuse me, sir," the jogger said, "do you have the time?" The man looked at the car clock and answered, "8:15." The jogger said thanks and left. The man settled back again, and was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window and another jogger.

"Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?" asked the jogger. "8:25!" the man replied. The jogger said thanks and left. Now the man could see other joggers passing by and he knew it was only a matter of time before another one disturbed him. To avoid the problem, he got out a pen and paper and put a sign in his window saying, "I do not know the time!" Once again he settled back to sleep. He was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window. "Sir, sir?" said a jogger seeking to be helpful. "It's 8:45!" Sometimes you just can't win.

When we are looking for a winning pattern for marriage, only God's plan will do. The Bible says, "*This is love for God:*

to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..." When we do things God's way, they always seem to work out because He knows us best and what are needs are and the best way to meet those needs.

A *pattern* is that which is designed as a model for making things, that which is to be copied or imitated. Since it is impossible for man to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23), God has supplied sufficient help in His Word (II Timothy 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:3).

In respect to marriage, God has clearly spoken. Just as Moses was commanded to make the tabernacle *according to the pattern* shown him in the mount, so man must build the home according to the divine model (Hebrews 8:5). The apostle Paul states that we should keep the pattern of sound teaching (II Timothy 1:13) and this includes sound teaching in reference to the home (I Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-5). The word *pattern* in both Timothy and Hebrews comes from the Greek word TUPOS, meaning, *blueprint, copy or model*. It will be our purpose to look at this model.

The pattern in Scripture for marriage reveals that it is to be *monogamic* in form. A person can have only one scriptural mate at a time (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:7-9; I Corinthians 7:2). It must be *united* in construction.

This thought is implied in the fact that the woman was formed out of man. The two became one flesh and were to dwell together according to knowledge (I Peter 3:7). It was to be *procreative* in design. To the first couple God said that He created but one male and one female, and from them has come every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26). The apostle Paul commanded that the younger women marry and bear children (I Timothy 5:14). In order to fulfill their divine mission normal married couples, if possible, should rear children (Genesis 1:28).

Marriage should be a *mutual obligation*. Man and woman are complements of each other and dependent upon each other.

Social equality is implied, and mutual obligations are enjoined in the marriage relationship. In other words, the mutual obligation of meeting each other's sexual, emotional and spiritual needs is implied (I Corinthians 7:1-7). Marriage must be *patriarchal* in government. By divine restrictions, the wife is to submit herself to her husband and he is to meet her needs and set the tone for the family. He is to model the kind of leadership that encourages, nourishes, disciplines and directs them in the footsteps of the Lord.

Marriage requires *mutual respect* (Ephesians 5:33; I Peter 3:7). The wife is to reverence her husband. Reverence means, *to respect and honor someone in a thoughtful sense*. Acceptance of one another is the key here (Romans 15:7). The wife should look her best, when she can, with a most attractive personality and disposition, and do her best for him (Ephesians 4:29-32).

The husband should love and respect his wife and say and do the things that reflect his love and need for her (I Corinthians 7:33, 34). He should practice good physical hygiene and look his best, when he can, for her.

The man (with some exceptions) primarily receives his self-worth from his work. The woman receives her self-worth primarily from her husband and her family. This principle has been proven to me in my counseling ministry and I believe it fits the pattern that God established for the roles of man and wife (Genesis 3:16-19). God's pattern for the home is for mothers to take care of the home and nurture the young children (Titus 2:3-5). I know this is contrary to popular opinion and the feminist movement, but it is God's plan for the Christian home. Women are not forbidden to work outside of the home, but Paul says that mothers should be busy at home overseeing the children and the home. How can this be done unless she stays at home, at least until the children are full-grown?

God's Ordained Role for Men and Women

Michael Gurian, a brain researcher, reveals in his two books, *The Wonder of Boys* and *The Wonder of Girls*, that modern, heat sensitive equipment can help scientists observe brain activity to the point that they can almost tell what a person is thinking. He states, "If we had X-ray glasses and could look into our children's heads, what are some of the differences we would see?" He goes on to say that we would see in the brain that we could "identify a neurotransmitter, serotonin, which inhibits aggressive behavior, and which exists in higher levels in girls than boys. Serotonin works with hormones secreted in the hypothalamus of the brain: hormones like testosterone." He reveals that the difference between boys and girls is inherent. He says, "A boy's brain secretes more testosterone than a girl's and transmits less serotonin. Boys become all the more aggressive, girls less aggressive." His conclusion is that the brain difference between boys and girls has to do with the structural aspects of the brain, which reveal that there is an increased focus in the male brain on spatial relationships and activity. Little boys, much more than little girls, manipulate objects like blocks to see how they use up space. Television, videogames, and the whole computer culture is very much a creation of the male brain. It is predominantly a visual means of communication, providing lots of quick moving images, and objects moving through virtual space.

Michael Gurian goes on to say,

The girl's brain tries to recreate itself in the outside world by creating situations and playing games – like house, doll life, imagined community life – that uses lots of verbal skills, requires lots of one-on-one communication between actors, and involve overtly complex, emotional behavior.

The final result of modern day brain study reveals that the male brain is uniquely geared for worldly pursuits in supporting the family, and the female brain is uniquely suited for being at home and nurturing children, and communicating in emotional and meaningful ways. I believe that God so designed them this way from the beginning (Genesis 3:16-19; I Timothy 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-5).

The Glory of Submission

As members of God's church, we have responsibilities in establishing and maintaining proper human relationships. We must consider the need today for proper husband-wife relationships. Never has there been a greater need! It is estimated that an average three out of five marriages will end in divorce in America each year. We must realize that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). The situation is desperate even in the church today. The apostle Paul gave the Ephesians the ideal – and it will still work today (Ephesians 5:21-33).

God has always required *submission* in marriage (Genesis 2:21-25; 3:13-19). He has always provided for a line of authority and responsibility. The very idea of some kind of rank or leadership in the church or the home has been a staple in God's plan for man. Such leadership is essential to any well-ordered society. Even in Jesus' work, it is stated, "*the head of Christ is God*" (I Corinthians 11:3).

In government someone must be in charge; else, there will be anarchy. In the church someone must provide spiritual leadership, otherwise there will confusion, false teaching, and chaos (Hebrews 13:7, 17). In business, schools, clubs, all group activity, someone must lead in order to accomplish unity and success in their endeavors. The same principle is applicable to the home (I Timothy 3:4, 5; Ephesians 5:23;

I Corinthians 11:3). God has always required order and discipline (I Corinthians 14:40). God has always required someone to lead.

God called us to have a *servant* attitude. The apostle Paul commands us to have the *mind of Christ* (Philippians 2:5-8). In this passage he emphasizes the quality of a servant's heart and that it is most precious to God when we possess it. When it comes to leadership, most people struggle with the concept of submission vs. selfishness.

God has always emphasized the value of a submissive heart. The story of the Pharisee and the tax collector surely confirms His feelings about pride and how we must rid ourselves of this attitude in our lives (Luke 18:9-14). Subjection does not mean the same as inferiority. All of us are in subjection to someone, whether it is our employer, boss, government, police, etc. In all of these cases, being in subjection does not mean that we are necessarily inferior to the person or persons to whom we are in subjection.

In all endeavors of life there are positions of leadership to be filled (Ephesians 5:22-25). In marriage, the husband is to be the leader, not the dictator (I Peter 3:7). He is to be the *head* and be responsible for the spiritual leadership of the home. Yet, he must also submit unto his wife's and his children's needs (Ephesians 5:21). This means he has certain responsibilities to bear. He *cops out* when he turns his duties over to his wife. He has to take the lead, set the pace and create an atmosphere that encourages a spiritual and loving home. He is to set the tone for discipline and training responsibilities in the home (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:18, 19).

In the very creation period, Adam and Eve sinned against God and were given their punishment (Genesis 3:16-19). The curse upon Eve was that God would greatly increase her pain in childbirth and her desire would be for her husband, and he would rule over her. This curse, on both man and woman,

would be carried on throughout the time they would live on the earth. Most conservative scholars seem to interpret the desire that a woman would have for her husband (and his rule over her) to be natural and instinctual and God's way of establishing the man as the leader of the church and the home.

The wife then, is to *submit* (support) and adapt to her husband as the leader in the home as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22; I Peter 3:3-6). A careful analysis and acceptance of this principle would solve many problems. This is not just a cultural preference, but is the original will of God from the beginning of creation (I Corinthians 11:7-12; 14:34; I Timothy 2:8-15).

The Biblical Model of Leadership

The role of leadership as described in the Bible, applies to both the church and the home in the form of a shepherding model. The work of a shepherd in the Bible is that of an effective leader (Isaiah 40:10, 11). Jesus compares the *good shepherd* with the *hireling*, who simply serves for the purpose of: "what's in it for me?" (John 10:1-13 KJV). Many shepherds can guard well, but feed the sheep a poor diet. The good shepherd protects his sheep – even to the point of giving his life for them. The hireling protects himself and lets the sheep perish. It is not the wages which make one a hireling – but his attitude. Jesus is the good shepherd because He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him and follow Him. They follow Him because they know that He loves them. "It is strictly true that the sheep know and understand the eastern shepherd's voice; and that they will never answer to the voice of a stranger."¹ Such a model of leadership requires dedication.

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, the Westminster Press (1975) 56.

When we compare the Israelite shepherd with the American shepherd, we see a distinct contrast. When I was a young boy (in the 1950's), my family lived on a farm in Northern California. We were farmers and my father worked a three hundred acre farm. When the barley was harvested, one of the local shepherders would bring his sheep into the field, and for a fee, let the sheep eat the stubble. This was practical for both the farmer and the shepherd.

In those days, it would be common to see the shepherders herd their sheep down a back road in the country where I lived, driving them to the next field to graze the stubble. The shepherd usually had a well-trained sheep dog, which would nip at the heels of the sheep to make sure that they went to the right place. If the sheep did not follow orders, the sheepdog would bark at them and intimidate them to obey. We even had sheep dog shows at the local fair each spring to award the best dog, which was the most successful in driving the sheep into a pen.

The Israelite shepherd (as many eastern shepherds still do today) operated differently. In the evening, the Israelite shepherd would bring the sheep down from the foothills to bed down for the night. They would normally be housed in a fenced area or pen (*fold*, NASB) that sometimes would have a roof and would house many different flocks of sheep. The shepherds would each take turns being (sometimes they would hire someone to do this for them) a watchman to guard the door against wild animals and thieves.

In the morning, the shepherds would come to the sheep pen and call out for their sheep and take them to the grazing fields. Since the shepherds did not brand or mark their sheep, the only way each shepherd could determine which flock belonged to him was to call out to them in a certain way, and the sheep would know his voice and respond to him. The other flocks would not move because the voice was not familiar to them.

The flocks knew their shepherd's voice, because their shepherd had spent many hours and days living with the sheep, tending to their needs and protecting them. They knew the voice of the true shepherd that loved them and cared for them. Every detail of the Israelite shepherd's life illuminates the picture of the good shepherd, whose sheep hear his voice and whose constant care is for his flock.

Positional vs. Relational Leadership

Biblical leadership, whether in the home or the church, requires the kind of dedication that only a true servant will provide. It requires that the leader know his flock and tend to their needs, their hurts, their discipline, their feeding and their protection. Biblical leadership influences for good and is powerful. Biblical leadership can best be described as: "the ability for one person to influence another for good."

There are basically two kinds of leadership: (1) The POSITIONAL model, and (2) The RELATIONAL model. Jesus told his disciples, when John and James were vying for the top spots in the kingdom, that the true leader in the kingdom would be different than the leader in the world (Matthew 20:20-28). He said that the worldly leader was a manager who would lord it over the follower. But in the kingdom, the spiritual leader would be a servant, the good shepherd, who was dedicated and sought to meet the needs of his followers (I Peter 5:2, 3).

The *positional leader* believes he draws his authority and power from the very position awarded him and that that alone gives him authority. It is autocratic and dictatorial in nature. The *relational leader* believes that his authority and power lie in his leadership abilities and relationship with his followers. Like the good shepherd, he knows his followers and they know him and they know he is dedicated to meeting their needs and

protecting them even to the extent of giving his life for them (I John 3:16). His followers know his voice and they can trust him. It seems evident that God prefers the relational model of leadership in the home and the church.

The following are three types of marriage relationships that primarily reflect a cross-section, to one degree or another, of all marriage relationships and their leadership models:

Three Types of Marriage Relationships

1. The *Father-Dominant*, which is unhealthy spiritually, psychologically and emotionally.
 - a. In this relationship, the father is usually harsh, autocratic and lacking in relational skills.
 - b. The wife is warm, compliant, fearful, frustrated and lonely.
 - c. The children usually lack relational skills, and have a strong tendency towards violence.
2. The *Mother-Dominant*, which is also unhealthy spiritually, psychologically and emotionally.
 - a. Her husband is usually very nice, kind, passionate (usually incompetent at home and often at work), and is resentful.
 - b. The daughter, in this relationship, is usually lacking in understanding her feminine role, and the son as well lacks an understanding of his masculine role.
 - c. This environment also distorts a child's understanding of his/her sexual (homosexual vs. heterosexual) and leadership roles. "Boys become effeminate when they grow up identifying with their mothers instead of with their fathers."²

² Paul D. Meier, M.D., *Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development*, 33.

3. The *Father-Led Home*, which is a spiritually, psychologically and emotionally healthy relationship.
 - a. The father in this relationship knows how to lead without dominating, discipline without destroying the will, nurture without spoiling, and be vulnerable but firm. He meets the needs of his family.
 - a. He provides a masculine role model that helps both the son and daughter understand their respective God ordained roles in marriage.
 - b. He epitomizes the shepherding model of leadership.

Definitions

When we think of the term *family*, we think of a man and a woman who have entered into wedlock and are living together. Children may or may not come to bless this home. The term *home* refers to a family that happily lives together. The *Christian Home* – is a family, where the relationships are Christian and the members seek to please God (Ephesians 5:10).

Mankind refers to the outward man and the inward man (II Corinthians 4:16). It is the *body*, *soul*, and *spirit* of man (I Thessalonians 5:23; Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7). He is made in the image of God (having the same characteristics of God as opposed to animal life) and a little lower than angels (Genesis 1:27; 5:1; I Corinthians 11:7; Psalm 84:5; Hebrews 2:7). God made them *male* and *female* (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4).

Woman was created for man. Adam was formed first, then Eve (I Timothy 2:13; Genesis 2:7, 21-23; I Corinthians 11:8, 9). She was to be a *complement* to his life (Genesis 2:18). There is nothing in this passage to indicate that woman is to be man's slave. Consider too, that *complement* is an adjective, and it means *suitable* of a quality that *supports* man.

The Bible says she is the *weaker partner*, which refers to the fact that women, in general, are more delicate, of smaller physique, with finer features and sensibilities, and are more delicately poised in their emotional nature (I Peter 3:7).

We must also consider her size, framework, hair, muscular distribution, and feminine characteristics. Peter is not saying that women are weaker morally or intellectually, but they are generally weaker physically and should be cherished and protected.

My experience, as a professional counselor, has proven to me that a man feels *masculine* when he is respected, depended upon, looked up to and thought of positively. A woman then feels *feminine* when she is loved, cared for, protected and understood. These qualities of masculinity and femininity are reflected as specific needs in what the apostle Paul stressed for husbands and wives, that is, that husbands should show love and consideration to their wives and wives should show submission and respect to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33).

It has been reported that medical studies have shown that between the 18th and 26th week of pregnancy something happens that separates the sexes in a way that forever affects communication between them. Researchers have actually observed testosterone and other sex-related hormones released over a baby boy's brain. This causes a change that happens only to a baby boy.

The sex-related hormones and chemicals that cover the baby boy's brain cause the right side to recede somewhat from the left side. One result is that, in most cases, a boy starts life more *left-brain* oriented. This means that girls start life more *right-brain* oriented than boys or more two-sided in their thinking.

We do know that the left-brain houses more of the logical, analytical, factual and aggressive centers of thought. This is why men are usually more logical, organized and aggressive in

their thinking and women are more centered on feelings, language, pictures, fine-detailed work and intuitive thinking. It is quite evident that this can cause communication blocks. There are some natural complications in communication between men and women, which sometimes destroy the validating process. These facts reveal that God created men and women with different physiological features and thinking capabilities that distinguish their respective roles.³

“No Longer Two, But One Flesh”

God commanded that man should leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and they would no longer be two, but one flesh (Genesis 2:18; Matthew 19:6). The marriage pattern of oneness or *togetherness* was established in the first union. They are to be a support system for each other. Adam and Eve were together in the following ways:

1. Together they sinned.
2. Together they were punished.
 - a. Together they worked.
 - b. Together they created children.

As one writer states:

Together a lock and key form a functioning unit. Together they can accomplish something that neither acting alone can accomplish, nor can it be accomplished with two locks or two keys. Each is distinct; yet neither is complete in and of itself. Their roles are neither identical nor interchangeable.

³ Gary Smalley & John Trent, *The Language of Love*, Focus on the Family Publishing (1988) 35.

Neither is superior to the other, since both are necessary. They are equally important. Each must be judged in terms of its own function. They are complementary and together they form a functioning unit. Either alone is in a sense non-complementary, but together they are complementary. Though separate with the possibility of independent existence, they are at the same time a mutually dependent part of a functioning whole. This complementariness is not 100 per cent complete and does not apply to all traits, functions, drives, or goals. When men and women engage in the same occupations or perform common functions, this complementary relationship may break down. The sexes are not complementary for such things as number of appendages need for food, and so on, but in many important aspects they are. ⁴

A Dependent/Co-dependent Relationship

God designed marriage to have a healthy, dependent/co-dependent relationship. The wife is to be dependent upon her husband and he is to be dependent upon her dependency. He needs to know that his wife depends on him (I Peter 3:5, 6). God designed the wife in such a way that she needs to know that her husband is dependable. In doing so, she feels feminine, protected, and cared for. He then feels masculine, needed and important. She then feels loved, and he feels respected. To compensate for feelings of inadequacy and weakness in the marriage, many men adopt a quasi-masculine type lifestyle that allows them to feel masculine power without the threat of a close encounter with the opposite sex that might tell them otherwise.

⁴ Henry A. Bowman, *Marriage For Moderns*.

Harmful use of power ranges from being unreasonable to a spouse to outright violence and power-driven crime. Our society tends to accept violence in the media and the *victimization* mentality as an excuse for our behavior.

What are Masculinity and Femininity?

Our age is struggling with intimacy. We are developing cultural substitutes for masculinity and femininity. Young men whose fathers have not taught them how to be loving husbands and fathers in the home, still have a *nature* need to express their testosterone, their power. If their masculinity cannot be expressed in the marriage relationship, it seeks to find expression somewhere else. It is for this reason that many enthusiastic sports addicts are men who struggle with their masculinity at home.

A man feels masculine when he knows that his wife supports him, respects him, honors him and thinks positively of him. When these things happen a man feels secure in his masculinity. A woman feels feminine when she knows that she is loved, taken care of, protected, and honored. She has a sense of belonging, which makes her vulnerable, but she knows that her husband will not take advantage of that vulnerability. She feels feminine when she has an intimate relationship with her husband and he validates her thinking. Validation does not mean a husband has to agree with his wife, it simply means that he accepts her feelings and opinions as valid to her. A woman feels feminine when: her husband loves and cares for her unconditionally; he understands her needs and does not put her down (I Peter 5:7); he is not cruel to her (Colossians 3:19) and she is the apple of his eye; then she feels secure, feminine, intimate and satisfied. A woman's substitute for femininity might be her ability to be sensuous, to be beautiful, to be sexy. "Women who stress outward beauty

and sexuality have the most difficult time with sexual intimacy.”⁵

The Fall of Mankind

The fall of mankind hurt intimacy between a woman and a man. But she still needs to belong! How can she attract the attentions of a man to her, when at the same time she fears too close an intimacy with a man? She may substitute her ability to be sensuous, to be beautiful, to be sexy for true femininity. Read *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Seventeen* and *Teen* magazines and see that *beauty* is in. It's cosmetics, good looks; it is beauty all the way. Women who stress outward beauty lose sight of their real beauty (I Peter 3:1-6). Even beautiful women, whose beauty fades through the years, find a greater inner strength that comes with the development of inner beauty rather than outer beauty. The apostle Paul says,

I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God (I Timothy 2:9).

The issues about which couples argue are often symptoms of the fact that husbands do not feel they or their ideas are important to their wives and wives do not feel safe and protected by their husbands. Couples often must find issues to fight over to maintain enough emotional distance for self-protection. God didn't design marriage to be that way. He established a plan that would mutually reward both husband

⁵ M. Farrell, *Why Men Are The Way They Are*.

and wife, meet their needs and provide a union that would help them both to grow closer to Him and to each other.

The Fitted Yoke

Christ promises that we would receive rest from our labors and how we will receive rest is found in what Jesus said,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

The *yoke* that Christ speaks of in these verses is symbolic. In the life and times of Christ, His occupation was that of a carpenter (Mark 6:3). In those days the chief product of these craftsmen was not building homes, but rather, for fitting and making yokes for the oxen, which would work the fields and provide transportation.

These yokes were made so the owner could steer the beast, but this yoke was also made so the animal could work longer and more efficiently by tiring less under his heavy burdens. This mechanism was made of heavy wood and it was not padded as they are today. Therefore, they had to be measured and fitted perfectly. When two oxen were pulling a load, the yoke provided for each animal to equally carry his share. When one animal was forced to do this very heavy work, the yoke equalized the load, allowing the animal to pull more with less effort.

Christ fitted these yokes perfectly for the animals, but in v. 30, He tells us that He also fits the yoke perfectly for man. Christ knew that the most empty-headed, stubborn, and gifted of God's creations (man) could benefit from a perfectly fitted

God's Pattern for Marriage

yoke. The perfectly fitted yoke that Christ speaks about in these verses is the ability to function according to the design we were intended to fulfill. *For my yoke is easy* is a statement that is very important for us to understand. In this verse, the word *easy* does not mean requiring little or no sacrifice, but according to the interpretation, the word Christ used was *chrestas*, which means, *well-fitting* (I John 5:3). Therefore, a proper translation would be, *For my yoke is well-fitting*. God's commandments are *well-fitting* or uniquely fitted to our needs and abilities in order that we might live the full life He promised us (John 10:10).

God's plan for marriage is that man and woman *will become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). His plan was for man and woman to share the load. This is why a Christian should marry another Christian (II Corinthians 6:14). It has been my experience that when a Christian marries a non-Christian, the Christian usually succumbs to a weak faith or leaves the church and the Lord altogether. God intended for marriage to be a well-fitted yoke so that the two would share their faith and load in life and experience the joy of being husband and wife.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the definition of the word *pattern*?
2. What is God's purpose for marriage?
3. How would you define the term *submission*, in the context of a wife's duties?
4. What are the positive qualities of a *Father-Led* marriage relationship?
5. When does a home become a *Christian Home*?
6. What is the *Glory of Submission* concept?
7. What did modern day brain research reveal about the differences between a boy's brain and a girl's?
8. What is the concept of the *yoke*, as applied to a marriage?

chapter two

The Problems in Marriage

Our newsstands are filled with family-oriented magazines. Book publishers are flooding the market with material on marriage and family life. You will see articles and books with such titles as: How to Handle Conflict, How to Achieve Open Communication, How to Express Emotion Honestly, How to Prevent Children from Crowding a Marriage, etc. Perhaps all this information is needed today in view of the fragile condition of most marriages. It seems the divorce rate today is reflecting a lack of realistic expectations on the part of many people.

One of my favorite stories is about the mother who sent a letter to a college president. “Dear Sir,” she said,

My son has been accepted for admission to your college and soon he will be leaving, and I am writing to ask that you give your personal attention to the selection of his roommate. I want to be sure that he is a roommate that is not the kind of person who uses foul language or tells off color jokes, smokes, drinks or chases after girls. I hope you will understand why I am appealing to you directly, as you see this is the first time my son will be away from home, except for his three years in the Marines.

Some people are oblivious to the obvious. So it can be in marriage.

It appears that some longstanding myths surrounding marriage need to be examined closely. These myths have created some unrealistic expectations that in turn have disappointed and discouraged many husbands and wives.

A common myth is that *marriage guarantees complete contentment*. In Mark 12:18-27, Jesus taught that human marriages are limited to this world. This is a very important concept for Christians. Marriage is a training ground for eternity. It helps us learn to love, accept and forgive one another, just as Christ does for us. Any attempt to ignore this biblical perspective and deify marriage or make it into a myth of perfect joy will lead to disappointment and failure. Marriage may be made in heaven, as some would say, but it has to be worked out here on earth.

Another is that *marriage will meet all the partner's personal needs*. Marriage partners today often find themselves removed from family, friends or relationships and to fill that void husbands and wives must rely on each other alone for support. Many marriages crumble from the weight.

It is impossible for one human being to meet all the emotional needs of another – even in marriage. Here is where the church can provide the emotional support system needed in marriage. With many loving brothers and sisters in Christ in a local congregation, one can find the strength and encouragement that may be lacking in the marriage.

Another one is that *marriage is for everyone*. Paul's argument concerning singleness should not be restricted to times of persecution (I Corinthians 7:25-34). The fact is that without the conflicting demands of home and family, a person

is better suited for ministry. Therefore, we should not view the single life as inferior.

In regard to certain spiritual tasks, singleness actually may be superior to marriage. We need a positive image of the single life. When we achieve this, the church will be taking a more balanced perspective on marriage. Marriage will not be viewed as the only route to happiness.

Is the prognosis for marriage going to get better, or are we going to continue to see more broken homes and marriages and more people walking to the divorce court, not once but two or three times? The answer depends on how well we are able to teach our children about the permanency of marriage and how to avoid the myths that surround it.

Accept One Another

I do not have the right to be angry when another person does not live up to my expectations. There is no necessary connection between the behavior of another person and our anger. It doesn't matter how unfairly, unjustly or thoughtlessly someone has behaved toward us, we are angry because of our own self-talk. I do have a choice whether or not to be or remain angry. "*Everyone should be QUICK to listen, SLOW to speak and SLOW to become angry*" (James 1:19). Someone else cannot make me angry if I choose not to be. It is my choice, and I must take responsibility for it (Ephesians 4:26, 27).

Too often we allow *unrealistic expectations* to set us up for a fall. They set us up for disappointment and heartbreak. It is not *dreadful* or even especially unusual if others do things I don't like or fail to treat me as well as I treat them. We waste a lot of time, energy and thought when we brood over the offenses of others. If I have expectations of my wife or my children or anybody in my world, I must evaluate whether or not they are realistic for that person to fulfill.

We are all different and many of us come from different backgrounds. To expect everybody in my world to do or be what I want is impossible. Some people may not be able to perform exactly as I expect them to and they may have different belief systems than I have.

All of us have sinned, according to God's word (Romans 3:23). The people in your life will not always be kind, just, loving, and thoughtful to you. Learn to deal with it! None of us behave perfectly and fairly in every instance. We must learn to accept one another, with all of our quirks and idiosyncrasies, just as Christ has accepted us (Romans 15:7).

Living with a Perfectionist

Judy came to my office one day wanting help. Jason, her husband, was a perfectionist and it was destroying their marriage. Judy was distraught and ready to leave her husband. She told me Jason was controlling and he always criticized her, he was never satisfied with what she did at home. He expected her to not only wash his clothes, but to press and starch his shirts and arrange all of his clothes in a certain order in their dresser and in their closet. He expected the kids to have all their toys in the toy box, except the ones they were playing with. The house had to be spotless at all times, and he inspected it every night when he got home. If it didn't meet his expectations, he would go into a tirade and then not talk to her the rest of the night. Judy told me she was leaving Jason if he didn't get counseling. "I can't live this way any longer. I feel like a slave in my own house and I don't love him anymore," she told me. They had been married for eight years.

When Jason finally came into my office, I could see that he really didn't want to be there and he didn't comprehend that there was a problem in his marriage. "I don't see any reason

why I have to be here; if it weren't for my wife threatening me, I wouldn't have come," he said. It is beyond me why some husbands don't see a problem in their marriage when their wives threaten to leave them.

Jason had a problem with perfectionism and unrealistic expectations. In his mind, he thought that he knew best how things should be and that everything should be in a certain order. If things weren't in the order he prescribed, it would mean that he failed as a husband and father. It became apparent after a few counseling sessions that Jason suffered from the lie, "Unless things are in a certain order and tidy, I cannot feel good about myself and find peace." It was hard for Jason to perceive the lie he was telling himself. He had been taught in his childhood to believe that "an orderly life is a happy life," even if it hurts others. His parents constantly berated and rejected him when he didn't do things the way they thought he should. They had transferred their insecurities on to him and he was suffering for it.

Jason was also an *introvert*, and it has been proven to me in my counseling practice that introverts usually have a temperamental tendency towards perfectionism. This, of course, doesn't mean he couldn't control his desires to be perfect, he just didn't believe that such behavior was wrong and harmful to his relationships. His mind was so programmed to believe the lie, "his way was the only way," that it took a long time for him to recognize it and remove it. After several counseling sessions the removal process was completed. "This process of changing my belief systems is very frightening; I feel very insecure during this time," he said. It took Jason several months of practice to finally fight off the urge to arrange things or expect his wife to arrange the house a certain way. He was finally replacing the lies he was telling himself with the truth.

Jason found peace of mind through Christian counseling and a growing faith in God, who was willing to help him

through the struggle of overcoming perfectionism. When we came to the final stages of the counseling process, he said, “I have never felt more secure in my relationship with God and my family. I feel like a gigantic boulder has been taken off my shoulders and I am free again.” Jesus said, “*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).

When we get caught up in what we think *ought* to be done, we set ourselves up for frustration. Judy continued to tell herself that Jason *should* treat her and the children right and not be so demanding. We could all sympathize with Judy; she was right and Jason was wrong. We could become indignant towards Jason and cry out that he shouldn’t act that way because it’s not Christ-like. Vindictive anger towards someone who is unjust and cruel, is usually futile. Such people do not have the same mindset as we do and our expectations and opinions are not theirs and they usually have little effect on the controller or the perfectionist. All they do is cause us emotional pain and heartache. We can learn to accept people even when we don’t condone their behavior. This is how God loves us.

The Agape Principle

The *Agape Principle* requires of us that we love our neighbor regardless of what he/she believes or how he/she behaves towards us (Matthew 19:19). *Agape* (pronounced a-gá-pay) is the noun form of the Greek word for *unconditional love*. When Jesus said, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*,” he used this word (agapao – verb form) in this passage when describing how we should love our neighbor. *Phileo* is the verb form of the Greek word for *affectionate love*. *Phileo* is not normally used in a command to *love* someone. *Agapao* can be commanded because it is a type of love that doesn’t require emotional attachment.

When speaking of how *agapao* is used in reference to God (I John 4:9, 10), W. E. Vine says, “But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by an excellency in its objects.”⁶ When Paul says, “*husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church . . .*” He used the word *agapao* for love.

That is how Jesus could love us and command us to love and serve our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48; Romans 5:8; 12:17-21; 13:9). I believe that a good biblical definition of *agape* love would be, “the kind of love that does not require affection, but does require that I do what is best for someone even if he/she doesn’t like it or thinks that it is unloving.” It is a *proactive* love, a *tough* love. As a Christian, God expects me to love everyone unconditionally, whether I like them or not.

In the case of Jason’s wife, she needed to learn how to *agape* love him in spite of his perfectionism. It is easy for us to blame Jason for his abusive and controlling behavior towards his wife, but she also has a responsibility to deal with it in a Christian manner. All marriages, where there is a controlling partner, certainly do not turn out this positive after counseling. When the mate, who is being controlled, tries to stop the controller by nagging, complaining or enabling, it usually fails and only makes things worse.

Dealing with the Controller

The concept of REACTING to the controller’s manipulation is important here. To *react* is to *counteract* and it is a controlling action in and of itself. We usually *react* to people we know are trying to control us, but when we do, we actually feed into a power trip the insecure controller is on.

⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 382.

He/she is looking for some kind of reaction that will reflect his/her power over the person he/she is trying to manipulate. No matter how negative the *reaction*, the controller gains a sense of power by it. I realize that this comparison is a play on words, but please allow me to have the liberty to use words in a way that best describes the dynamic that is going on between the controller and the controllee. Husbands and wives must learn to not try to control one another.

I will use the word *respond* as opposed to the word *react*. I teach my counselees to *respond* in a non-emotional way that does not reinforce the belief system of the controller that he has the power over someone. The controllee must be careful that his/her body language does not reflect a reaction. I realize that this is hard to do and that we all have emotions that are hard to control at times. God can give us the power to accomplish it (Ephesians 3:16). I am not saying that the controllee should not get angry at times, but that anger must be under control and not a direct, visible reaction to the controller.

When a person refuses to enable a controller, it is not rebellion, but it is self-control, and that is pleasing to God (Galatians 5:22-26). Such a response will usually have the effect of causing the controller to turn up the heat for a while, because he is not getting the results he thinks he needs to claim power over someone and feel good about himself. This type of behavior (refusing to react to the controller) is sending a message to the controller that he needs to start taking responsibility for his actions. The goal is to change the belief system and replace it with the truth. The truth is we don't need to control and manipulate people to feel good about ourselves. When we humble ourselves, God will exalt us (James 4:10).

The Need for Boundaries

In their very popular book, *Boundaries*, Drs. Cloud and Townsend state that the purpose of boundaries is not to put limits on others, but to put limits on ourselves and our exposure to others, who may be using or manipulating us. In other words, boundaries are limits on how we allow others to influence us and are vital to our own emotional, psychological and spiritual health.

A problem occurs in the context of the *controller* vs. the *compliant* person. When the controller seeks to control others by manipulation or intimidation, it is sinful and harmful to a relationship. The Bible tells us that we must be responsible for our feelings and our actions. In the Galatian letter, Paul says that we should, “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*” In another verse Paul says, “*For each one should carry his own load*” (Galatians 6:2, 5). These two verses seem contradictory at first glance until you examine the Greek words and their definitions. Vine says that the Greek word for *burden* in verse two is *baros* meaning, “a weight, anything pressing on one physically.”⁷ It could be equated to a giant boulder that is too much for one man to carry.

The Greek word for *load* in verse five is *phortion*. Vine says, “The difference between *phortion* and *baros* is, that *phortion* is simply something to be borne, without reference to its weight, but *baros* always suggests what is heavy or burdensome.”⁸ It could be said that *baros* represents a boulder of immense weight and *phortion* represents something as light as a *backpack* for hiking. What God is really telling us, through the apostle Paul, is that we are to help those who can’t

⁷ Vine, 159.

⁸ Vine, 159.

carry their load because it is too much for them, but we can and should take responsibility for our own burdens that we are capable of carrying.

If we are not willing to take on our own responsibilities when we are capable, we are sinning before God. When we *enable* others by carrying their load when they are capable, we are enabling them to be irresponsible and are therefore sinning against the will of God. I believe the above statements with all my heart, and I believe that we must be strong and set limits on others in regards to their influence on us, when they use us to enable them to act irresponsibly. Husbands and wives should not enable one another to act irresponsibly.

When we allow other people to be irresponsible, we encourage them in their lack of commitment to God and their slothfulness in life (Matthew 25:26). I think we can see how this principle applies to parenting. When people learn to be responsible, accept their own identity, and depend on God for their happiness rather than circumstances, they will learn to control their anger and be responsible for their speech and behavior.

Filling Our Empty Places

When the apostle Paul stated (in a Roman prison) that he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in, he proclaimed a truth that many never experience in life (Philippians 4:11-13). Paul was saying that with God he could be content in any circumstance. In other words, it was not the circumstance that made him content or happy, but the mindset he had and his relationship with God. It is not the circumstances in life that make us content, but our belief systems and our trust in God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells the story of a man, who had an evil spirit (during the age when God allowed evil

spirits to possess people) and it was cast out of him (Matthew 12:43-45). Then the man was (metaphorically) swept clean and what remained was an empty place. It is inferred that the man did not replace the evil spirit with God's Spirit, that he might produce the fruits of the Spirit. Eventually the evil spirit came back in full force and found the place swept clean and empty. Jesus said of the evil spirit, *"Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there."* I believe the moral of this story is that we must sweep our lives clean of sin and continue to keep close to the Lord (James 4:6-10).

When we begin to become discontented with our circumstances, we have a tendency to fantasize about what we would like them to be. At this point, we begin a thought process that breaks down our inhibitions against sin and our mind starts to have sinful thoughts, which will ultimately lead to sinful actions (Matthew 5:21-30). Then comes the process of leaving the Lord behind and not giving Him a place in our lives.

We often rationalize to excuse our sinful thoughts and actions. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other"* (Matthew 6:24). Paul gives us the solution to sinful fantasies when he says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5).

When we become discontented with our circumstances, we begin to think of ways to change them to feel better about ourselves and to find contentment. We then cease to rely on God to give us contentment, and we begin giving into sinful behavior (James 1:13-15). We have gotten off the track of trust in God to give us contentment and have begun to look to the world and its fleshly desires to find it. Paul was not equating

contentment with complacency. Sometimes we can change our circumstances in a Godly way to make our life better, but we must not trust in our circumstances alone. If we do, we will fail.

When we were converted to Christ, we swept our lives clean of the sinful nature (Romans 6:1-7). If we don't continue in a prayerful relationship with God, a vacuum will begin to develop and Satan and the world will readily fill it with sinful thoughts, desires and behavior. It is vitally important that our thought processes and belief systems be programmed with the truth that God has the power to give us peace and give us contentment in whatever state we are in (Philippians 4:4-13). Paul is telling us that we really can have self-control when he says,

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (I Corinthians 10:13).

We must have faith in Him and trust in His word. It is vitally important that husbands and wives learn to be content with one another.

Many people in the world believe that happiness is by luck or circumstances and that we have very little or no control over it. Without a belief in and a relationship with the Lord, there is no reason to believe in the fact that we can have joy in this world without luck or favorable circumstances. I'm convinced that dysfunctional behavior is caused when a person believes, *circumstances determine happiness.*

Why Do Opposites Attract?

Life itself is not easy – it requires many adjustments. The most difficult of all human adjustments is marriage. This is so because it is such an intimate relationship. There is the molding of the life of each individual into that of the other. Satisfactory emotional adjustments are most important. The demands on each other can be unreasonable.

Why are people attracted to spouses whom they will later resent? Studies show that in healthy relationships, opposites attract most of the time. In unhealthy families, opposites attract too, but they do not get along well at all. Such is the case in dysfunctional families. There are two kinds of dysfunctional family systems – the *dominant male* and the *dominant female*. Since opposites attract, the dominant male will instinctively be attracted to a compliant, passive female. In much the same way, the dominant female will be attracted to a passive male.

You may ask, “Why don’t people who are dominant or passive just change? The dominant person needs to back off and the passive person needs to get with it!” It is not that easy! Researchers have learned that between 17 to 20 years of age, every person internalizes his or her identity. Simply put, after adolescence, a person’s natural ability to change decreases. He or she is less pliable and is more resistant to change. Solomon knew this when he wrote, “*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it*” (Proverbs 22:6). The word *old* literally means, *hair on the chin*. At the age that a son starts growing a beard, he begins to slow down the *changing process*.

What happens to young men (and women) at ages 17 to 20? The logic is that since the sons and daughters at this age do not want to change anymore, whatever weaknesses each may have must be equally matched with strengths in their spouses.

The Problems in Marriage

So, a dominant young man must find a compliant, submissive spouse. A dependent young man must find a competent, decisive and independent spouse. In much the same way, non-talkers are attracted to talkers; emotional people are attracted to logical people; introverts are attracted to extroverts, and so on.

The bottom line is that since we do not want to change, we must find spouses, who are what we are not. Since we no longer want to fix ourselves, we must find spouses, who will do our fixing for us. The assumption, though false, is that if I am an unbalanced or incomplete person, I then need a spouse who is opposite of me and together, we will make a whole – or my half plus my wife's half equals a whole. After all, the Bible says that husbands and wives are to be one. And then, of course, we will live happily together. It is not likely!

Once married, the two soon dislike each other. Why? After marriage, each spouse quickly finds fault with the other. The dominant female will criticize her passive husband for his indecision and lack of responsibility. He resents her for being too controlling and unresponsive. The dominant male criticizes his passive wife for being inept and non-assertive. She criticizes him for his lack of love and relationship. Simply put, each believes that if the other spouse would change in a few key areas, that all would be well. Those key areas, however, happen to be the areas where each spouse is strong. So, a dominant female wants her husband to be more assertive and the compliant female wants her husband to be more loving. That is not why each was attracted to the other and why they eventually got married.

When two people who are opposites were once attracted to each other, and now repel each other, it is because they want the other to change. This is unrealistic. In short, the husband is asking his wife to be more like him. She wants her husband to be more like her. Why? The problem is neither wants to do the changing. The other spouse must do the changing.

Remember, neither spouse is into change after 17 to 20 years of age. Since neither wants to change, a fight ensues. They grow emotionally distant. So, before marriage, opposites attract; after marriage, opposites repel.

Most newlyweds anticipate their marriage to be a happy one because their spouse is going to make them happy. Marriage counselors know that most major problems in marriage involve issues of power. Marriage is usually not $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$; but rather, $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$. Then two individuals, who are unhealthy, will inevitably become embroiled in a marital fight. Both were expecting the other spouse to do all the fixing. Marriage, which involves two getters and no givers, is bound to fail. At the altar, both expected the other person to make them whole. However, in the marriage relationship, both are reduced to a fraction of that expectation. Each partner feels worse than when they were single.

When two partners reach this point (of unfulfilled expectations), stubbornness sets in and both dig in for the long haul. Both refuse to change – and the reason they married each other in the first place has become the rub! Emotional distance occurs. Later, the kids or careers are asked to fill the void. Sometimes alcohol, drugs and even an affair are used to soften the pain. Unwise counselors or friends may encourage divorce. Then the gusto that God designed for marriage is gone. Much worse, God's image in the marriage is severely tarnished. God's will is for each spouse to do his or her own changing.

In reality, what God really wants from us is for two persons to work on their own individual issues, each one working towards becoming a whole person as an individual. Then the equation would be: $1 + 1 = 1$. It is God's plan that the two become one flesh. Marriage is for support and partnership, not to complete each mate where he or she is incomplete. That would truly be impossible.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some myths that involve marriage other than those mentioned?
2. Why do you think people view divorce as the solution to marriage problems?
3. What are the pros and cons of a couple living near an extended family?
4. What are some ways the church can become an extended family to a couple?
5. Why do people enter marriage with unrealistic expectations?
6. What happens when a spouse depends on the other for complete fulfillment?
7. What is meant by the concept of, *Fulfilling our Empty Spaces*?
8. What is the need for *boundaries*?

chapter three

Considering a Woman's Needs

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a fighter pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a North Vietnamese prison. He survived that ordeal and now lectures about lessons learned from that experience. One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. "I packed your parachute," the man replied. Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, "I guess it worked!" Plumb assured him, "It sure did – if your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today." Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he might have looked like in a Navy uniform – a Dixie cup hat, a bib in the back, and bell bottom trousers. I wondered how many times I might have seen him and not even said, 'good morning, how are you,' or anything, because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor."

Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't

know. Now, Plumb asks his audience, “Who’s packing your parachute?”

This story has a message for all of us. There is almost, always someone in our life who *packs our parachute*, in other words, is our support system. For the husband, it is usually his wife, and usually he doesn’t appreciate her in this role enough. In his best selling book, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, John Gray has successfully made the point that men and women think differently and communicate differently. He states that men are motivated when they feel needed and women are motivated when they feel cherished. He concludes that when men talk about problems they instinctively offer solutions, but when women talk about problems, they primarily want to be validated.

Women are more relationship-oriented and men are more goal-oriented. It is interesting that the Bible implores men to love their wives and that wives should respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18, 19). I have found, in my ministry that men have a hard time expressing love to their wives and women have a difficult time showing respect to their husbands. The Bible says,

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
(I Peter 3:7).

Again, Peter is not saying that women are weaker morally or intellectually, but are generally weaker physically and should be cherished and protected.

John Gray concludes that men are fulfilled through working out the details of a problem and women are fulfilled through talking about the problem. *Validating* is the most difficult process in communication for men. Men like to feel that they have the *right* answers and have a difficult time validating a woman's feelings when they disagree with them. *Validation* does not require that a person agree with someone else's feelings, it only requires that those feelings be recognized as valid to that person.

Perceiving the Problem

Bill and Susie had been married for ten years and seemed on the surface to be the perfect couple. They did things together. They enjoyed watching TV and reading together, but something was missing in Susie's life. She was an introvert in social activities and so was Bill. In this area they did not seem to have any problems. They were both independent in nature and respected each other's space and individual pursuits. She enjoyed being at home with her children and husband. They had only a few surface relationships with which they, individually or together, spent time.

Bill was an introvert as well, so he was never forced to do things, go places and be with people because Susie was of the same temperament. The two of them enjoyed long hours of reading and watching TV. Her desire for independence was recognized and respected by the family and friends. They did not interfere in her chosen life style and did nothing to stress her desires for alone time.

When Bill came to me, he was worried that his wife was having an affair and that she might leave him. It is unusual for a husband to request counseling first, before the wife, but he was very worried about their marriage. I asked him what was causing him to feel this way, and he said that she had become

estranged from the family and was in some kind of depressed state. He did not know what to do to help her and he didn't understand why she was acting this way.

I talked to Susie alone for a few sessions and found out that she felt like Bill did not love her anymore. She said that he never seemed to show affection or love towards her and that he didn't accept her. She had become very stressed and was deeply depressed. She had lost all hope of being loved and accepted by Bill.

Her husband told me that he loved her very much, but he couldn't understand why she would not believe him. Because Bill was emotionally guarded, he rarely expressed his love for her and how he felt towards her (which she desperately needed to know).

It reminds me of the joke about the husband whose wife complained about the fact that he never told her that he loved her. The husband stated, "I told her I loved her forty years ago when I married her, and if I change my mind, I'll let her know."

Susie, as most women do, needed physical expressions of love, intimacy, and acceptance, which he did not provide. For short periods of time she would deny this need or stuff it, especially when she could keep her mind active and thinking about other things, but the longer the need for love and affection was not being met, the worse she would feel.

This was especially true late at night or after everyone had gone to bed, for at these times she could no longer keep her mind active and the downward thinking process was spinning dramatically. At these times she was unable to sleep and not until early in the morning, when physical exhaustion took over, would she be able to fall asleep. When the alarm went off in the morning, she would be tired and did not want to face another day.

The lack of energy caused her to wake in the morning already feeling depressed. Because of this feeling, she could

not deal with her children and her husband effectively. She was irritable, short-tempered, and not very pleasant to be around. Her mind would automatically focus on the things she perceived her family did that revealed they did not love her instead of seeing all the things they did do to show love and affection.

At this time, the emotions she felt were deep-seated anger, loss of self-worth, feelings of being unloved and unaccepted, anxiety, and loneliness. At night these feelings would be intensified and again she could not sleep, which made things worse. When she went to see a doctor, she was diagnosed as being exhausted, and received a prescription for tranquilizers or sleeping pills to allow her body to receive the rest it needed. When she finally went to a psychiatrist, she was diagnosed as deeply depressed and given an anti-depressant drug. Neither of these approaches would solve the problem, for the need for expressed love and affection was not being met.

She began to read books that took her out of her life's circumstances (as she perceived them anyway) and placed her in another, which would make her life seem all the more hopeless and lonely. At night, to avoid feeling lonely and unloved, she would undertake either romantic or sexual fantasies, which for that time, made her feel loved and accepted, and because of her desires, these fantasies would appear to be real to her (II Corinthians 10:5). She could then sleep at night, but in the morning she would still be tired, for now she was beginning to hate the life she was living, for it could not measure up to the perfect life she had been fantasizing about in her mind. She would even find herself wandering off into these fantasies during the day, when she should be concentrating on her family and her husband.

The original sinful emotions were beginning to be intensified. She also felt guilt because she knew that these fantasies were adulterous in nature (Matthew 5:27-30) and she

was allowing something to come between her and her husband. The physical problems ranged from simple fatigue to a host of stress-related ailments. Spiritually, she no longer desired to seek the will of God, for she knew in her heart that if she did this, she would have to give up her fantasies. And those fantasies were the only thing that got her through the long and lonely nights. Therefore, she began to separate herself from God and her husband. By the time I entered the scene as a counselor, she was deeply depressed and suicidal.

Bill had been oblivious to all of this, except he did see that his wife was becoming more and more withdrawn. Bill, because of her behavior, was suspicious that she was having an affair. I had to counsel Bill on the facts of married life in the sense that the Bible says that husbands are to “*be considerate (understanding) as you live with your wives...*” The apostle Peter is explaining to husbands that they need to learn to understand how their wives are feeling and what their needs are (I Peter 3:7).

Bill would bring her flowers, take her out to dinner and shower her with gifts but eventually that was not enough. He did not seem to understand that Susie needed love and affection expressed to her on a regular basis. It may be true that not all women have this need, but I have not counseled one yet that didn't. Bill was task oriented and didn't understand the delicacies of tender moments with his wife, kissing, hugging and intimately expressing affection towards each other.

Setting the Stage for Love

One of the main differences between men and women is the way each looks at love – or what each considers a *lover* to be. Husbands associate erotic love with such behaviors as being aggressive, gallant, virile and masculine. Wives, on the other hand, equate lovemaking with such behaviors as being

charming, romantic, desirable, intimate, and involved in touching. The husband tends to look at lovemaking in a mechanical and reasonable way, where the wife looks more deeply into the feelings and tenderness of the expressions of love.

For a man to get to know his wife as a lover, he must enter her world of love – look through her eyes, feel her romantic love. Otherwise, he is on the outside looking in – never understanding, always missing out. Mrs. Helen Young, wife of M. Norvel Young (a former president of Pepperdine University) wrote one time in an article, “The three little words ‘love, honor, and obey’ have a big significance to the Christian wife as she contemplates the attitude she will have toward the man she marries.”

What a man values, he takes good care of. Or as Christ said, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). If your hobby is fishing, you will probably hesitate to loan out your best rod and reel. If you enjoy hunting, you probably know how to carefully oil and polish guns.

Based on the amount of time you spend on each activity, your wife can sense which is most important to you. If she doesn't feel that you are as careful with her as you are with your other interests, she will know she is not as important. That feeling shatters her self-worth and can result in physical as well as emotional problems. The emotions she struggles with now may surface years later in the form of serious and expensive physical complications.

When a wife feels she is the most important, she gets excited about her husband being able to do the things he likes to do and she is more receptive to love-making also. Simply telling her she's first, or giving her flowers and taking her out to dinner doesn't work when she doesn't see affection expressed to her on a regular basis. She may see these efforts

on the husband's part as him trying to manipulate her, because he senses her displeasure with him. If she finds out that her husband has tried to manipulate her, he may be faced with major problems concerning her trust in him and her own feelings of self-worth.

This is what happened to Susie. She perceived that Bill was simply using her to get her to be more receptive to being a more involved wife. She perceived that he did not love her by observing his lack of intimacy. Her perception was flawed and wrong, yet to her it was real.

Of course Bill was wrong by not perceiving her need for affection, but she was wrong by not expressing her need to him. She assumed that he should know by reading her mind and she told herself lies about what she perceived his lack of intimacy meant. Both of them lacked the communication tools and skills to adequately express their feelings. Both of them assumed what the other was feeling or thinking without confirming it through communication that expresses feelings.

The Husband's Goal in Marriage

The husband's goal should be to become a gentle, loving, and tender husband, refraining from lecturing his wife. Lectures during stressful times only create more stress. The husband needs to learn how to listen and validate what his wife is telling him. He does not have to agree with her, just be willing to listen and make her feel like he understands and believes her feelings and opinions are valid to her. He needs to learn to hold his wife affectionately and warmly instead of lecturing to her. He needs to learn that he doesn't have to win an argument or act like he knows all of the answers. He needs to learn that she will love him more when he is considerate of and listens to her feelings than when he has all the answers to her problems (Colossians 3:19).

When a man treats his wife carelessly, she is usually offended far deeper than he realizes. She begins to close him out, and if he continues to hurt her feelings, she will separate herself from him mentally, emotionally, and physically. In other words, she doesn't want any contact in any way with him. She will not only avoid conversation, but also will avoid being touched. A wife simply will not respond to her husband when he continually hurts her feelings without working out the problem. Working out the problem requires direct, positive, non-accusative, *I messages* that reflect feelings and not judgment of another. Some people justify their actions or speech by saying that "you made me do it." We must learn to take responsibility for our actions and feelings. Nobody makes us feel a certain way unless we choose to feel that way. The Bible tells us that we can control our emotions and that we are responsible for them (Ephesians 4:26, 27; James 1:19).

Bill had to recognize his insensitivity to his wife's need for love and affection. He needed to express to her his desire to love her and understand her. He needed to impress upon her that he wanted to meet her needs as best he could.

Susie had to learn that Bill could not read her mind. She had to learn that, because of his introverted temperament, he was unable to meet all of her needs for affection, but he could do his best. She needed to learn that her self-talk had been full of lies about her self-worth and her husband's feelings. She needed to learn that she should express her feelings and desires to Bill in ways that he could understand and respond to.

I find in my counseling ministry that this kind of marital problem is very common. Bill and Susie, through extensive Christian counseling, finally reached a point in their marriage when they understood each other's feelings and needs, could willingly try to meet one another's needs and have a fulfilling relationship.

The Husband's Responsibility to His Wife

Real unity and oneness cannot be experienced unless the husband and wife know, accept, and fulfill their varying but complementary responsibilities. The husband's God-given responsibilities to his wife involve, first of all, the leadership that God expects of a husband (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Today, when leadership is spoken of, we often think about giving orders and being the boss. But this is not biblical leadership. The Lord's concept of a leader is not a dictator, but a person who is first and foremost a *servant* (Matthew 20:20-28). His concern is not for himself; his concern is not to give orders or to boss other people around, or to have his own way. His first concern is to meet the needs of others (Ephesians 5:21). Indeed, if the best interests of others are not on a leader's heart, if he is not willing to sacrifice himself – his personal needs, wants, desires, aspirations, time, money, etc. – if the needs of others are not more important than his own, he is not a qualified leader (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Christ gives us the model of a Godly leader (John 13:1-15). In this passage, we see a picture of what it means to be a leader. The symbol of leadership described here is not a throne or a club but a big towel and a basin. In other words, a leader must have a servant's heart. And if he has a servant's heart, he will act like a servant and react like a servant, when he is treated like a servant (I Peter 5:3; II Thessalonians 2:5-11). Such leadership is more *relational* than *positional*, more *leader* than *manager*.

When we apply this biblical concept of leadership to the husband, we see that being the leader (head) means that he must be the family's biggest servant. He is to be *head* of his wife even as Christ is head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). He

must have her best interests at heart, live for and be willing to give his life for his wife, as Christ did for the church.

Surely biblical leadership involves being an example for those who are being led. Surely the husband's leadership means that he must strive to be an example, and model a pattern of godliness, holiness, righteousness, compassion, dedication, honesty, commitment, patience, and devotion to God.

Certainly, because no one is sinless, no earthly husband will ever be a perfect example for his wife, but that is what he should strive for (Philippians 3:12-14). And when he fails, he should be quick to confess to his God and his wife that he has failed and ask for forgiveness (James 5:16). Even in failure, the husband must be an example to his wife of how the believer should deal with sin. In failure, as well as at all other times, the Christian husband is to lead his wife by the power and authority of a good example.

Christian husbands are called upon to lead their wives and families by making decisions and delegating responsibility, always considering their opinions and feelings. To be a leader does not mean that he must bear all the responsibility and do all the work while his wife bears nothing and does nothing. It does mean that he will see to it that the work gets done and that everyone knows who does what.

In a marriage someone has to be the leader, the final decision maker. That is why God has always, in all circumstances, required a leader for His people. He has required someone to take responsibility to make sure righteous decisions are made and carried out. Without such leadership, there would be chaos and eventually the rule of sinful desires (example: Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai and left the people without leadership and they resorted to idolatry; Exodus 32).

Indeed, the husband must make decisions and delegate responsibility as a servant of his wife. Her opinions, advice, desires, suggestions, requests, fears, and questions should be given serious consideration. The wife is to be the husband's helper. She is to be his chief adviser, resource person, and consultant.

Husbands, you must realize that God calls you to be your wife's leader. This means that you must be your wife's servant, that you must spend much time with her, that you must give her useful, scriptural, and practical instruction, that you must be a good example to her, and that you must make decisions and delegate responsibilities in your home. Husbands, you must be a good example, because it is one of the most vital elements in spiritual leadership in the home. Without it, the wife, the children, and the family are missing the kind of spiritual guidance that a man, a husband, can provide.

Of the many elements involved in developing genuine oneness, none is more important than this one. Unquestionably, it is the other side of the marital coin. If genuine oneness is to be experienced, the lifestyle of the wife must be of genuine biblical submission to her husband. Conversely, the lifestyle of the husband must be the kind of leadership that has just been described.

But the Bible not only says that the husband must be his wife's leader, it also asserts that he is to be his wife's lover. The importance of husbandly love has already been implied in what has previously been said about the husband, but it must be emphasized and amplified.

The husband's needs, his desires, his aspirations, his hopes, his body, his comfort are very important to him. He nourishes and cherishes himself. He carefully protects and provides for the needs of his body. He does not deliberately do that which would bring harm to himself. The Scriptures indicate that this is the way a man should love his wife

(Ephesians 5:28, 29). In fact, a husband's body does not belong to him, but to his wife (I Corinthians 7:1-5). He is to nourish her, cherish her, protect her, satisfy her, provide for her, care for her, and sacrifice for her to the same degree and extent, and in the same manner as he does himself.

It has been my experience as a professional counselor (for 20 years as of this writing) that Christian women, in general, want and desire their husbands to be the head of the family, and to be the spiritual leader of the home (Genesis 3:16). I believe God made woman that way and it gives the wife the sense of security, affection, leadership, and commitment that she needs from a man. I have had many women tell me in counseling that they just wished that their husbands would provide spiritual leadership and give them the attention they need for security and love.

John the apostle said long ago, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (I John 5:3). His commands are for our good and benefit that we might live the fulfilling life as husband and wife that God intended us to live.

Questions for Discussion

1. Are there differences between a husband and a wife's needs and wants?
2. What are they?
3. What does it take to motivate men? What does it take to motivate women?
4. How is a husband supposed to lead, and what are the implications of such?
5. What is the difference between how a woman and a man deal with problems?
6. Why do women need to have a man be a leader in the home?
7. How do women normally behave when treated harshly or carelessly?
8. When should a husband realize it is time to express his feelings? What should be the husband's goal in marriage?

chapter four

Considering a Man's Needs

Another one of my favorite stories is about an extremely successful sea captain, who was renowned for his ability to guide ships safely across the high seas. He was normal in every way except for one unusual habit. Every morning he would open a small safe, pull out a piece of paper, and look at it. Then, after just a few seconds, he would return it to the safe and lock it up securely.

The word of this mysterious ritual spread far and wide. People wondered what could possibly demand his daily attention. Is it a love note, a song, a prayer? Finally, the captain died, and his attorney set a date for opening the safe and revealing the contents of the paper.

As a large crowd gathered around, the captain's profound secret was unveiled at last: it said, "Port – left; starboard – right." We must never forget the *basics*, though we do not dwell on them, neither should we ignore them.

This story reminds me that men are more rational and goal-oriented than women. Men are problem-solvers and they have this instinctual desire to be right and protect their manhood. They have a greater tendency to stay with the basics and the same routines. Women are more intuitive and challenge men more in the area of creativity and exploration of their feelings.

Men are more aggressive and have the tendency to take charge. It is the tendency to constantly prove their macho status, which becomes a difficulty for the women with whom they have a relationship.

A young lady by the name of Brenda called me one day and said, "Our family needs help and healing. Can you help us?" Brenda came to my office and described her husband George as a madman, out of control and threatening to her and her family. George threatened to hit her, and she was sure that he would sooner or later hit the kids.

During the counseling process with Brenda, George entered my office with a chip on his shoulder and a very critical demeanor. George was a young man and very much into proving his power and virility. I was eventually able to get him to submit to counseling. I found out that he spent most of his time trying to control and gain power over the people in his life.

This young man had a very controlling temperament and a deep need to control his environment. He had only a few friends – surface relationships that he could control and fulfill his desire for power. He exerted pressure on these friends because they were weak-willed. Eventually, they would begin to feel used and become angry at being manipulated. This anger would cause them to eventually reject George, which would cause him to get angry and feel abandoned. He would then experience a loss of self-worth, feeling unaccepted and unloved. The anger and the vengeance he felt from this rejection would be directed at the only people left in his life – his family.

George would then begin to drive his family unmercifully. He would use them, not only to meet his intense need for love and affection, but also to meet his need for control and power. The rejection he experienced in his surface relationships pushed him to try to save face. Because of this drive to save face, he drove his family; needing them to make him look good to the

people they came in contact with. This was a heavy burden for them to bear.

Everything his family did had to be done according to his terms. He would not accept anything his family did, which conflicted with his preference. Soon they would feel as if they could do nothing right, and they would stop trying. So they too began to reject him, and did only what they needed to do out of fear. During this time, the young man went through physical changes; loss of appetite, high blood pressure, eating disorders and other stress-related ailments. He blamed his family for this, and sought vengeance for the feelings and the physical problems he was suffering.

By this time his need for love and affection was being completely denied. The driving force in his temperament was the need to have power over his environment. The deep-seated anger began to erupt in bouts of emotional abuse, which drove his family farther from him. He blamed others for this deeper rejection. He felt that things would be all right if they would only do as he said; therefore, he sought to punish them more to get them on track.

The emotional browbeating eventually became more frequent. From here, he sought God to rectify the situation by causing everyone under his rule to do as he said. When God did not do this (He will not override man's free will), he turned his back on God and began to threaten his family into submission. From here the progression is predictable.

This case study will give you a better understanding of why people can do the terrible things they do to the people they love. The controlling type of temperament has the most potential for anger of all the temperament types, and while controllers are feeling this anger, it overrides all of their tender emotions; love, compassion, gentleness, peace and joy. These emotions are lost beneath the feelings of anger. The fact that

this man's need for control and affection was not met is not reason enough to excuse his behavior or attitude.

My goal, as a counselor, was to help George recognize the lies he was telling himself and replace them with the truth. The truth is that controllers don't need to control and manipulate people to feel good about themselves. George needed to realize that people don't like being controlled. Through extensive counseling, he would learn to be more successful in meeting his power needs by putting himself in a leadership position and helping people he leads to meet their needs.

Men have a desperate need to be needed and respected. But that need can't be fulfilled by intimidation or manipulation. Once George began to meet his family's needs, he saw a positive response from them, and they began to meet his needs.

Submit to One Another

God designed marriage to be a healthy dependent/co-dependent relationship. The wife is to be dependent upon her husband. He is to be dependent upon her dependency. He needs to know that his wife depends on him. She needs to know that he is dependable. If this is so, she feels feminine, protected, cared for. He feels masculine, needed, and important. She feels loved. He feels respected (Ephesians 5).

In the *mother-dominant* home, the creative roles of both husband and wife are reversed. She watches out for him and he lets her. In time, however, she will grow weary and he will be resentful and the marriage will suffer. All too often, each spouse will compensate for a bad marriage with an over-involvement with the children, work, or even an addictive behavior. Thus, the family sickness passes onward to the next generation.

The question is, "How could all this be since the couple had such strong feelings for each other when they first met?"

Were they not in love?" They had strong feelings, yes, but were they in love? Probably not! For a variety of reasons, many women grow up having learned how to *wear the pants* in the family. The down side to this is that these women did not have much experience in trusting men. To self-protect, these women will be attracted to nice, safe men. All too often, however, these softer men have a less developed masculine side. They are usually *under-fathered*. In much the same way, these men are attracted to decisive, controlling women. These women are usually *under-developed* on their feminine side. They are often *under-nurtured*.

What happens? Principle: A wife will not respect a husband that she can control, and a husband will not love a wife that is in control over him. Shortly after marriage, he feels disrespect from her; she feels unloved by him. Nevertheless, at times, she will desire him to take the lead, to protect her, to be her man. He will not do it! At times, he wants her support, her respect, and her admiration. She will not do it! In a flip-flop manner, when either spouse desires a healthier intimacy from the other spouse, that spouse will not be responsive. Should she desire him to be there for her, he will pull away. He flees through withdrawal, disinterest, sports, hunting, fishing, the job, church work, drinking, fighting, carousing, etc. Feeling unacknowledged, she ceases her pursuit. She might even threaten separation or divorce. Sensing her emotional distance, the husband makes a surprise turn around.

Finally, he agrees to counseling. He promises to reform, the moon, and even guarantees the impossible. While she should feel good about the change, an inner feeling of repulsion begins to surface. To her, he appears unmanly. She is unaware of her own lessened femininity. Nevertheless, the couple may draw together, but for only a brief time. The *cat and mouse* interaction will begin again, and again. Each cycle brings the

marriage into further deterioration. In time, the relationship will break down – with either a real or emotional divorce.

Each spouse considers the other person to be most at fault. Not so! Looking at the big picture, the fault lies with each, and the family systems from which both partners came. According to Exodus 20:5, the inability of couples to love each other may have roots that go back many years. Research shows that couples are set up by their families of origin to be attracted to each other. Yet, to blame mother and father will not help much since they, too, were set up by their families. In addition, parent blaming signifies reluctance on the part of the grown children to take responsibility for their own change. For the grown child to say, “I am just a victim,” is no excuse (Ezekiel 18). Even the fear that they married the wrong spouse will prove ineffectual. Research suggests that had both partners not married each other, both would have married other spouses equally unhealthy. That is just the way it is! It is the system.

Dr. John Money, of Johns Hopkins University, has released startling research, which suggests that by age eight, every person has a love map in his/her head that leads them to a certain kind of spouse later in life. Family of origin, the relationship between mother and father, parent to child, and other life experiences form this love map (Proverbs 22:6).

The solution: How can a couple caught in this *love-hate, can't live with you, can't live without you* relationship, be helped? The answer for both the *father-dominant* and *mother-dominant* marriages is to apply the *honor Christ and be in submission to one another* principle (Ephesians 5:21).

How Does a Wife Help a Husband Be a Leader?

I put this question to Loretta, an aggressive wife, who was married to a passive husband. Years earlier, she felt disgust for his inability to make decisions. Over time, however, something

strange happened. Loretta's husband (Stan) improved significantly in his decision-making skills. As his helpmate, I asked her, "What was your part in your husband's change?" This was Loretta's response:

In talking with my husband concerning decisions that need to be made when he was not used to making these decisions, I at first did not overwhelm him with making decisions on everything. I started small and let him get used to the idea of his making the decisions. I did not burden him with decisions on every little detail, but let him make the major decision and then I carried out the details myself. After he became accustomed to making the decision this way, I then began to ask him to make more and more of the decisions and to take care of more and more of the details.

After he made a decision it was final! I did not contradict what he said, or question him concerning the decision. I did, however, express my opinion before the decision was made. I assured him that the decision was completely his – and it was. If he made a bad decision, which he did at times, I did not hold it over his head. I would encourage him and assure him that things would be okay.

Stan would tell me later that when he was growing up, his mother was a dominant type of woman and seemed to always berate his father. He grew up both fearing his mother and despising her. After he married Loretta, he realized that he had married a woman who was much like his mother.

The difference between the two would be that Loretta was a Christian and understood that the husband should be the

leader of the home. She did not know at first how to allow Stan to be a leader and kept interfering with his decisions.

When she finally came to counseling, she learned that such an approach, even if Stan was compliant in the beginning, was detrimental to their relationship. She had to learn to be *dependent* on him and he had to learn to be *dependable*.

The Wife's Responsibility to Her Husband

Genuine unity requires a sorting out of responsibilities. Imagine the confusion that would occur on a football team where no one knew his specific responsibility. Imagine the frustration that would exist in a business where there were no job descriptions, where everything was everybody's business and nothing was anybody's business, where everyone was in charge and no one was a follower. This is the kind of confusion and frustration that exists in many marriages, because there has never been a sorting out of the responsibilities. The idea of the wife's submission is not a very popular one in our day. Sometimes antagonism to wifely submission arises out of sinful rebellion against the will of God. Sometimes, however, it may arise from a false picture of what the wife's submission involves.

Submission is not merely a concept for women. It is a concept for all believers (Compare Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3, 4; I Peter 5:5). Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a slave. Actually, the wife is never freer than when she is in submission to her husband, for then she is free to become all that God intended her to become.

Submission does not mean that the wife never opens her mouth, never has an opinion, or never gives advice (Proverbs 31:26; Judges 13:21-23; Acts 18:26). Submission does not mean that the wife becomes a wallflower, who folds up and allows her abilities to lie dormant. Submission does not

mean that the wife is inferior to the husband. Jesus Christ was not inferior to Mary and Joseph, and yet the Scripture says that as a child, "*He continued in subjection to them*" (Luke 2:51).

Scripture indicates that it is the wife's responsibility to be submissive. Nowhere is the husband commanded to physically force his wife into submission. Rather the wife is commanded to make herself submissive (Ephesians 5:22; I Peter 3:1). Scripture also indicates that the wife's submission is to be continuous. The Greek verb in passages referring to the submission of wives is in the present tense, which suggests a continuous action. Submission is to be the continuous life style of the wife. Wifely submission is mandatory, not optional.

The wife's submission is not to be based upon the way her husband treats her. Nor is it to be conditioned by the husband's abilities, talents, wisdom, education, or spiritual state. Unless the husband physically or sexually abuses the wife (she may have to separate under such conditions), she is to remain with him in submission (I Corinthians 7:10-16).

Wifely submission is a spiritual matter. It is to be done *as to the Lord* (Ephesians 5:22). The Lord commands the wife to be submissive. Refusal to submit to the husband is therefore rebellion against God Himself. Submission to the husband is a test of her love for God as well as a test of her love for her husband. The wife then must look upon her submission to her husband as an act of obedience to Christ and not merely to her husband.

Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will obey what I command*" (John 14:15). Submission is a positive, not a negative concept. It emphasizes what the wife should do rather than what she should not do. Submission means that she sees herself as a part of her husband's team. She is not her husband's opponent fighting at cross-purposes or trying to outdo him. She is not merely an individual going her separate way.

A Man Needs Respect From His Wife

How can a man say something to his wife that cuts her to the core and an hour later expect her to respond romantically to his advances? Why does a man feel obligated to lecture his wife when he sees that her feelings are hurt? How can a man lie next to his crying wife, giving her the silent treatment, when she so desperately needs his compassion and concern? These situations are not the exception; they are the norm in many marriages.

When couples come to my office for help, they are usually surprised that I don't fall out of my chair in total shock as they tell me their feelings. They can't believe their experiences are common. Every marriage and every person is unique, yet the problems people experience are practically universal. When we consider this fact, that we all have the same basic emotional needs to one degree or another, it is not hard to realize that we have common problems (I Corinthians 10:13).

Many of the problems couples experience are based on one simple fact. Men and women are totally different. The differences – emotionally, mentally, and physically – are so extreme that if a husband and wife don't put forth a concentrated effort to gain a realistic understanding of each other, it is nearly impossible for them to have a happy marriage.

The remainder of this chapter is addressed to wives, to help you understand some differences between you and your husband that are responsible for many of the problems within your relationship. The fact is that your husband is a man, and many of the hurtful and calloused actions you have witnessed are simply the result of his basic nature as a man. This does not mean you have to resign to living with a calloused or insensitive man – quite the contrary. Once you understand some of the basic differences between you, you will be able to help him balance his natural tendencies.

Learn to express your feelings through three loving attitudes: warmth, empathy, and sincerity. These are common words, but what do they mean? Why are they so necessary? Your husband may resist your help unless he sees these three attitudes within you (I Peter 3:1-7). These are attitudes that anyone can develop.

To be *warm* is to have a friendly acceptance of a person. This is when you consider a person to be important enough to give your time and resources to. It is when you are willing to share his concerns, not because he has earned it, but simply because he's a human being. The ability to understand and identify with a person's feelings reveals what is called *empathy*. *Sincerity* is showing a genuine concern for a person without changing your attitude toward him when circumstances change.

You need to learn to share your feelings when angry or irritated without using *you statements*. For example, "You make me sick" or "You're always late" or "You've always got the answers." *You statements* usually cause a man either to dig in and fight or to promptly leave your presence without resolving the issue. Either way, it makes him more determined to have his own way and causes you to lose ground in the situation. *I statements* are better because they usually do not cause the other person to get defensive. Use *I statements* such as: "I feel angry when you are late and I have prepared a meal for you" or "I get frustrated when you seem to have all the answers and I need to be validated for my feelings too."

You need to learn to wait until your anger or feelings of irritability have subsided before you begin to discuss a sensitive issue. No matter what you say or how you say it, if you're angry or irritated at the time, it probably will provoke a wrong reaction in him. While you are waiting to cool off, either remain quiet or change the subject to one you can talk about.

If your husband wants to know why you're quiet or why you're changing the subject, say to him quietly, "I need a little

time to think this through so I can better understand my feelings.” I am not saying that you have to eliminate the feelings of anger from your life. I understand how hard it is to deal with anger. However, when those times arise, avoid discussing a sensitive issue in the heat of anger. That way, neither of you will exchange words you will regret later (Ephesians 4:26, 27).

When you have cooled off, replace *you statements* with *I feel messages*. Learn to share your feelings in the context of your uniqueness as a woman. If you can creatively share your feelings, and do it in a positive context, you will be more effective.

By learning to share your feelings calmly, you will gradually wear down his tendency to react sharply in anger. It may take time, but if you persist, you will see changes. Remember the principle: “*A gentle answer turns away wrath*” (Proverbs 15:1 NASB). This principle really works as long as your soft answer is not spoken with a self-righteous or sarcastic attitude.

Learn to abandon the “I told you so” comments from your speech. Such statements can take many forms and should be completely eliminated. They reflect arrogance and self-centeredness, and only set your marriage relationship back. After all, the secret to understanding your husband is helping him understand you. In order to help him to understand you, it requires that you help him by not accusing him of feelings and actions that you might have misinterpreted. The Bible tells us to let no unwholesome word come out of our mouths, but only what will build one another up (Ephesians 4:29). Such a policy goes a long way towards a compatible relationship.

The first law of a relationship is played out in the two main areas of marriage: *relational* and *functional*. The relational part of marriage involves the *emotional* tie two people have to each

other, such as how deeply connected they are and how they feel about each other, both positively and negatively.

The *functional* part of marriage has to do with the *doing* aspects of the relationship, such as: paying bills, managing time, cooking meals, keeping house, and rearing children. In the *relational* aspect of marriage, sowing and reaping has to do with how spouses affect and impact each other's heart.

The Five Love Languages

1. Affirming words.
 - a. Your mate feels most loved when he/she receives verbal affirmation; words that build him/her up, expressed in simple straightforward statements of affirmation. Verbal compliments or words of appreciation are powerful communicators of love.
2. Quality time.
 - a. Give your mate your undivided attention, or focused time.
 - b. This involves taking walks, hiking, going out to eat, uninterrupted conversation, and little get-away trips.
3. Giving/receiving gifts.
 - a. Give your mate a visual symbol that you thought of him/her, and care for him/her. These gifts are visual symbols of love.
 - b. Symbols have emotional value. You can show love by giving gifts to communicate your love for your mate.
4. Acts of service.
 - a. Do things for your mate – things that require thought, planning, effort and energy.
5. Physical touch.

- a. Reach out and touch your mate physically by holding hands, hugging, playing with his/her hair, patting them or just making physical contact in some way.

All of the above are examples of love in languages that can be readily understood and help make the compatibility and communication process more effective. They are *relational* aspects of the heart and they reveal a message of love that transcends the barriers that normally block our communication. They are ways of saying, "I love you" and "I care about you."

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the one word in Ephesians 5:22-33 that summarizes the wife's responsibility to the husband? (Compare also I Peter 3:1 and I Timothy 2:9-12)
2. What do the words "*as unto the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:22) suggest about the wife's submission?
3. According to Ephesians 5:24, how extensive should a woman's submission be?
4. Why is it important for a couple to have a *dependent/co-dependent* relationship?
5. How does a wife help a husband be a leader?
6. What is the primary purpose of leadership?
7. What are a man's most important needs?
8. How should a wife meet those needs?

chapter five

The Boundaries in Marriage

One day a man found the cocoon of a butterfly. The next day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further. So the man decided to help the butterfly, and then it emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened!

In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings... so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. If God allowed us to go through our life without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would be weakened to the point that we could never fly!

A boundary is a property line. It denotes the beginning and the end of something. In reality, it denotes the extent to which we will allow someone to influence us, and the extent to which we will put perimeters on our own behavior. A boundary also *defines* who we are and what we are responsible for. Boundaries allow us the freedom to be ourselves and empower us to be responsible for our attitudes and behaviors. Boundaries also require of us that we be willing to accept struggles and trials as a growth process that God has ordained that we must endure (Hebrews 12:7-13). There is no growth without trials and difficulties (James 1:1-4). For the Christian, there is no escaping it, because it is God's will and it is necessary for us to experience *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding* (Philippians 4:6, 7).

As Christians we have boundaries. Christ requires His followers to give up self (Luke 9:57-62). He also requires that we be accountable (I John 1:8-10). The Bible also teaches us that we have a commitment to our mate (Ephesians 5:21-33). Our commitment is to be total, not a cheap, nominal, half-hearted one (Matthew 19:16-26). Pre-marital agreements that specify the allotment of property and the conditions of commitment to the marriage pre-suppose that either one of the mates can get out of the marriage at will. Such agreements almost pre-destine a divorce.

Three doctors who studied six thousand marriages and three thousand divorces concluded there may be nothing more important in a marriage than a determination that it shall persist. With such determination, individuals force themselves to adjust and to accept situations which could seem sufficient grounds for a breakup, if continuation of the marriage were not the prime objective. (Drs. Jim and Sally Conway)

Marriage success is not based on our own conditions. But it is based on *boundaries* that must be established in order to give it the freedom and permanence it requires to be successful. Love, too often, is subjective and as marriages progress, there are moments when mates don't feel *in love* with each other and don't have the *warm fuzzies*.

Marital satisfaction is closely tied to a belief in marital permanence. Obviously just staying in a marriage isn't what makes it good. Good marriages require the people in them to work at making them good. A commitment to a lifelong marriage is a great motivator to make things better. It encourages constructive communication, negotiation, compromise and sensitivity to the other's needs. Indeed, a number of research studies have found that sexual satisfaction is strongly linked to honest communication about sexual needs, desires and feelings. (Dr. Paul Meier)

Boundaries in marriage will help in achieving total commitment in the marriage. And total commitment will put joy into a relationship, help the couple to focus on individual needs rather than wants and make life fulfilling.

Often couples will reach a point in their relationship where they don't *feel* in love anymore. The real issue, though, is not their emotional state. The question is whether they are behaving toward each other in loving ways. Couples need to be committed enough to keep doing things even when they don't feel like it. In time, the emotions will return. (Dr. David Stoop)

Just like the butterfly had to struggle with its emergence from the cocoon to be able to fly, marriage partners have to

struggle with boundaries in order to define who they are and what they can accomplish. This struggle is so difficult at times that a couple may feel like giving up, but if the desire to work towards compatibility is there, it is the struggle itself that brings about the strength they will have to be committed to each other.

Meeting each other's emotional and physical needs is a vital part of developing a relationship (I Corinthians 7:1-5). It is this kind of commitment that will last a lifetime and create the strength in a couple to grow in love for each other and for God.

Ungodly Forces That Affect Modern Marriages

The high, fast-paced standard of living we experience in America brings with it four modern trends: *affluence*, *easy credit*, *disposability*, and the *pursuit of pleasure*. We become too easily addicted to affluence and a high standard of living. When we live in plenty, we enjoy pleasures and comforts that are hard to give up. Such affluence breeds a self-centered attitude of pleasing ourselves first even if it is at the expense of someone else. Marriages are then evaluated only on the basis of the pleasure they bring. When this happens, commitment and permanence in a relationship begin to suffer and when society begins to condone easy divorce, we find it acceptable to go from one mate to another based on our own pleasures.

Related to affluence is a sense of disposability. If we tire of something, we get rid of it (hidden in this value system is the idea that we can always replace *it*, whatever it be, with another that is more appealing and suits us better). If something is too much trouble, throw it away (i.e., abortion).

Related to both affluence and disposability is the pursuit of pleasure. We continually look for things that make us feel good. With easy credit in our society, we have the money to buy whatever we wish that might indulge our passions. Then

when we couple these attitudes with the lack of concern for absolute authority, we have a complete breakdown of the commitment, truth, sacrifice and stability it takes to make a marriage work.

We have lost the belief in reasoning and truth to guide us in ethical and moral dilemmas. We frequently hear the statement that no one is responsible for marriage troubles, meaning nobody has to accept the need to change or suffer the consequences. *If it feels good, do it* is the value of the day and it has no real regard for the values and needs of others. It reminds me of the days of the biblical judges when it was said, “*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit*” (Judges 21:25).

In recent years, there has been more of an emphasis on individual liberty than on community responsibility. In marriages, this has shown up as an emphasis on rights to the exclusion of responsibilities, and on contracts, to the exclusion of trust and commitment. One of the consequences of this is that we have lost a vision for what a marriage or family should be like. We won’t allow the biblical ideal of marriage to develop and have replaced it with a self-centered mandate of choice and individual interpretation.

Now a *homosexual marriage* and family can be the ideal, if there is love and commitment. The moral stigma of such a relationship is fading away. *Choice* is our god now, and everyone has the right to a choice, and one choice is as good as another. Such a stance has eroded the ability of our nation to take a positive moral stance, and will ultimately cripple its power to be a free country, if we don’t learn to respect and obey the moral principles in the word of God.

In reality, we must look to Jesus as our Savior, not to this nation, or this world. Nations rise and fall, but Jesus will be our King forever.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:35, 37).

If we are Christians, then we must believe what Christ said, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command”* (John 14:15).

God ordained marriage and the home to be the foundation of man’s spiritual, emotional and moral stability and growth. When marriage and the home are centered on God’s word, they are a blessing to mankind. We must not let *ungodly forces* shape our lives.

Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to one another. It is a commitment in which there is no holding back. It is a pledge of mutual fidelity. It is a partnership of mutual subordination. A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent, a freeing up of the man and woman to become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is a refining process that God will use to shape us into the man or woman that He wants us to become. (Dr. H. Norman Wright)

Principles That Enhance Commitment

1. No conflict is unsolvable (Christian marriages have conflicts, but they are not beyond solution; Philippians 2:12, 13).
2. Persistence pays off (working through it is harder than walking out, but it is God’s way). *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*

who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

3. God demands unselfish commitment (being committed to one’s mate is not a matter of demanding rights, but releasing rights; Philippians 2:1-5).
4. Commitment glorifies God (the Christian’s ultimate goal in life is not to be happy, but to glorify God; I Corinthians 10:31).

Certainly we need information about the problems, but we also need a balanced view. We need more information about positive family models and what strong families are like. We need to learn how to strengthen families. We learn most effectively by examining how to do something correctly and studying a positive model. We have not had this positive model as much as we need in the area of family life. (Dr. Nick Stinnett)

Steps to Staying Faithful

1. Recognize that anyone can commit sexual sin.
2. Monitor your spiritual pulse.
3. Safeguard your marriage.
4. Take precautions.
5. Deal with subtle signs of sexual attraction.
6. Back off early.
7. Clear cloudy thoughts.
8. Hold yourself accountable.
9. Guard your mind.
10. Regularly rehearse the consequences.

Boundaries Require Ownership

The term *co-dependency*, which was a buzzword of the 1980's, reflects a habit of enabling another to continue in irresponsible and self-destructive behavior. Co-dependency is taking responsibility for another person's problems and not requiring that person to take responsibility for his speech or actions. A mature, complete adult takes responsibility for himself, but also requires the same from the people he loves. To be co-dependent and not require responsibility from others is to not be responsible yourself.

Dan and Judy came to see me with serious difficulties in their marriage. Neither one could see the other as a person in his own right. When Judy wanted to talk with him, she could not see that he had been working hard, was tired, and wanted to go to bed. She would interpret his need for sleep as not caring about her.

In like fashion, when Dan wanted something done and it was not done the same day, he would become angry. He would ask her, "Don't you ever do the laundry?" – and accuse Judy when the pants he wanted were not ready. He failed to understand that Judy was taking care of a thousand other things that day and didn't get around to doing what he needed.

Whenever we view others only in terms of how they affect us, we are in trouble. This is self-centeredness. We reduce others to objects of our own needs, and we don't see them as real people. And whenever we don't see people for who they really are, love breaks down. Both Dan and Judy needed to understand their need for *boundaries* in their marriage. The boundary they both needed was to respect each other's time and responsibilities. These are essential needs that couples must learn to adapt to and work on together.

Jerome was failing miserably with his wife Jackie, when he entered my office for counseling. His first complaint was

about himself. “I just can’t seem to be the right kind of husband. I keep letting Jackie down, and I don’t know how to do better.” He talked for a while about how guilty he felt because he was a lousy husband.

Jerome told me that Jackie was disappointed in him because he was not making enough money to provide for all her needs. She said he was working too much and making her unhappy because he was away from home so much. She felt like he was ignoring her when he would come home very tired from working long hours. He worked a second job to earn enough money to pay for the things he bought her.

Jerome had some problems, but being a bad husband was not one of them. He had allowed himself to become so co-dependent (enabling her) that he did not require Jackie to take any responsibility for her desire for things and her own pleasures. He had to learn that he was not responsible for meeting all of her demands and so-called needs. He had to learn to say *no* and set boundaries on her demands of him. He had to learn to not internalize her blame and that it was all right to set boundaries on how she influenced him.

Jackie needed to realize that her unrealistic financial wishes were standing in the way of her taking responsibility for her selfishness and lack of contentment. When he gave in to her, he didn’t realize he was enabling her to be self-centered and irresponsible. He did not require her to deal with the lies she internalized and the problems that arose from them.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to each other is the gift of honesty and confrontation. As Proverbs tells us, “*Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses*” (Proverbs 27:6). We grow when someone we love *wounds* us by telling us painful truths we need to hear. Requiring responsibility from each other by telling each other the truth and not giving in to each other’s immaturity is indeed a gift. Setting boundaries on each other certainly is an act of

love. It is a hard struggle at first, but it brings about a sense of security and responsibility that creates a bond through all the problems of life. But always remember to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

When we set boundaries, we learn to take ownership of our responsibilities and face the consequences of our actions. It helps us build character and develop a sense of self-reliance. Ownership, in this context, requires of us as married couples to be honest in our commitments and consistent in our values.

Divorce Damages Kids

“Twenty-five years after their parent’s divorce, children continue to suffer the emotional repercussions,” the author of a long-term, celebrated study said. The findings by California psychologist Judith Wallestein, one of the most influential researchers on the effect of divorce and author of one of the longest-running studies on this subject, has likely added more fuel to the political and social debate about the changing shape of the American family.

She said, in a June 1997 article, that her newest research provides more evidence that, despite the initial contentions of some sociologists, the impact of divorce on children is both long-lasting and cumulative. In effect, the trauma experienced by young children when their parents break up, makes it difficult for them to weather the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood. Even as they form their own romantic relationships in their late 20s and early 30s, they continue to struggle with fears engendered by their parents’ divorce, according to her research.

Wallerstein began her study in the early 1970s, when the divorce rate was just beginning to soar. At the time, she said, the prevailing view was that divorce was a “transient, minor upheaval in the life of a child.” Her study was based on

hundreds of hours of interviews conducted with a group of families for 25 years. “Unlike the adult experience, the child’s suffering does not reach its peak at the breakup and then level off,” Wallerstein said in a paper on children and the law that she presented at a San Francisco conference in 1997. “The effect of the parents’ divorce is played and replayed throughout the first three decades of the children’s lives.”

While this does not necessarily cause them to fail as adults, she said, it does make the normal challenges of growing up more difficult. Wallerstein began following 131 middle-class children and their parents in Northern California in the early 1970s – just as the marriages were breaking up.

More recent scientific studies have concluded that, while the majority of young people from divorced families do not suffer serious negative consequences, divorce raises the likelihood of serious self-esteem problems in the children. The parents’ divorce also creates a propensity for divorce in their children’s marriages, rather than their children having the will to struggle with and work through their marital differences.

Parents who haven’t learned to work through problems or set boundaries are doing themselves and their children a big disservice when they decide to divorce. There is no substitute for loving parents, who love each other enough to work through the problems, who seek to serve one another’s true needs and make a commitment to their marriage that is consistent until death do they part. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).

Commit to Your Marriage

REMEMBER:

1. Partnership is more important than parenthood.
2. A radiant partnership is necessary for the right marriage example.

3. Marriage is permanent while day-to-day parenthood is only temporary.

Boundaries should be designed to help with reality and protect you, not designed to control or change your spouse. Boundaries and consequences are not about fixing someone or making them choose better. They are about allowing appropriate cause and effect so that your spouse will experience the pain of irresponsibility and then change. Boundaries should be deliberate and not impulsive or set in anger. Think through, prayerfully and with friends, what an appropriate consequence might be. It is not about getting even. It is about getting out of enabling your spouse and about protecting yourself from evil. ⁹

The Marriage Test

Life itself is not easy – it has many adjustments. The most difficult of all human adjustments is marriage. This is so because it is such an intimate relationship. There is the molding of the life of each individual into that of the other. Satisfactory emotional adjustments are most important. The demands of some couples on each other are sometimes unreasonable. *Adjustment* is the key word for all our tests. There will be the need of adjustment in matters of sex, family connections, money matters, etc. We all want others to be loyal to us. We believe in loyalty to church, to home, to community, state and nation. But there is not a more important loyalty (except to God) in all of life than two people, who are willing to be loyal to each other in marriage for the rest of their lives.

⁹ Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Boundaries in Marriage*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is a good definition of boundaries, as described in this book?
2. How do boundaries help build character?
3. What kind of ungodly forces are affecting your marriage?
4. Why is it important that we have consequences for what we do?
5. How does divorce affect children throughout their lives?
6. How is marriage a refining process in a couples' life?
7. What is the marriage test?
8. How do boundaries require ownership?

chapter six

The Purpose of Parenting

Two twelve-year-old boys, Bob and Mike, broke a window while playing baseball. They looked around to see if anyone had seen them. No one was in sight, except for Mike's little brother. They went over and offered him a piece of candy not to tell. He refused it. "I'll give you my baseball," Mike said. "No," said his little brother. "Then what about my new glove?" Bob added. "No!" said the little brother. "Well, what do you want?" They pleaded. With resoluteness, the little fellow said, "I wanna tell."

Sometimes children can be unpredictable. Yet, they bring joy into the lives of many parents. They truly are a blessing from God, especially when they learn to be loving, responsible, caring, spiritual, and committed to the Lord. The Lord ordained that we should "*train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it*" (Proverbs 22:6).

I believe that the primary purpose of parenting is to build *character* in the child. Some people would disagree with me, but when you think about it, building character in a child will do more to develop him/her as a responsible adult in society and as a committed Christian than all the micro managing, and coaching a parent can do. Character develops in a child respect for boundaries and their consequences. It also builds respect

for authority. The apostle Paul stated that parents must require of their children respect toward their parents, because it will determine the child's respect or the lack of it towards authority in general (Ephesians 6:1-3). When a child does not respect authority at home, he/she will not respect civil or spiritual authority. Children brought up in a home that requires respect of authority, and where the parents are role models of commitment to Christ and His church, good character will develop more than likely in the child, and will draw him/her to a faith in the Lord. Therefore, proper discipline is vitally important in building character in the child (Ephesians 6:4).

Discipline is a God ordained responsibility of parents (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Colossians 3:20, 21; Ephesians 6:1-4). God does not condone child abuse or child beating. But He does condone corporal punishment with restraint. The proper balance of love, acceptance and discipline is absolutely vital to a child's positive self-concept.

There are three important ways to show acceptance:

1. Unconditional love (Romans 5:8; 15:7).
2. Healthy communication (Ephesians 4:29; James 5:16).
3. Appropriate discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11; Ephesians 6:4)

Acceptance of the child, no matter what he/she does, is vitally important for the child to feel loved and secure in his/her identity. It helps develop trust and self-worth in the child. This is how God parented David. David committed a terrible sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed when she became pregnant. But God still accepted and loved David and when the time was right David repented. The love of God motivated him (II Samuel 11&12; Acts 13:22).

Parents sometimes think that *acceptance* is the same as *condoning*. It is not the same, because acceptance simply means that the parent *agape* loves the child. *Agape* is an unconditional love, which accepts the child without condoning

the sins of the child. Parents adversely affect a child's behavior in the following ways:

- Lack of parental affirmation and acceptance of the child.
- Being over-protective and not requiring child responsibility.
- Lack of attention to a child or parental favoritism of a child.
- Lack of parental firmness, or too much permissiveness.
- Lack of providing security and boundaries for the child.
- Lack of credibility because of parental inconsistency or dishonesty.
- Inappropriate child/parent relationships that distort proper roles.

There can be no effective discipline without some suffering or pain (Hebrews 12:7-11). Children need to know the consequences of violating the laws of God, man, and nature. This helps them to grow up and be responsible. It does not mean that parents have the right to physically, emotionally, sexually or verbally abuse a child. The following is a list of five rules I believe are important in disciplining a child:

1. Be willing, as parents, to agree on the forms of discipline you use.
2. Be consistent with the forms of discipline you agreed upon.
3. Be willing to accept the child while not condoning the behavior.
4. Be sure that expectations of the child are understood and realistic.
5. Be sure the discipline shapes the will without damaging the spirit.

Discipline must be coupled with love. Dr. Jack Raskin, Child Psychologist at Children's Orthopedic Hospital at the University of Washington in Seattle states,

The key to a healthy personality development lies in the child's close unbroken attachment in its early months to the people who care for him. If you give your children consistent love and discipline until the age of six, you'll find most of your work is done.

God tells parents to not withhold discipline from a child and that,

He who spares the rod hates his son." He also says, Folly is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him, and The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother (Proverbs 23:13, 14; 13:24; 22:15; 29:15).

Non-abusive spanking is most effective when:

1. It is administered only as a *last resort*.
2. It is administered with self-control.
3. It is reserved for willful acts of defiance.
4. It is administered in private (not on the face).
5. It is always followed by love and acceptance.

Social scientists tell us that spanking at the adolescent stage of the child attacks the self-esteem only, it does very little to discipline them. I believe it is better to set boundaries and restrict privileges as appropriate discipline when they begin to reach this stage. The modern culture, supported by misguided and permissive psychologists, has condemned *spanking* as

physical abuse that engenders violence in the child. I have seen no research to prove such conclusions. It is evident that actual physical, emotional, and sexual abuse can and often does engender violence in a child, but God ordained corporal punishment, with appropriate restraint, does not fall into that category.

In September 2001, there was a report in the media from Diana Baumrind, a psychologist at the University of California at Berkeley, who did a study on 164 middle-class families from the time their children were in preschool until they reached their twenties. She found that most parents used some form of corporal punishment. She further found that contrary to what we've been told for years, giving a child a spanking is not child abuse as long as it is done with proper restraint.

When I say proper restraint, I mean that it is restricted to swatting the child's bottom, hand or leg without beating the child. Baumrind, by the way, opposes spanking. But she still felt compelled to report the truth, that proper spanking does not harm the child emotionally or psychologically, and can be a very effective disciplinary tool.

It strikes me as outright foolishness, for so-called *parenting experts*, to say that time honored and biblically mandated corporal punishment is child abuse. God never condoned child abuse, but He never condoned parental permissiveness either.

Ground Rules for Parenting

The apostle Paul established some ground rules for behavior on the part of the child and the parent (Ephesians 6:1-4). The child is to be taught to honor father and mother. This is a parental responsibility and is vital to the child's ultimate respect for authority in all facets of life (I Samuel 2:22-36). Love is not a substitute for consistent and effective discipline.

Are we not seeing the effects of permissive parenting theories in our society that have spawned many spoiled children? A little pain on a child's bottom goes a long way towards making an impact on his brain (Hebrews 12:11).

James Dobson states,

Yelling and nagging at children can become a habit, and an ineffectual one at that. It is like trying to steer a car by honking a horn. The parent must recognize that the most successful techniques of control are those that involve withholding something of importance to the child, but not something that is vital to his well-being. When you are defiantly challenged, win decisively. When the child asks, *Who's in charge?* – tell him! When he mutters, *Who loves me?* Take him in your arms and surround him with affection.⁰¹

Parents need to understand the process psychologists call *self-actualization*, which begins about the end of the *symbiotic stage* (first year) of the child's life, when the child and mom experience oneness in their existence. It will continue until he leaves home, so that he will be able to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and then the two can become *one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). This process is for the purpose of the child (boy or girl) becoming separate from his parents, which facilitates his ability to reach his potential as an adult. Of course, it is acted out in disobedience at times, but it is God's will that parents are to let loose of the reigns slowly until the process is complete.

God has allowed us to be stewards of our precious children; therefore, we do not *own* them (I Corinthians 4:2)!

¹⁰ James Dobson, *Focus on the Family Magazine*.

Remember that the purpose of discipline is to develop character and the purpose of parenting is to show the child guidance, acceptance and love. This is what the child needs more than anything else, and no one on this earth can give it to him better than loving, responsible Christian parents.

Good Parenting Builds Character

Children need boundaries to help them build character. This concept teaches them principles from the Bible that will help them take ownership of their lives. All parents must realize that parenting involves more than the events of the day, it is the preparing of children for the future.

Most of our problems result from our own character weaknesses. Character refers to a person's moral makeup, his functioning in relationships, and his sense of responsibility in performing tasks. Where we possess inner strength, we succeed, often in spite of tough circumstances. But where we do not possess inner strength, we either get stuck or fail. If a relationship requires understanding and forgiveness and we do not have that character ability, the relationship will not make it. If a difficult time period in work requires patience and delay of gratification and we do not possess those traits, we will fail. Character is almost everything.

In the sense of a child's character, the future is now! When you are a parent, you help create a child's future. The patterns children establish early in life (their character) they will live out later. Character is always formed in a relationship. The parent's role in developing character is vital.

Adults do not develop their character problems as grown-ups. They had learned patterns early in life and then continued those out-of-control patterns in their adult lives, where the stakes are higher. They had not learned the ability to say *no* to hurtful people or set limits on hurtful behavior from others or

say *no* to their own destructive impulses. They had not learned the ability to hear *no* from others and respect their limits. They had not learned to delay gratification so they could accomplish goals and tasks. They had not learned to resist the tendency to be attracted to irresponsible or hurtful people. They had not learned to avoid being manipulated or controlled. They struggle with intimacy because they never saw it modeled by their parents and consequently have a problem with honesty with those they are close to. They did not learn how to confront others with problems and be able to develop problem-solving skills to resolve conflicts productively. They learned to develop the victim mentality and not take responsibility for anything they say or do. They learned how to be attracted to addictions and compulsions and how to be disorganized and lack the will to follow through with their commitments.

Children are not born with boundaries; they internalize boundaries from external relationships and discipline. A boundary is a property line that defines a person. It defines where a person ends and someone else begins. If we know where a person's boundaries are, we know what we can expect this person to take control of. We can and must require responsibility in regard to feelings, behaviors and attitudes. If a child grows up in a relationship where he is confused about what is expected of him and what his boundaries are, he will not develop the self-control he needs to steer him through life.

The Pain of Irresponsibility

Parents are the bridge to the outside world and the resource that sustains life for their children. They help define boundaries for the child as he faces life. Parents must realize that children react to their style of parenting. As a parent you need to interpret a child's behavior as a response to your own. This requires a shift in focus, because we normally look at a

person's actions in terms of his motives, needs, personality and circumstances, but we do not look at our own.

As a rule, children don't know what they are doing. They are *reactive* rather than *proactive*. They have no idea how to handle life so that it works right. They do not analyze problems and come up with solutions. That's why God gave them parents – to love them, and give them structure, and guide them into maturity. Basically, children will mature to the level the parent structures them, and no higher (Colossians 3:21). Children need limits in order to develop a positive self-worth. They need to feel the pain of irresponsibility (Hebrews 12:7-11).

Bobby's mother came to my office one day in tears having just realized that her son was missing, and she didn't know where he was. After calling the police, I asked her where she thought he might be. She told me, "He's probably out with his friends somewhere getting into trouble." I asked her if she knew how to contact his friends and she said that she didn't know them well enough. Bobby was eventually found. He was roaming through the local mall with his friends, who had also skipped school.

Margaret had tried to be a good mother but she had a problem. When Bobby was brought in to see me, I asked him why he kept running away from home. He said that his father verbally abused him and he couldn't take it anymore. Shortly after this incident, his father deserted the family, never to see them again. Margaret seemed at ease with her husband gone and no longer terrorizing the family. But now she began to feel guilty for her two children, who didn't have a father at home.

Bobby was twelve years old when his father left their home. He began to throw temper tantrums when he was frustrated. Margaret was at the end of her rope. He would yell at her, stomp his feet, slam doors, and throw things. All the time Margaret (because she felt sorry for him) told herself that

“he needs a place to let out those bottled-up feelings, or they will eat him up.” Margaret told me that she was letting Bobby express himself, when her husband would not allow it. So she would allow him to “express himself” or she would try to soothe and calm him. But his behavior escalated over time. Finally, I told her, *“You’re training him to be a violent male, who will not respect other people or the law”* (Ephesians 6:1-4).

I began counseling Margaret on a regular basis when Bobby was arrested and put in Juvenile Hall for viciously attacking a boy at school. I told Margaret that she needed to change her approach to parenting. I told her that the purpose of her parenting needed to be to build character in her son not to soothe his feelings to make up for the absence of his father. I began to teach her how to change her approach to Bobby’s violent tantrums.

I told Margaret the next time Bobby threw a fit, to say,

I know things make you angry, and I feel for your frustration. Things do get to all of us. But your feelings and actions are disturbing your sister and me. So here’s what we’ve come up with. When you’re mad, you can tell us you’re angry. We want you to be honest with your feelings. And if it’s about us, we will sit down and try to resolve the problem. But yelling, cursing, stomping, and throwing things are not acceptable. If those things happen, you’ll need to go to your room without a phone, computer, or music until you can be civil. Then, for the minutes that you’ve disrupted the family, you’ll need to do that many extra minutes of housework. I hope we can help you with these feelings.

Bobby didn’t believe his mother at first, but she stuck to her guns. He escalated his disruptive behavior for a while

(parents can expect such behavior when they set limits and consequences for misbehavior). But Margaret followed through with the threatened consequences. She was tremendously anxious about this part, as she feared that Bobby would no longer have an outlet for his feelings and would run away for good. She was afraid also that he might blow up even more intensely or that his spirit would be broken.

None of the things she feared actually happened. The experience in Juvenile Hall and the boundaries that Margaret set, and consistently enforced, had ultimately made an impact on him. After Bobby's initial protest, his tantrums became less intense and further apart. He began to bring his problems to his mother as problems to be worked out and they both learned how to problem-solve.

Bobby was beginning to learn to control his emotions and to understand the effect his behavior was having on others. He was using feelings the way God wants him to use them (Ephesians 4:26, 27, 29-32). Instead of allowing his emotions to get out of control, he would identify the source of his anger and solve whatever problem in life had led up to it. Bobby was beginning to own his feelings and behavior.

Parenting That Empowers

Effective parents have learned that they have the power to build character in their children and shouldn't give it up or delegate it to others. Too many parents have given up their power, and as a result, their families are in trouble. Parents need to realize that God gave them the power to raise their children "*in the way they should go*" (Proverbs 22:6). They need to realize that they are preparing their children for the future, not just enabling them for the present.

Christianity, unlike other religions, is most significant in that the Son of God came to this earth to model for us what the

ideal life is like, how it is to be lived, and how one behaves under fire. He modeled for us that submission leads to strength in dealing with adversity (Hebrews 5:8).

When there is a problem among siblings, parents need to ask, “What was my part in creating this problem?” This may be painful, but it is absolutely required. It will require your looking at the *plank* in your own eye as a parent, rather than the *speck* of sawdust in your child’s (Matthew 7:1-5).

This approach takes you out of the futility of trying to control your child and into the possibility of controlling your *stance* with your child. Let the boundaries and the consequences when they are violated, do the controlling. I highly recommend the book, “Boundaries With Kids” by Drs. Cloud and Townsend. It is one of the best on this subject.¹¹

Preventive Medicine That Empowers

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). How does God motivate us? He loves us by accepting us unconditionally. We realize that perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18). If love is what motivates us to do right, surely it will motivate our children just as powerfully. Love is a medicine that empowers.

If we are going to make the most out of the motivating power of love, we’ve got to understand the difference between love and perceived love. You may love your children with all your heart, and you may tell your children over and over that you love them, but until your children actually believe you love them, it is all in vain. They must see this true love in action, all the time, not just when the children are good or do things you as a parent want them to. Your child’s perception of your love

¹¹ Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Boundaries With Kids*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.

for them makes all the difference in the world. It is not so much what you say as what they hear you say.

Researchers tell us that the combined effects of perceived love, and perceived trust, actually provides the antidote to the two major negatives in children's lives: peer influence and conflicts with Mom and Dad. In the chapter on *The Significance of Fathers*, you will see some of the researcher's findings.

Another thing that happens when children feel loved and trusted is that there are fewer conflicts at home, because the children see the rules as boundaries of love, rather than hard-nosed and unreasonable demands. They will then know that beyond any rules or policies, there is genuine love – a love that is bigger than the rules, and a love that is actually the reason for the rules.

The kind of love that motivates is *unconditional*. Whether we intend to or not, what we often communicate is, "I love you if you do what I want you to do or if you are talented as an athlete or as a student or are good at something." "I love you if you clean up your room, if you win, or if you make an *A* in all your classes in school." But that's not how it works. The kind of love that really motivates is not performance oriented. Unconditional love is when you love the child regardless of what he does.

Trust is just as important as *love*. The fact is, it is even more important because you can't have love without trust. The parent who trusts his child, even when he doubts he should, tells the child that he accepts him and wants to believe that the child can be trusted. Such trust allows the child to claim his own identity, and shows he is accepted regardless.

High expectations are another motivation for children. They are a powerful motivation when parents express them in a way that reveals a parent's belief that the child will succeed. When parents try to use a child's failures, fear of punishment,

or retaliation to motivate a child to respond in certain ways, they are not too successful. The fear of letting their parents down is much more powerful in children. The agony of knowing that they would disappoint their parents, who love and trust them so very much, is very effective in motivating children to stay in line.

The expectations parents have of their children must not be out of reach; they must be attainable and reasonable. Parents should never expect their children to be anything beyond what they are capable of being. Parents should expect them to try to live up to their potential. Parents should provide opportunities for their children to pursue their interests and develop their talents.

In setting expectations for your children, it is important not to keep *raising the bar* above performance ability. If you have expectations beyond your child's abilities, your child will respond with frustration and discouragement. They will say, "I just can't do enough to please my parents, so why try anymore?"

Another thing that motivates children is a feeling of *significance*. It would please a child to know that his parents think he is important to the family and significant to their lives. When human beings do not feel a sense of belonging and significance, they find mistaken and self-destructive ways of behaving in order to draw attention. Kids will do anything within their power to get noticed and feel like they are needed and wanted.

And finally, parents need to give their children *responsibilities* appropriate for their age. Children like to be contributors to the family and be responsible for some part of its function. Sometimes we coddle them long beyond the days when they should be coddled. Kids will often times react negatively to responsibilities around the house, but when told that it is their job, and when all members of the family have a

responsibility, there is usually little resistance. A family is a system, a unit, and works best when all its members feel significant, needed, loved, respected and accepted.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the purpose of disciplining?
2. What are the three important ways to show acceptance?
3. What are the five rules needed for disciplining a child?
4. What are the restrictions on corporal punishment of a child?
5. How does good parenting build character in a child?
6. Why is pain important in building character?
7. How do parents empower their children?
8. What is the primary purpose of parenting?

chapter seven

The Significance of Fathers

Early childhood experts tell us that, to a certain extent, we can tell when a child is in kindergarten whether that child is headed toward a troubled adolescence or adulthood. Is it because of a lack of nurturing, or poor potty training or too much television?

It was reported in the media that an instructor in a dog-training workshop in Salt Lake City noted, that it is possible for an owner to test his dog's disposition. If the owner will fall down and pretend to be hurt, a dog with a *bad* temper will tend to bite him. But a *good* dog will show concern and may lick the fallen owner's face.

A woman who attended the class decided to test her two dogs. While eating pizza in her living room, she stood up, clutched her heart, screamed, and fell to the floor. Her two dogs looked at her, looked at each other, then, they raced to the coffee table for her pizza.

Dogs aren't people, but sometimes people act like animals. But such behavior is not genetically caused. To say that it is would be in conflict with what the Bible says about man being accountable for his behavior. There is no concrete proof from research that a man is genetically inclined to be violent, pedophilic, homosexual, sociopathic, etc. It is simply a matter

of his upbringing, and whether or not he was nurtured and disciplined with love in the understanding of Christian principles (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Research shows that nurturing fathers are vitally important in their children's development of a healthy self-worth and an avoidance of deviant behavior. Several aspects are involved in the nurturant dimension of fathering. One aspect that is important for parents is to show *affection* and *intimacy* to one another in spontaneous, non-self-conscious ways.

Drs. Faulkner and Brecheen state,

You have seen the sign that said, *The greatest thing I can do for my children is to love their mother*. That's basic – that the father and mother love each other. And they need to love each other in ways that the children can see. That love between parents provides the backdrop for the love that the child experiences.²¹

Parents need to show such intimacy towards their children the same way. Fathers are especially important in the nurturing of their children. It is expected that mothers will nurture their children, but fathers (in this culture in the past) have not been motivated to nurture their children as a general rule. The modern day father is becoming more aware and motivated to do so.

Current research in child development shows that the relationships children have with their fathers is very important in the personality development of their children. How do boys develop a sense of masculine identity and girls a sense of feminine identity? For many years child development studies have

²¹ Paul Faulkner & Carl Brecheen, *What Every Family Needs*, Gospel Advocate Publishers (1994) 145, 146.

consistently highlighted the importance of fathers as role models.³₁

“These studies show that for fathers to be effective as masculine role models for their sons, they must be perceived as *nurturant*.”¹⁴ A *nurturing parent* is one who cares for, loves, accepts, and properly disciplines his/her child. “Kindergarten boys’ development of a masculine orientation was facilitated by warm, rewarding, nurturant fathers who openly expressed interest in their son’s development of masculine traits.”¹⁵

The understanding, expressive, and supportive responsiveness of nurturant fathers with their daughters has also been shown to be important in helping the daughters develop a feminine sex-role orientation. “Girls learn to appreciate and develop their femininity through their relationship with confident, caring and expressive fathers.”⁶₁

An analysis of different parenting styles made the following summary:

Children whose parents were above average in *warmth* tend to be securely attached to their parents and were more competent. These children also had high self-esteem, did well in school, and accepted limits on their behavior. They were more considerate of other children and referred to internalized moral standards.⁷₁

¹³ Kagen, *Psychological Review* (1958) 296-305.

¹⁴ Ken Canfield, *The National Center for Fathering*, Manhattan, Kansas.

¹⁵ H. Biller, *Child Development* (1969) 539-546.

¹⁶ A. Heilbrun, *The Parent-Child Relations*, The Family Coordinator (1976) 65-70.

¹⁷ R. B. Berns, *Child, Family, Community* (1989) 155.

Numerous studies show that children and adolescents who report strong parental support through “praise and communication, and expressing affection,” scored high on measures of self-esteem.

An extensive analysis of the literature on parental support shows that the greater the parental support the less anti-social aggression in children, the less behavior problems in children, and the less drug abuse in children’s behavior. In those studies, parental support was described as parenting behavior that was praising, approving, encouraging, helping, cooperating, and expressed in terms of endearment and physical affection.⁸¹

All of this research simply reinforces the truth already found in Scripture. “*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training (KJV says nurture) and instruction of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4).

Fathers Affect a Daughter’s Self-Worth

In the early 80’s, when clinical psychologist Margo Maine was just starting to interview girls with eating disorders, she found an interesting oversight in the research. Nowhere was there a mention of the role father’s play in the upbringing of the walking skeletons Maine was treating. And when the girls painstakingly pieced together how they went from being chubby, happy infants to emaciated shadows trying to starve themselves, they rarely mentioned Dad. Or if they mentioned Dad, he wasn’t a distant

¹⁸ B. & D. Rollins, *Contemporary Theories About The Family*.

ogre. Instead, he was inept at connecting with his daughter.⁹¹

The existing research usually focuses on the effects of the father's absence on a son. Daughters are rarely mentioned. In the past, mental health therapy focused on the patient's relationships with their mothers, and most patients felt more comfortable talking about their mothers, rather than their fathers.

Overall, the American culture makes it easier to be a good mother than a good father. Fathers are often viewed as second-class citizens, valued only for the economic value they supply. The modern day sitcom on TV portrays the father as a pitiful figure no more needed than the supposedly useless *appendix* in the body.

A father's lack of connectedness to his children also opens the door for a child to experiment with mind-altering agents such as drugs or alcohol. To bridge the gap, fathers need to express their feelings. When a daughter reaches her pre-adolescent or puberty stage in life, she not only begins to change physically, but she also changes emotionally and psychologically. At this point she no longer sees boys as those bothersome creatures she has tried to avoid, because she now has some kind of feelings for the opposite sex she hasn't experienced before. This is the time when she will turn to her father to try to understand her role as a woman and how she should react towards a man. If her father does not respond in nurturing and loving ways, she may begin to feel incompetent as a woman and misunderstand her feminine role.

¹⁹ Susan Campbell, *USA Today*, 1994.

The Rescuing Complex

Carol was well dressed and had the appearance of an accomplished woman when she came to me for counseling. She was very successful and had graduated from college with honors. However, she could not accept her accomplishments and was also clinically depressed. “I don’t feel good about myself,” she said. “I want to sleep all the time; I don’t want to go to work and I am not taking care of my children and the house like I should,” she blurted out in my office. I advised her to make an appointment with a psychiatrist and get some medical help with her depression.

A doctor diagnosed her condition and prescribed an antidepressant. It took about ten days for the antidepressant to take affect so she could relax to the point where I could counsel her. As a Christian, Carol couldn’t find any acceptance from God in her life. She felt that she had greatly disappointed Him and was a terrible sinner. When I probed into her past, I didn’t find any evidence of a terrible sin or a sordid and rebellious lifestyle. I did find evidence of a very demanding father, who never seemed to accept Carol on her own merits. He was very critical and constantly yelled at her. She felt he was very strict and didn’t love her. She believed that she was a failure at anything she did because she couldn’t please him.

Carol married a man who was very much like her father. In my counseling ministry I have found that roughly ninety percent of the women I counsel, who have very demanding fathers (accepting their daughters only on the basis of performance), marry men just like them. They finally give up trying to please their fathers, because they conclude it is impossible. They subconsciously select men as husbands, who are like their fathers, hoping to create a relationship that will fulfill their need for love and acceptance. This is called the *Rescuing Complex*.

The fascinating aspect of this is that these women have a tendency to *transfer* feelings and fears they have for their fathers to God Himself. They tend to see God as very strict and demanding. They see Him as rejecting them because they couldn't meet His expectations. They see Him as unloving and unforgiving of them. There is no hope in their lives for love and acceptance, so they become depressed and sometimes suicidal.

As I counseled Carol, I shared with her the fact that she viewed God just like she did her father. She had to learn that she had programmed her mind to think that God had rejected her just like her father did. I had to prove to her that God loves her and won't reject her. As we studied the Bible and addressed the lies she was telling herself, she began to realize that God did love her. She also began to realize that even though her father seemed to reject her, she was still worthy of love and was accepted by many people in her life.

Carol's husband began to come to counseling and he too realized that he was treating her just like his father had treated his mother. After many months of counseling they both began to trust in God for their self-worth and to support one another in love and understanding.

Fathering – the Key to Strong Families

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *father*? Does it produce warm fuzzy feelings, mixed emotions or anger and resentment? Our culture's perception of the father's role is primarily what the media portrays him to be. He is portrayed as a spineless, mindless, and needless boob who doesn't have much of a role to play in the family. This may be because of the rash of single parents in our society, and most of them are women. It may be an effort to defend and

support these single mothers by proving that fathers aren't needed anyway.

It is interesting that some five times more books are written on mothering than are written on fathering. As is the case with all authority figures or institutions in our society, the father has been maligned and ridiculed. This is against God's plan.

In the Old Testament we find an unusual prophecy of the father's role in the Christian Age (Malachi 4:6; Luke 1:17). In the Malachi passage God says,

He will [a reference to John the Baptist] 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.

In the Luke passage an angel of the Lord said,

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

In these two passages there is the strong indication that fathers would be the key to changing the hearts of their children and the conversion to righteousness in many families, when John the Baptist preached the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom.

God has uniquely made man for the fathering role (Genesis 3:16-19). God has given fathers the responsibility of being the spiritual and moral leader of the home. It is apparent that the Bible is saying that as the father goes, so goes the family, and as the family goes, so goes the nation.

Modern sociological/psychological studies support the Bible on the importance of the father's role of leading and nurturing the family. "Children with highly involved fathers are characterized by increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, and a more internal locus of control [self-control]." ⁰²

Many father-absent or father-neglect families carry on successfully. But few would say that they would not be stronger by having two caring and cooperative parents. The importance of fathers to the well-being of children is clearly shown by the variety of negative effects experienced by children of father-absent families, as reported by research.

Research shows that *mother-only* families live 50% below the poverty line, and move more frequently. Adolescents are more likely to be sexually active, daughters more likely to become single parents in mother-only families. In such families, adolescents are more susceptible to peer pressure and more likely to commit delinquent acts. Children are more susceptible to low grades in school, alcohol and drug abuse, and truancy, etc. Such families have more teen pregnancy and divorce.²¹ I sympathize with mother-only and father-only families and I realize that in many of these situations the mother or father could not help arriving at such a condition. It may not have been their fault. But the facts speak for themselves. It is much harder to raise a family with only one parent. As a family of God's people, we need to support our single-parent families. We also need to promote effective family structures and God's plan of fathering.

Absent Fathers

²⁰ Michael Lamb, *The Father's Role*.

²¹ S. McLanahan & K. Booth, *Mother-Only Families: Problems, Prospects and Politics*, Journal of Marriage and Family, 1989.

It is evident that children, whose fathers were absent from the parenting process, suffer the consequences, which were identified by a Vice Chief of Police of Los Angeles. He claimed that a chief characteristic of boys who joined street gangs was the absence of a father; the gangs provided a sense of protection and commitment, which the absent father did not. ²²

In 1970, Henry Nouwen wrote a book, in which he predicted that the following generation would suffer from a sense of inwardness, a sense of convulsiveness, and a sense of fatherlessness. He seemed particularly accurate on the last account. His observation was that one of the consequences of this sense of fatherlessness, was identified by Wayne Perryman, president of Campus Violence Consultants. He claimed that a chief characteristic of boys who joined street gangs was the absence of a father; the gangs provided a sense of protection, acceptance, love and commitment that they had not experienced from their absent fathers. ²³

Research clearly shows that the vast majority of adult and child citizens in America desire continuity and enduring commitment in father-child relationships, rather than having to suffer the loss of a nurturing and supportive father.

In the face of pessimistic headlines that the family is an endangered species, we still discover two truths: (1) Desire for a fulfilling family life is as strong today as it was 50 years ago, and (2) Effective family life does not just happen, it is the result of deliberate intention and practice. ²⁴

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, men began to take jobs, which substantially removed them from the

²² National Center For Fathering, May 1992.

²³ Henry Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 1970.

²⁴ Canfield, National Center For Fathering, 1997.

home. “Mothers took over the main responsibility of raising children, and the fathering role was relegated to being a good financial provider, or a disciplinarian of last resort.”²⁵ Theories of Sigmund Freud also de-emphasized the importance of fathers.

In the 1950’s, however, research from child development specialists began to perceive that fathers are more powerful than historically given credit for. Children from father-absent or father-neglect families are at tremendous risk.⁶²

It is no longer acceptable for a father to merely be a good financial provider or disciplinarian. Bringing home the paycheck will not be sufficient fulfillment of the fathering role (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). “Dads will be expected to be more involved and nurturant.”²⁷ A great deal of pressure will come from the wives, particularly working women and those women who grew up without a father in their homes.

Today, these women will not allow their children to suffer the same neglected childhood that they experienced. More adult children, perhaps as a result of co-dependency counseling, are beginning to confront their fathers about what they did not receive. The sense of accountability is growing in respect to the fathering role. The intense focus on the problem of co-dependency and the realization that it is okay to confront fathers and expect them to fulfill their responsibilities is becoming a part of the family landscape in America.

The Rising Expectations of Fathers

²⁵ Feldman, 1990.

²⁶ Booth & McLanahan, 1989.

²⁷ Napier, 1991.

The Significance of Fathers

A growing male commitment to the home will not be matched by diminished demands in the marketplace. Economic pressures will mean that men will be more stretched as they try to balance between work and family commitments. For just one example, because of reduced airline costs with a Saturday night stay-over, some companies are having their executives fly out early in the weekend, even though their meetings may be scheduled for Monday. Such fathers no longer have even their weekends free for their children. The Bible tells us that God created parents for the purpose of *nurturing* their children (Ephesians 6:4; KJV).

If we know anything about normal human development, it rests heavily on a close, warm sustained relationship with both parents. And if people with severe disorders have anything in common, it is that they have experienced, sometime in their childhood, an absence of an accessible parent because of death, divorce or a time-demanding job.⁸²

A wealth of child-development research indicates that a secure male identity and a normal psychological adjustment is fostered in boys by fathers in the home who are affectionate, nurturant, available, and actively involved in child rearing.²⁹

Girls, secure in their femininity, tend to have fathers who encourage their feminine adjustment and provide leadership in child-rearing. Boys are much more

²⁸ Armand Nicholi, Harvard University, 1985.

²⁹ Mead & Rekers, 1979.

The Significance of Fathers

likely to identify with their fathers, if their interactions are rewarding and affectionate.³⁰

Remembering Dad through the Years

This appeared in the Danbury, Connecticut, *News-Times* sometime back that was translated from a Dutch magazine. It traces our thoughts of dads through the years:

- 4 years: My daddy can do anything.
- 7 years: My dad knows a lot, a whole lot.
- 8 years: My father doesn't know quite everything.
- 12 years: Oh, well, naturally Father doesn't know that, either.
- 14 years: Father? He is hopelessly old-fashioned.
- 21 years: Oh, that man is out-of-date. What did you expect?
- 25 years: He knows a little bit about it, but not much.
- 30 years: Maybe we ought to find out what Dad thinks.
- 35 years: A little patience. Let's get Dad's assessment before we do anything.
- 50 years: I wonder what Dad would have thought about that. He was pretty smart.
- 60 years: My Dad knew absolutely everything!
- 65 years: I'd give anything if Dad were here so I could talk this over with him. I really miss that man.

The greatest need in our world today is for fathers to be fathers, accepting and fulfilling the responsibilities that God has given them. It is not an accident that the Bible refers to God as Father. He is the perfect father and an example to all of us as to how fathers ought to be. Like God, may we as fathers love our children even when they go astray and may mercy,

³⁰ Mussen & Distler, 1960.

compassion and tenderness ever characterize our lives. Like God, we should be firm, fair and consistent.

The bottom line to all of this is that fathers have a choice. They can criticize the church, they can point their accusing finger towards the TV, they can blame the school system or they can lead and nurture their children. God has not promised fathers that He will provide a sin-free environment in which to rear their children. He has not called us to build an “Ark,” to escape the world, and live like hermits. He has called us to be responsible fathers so that we might train up our children in the way they should go, no matter what the cost or sacrifice.

Paul Harvey has an interesting description of a father as:

a person who is forced to endure childbirth without an anesthetic, a person who growls when he feels good and laughs very loud when he’s scared, a person who gives daughters away to other men who aren’t good enough so that they can have grandchildren that are smarter than anybody’s.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe a *nurturing* father?
2. How do fathers have an influence on a daughter’s femininity?
3. Why do sitcoms portray fathers as mindless, useless creatures?
4. What is the psychological effect on kids who have absent fathers?
5. What are the rising expectations of fathers in America today?
6. How would you define an *absent* father and the implications of such?
7. Why were fathers less involved as nurturers during the Industrial Age?
8. What is implied in Luke 1:17, about fathers and a child’s morality?

chapter eight

Birth Order and Parenting

“It was one of the worst days of my life,” writes Clara Null of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in *The Christian Reader* magazine. “The washing machine broke down, the telephone kept ringing, my head ached, and the mail carrier brought a bill I had no money to pay. Almost to the breaking point, I lifted my one-year-old into his highchair, leaned my head against the tray, and began to cry. Without a word, my son took his pacifier out of his mouth...and stuck it in mine.” Some of you, I am sure, have been there and you understand.

In the *Talmud* we read, “A child’s tears move heaven itself.” And also we read, “It is better that children cry than that their mothers cry.” Children can give us the greatest thrill in our lives one minute and break our hearts the next. It is a growing debate among social scientists as to whether or not *birth order* has anything to do with parenting styles and a child’s behavior.

Researchers tell us that what causes the differences in behavior, according to birth order, is the way each sibling sees himself, the expectations the parents place on him and the differences in the treatment of each child. These differences are universal within the working of the family.

The economic, religious or ethnic background of the family does not matter because the expectations and the perceptions of each child held by the parents is basically the same in all countries and nationalities. Even within the troubled family (dysfunctional family) where there are instances of child abuse or spousal abuse, these expectations are still present.

Temperament and Birth Order

The birth order of the child has such an effect on the temperaments that the traits taken on by the child remain with them long after the child reaches adulthood and leaves the immediate family. In fact, the molding remains with the person till death. The effect of this birth order on behavior cannot be measured or scored. The result of birth order behaviors is usually better observed in adulthood. This molding and refining process occurs within the person and has the ability to magnify some of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her temperament. This is especially true of the *first* child. When parents are expecting the arrival of the first child, everything is new and exciting. From the pregnancy to the actual birth, their hopes and dreams for the future are wrapped up in this small child.

From the first word to little league, grammar school to high school and college, children are pushed to be the best, smartest and to achieve the most. If a child has the temperament that will thrive under this kind of pressure, the child could become a compulsively independent, compulsively perfectionist person, always driving, always reaching for that illusive achievement, which will fulfill that driving need. If a child has the type of temperament that cannot meet this challenge, he will still want to achieve and try to please someone. However, he will never measure up.

By the time the middle children come along, the parents are *old pros*. They know what they are doing and they face this

new life with a renewed confidence. The things this new child does, although a new experience for the child, were done first, and possibly better, by someone else (the first child). This is a difficult situation for a young person.

Depending on his temperament, the *middle-born* will develop behaviors completely different from the first-born; always searching for a unique place to fit in and feel significant. A serious child will soon discover that it is easier to compete in the outside world, so they will be tempted to go outside the family to develop these close, personal relationships that are really only surface relationships. Those children with a more outgoing temperament will also go outside the home to develop relationships; however, they will be more rebellious and less disciplined within the home.

The relationship between parents and children is fluid, dynamic, and all-important. Every time another child is born, the entire family environment changes. How parents interact with each child as he/she enters the family's circle determines to a great degree that child's final destiny.

What gives the *middle* child's position its uniqueness is that this child is left to develop his own personality, because of less interference from his/her parents. By the time the *last child* comes along, the parents are not only mellowed, they are just tired. They are older and do not possess the energy reserves they once had, and this dwindling supply is split between all of the siblings. Whatever this child does, it is not usually as exciting as it was with the older siblings. This child soon learns that if he wants to receive time and attention, drastic action is called for.

The problem of the *last-born* child is made worse because his parents know this is the end of the line, so they tend to discourage the maturing process and leaving the nest. Without knowing it, they are encouraging him to remain immature, selfish and childish.

Because of the antics the *last* child pulls, he/she gets the time and attention of the parents. These antics will be determined by the temperament (extrovert vs. introvert). A less serious temperament will pull antics like being a clown, talkative, or undisciplined to get the attention of the parents.

A more serious temperament will cling to the parents and other deep relationships, barely letting them out of their sight or smothering them with closeness. The other temperament types will observe competing siblings and will develop behaviors different from theirs, either good or bad, so that time and attention are assured.

The Mother's Role

Many social scientists believe that a child's personality is 80% formed by the age of six or seven. It is also a common belief among professionals that the mother has more of an influence (nurturing) in the early formative years. The father has more of an impact on the child in the latter years (pre-adolescent and adolescent stages). This being the case, the mother may have the most impact on the effect that birth order has on the child. A mother's nurturing in the formative years, if done with consistency and love, can offset the distinct differences the birth order can instill in a child. Mothers nurture better and are more effective than anybody else.

A headline in many of the nation's newspapers stated, *Day Care Linked to Aggression in Children*.³¹ The article stated that the longer children spend in day care away from their mothers the more likely they are to be overly aggressive by the time they reach kindergarten, according to the largest study of child care and development ever conducted.

³¹ Tacoma News-Tribune, April 3, 2001.

It went on to state the basic results of a ten-year and ten-city federally financed study, which were outlined at a press briefing. Principal researcher Jay Belsky, of Birkbeck College in London, presented the findings in more detail in Minneapolis at a meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development.

“There is a constant dose-response relationship between time in care and problem behavior, especially those involving aggression and behavior,” Belsky told reporters. Belsky, a research psychologist who worked at Penn State University until two years before, added that children who spend more than 30 hours a week in child care “scored higher on items like *gets in lots of fights, cruelty, explosive behavior*, as well as *talking too much, argues a lot, and demands a lot of attention.*”

“If more time in all sorts of child care arrangements is predicting disconcerting outcomes, then if you want to reduce the probability of those outcomes, you reduce the time in care,” said Belsky. “Extend parental leave and part-time work.” However, Sarah Friedman of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which financed the study, said the federal agency “is not willing to get into policy recommendations.”

One of the lead scientists on the study with Belsky, Friedman said, “The easy solution is to cut the numbers of hours, but that may have implications for the family that may not be beneficial for the development of the children in terms of economics.” I believe that families today have to make the decision that parenting is a priority over economics. I would rather have a child who is healthy emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually than be economically secure.

The study followed more than 1,364 children in a variety of settings, from care with relatives and nannies to preschool and large day care centers. The conclusions from the study were based on the way mothers, caregivers, and kindergarten teachers rated the children. The average time in day care for all

those studied was 26 hours per week. Researchers found that: 17% of the children, who were in care for more than 30 hours per week, were regarded by teachers, mothers, and caregivers as being aggressive toward other children. That compared with 6% for the group of children in child care for less than 10 hours a week.

It has consistently amazed me how researchers continue to come up with conclusions that the Bible has already established (Proverbs 29:15). The apostle Paul said for mothers to

...love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:4,5).

A Mother's Reflection
(Author Unknown)

BEFORE children: I was thankful for the opportunity to obtain a college education and have a higher quality of life than my ancestors.

AFTER children: I am thankful to finish a complete thought without being interrupted.

BEFORE children: I was thankful for holistic medicine and natural herbs.

AFTER children: I am thankful for pediatric cough syrup guaranteed to "cause drowsiness" in young children.

BEFORE children: I was thankful for the opportunity to vacation in exotic foreign countries so I could experience a different way of life in a new culture.

AFTER children: I am thankful to have time to make it all the way down the driveway to get the mail.

BEFORE children: I was thankful for a warm, cozy home to share with my loved ones.

AFTER children: I am thankful for a lock on the bathroom door.

BEFORE children: I was thankful for material objects like custom furniture, a nice car and trendy clothes.

AFTER children: I am thankful when the baby spits up and misses my good shoes.

BEFORE children: I was thankful for my wonderful family.

AFTER children: I am thankful for my wonderful family.

In my opinion, there can be no greater accomplishment than to be a mother who has molded the life of a child and has nurtured him/her in ways that no one can duplicate. God bless good mothers, and may their tribe increase.

The Peril of the Favored Child

Most parents start out in their parenting experience wanting to treat all their children equally. God said, “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12). Yet, there are Christian parents who are unaware that they may be causing their children to break this most basic of commandments. These parents sometimes set their children up to be too close. Researchers know that when one child is too close to a parent/s, another child will become distant. So, some children are favored while others are less favored. A favored child is often more dependent, relational, but often less productive. A less favored child is independent, less social, but productive – a survivor. While other factors may be involved, most parents are unaware that the major contributor to the behavioral differences between their children is directly linked to the parent-child bonding process – or lack thereof.

Most children in a family are uniquely different in temperament, personality and talents. Yet, without a doubt, parents usually say that they treated all their children alike. Usually parents say that their children grew up so different, because of their children's choices, not because of how they were parented. But in reality, each child is often not treated equally. Researchers know that the healthiest parental bonding is when a child identifies primarily with the same-sex parent, but who also likes and is liked by the opposite-sex parent. Especially harmful to children is cross-gender identity. This is when the father favors his daughter and the mother her son. For these children, sex role confusion usually occurs – the girls take on a more masculine and the boys a more feminine development. A small portion of these children may later enter the homosexual lifestyle.

Why do well meaning, loving, careful, Christian parents have favored and less favored children? Answer: It is not usually by conscious choice; but rather, an expected pattern that has been in the family system. If not noticed, checked and stopped, such ill parent-child bonding descends down through family systems from generation to generation. Such families marry into families with similar unhealthy patterns. A parent often times allows a child to become an appendage to him/her because the child is part of the parent's emotional system. When this happens, the parent tends to excuse and spoil the child. Such children are programmed to fail in life, because they will soon find out as adults that they will not receive the same treatment from others. Such children cause dissention in the family and the less favored child will resent the favored sibling and the parents as well.

The story of Jacob and his twelve sons is a case in point (Genesis 37). The favored son, Joseph, became the hated sibling and received an unjust consequence of the unwise father's favoritism. Parents, unknowingly, set up their own

children to more easily obey or disobey the most basic commandment,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother – which is the first commandment with a promise – that it might go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Adjusting to Birth Order

When it comes to the birth order, there are some suggestions to consider from child psychologists. Don't reinforce your first-born's already ingrained perfectionist tendencies. Realize that first-borns have a particular need to know exactly what the rules are. Recognize the first-born's first place in the family. As the oldest, the first-born should get some special privileges to go along with the additional responsibilities that always seem to come his way. Stay away from making your first-born your *instant baby-sitter*. He shouldn't feel like he is responsible for parenting duties when you are out and about. As your first-born grows older, be sure you don't pile on more responsibilities. Alleviate some responsibilities and give them to the younger children, when they become capable of taking on these jobs. When it comes to the middle child, it is apparent that a different dynamic is in place as far as parenting is concerned. You will, as a parent, have a tendency to feel that you have become a skilled parent and that you will not need to give as much attention to the middle child as you did to the first child. You also need to recognize that many middle children are prone to avoid sharing how they feel about things. If your middle child is an avoider, set aside times for just the two of you to talk. It is important to give this kind of time to every child, but a middle child may not insist on his share. Because a parent is less likely to give the

middle child the same attention he/she gives the first child, be aware that the middle child needs it just as much.

The *last-born* child has some very special problems to overcome. The parents of a last-born child tend to be less critical and less demanding. Using reality discipline is especially critical with the family baby because of the natural tendency to ease up and slack off. Be sure your last-born has his fair share of responsibilities around the house. *Last-borns* often wind up with very little to do. They tend to avoid responsibilities and parents tend to let them. Statistics show that the *last-born* is least likely to be disciplined and the least likely to have to toe the mark the way the older siblings did. While you are making sure you don't coddle your youngest child, don't let him get lost in the shuffle, either. *Last-borns* are well known for feeling that *nothing I do is important*. Make a big deal out of your *last-born's* accomplishments and be sure he or she gets a fair share of attention in all categories of the family's life.

Keys to Successful Parenting

Every child has both a *spirit* and a *will*. The *spirit* is fragile. It breaks and bruises very easily. The *will* is like steel. It is tough, stubborn, and is not easily moved. The *spirit* gives feedback to the child as to his/her self-worth, value, and importance. It tells a child who he/she is. The *will* tells a child what he/she does. The *will* is well formed at birth. How can a parent shape the child's character without damaging the *will*?

One of the most important aspects of good parenting is to give the child a sense of acceptance in response to his emotional needs. A parent's unconditional acceptance involves hundreds of little and big messages by each of the parents, which say one thing – that the child is very valuable no matter what he/she does. It includes all verbal and body language in the every day life of the child. Even when the parent

disciplines the child, there must be the message of acceptance at the end of the discipline. Acceptance is not the same as condoning. The parent's unconditional affection does for a child's emotions what acceptance does for a child's mind – the child knows that he/she is greatly loved. Not only does a child know he/she is loved, he/she feels loved. Children feel emotionally valuable through loving words, hand holding, squeezes, hugs, kisses, and looks of endearment. Children usually enjoy receiving affection well into adulthood.

Another key to successful parenting is the expressed appreciation that parents feel for their children. Praise is one reward that can never be overdone, if it is done in all sincerity. Tell them that they have done a good job, and build up their spirit by telling them how neat they are. Children, however, do not always act praise-worthy. At times, parents will not appreciate what their children do. Discipline is in order when that happens. But discipline should attempt to shape the will without damaging the spirit. Thus, successful parents are parents who effectively show acceptance, affection and appreciation for their children. These qualities of parenting must be shown even when the child is disciplined. To do otherwise will embitter the children (Ephesians 6:4). After all, whom the Lord loves, He disciplines (Hebrews 12:7-11). As hard as it may seem at times, all siblings must sense acceptance and love equally given by their parents.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does *temperament* have to do with *birth-order*?
2. What is the uniqueness of the *middle-child's* position?
3. What were the results of the *Day Care Linked to Aggression* study?
4. How will the favored child face difficulty in his/her adult life?
5. What is the most familiar characteristic of the *first-born*?
6. When is 80% of the child's personality formed?
7. Why do well-meaning, loving, careful parents favor a certain child?
8. Why is parental favoritism towards the opposite-sex child unhealthy?

chapter nine

The Functions of the Home

We are all familiar with Murphy's Law, "If anything can go wrong it will." Murphy's Law is the inspiration for a book by Paul Dickson, titled *The Official Rules at Home*. Here is a sample of laws, rules, and observations collected by Dickson:

Rabbe's Rule of the Bedroom: The spouse who snores louder always falls asleep first.

Dickson's Gardening Discovery: When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

Dorthy's Dilemma: The heavier the package and the farther you must carry it, the more your nose itches.

Todd's Rule of the Bar Code Malfunction: The bar code in the checkout line won't work on items you're embarrassed to be buying.

Rosenbaum's Rule: The easiest way to find something lost around the house is to buy a replacement.

It is amazing how wrong things can go sometimes. It is a rule of thumb that to define something as *dysfunctional*, it is best to compare it with something that is *functional*. I believe that the *dysfunctional family* is a model of angry responses to

perceived threats. It is a model of false belief systems and how they create in the *family system* a survival mentality that adversely affects the whole family. It affects their interpersonal relationships and creates an inability on the part of the family members to communicate their feelings and to develop problem-solving skills.

Perhaps the biggest difference between a functional and dysfunctional family is the ability of its members to problem-solve and come to solutions that are best for everybody. Too often anger and fear are emotions that rule the hearts and minds of dysfunctional family members every day. The primary criteria that qualify families as dysfunctional are: (1) a lack of personal identity of individual members, (2) a lack of communication skills, and (3) a lack of problem-solving skills to deal with everyday problems that arise in interpersonal relationships.

The Dysfunctional Family

The *systems model* in family therapy assumes that the *nuclear family* is the basic system in which problems occur. The family is seen as a rule-governed organism that has a dynamic, which transcends that of its separate participants. If it is our intention to really understand a particular individual, it is argued, then we must become thoroughly familiar with his or her family system.

“A *system* can be defined as a group of interconnected or interrelated parts, which mutually interact across time.”²³ Systems have distinct characteristics and are made up of their parts and the relationships of their parts, and thus the system is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Systems are characterized by an *interdependency*, which includes how the

³² Foley, 1984.

parts influence each other. There are no insignificant parts. Systems have boundaries that differentiate one system from another system. A system is an organism.

A particular member's dysfunctional behavior, under the systems theory, reflects a family system that is dysfunctional. The *troubled member* reveals a family in trouble. If a family is dysfunctional, the family relationships that support the lack of stability must be dealt with, or long-term change in the troubled member is unlikely. Since the dysfunctional family is a *closed* system, it makes sense to explore how each family member affects and influences the other.

Co-Dependency Issues

Originally the word *co-dependence* was limited to the study of alcoholic families. It was first used to label the spouse of the alcoholic. Later, as *family systems thinking* came to be used, the *whole* family was seen as co-dependent. Co-dependency is the most common symptom of a dysfunctional family.

In every dysfunctional family there is a *primary stressor* and each family member adapts to this stress in an attempt to control and appease the stressor. Each member then becomes involved in adapting to the stressor as long as the stress exists. Each becomes co-dependent on the stressor. This state of readiness was intended by nature to be a survival state. In dysfunctional families, it is often the normal state. When a threat actually occurs, the person responds with *survival behaviors*. Such behaviors include denial, dissociation, repression, or withdrawal and anger.

Survival Behaviors

Survival behaviors are actual responses to the violent (and sometimes passive manipulations) and threatening behavior of

the *primary stressor*. The adult child of a dysfunctional family learns to survive by developing certain patterns of behavior. As the child of a dysfunctional family grows up, these survival behaviors continue even though they are disconnected from the original stressor. These survival behaviors feel normal since they are the patterns one used every day of his/her early life in order to survive.

As an adult, survival behaviors are unnecessary and can be very unhealthy. While they were once protective, now they are destructive. There must be a change in belief systems for the member to change his/her behavior.

Survival behaviors are hard to give up. They have become very familiar. They helped the person survive by developing a kind of power that resulted from sacrificing self. In every case the person threatened develops a dependency on things outside himself to the point of self-neglect.

In the counseling cases I have been involved with, there has always been an underlying sense of anger and bitterness. God does not want it to be so. He is very sensitive to child abuse and will judge those who engage in it, whatever the reason. Jesus said,

. . . if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (Matthew 18:6).

The Victim Mentality

I believe that anger is a defense mechanism for the dysfunctional member who possesses a *victim mentality* in most situations in life. He/she is always lacking in fulfilling their essential needs and they do not become self-actualized. A dysfunctional family member believes that his identity lies outside himself in a substance, activity or another person. He

has sold himself and he is not able to be his own person. The person then develops a *survival belief system*, which produces the following programmed responses: people-pleasing, self-debasing, anti-social behavior, denial, distrust of others, intimidating and controlling, blaming, avenging, habitual lying, manipulation, unhealthy expression of anger, avoidance or rejection of feelings, lack of relational and problem-solving skills.

Co-dependent (enabling) children have given up their own identity in order to take care of their parent/s or the needs of the family system. The co-dependent must live a life of survival, like animals, always on guard against threats from the outside. Thus, the continuing, underlying emotion of anger is always under the surface ready to explode.

Many times co-dependents try to make themselves indispensable by taking care of others. They are willing to do whatever it takes to be loved or feel significant. Once a person believes that his identity lies outside himself in a substance, activity or another person, he has sold himself and he is not able to fulfill his own essential needs. He is not able to truly love and be loved as long as he believes that he is not worthy of love and must always be on the alert to please others. God created in us basic needs. We need to be: loved, respected, needed, capable, significant, and secure in our self-worth (Romans 12:9-18).

Neglecting our essential needs to serve others (especially the primary stressor in the family) is not healthy spiritually, emotionally or psychologically. God wants us to serve others and put their needs first, but not at the expense of our self-worth, or as a response to a threat. Our service to others should be an act of the will (Philippians 2:3, 4)! Co-dependents need to learn to depend on God as their Savior (I Peter 5:7).

Self-Worth and Identity Issues

An accurate, healthy identity includes self-acceptance founded on realistic self-knowledge (Romans 12:3). But

people ask, “Doesn’t all the self-focus necessary to gain a realistic self-knowledge promote a selfish, self-centered life?” As newborns, we are unable to answer several critical questions. Who am I? Am I lovable? Am I competent?

So, at birth, all of us are enrolled in an incredibly effective education system known as the family. Whether the family curriculum teaches predominantly truth (as in well-functioning families) or error, the captive young pupils thoroughly master its contents. Part of the family curriculum is designed to provide answers to questions of personal identity.

There is overwhelming research evidence to show that a high level of self-esteem in the parents produces a more consistent atmosphere of unconditional love and acceptance, and this optimizes the development of high self-esteem in the children.³³

Many psychological studies confirm the commonly held belief that loving acceptance of children by their parents, correlates with positive self-concepts.³⁴

However, in many dysfunctional families, neither parent is emotionally available to provide loving acceptance.

Dysfunctional families tend to be rigid systems that offer little emotional nourishment to the children in them. Studies show that unhealthy self-concepts produce in children dysfunctional, anti-social behavior as a survival tactic to deal with their lack of confidence, security, and self-worth. As these children become adults, they develop an inaccurate, performance-based identity. Such an identity destroys their joy and contentment.

³³ Archibald Hart, *Feeling Free* (1979) 126.

³⁴ Rollins, *Contemporary Family Theories*.

Fulfilling the Family's Needs

Like all social systems, a family has basic needs. The family needs a sense of: self-worth, security, productivity, intimacy, relatedness, structure and responsibility. There is also a need for challenge, stimulation, joy, affirmation and a spiritual grounding. A family also needs a mother and father who are committed to one another in a basically healthy relationship and who are secure enough to parent their children without contamination.

Everyone in the family is affected by Mom's and Dad's relationship. As each member of a dysfunctional family adapts to the stress in a particular role or roles, each loses his or her true identity. As a role becomes more and more rigid, the family system closes more and more into a frozen trance-like state. Once this freezing occurs, the family is stuck. And the more each one tries to help by playing his role, the more the family stays the same. Each person is impacted by everyone else's behavior. Like a mobile, you touch one part and all the other parts are affected. To illustrate this *homeostatic principle*, when a mobile is touched all parts move, but it always comes to rest in exactly the same position it had started. This is a *closed* system because it is rigid and inflexible. An *open* family system could be illustrated by keeping the mobile in a gentle motion all the time. An open family system is one that has flexibility in expression of feelings, self-identity, and adaptation to solving problems in search of truth.

Causes of Low Self-Worth

Is a consideration of self-esteem important? Some people think we are too self-centered anyway. God created in us the ability to instinctively learn in certain areas of our lives, such as: talking, eating, walking, and developing a self-concept either negative or positive. God does not want us to think too

highly or too lowly of ourselves. The apostle Paul said,

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in
accordance with the measure of faith God has given
you (Romans 12:3).*

If we think too highly of ourselves, we become arrogant and prideful and believe we don't need God (James 4:6). If we think too lowly of ourselves, we become incompetent and ineffective for God, because then we don't believe He can love us, care for us or that we are capable of success (Philippians 4:13). If we can't see that God loves us, then we can't do all things through Him. We will not have the willpower or the faith to be effective and consistent in serving Him. We must believe that He is God and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

In most cases we are products of our own thinking, which was to a great degree conditioned by our environment when we were children. Our parents and significant others in our lives helped shape our self-concept by what they told us about our self-worth and how they treated us. We became *conditioned* over a period of time by our negative interpretation of what others said about us. When our self-talk became negative and repeated often enough, our minds believed these things to be true. When our belief systems are full of lies about our self-worth, we will act that way. When we tell ourselves that we must please people to be liked or loved, we set ourselves up for disappointment. People eventually lose respect for people-pleasers.

When we feel like our opinions don't matter, or other opinions are more important than ours, we allow others to manipulate and use us. God wants us to love others as we *love ourselves* (Matthew 19:19). When Jesus said this, it would

seem that He assumed the normal attitude of an emotionally healthy person is that he loves himself. God is the most powerful source we can draw from to develop a positive self-worth (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

The People-Pleasers

People-pleasing is a result of the low self-worth that a child experiences in a dysfunctional family. Pleasers feel their value does not come from within but from without. They feel they have worth only when they perform well and others accept them. They live their lives in constant reflex, dependent on the moods, emotions, and opinions of others. Pleasers are quick to blame themselves and go through life saying, "I'm sorry, it's my fault, how stupid of me." When pleasers get married, they usually look for someone they can please and then take over the relationship to make it work. A pleaser can be so adept at taking charge that on the surface she may look like a controller, but what she's really doing is trying harder to gain acceptance from her husband.

The pleaser sees God as a big policeman in the sky who is ready to zap her for the slightest infraction, mistake, or shortcoming. Actually there is nothing wrong with being a pleaser as long as you keep your schedule halfway under control and don't feel walked on or totally unloved and unappreciated.

The Peril of Enabling

The day I met Rebecca, she was very depressed and felt a deep sense of guilt for having let her husband down. She came to me because I had counseled a couple that had had problems with their teenage daughter, and they had recommended me as a counselor. Rebecca told me that she couldn't please her husband and she said she was guilty of neglecting his needs.

Pleasers are burdened by low self-esteem, and they are always willing to try harder so that others will like and accept them. Rebecca told me that her earliest memory of her family was that they always had to tiptoe around their father. He was an alcoholic and would shout and scream at the kids when he was drunk. He would beat her mother and threaten to do the same to the kids if they didn't toe the line. She could not remember ever being approved by him and the family members never discussed any problems or were allowed to express themselves. She came away from that experience feeling that she couldn't be herself, because if she did she would be rejected.

Her husband Charles was a controller and demanded a lot from his wife. They had five kids and a large house. Rebecca would work herself to exhaustion trying to meet the needs of her children and keep the house clean to her husband's satisfaction.

At the age of five, Rebecca had begun establishing the behavioral pattern and lifestyle of a pleaser. She had come to the point that pleasing people was programmed into her belief system of interpersonal behaviors. "There is so much to do," she said, "I can't let people down." Besides all her responsibilities with five children at home, she was a Bible teacher at her church, a newly elected president of the local PTA and had a commitment to the boy's soccer league. When she came to me in complete exhaustion and depression she said, "I'm stuck. I can't make any progress. For every two steps forward I make three backward." She felt like she had completely disappointed God and her family. It didn't seem worth living anymore. After several weeks of counseling, Rebecca was able to see the lies she was telling herself. She began to realize how her childhood had programmed her to believe such lies about herself. She quickly realized that her pleaser/perfectionist lifestyle was based on a distorted picture

of reality that started way back when she was a little girl.

Rebecca began to see that she needed to deal with her beliefs about what she thought was true as an adult, such as:

1. She couldn't make any mistakes;
2. She always had to try harder to cover all the bases;
3. She couldn't say no to requests for help.

But changing her self-talk and her behavior was another matter. How could she quit the PTA when so few people were willing to help? How could she quit her part-time job when they needed the money? How could she take a quarter off of teaching Bible class when the church needed her so much? That is when changing her perception of her self-worth became a major counseling challenge. She had to learn that God loved her no matter what she did or didn't do. She needed to learn that people should accept her no matter whether she pleased them or not. She needed to learn that as long as she did the best she could and treated people right, if they didn't accept her it was their problem, not hers.

With her new perceptions, Rebecca made slow but steady progress. She was learning to express her feelings to her husband, even when he didn't like it. She was learning how to communicate with her children and to set boundaries for them to help build character in them. She was learning not to enable people and that she didn't want to do anything that would cripple her children spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically as she had been crippled in her dysfunctional family.

Dysfunctional Families Are Crippling

Dysfunctional families are crippling to the emotional stability of the family members. We have seen that the chief component in the family system is the marriage relationship.

Mom's relationship with herself and Dad's relationship with himself and their relationship with each other are the foundation of the family. The husband and wife are the architects of the family. Dysfunctional families are created by dysfunctional marriages. Good functional marriages are dependent upon each partner's relationship to his/her self. If the mother/wife loves herself and feels centered and growing in wholeness, she feels complete; likewise, with the husband/father. Each person feels complete and therefore, doesn't look to the other for completion. And ultimately the members of a Christian home must believe that their complete dependence upon God and His love is the source of all true self-worth.

Ten Rules That Provide the Basis for a Functional Family

1. Each member gets needs met
2. Members can be different
3. Roles are individually chosen
4. Problems are acknowledged and resolved
5. Members express themselves without fear
6. Communication is direct, clear, sensitive, and sincere
7. Members are accountable and parents discipline with love
8. The atmosphere is fun and spontaneous
9. Members are of equal value
10. All mistakes are forgiven

It is evident that an important component of dysfunctional families to be aware of is; *they are part of a multi-generational process*. The dysfunctional individuals who marry other dysfunctional individuals have come from dysfunctional families. So the circle tends to be unbroken. Dysfunctional families create dysfunctional individuals who marry other dysfunctional individuals and create new dysfunctional families. Left to our own devices, it is very difficult to get out of the multi-generational disease.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe a *dysfunctional* family?
2. Why is *open* communication in a family so important?
3. How would you define *co-dependency*?
4. Why do people develop *survival behaviors*?
5. How would you describe an *open* family system?
6. How would you describe a *closed* family system?
7. What is the major flaw with *people-pleasing*?
8. What are the three criteria that define a dysfunctional family?

chapter ten

Speaking the Truth in Love

Someone has compiled a list of Kid's Instructions on life. Some of these are quite insightful:

- "Wear a hat when feeding seagulls." - Rocky, age 9
- "Sleep in your clothes so you'll be dressed in the morning."
- Stephanie, age 8
- "Don't flush the john when your dad's in the shower."
- Lamar, age 10
- "Never ask for anything that costs more than \$5 when your
parents are doing taxes." - Carol, age 9
- "Never tell your mom her diet's not working."
- Michael, age 14
- "Don't pick on your sister when she's holding a baseball bat."
- Joel, age 12
- "When you get a bad grade in school, show it to your mom
when she's on the phone." - Alysha, age 13
- "Never try to baptize a cat." - Laura, age 13.

Those children's instructions about life seem very good and maybe as adults we can learn from our kids by listening to them more intently, even if at times we don't understand them.

There are some things we will never understand. That's the first thing we need to learn in our communication with others. Some of us don't understand our spouses, or our children. Sometimes we ask, "Why in the world did I do that?"

And we don't know why. There is a lot in this world that we do not comprehend, but it is our responsibility to try to understand other people who are trying to communicate with us.

Positive communication is effective communication. When you care what other people are saying and you *validate* their feelings, you are creating positive communication. To validate is to give credibility to the feelings of the other person communicating with you, even if you don't agree with him/her. It doesn't require agreement, just the acknowledgment of the validity of that person's feelings. To validate is to say to the other person communicating with you, "I care about your feelings and your opinions." It says that other people's feelings matter to you. We must learn "*to speak the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15).

Organism vs. Organization

It is a fact that poor communication is the number one leadership and management problem. Once understanding breaks down, unity, commitment, motivation, and group activity are lost and the group fails. This is even more of a fact if we see the church as an *organism* rather than an *organization*.

Both organisms and organizations have a common goal and the members all work toward that goal. The difference is that an organization does not require that the members work together, but an organism requires that the members be *interdependent*. The church is an organism (I Corinthians 12:12-27).

Good communication is even more important in an organism. The family structure is basically an organism and positive communication is vital to the family for it to be *functional*. A lack of communicating in positive and caring ways is a major defect in dysfunctional families.

Communication Blocks

The Bible gives us instructions on how to create positive communication (Ephesians 4:29-32). We learn from birth to adulthood, how to communicate ideas and concepts and how to persuade and negotiate. We will learn positive ways to do this if our parents teach and model communication that *cares*. Unfortunately, we also learn how to distort and confuse our communications so that we do not have to deal with issues head on. Communication distortions are designed to hide from, deflect attention from, hurt or humiliate the other person. It is also important to realize that distorted communication is caused by distorted thoughts.

The following are ways to change distorted communications:

- Sensitize your mind to be able to recognize the distortions when they appear in your thinking and communication.
- Confront each distortion that you recognize, and challenge its accuracy.
- Replace each distorted thought with a truthful and accurate message.
- The most difficult, but the most important part, is to communicate the truthful and accurate message to the other person, along with an appropriate apology for the distorted message and for whatever hurt or damage it caused the relationship.

Remember that all confused or misunderstood communication involves some form of *communication distortion*, and the following are some examples (adapted from unknown sources):

- **TUNNEL VISION** – This is when you see only what fits your attitude or state of mind. Thus, you seize on a single, small detail and make that the basis for your overall interpretation. Other important details are deleted from your awareness.

Example: A couple is going on a picnic for the day. On the way there they have a sharp disagreement over how to get to the park. They finally find it and the rest of the day goes well. But later he complains to her; “you ruined the whole day because of the fight.”

- **ABSOLUTE STATEMENTS** – Absolute statements contain absolute words, such as: “always” or “never” or “can’t,” etc. These are used to make the argument or statement stronger, but because they are seldom ever true, such statements weaken the truth and are often used to avoid responsibility. These kinds of statements categorize events as *awful* or *terrible*, whereas in reality its implications are only mild or moderate.

Example: Joe forgot to take the garbage out to the street for pickup as he left for work. That night his wife, Marge said furiously, “You always forget to take the garbage out.”

- **POLARIZED THINKING** – In this kind of thinking, everything is, either black or white, good or bad, with no other possible explanations in between. Sometimes called *all-or-nothing* thinking, a person sees only two extreme choices by thinking this way. This thinking seems to have its advantages because you don’t have to expend the mental energy to find options other than the two polarized ones.

Example: Jack phoned his wife Mary at lunchtime and asked her to prepare a fancy, formal dinner for that night. He had invited the president of the company he works for, along with two vice-presidents, and each of their wives to come to his home for dinner. After Mary got off the phone she thought, “I don’t have the time to do this, but I have to or Jack will threaten to leave me.”

- **SHOULD AND OUGHTS** – This form of distortion is when a person operates from a list of inflexible rules about how you or other people should act. There is a feeling of rigidity and controlling with this distortion. It also sets people up for *unrealistic expectations* that when unfulfilled, cause frustration and anger.

Example: Peter comes home from work and tells June that he had a run-in with a fellow worker. Instead of June hearing him out, she immediately says, “You should have just backed away from the fight. You ought to go back right now and apologize to him. You should know better.”

- **MIND READING** – Mind reading can operate in two directions. The first is when you believe that you can tell what the other person is thinking. The second, is when you expect the other person to know what you are thinking, wanting or expecting. Again, it sets you up for unrealistic expectations that distort communication and disrupt relationships.

Example: Jason and Leah are riding home together in the car. They are both quiet, not talking. Jason is thinking, “I’ll bet she is angry at me for not taking out the garbage this morning.” She is thinking, “I would sure like to

stop at a restaurant. If he loved me, he would know what I want.”

- **PERSONALIZATION** – This distortion is a form of paranoia, inasmuch as the person believes that the actions of other people are directed toward him in a negative way. This is an attitude that reflects a person’s insecurities. When we have low self-esteem or feel inadequate, we have a tendency to personalize what other people say to us and it then causes us to feel defensive and vengeful. Such distortions are destructive to healthy relationships and tend to create the feeling of alienation.

Example: When Jill hears her husband Jack singing in the shower, she angrily says, “He does that just because he wants to irritate me.”

Examples of Helpful Statements

Statements are more helpful if they are. . .

- Specific rather than general: “You bumped my cup,” rather than, “You never watch where you’re going.”
- Tentative rather than absolute: “You seem unconcerned about Jimmy,” rather than, “You don’t care about Jimmy and you never will.”
- Informing rather than ordering: “I hadn’t finished yet,” rather than, “Stop interrupting me.”
- The most helpful kinds of information are...
- Behavior descriptions: These report specific acts of the other person that affect you. “I felt like you cut in before I had finished my sentence.”
- Descriptions of your own feelings: “I like what you just said,” or “I feel blue.”

Perception-checking responses: “I thought you weren’t interested in trying to understand my idea,” or “Are you feeling discouraged?”

The least helpful kinds of statements are. . .

1. Generalizations about the other: “You never pay any attention.”
2. Name-calling, trait labeling: “You’re too rude,” or “You’re a phony.”
3. Accusations, imputing undesirable motives to the other: “You enjoy putting people down,” or “You always have to be the center of attention.”
4. Commands and orders: “Don’t talk so much,” or “Stop laughing.”

Communication Requires Openness

Rarely do two people talk openly about their reactions to each other. Most of us withhold our feelings about people (even in relations that are very important or dear to us), because we fear hurting them, making them angry or being rejected by them. Because we don’t know how to be open and sensitive, we say nothing. They are then totally unaware of our reactions to them. Likewise, we continue to be ignorant of how our behavior affects other people. As a result many relationships that could be productive and enjoyable gradually fail under an accumulated load of tiny annoyances, feelings and misunderstandings that were never talked about openly.

Openness must stem from a desire to improve our relationship with others. Openness is not an end in itself but a means to an end. When attempting to elicit an open sharing of reactions to each other, try to convey that you value your relationship and wish to improve it because it is important. We

need to strive to know what other people perceive and feel about our actions and to share what we perceive about theirs.

In the process of communication, there must be a willingness to be open to the possibility of risk. Communicating with others usually involves risk. Your willingness to risk your self-esteem, being rejected or hurt by others, etc., depends on the importance of the relationship to you. Likewise, you cannot expect others to not become angry or feel hurt by your comments. Although the discussion may become intense, spirited, angry or tearful, it should not be coercive or an attempt to force others to change.

The Art of Sharing

When sharing information, each person should use the information as he sees fit as long as there is consideration for the other person's feelings. The attitude should not be to make sure that you win the argument, but rather, "What can each of us learn from this discussion that will make our working together more productive and more satisfying?" Reactions should be shared as close to the behavior that aroused them as possible so that the other person will know exactly what behavior is being discussed. As an example, behavior during the encounter itself can be commented on, e.g., "I feel pushed away when you say those things to me."

Disturbing situations should be discussed as they occur rather than saving up massive accumulations of hurt feelings and annoyances and dumping them on the other person all at one time. There should be a *time-out* called by one or the other to allow time for feelings to cool and evaluation made as to what needs to be said for clarification. This is when *I messages* are vitally important. They allow you the opportunity to be *non-accusative*, *express your feelings* and *take responsibility for those feelings*. Be sure to paraphrase the other person's comments about you to make sure you understand him as he

intends to be understood and check to make sure that he understands you as you intend to be understood.

Five Basic Rules of Communication

1. Be willing to listen and understand others (James 1:19, 20).
2. Be willing to compromise but not on basic convictions (James 3:13-18).
3. Be willing to validate the feelings of others (Romans 15:7).
4. Be willing to be vulnerable with your feelings (James 4:6-10).
5. Be willing to admit when you are wrong and apologize (James 5:16).

The Power of Word Pictures

Word pictures are one of the most powerful forms of communication. Word pictures are capable of activating a person's emotions, which allow a person to change. Before puberty, children experience change primarily through simple teaching and instruction. Then when puberty comes, words alone are less effective on a child. Life changes occur for adults, mainly through important events, such as a death, marriage, birth, loss of a loved one or a religious conversion.

Word pictures create in people emotional, intellectual, and psychological reactions by creating pictures in the mind. Prior to the Civil War, Harriet Beecher Stowe was enraged at the system of slavery down South. But who would listen to her? During the early years of American history, there was no platform from which a woman could speak. An entire nation was greatly moved when she penned a book of very vivid word pictures called "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

The scenes in Beecher's book, which portrayed the white slave owner's abuse of the black slave, were so powerful and aroused such a fury in the North, that Abraham Lincoln felt the

Civil War was inevitable.

“Like the memory of a moonlit walk, word pictures linger long after they’ve been spoken. In nearly every home, major problems can surface because men and women have markedly different ways of thinking and talking. But emotional word pictures help couples find common ground for communication.”⁵³

Many marriages have been unfulfilling and stagnant for both partners. The changes needed to create a more satisfying and intimate relationship don’t happen by magic or without consistent work. It can happen, if people will work hard at discovering intimacy through the language of word pictures, which best illustrate the feeling of love one to another.

The Power of Body Language

One difficulty in sharing needs is how each partner verbalizes the requests. How the desired behavior is communicated will probably influence the response from the partner. Well-chosen and articulated words can have a negative effect when the accompanying tone of voice and non-verbal body language are sending yet another message. A flat, negative, demanding tone will over-shadow the well-chosen words of a positive statement. An indifferent look, scowl, frown, or even the lack of expression can sabotage a request.

Couples need to share their initial requests of one another in the presence of a counselor or trusted friend so they have an opportunity to evaluate and/or comment upon the mode in which the message is sent. The use of a tape recorder or even a video recorder has proven to be of immense help in showing an individual or couple these areas, of which they are probably unaware.

³⁵ Gary Smalley, *The Language of Love*.

Speaking the Truth in Love

It is probably obvious to us that when a positive behavior is performed toward another person, it should be positively reinforced. But such awareness is not always obvious to a couple. Sometimes it takes a counselor to help a couple to perceive what is happening in the communication process.

Above all else, the Bible tells us how to achieve *positive, loving communication*, and what our attitude toward one another should be. The apostle Paul said,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).

Dealing with Criticism

Most husbands and wives consider it crucial to be defensive when either is criticized. They feel that they have to prove that the criticism is totally wrong, and that they have been sadly misunderstood. Each feels that the response they made was correct and reasonable, and that the family member who criticizes is a poor judge, who has no right to criticize anyway. So they argue and plead their case or attack the critic, probably because of their fear of looking less capable or wise. What remains in the end is anger and strained relationships. Rarely do people handle criticism effectively or biblically.

There is the presupposition that the critic is wrong, that we have been terribly misunderstood, and that we will not survive another minute, unless we set things right, or prove the critic wrong. These common views are most likely false in light of reality. Strange as it may seem, much of the criticism is usually correct. Occasionally of course, the critic is wrong.

Not only is criticism frequently correct, it may be good for us, even though it may not feel good. Those truths that don't feel good may be good for us. God can use criticism, even

painful, unfair criticism, to call our attention to the need for change. Since He is at work to make us holy, we must not overlook the means He may choose to accomplish this work in us (Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 12:7-11).

As fathers, working as the head of our families, when family members become argumentative or offended by fellow members, we must provide the leadership to tell them the truth, and reject the lies they may be telling themselves about criticism. We are responsible for helping our families to grow in the transformation process of being more like Christ (Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 3:18). We must be involved in helping our family members work out conflicts in a biblical and proper way.

If any effort to improve the relationship between husband and wife, or siblings, is to succeed, the persons involved must listen. *If one listens to you, you have won your brother over*, is how Jesus put it (Matthew 18:15). If Jesus' instructions, *to go and show him his fault* is ignored, the importance He placed on listening is equally ignored. This same principle should be applied to the family disagreements.

You, as a parent, must learn the skill of listening before you can communicate well also. No matter how well you talk, without listening, your efforts will be in vain. We are responsible to develop our own listening skills, not someone else's (James 1:19, 20). As a Christian leader in the home, you must become the best communicator that you can be, because the spiritual welfare of the family under your care depends on it. And don't forget to communicate with God on a regular basis, through prayer, and in reading His Word (I Thessalonians 5:16-19; James 1:21-25).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is an organism more powerful than an organization?
2. What is a good definition for *validating* someone else?
3. Why does communication require *openness*?
4. What is the *Art of Sharing*?
5. What are the five basic rules of communication?
6. How can *shoulds* and *oughts* be communication blocks?
7. How do *absolute statements* avoid responsibility?
8. What is the value of *word pictures* in communication?

chapter eleven

Building Strong Families

One day, the young son of humor writer Erma Bombeck surprised her with this question: “Mommy, are we rich?” This was Bombeck’s answer:

“You’re rich when you can have eight people for dinner and don’t have to wash forks between the main course and dessert.”

“You’re rich when your television set has all of the knobs on it.”

“You’re rich when you can throw away a pair of pantyhose just because it has a large hole in it.”

“You’re rich when your dog is wet and it smells good.”

I hate to somewhat disagree with the humorous Erma Bombeck, but I think you are rich when you are a member of a truly Christian home. You are rich when you are participating in *building a strong family*.

In our society today, gangs are not our only problem – though their numbers are rising. A major contributing factor in decaying families is the lack in many families of any kind of emotional connection with others. They have no emotional support from their current family, no ties to their past, and no tools for building a future. Young couples are starting families without ever having learned what a family should be. And to their new families they bring a host of emotional, spiritual, and

material problems – all springing from the same root: a lack of strong families. It is not just in the slums of New York or Los Angeles where this is happening, but also Littleton, Colorado and Paducah, Kentucky.

The fact is that being a healthy family is more than being without problems; strong families have lots of problems – just like everyone else. To be a strong family is not to be without challenges. Being a strong family requires guidelines for living and the ability to surmount life's inevitable challenges when they arise. Strong families are pleasant, positive places to live because members have learned some beneficial ways of treating each other. Family members can count on each other for support, love, and loyalty. They can talk to each other; they enjoy each other.

Members of strong families feel good about themselves as a family unit or team; they have a sense of belonging with each other – a sense of “we’re in this together.” At the same time, no individual gets lost or smothered; each family member is encouraged to develop his or her potential. Strong families are able to survive the crises that come their way. They unite to meet challenges; they are effective problem-solvers. They pull together to pull each other through. Perhaps good families can best be defined as places where we enter for comfort, development, and regeneration and places from which we go forth renewed and charged.

What is a Family?

A family consists of parents and children, spouses, aunts, cousins, friends, and all those other people we acquire by birth, adoption and by living. A family in God's eyes ideally includes a Mom and a Dad. The conventional wisdom today, in some circles, proclaims a homosexual couple constitutes a family, but such a claim is forbidden according to the Scriptures (Romans 1:24-27). Any definition of family, then,

needs to be broad and designed to be inclusive rather than exclusive as long as it is acceptable to God. A family then involves “two or more people who are committed to each other and who share intimacy, resources, decisions, and values.” This definition does not quite identify the quality that makes relationships in a family different from those in other areas of life – at work, for example. Some have suggested that it is unconditional love and knowing that the family can be depended upon (commitment) that makes a good family. Here’s a simple way to express that distinguishing quality: “A good family is made up of people who love and care for each other always, regardless of the circumstances.”

Families with a Purpose

Families that are strong and healthy seem to be so because they have a purpose to be so. These families intentionally desire to work toward being Christian in conviction and purpose. *Intentional* is the opposite of *haphazard*. Intentionally means: “knowing what you want and aiming precisely to get it with all diligence.” This characteristic is one of the most essential ingredients to raising strong families. This concept, if integrated into your parenting style, could change the future of your family. It is truly one of the most valuable secrets of success I have come across and is a philosophy you will see woven into every strong Christian family. All things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). When you establish a mission in life, you get focused. And when you get focused, you receive joy because your life has meaning. Knowing this keeps me planning my day every day, knowing that if I organize my day I am going to accomplish the purpose for which I organized it.

When an architect builds an exceptional house, he puts much forethought into the plans and the foundation because he

knows that all that comes later (plumbing, electricity, heating, and air conditioning) is made easier or more difficult depending on how thoroughly the plans and foundation were conceived. You can rest assured that problems will arise in your family. Taking the time to develop a master plan now can save you much grief later. Jesus tells us that we must count the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-33). If you want to build a strong family, there must be the conviction to *count the cost* and make a master plan to develop the traits and characteristics that make up a strong Christian home.

What is a Functional Family?

A functional, healthy family is one in which all the members are fully functional and all the relationships between the members are fully functional. As human beings, all family members have available to them the use of all their human powers. They use these powers to cooperate, individuate and to get their collective and individual needs met. A functional family is the healthy soil out of which individuals can become mature human beings. This involves the following:

1. The functional family is a cohesive unit with a common moral system and religious preference.
2. The functional family allows each member to be an individual.
3. The functional family members are encouraged to express themselves properly and develop problem-solving skills.
4. The functional family supports each member in his/her individual gifts.
5. The members of a functional family are disciplined properly without preference and proper boundaries are in place.
6. The functional family is a place where a healthy self-esteem is encouraged.

7. The functional family is a unit of survival and growth.
8. The functional family is a place where socialization is encouraged.

The Family Cycle

Some authorities in Family Therapy see the family system as a group of people in a hypnotic state. Actually it is a trance, and a trance is a naturally occurring state. Most of us go in and out of a trance many times during the course of a day. We daydream, we get absorbed in future fantasies, relive old memories from the past, watch television, read novels or go to movies.

Once a trance state is in effect, all one learns in that state operates like a post-hypnotic suggestion. If a parent tells you as a child that you will never be as smart as your brother, this message will operate until the trance is broken. The trance is broken when you leave home, grow up, and break the bond with your parents.

The family trance is created by both parents' individual interactions with the children and by the marriage itself. Father's behavior impacts Mother, who responds or reacts with behavior that impacts Father. It then becomes the family cycle.

For example, Mom may nag Dad because he won't take out the garbage. When Dad is asked why he won't take out the garbage, he says it is because Mom nags him too much. So Mom nags and complains because Dad won't take out the garbage, and Dad won't take out the garbage because Mom nags and complains. A circular loop is thus created and the cycle takes on a life all its own.

The children then begin to form their mindset on the basis of how they see Mom and Dad fighting. They develop belief systems in reference to disagreements and fail to learn how to properly problem-solve disagreements. So now the whole family system is a part of the trance and all parts participate in it.

Part of every family trance is the way each person learns about his emotions and how to express them. The family trance dictates what feelings you can have and express in the family. The family cycle continues as the trance is modeled in each generation.

In functional families, such disagreements between parents are resolved through *communication that cares*. It is expedient for parents to communicate in *I messages* and to share feelings and to validate other's feelings. When healthy problem-solving practices are in place that meet the needs and respect the feelings of each person, the family learns a valuable lesson in communication. As I mentioned before in this book, the lack of communication and problem-solving skills are the two main deficiencies in the dysfunctional family.

Strong Families Give Kids an Edge in School

A Reader's Digest study in 1994 discovered why some students do better in school than others. To find out, they invited 2,130 high school seniors to take a special academic test and then answer a list of personal questions. Among the poll's top findings are the following:

- Strong families give kids an edge in school. For instance, students who lived with two parents scored high more often on the test than students who didn't. Students who regularly shared mealtimes with their families tested better than those who didn't. This *family gap* was revealed in students of all backgrounds.
- Today's youth are far more optimistic about themselves and their futures than is generally believed. Four of five were confident they would be able to "make things better for myself and for other people." Almost the same number described their lives at home as *pretty good* or *wonderful*.

- As has been seen in other polls, not all groups tested equally well. Children with college-educated parents tested better than kids whose parents didn't go past high school. Whites tended to score higher than blacks. Boys generally scored higher than girls. But, more importantly, the Reader's Digest poll revealed that, within each group, strong families were a significant factor. ⁶₃

Strong Families Have Boundaries

In my counseling ministry, I have observed that the concept of boundaries is a puzzle to many parents today. The idea that children should basically have what they want has permeated our society. As a result it has become a breeding ground for spoiled children, who have no true identity or sense of responsibility. Boundaries are necessary for children to have a healthy self-worth and feel secure in their relationships.

James Dobson says,

After working with and around children all these years, I could not be more convinced of the fact that children really do want limits [boundaries]. They derive security from knowing where the boundaries are and who's available to enforce them. Perhaps an illustration will make this clear. Imagine yourself driving a car over the Royal Gorge in Colorado. The bridge is suspended hundreds of feet above the canyon floor, and as a first-time traveler you are uneasy as you cross. Now suppose there were no guardrails on the side of the bridge, where would you steer the car? Right down the middle of the road! Even though you

³⁶ Reader's Digest, (October 1994) 49, 50.

wouldn't plan to hit the protective rails along the side, you'd feel more secure just knowing they were there.

Dr. Dobson continues,

The analogy to children has been demonstrated empirically. During the early days of the progressive education movement, one enthusiastic theorist removed the chain-link fence surrounding the nursery school yard. He thought children would feel more freedom of movement without the visible barrier surrounding them. When the fence was removed, however, the boys and girls huddled near the center of the playground. Not only did they not wander away, they didn't even venture to the edge of the grounds.⁷³

It is evident in recent studies of strong families that boundaries are a necessary ingredient for the security of the child and that such a family becomes the anchor for a healthy self-esteem and success in life. Boundaries help children understand where their responsibilities begin and end. Boundaries define who a person is and what he/she is responsible for. If boundaries are consistently enforced, when violated by children, they will learn there are consequences for wrong actions, and thus will learn to develop a sense of responsibility.

Empowered Through Strong Families

Psychologist Dr. Henry H. Goddard, did a study (1998) on energy levels in children. He used an instrument he called the *ergograph*. How he ever got some children to stand still long

³⁷ Dobson, *Focus on the Family Magazine*.

enough to connect them to the machine is a mystery. But he did, and his findings are fascinating. He found that when tired children are given a word of praise or commendation, the ergograph shows an immediate upward surge of new energy. When the children are criticized and discouraged, the ergograph shows their physical energy takes a sudden nosedive.

It seems evident to me that those results could be duplicated in adults. When we are praised our energy levels go up. When we are criticized our energy levels go down. Members of strong families empower one another. They are strong families because the members encourage one another. They are strong families because they have a healthy self-worth encouraged by association with parents who have a positive self-worth themselves.

Chuck Swindoll, a well-known speaker at leadership seminars, says that in the Marines he was taught that you should dig a hole big enough for two when preparing for combat. There's nothing quite like fighting a battle alone. There's something strengthening about having a buddy who can keep you from panicking. We all need someone to lean on. We all need another's show of support. Members of strong families empower one another by allowing each to lean on the other.

The development of children into responsible adults is a task requiring parents to have the commitment to empower them as children. Empowering children is critical so that they will become responsible adults. It cannot be left up to our schools or communities. To empower children does not mean parents should leave their children to their own devices. It means that parents must give them the support, nurturing, and guidance to be all that they can be in life and in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

In the allegorical *Lord of the Flies*, Nobel Prize winner William Golding relates the grim consequences of leaving

children to their own devices. When the adult rescuers arrive at the island to find all civilized behavior shattered, their first question is, “Are there any adults – any grownups with you?” It is a question, which all thoughtful people must begin to ask: “Are our communities becoming islands in which children grow up without adults?” In strong families, the children know that the parents are in charge, and the parents do not give up that right. The parents do not have the right to emotionally, physically, or sexually abuse their children. But they do have the right to be in charge of them and to direct them in such a way that the children are empowered, nurtured, and disciplined so that they can become responsible adults.

Members of Strong Families Show Appreciation

A story is told about a young man in London who aspired to be a writer. But everything seemed to be against him. Having had four years of school, his father in jail because he couldn't pay his debts, he often went to bed hungry. He got a job pasting labels on bottles in a rat-infested warehouse and slept in a dismal attic room with two other boys – hoodlums from the slums. He had so little confidence in his ability to write that he sneaked and mailed his first manuscript in the dead of night so nobody would laugh at him.

Story after story from this young man was rejected. Finally, the great day came when one was accepted. He wasn't paid a thing for it but the editor praised him. One editor had given him recognition, appreciation. He was so thrilled that he wandered aimlessly around the streets with tears rolling down his cheeks. That one bit of expressed appreciation changed his whole life and career. His name was Charles Dickens.

Strong families have a basic characteristic or trait, which is the ability and willingness of its members to show appreciation for one another. Appreciation goes a long ways towards salvaging a person's life. A few words of appreciation

Building Strong Families

from a parent and a child is encouraged to do the right thing, when tempted to rebel. Negative habits are formed without any conscious effort – they seem to come naturally. To express appreciation is to swim upstream and it requires initiative to begin and to follow through. The biblical principle is:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

Strong Families Are United

The elevation of radical individualism and relativism in our society is at the core of the decay of many families today. Strong families are united in one cause and that is to love, protect, support, and sacrifice for one another. The self-centeredness we see today in our culture saps the “we” from our vocabulary, and it diminishes the support needed in members of families.

One writer said,

It is impossible to translate *I’m OK, you’re OK* into the plural. It deliberately does not say *We’re OK*, or claim to say it, because *we* as a unit does not command our allegiance, only separate identities in transaction with each other. In this way even the family is no longer *we* but an exercise in mutual therapy for the self-centered egos of its members. If any of the members, parent or child, finds that the therapy is insufficient, that it wants more massage, it is free to leave.⁸³

³⁸ Henry Fairlie.

Life in the fast lane today reveals that individualism is in and community and family are out. No social contract – whether it is marriage, business, or commitment to the common good – can resist unbridled egotism. If the contract no longer meets their needs, it should be broken. When the family concept of *we* breaks down into an assembly of competing parts, something vital to society is lost.

The family was originated by God to be an *organism*. An organism's members are interdependent and it requires unity for them to function. Just as the apostle Paul described the church as a unit where each part depends on the other, so it is with the family (I Corinthians 12). If the family is not united in this way, it is dysfunctional. It is lacking in the basic commitment and sacrifice that are vital to its very existence.

Strong Families Are Open

We need to be valued for the special person we are. We each need to see ourselves in the eyes of our caretakers as we interact with them. All our emotions, all our needs, all our drives need to be echoed back to us so we can get a sense of ourselves and establish an inner unity. If parts of us are accepted and other parts are rejected, then those parts that are rejected get split off from us and we are not the whole person God intended us to be.

Members of a strong family appreciate each other, and they are open to the feelings of one another. This openness is vital to healthy communication and self-worth. The child's earliest need is for a warm, loving person to be there to mirror, echo and affirm him. This means that in the first twelve to fifteen months (the symbiotic stage) the child needs a face with accepting eyes to reflect his inner self. He needs to know that no matter what he does, he will be accepted (Romans 15:7).

Openness means that each member of the family is becoming self-actualized. In a strong family each member of

the family is allowed to be himself/herself and to express feelings without fear of criticism or rejection. Each member of a strong family is accepted solely on the basis of being a part of the family. In strong families, the member's acceptance of each other should be as total as the acceptance of us by Jesus Christ. He accepts us, with all our problems, when we believe He is the Son of God, and put Him on in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins (Galatians 3:26, 27; Acts 2:38; 22:6-16).

The essence of the Christian home is the reality of the worth of each member in the eyes of God (Romans 5:8). The Christian home relies not only on a genuine faith in Christ, but on the very traits and characteristics that make a strong family. May God bless strong families, which are so vital to the building of a *Christian home*.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the two main defects in a dysfunctional family?
2. What are the ingredients that make a family strong?
3. How would you define a *family*?
4. Why is it important for a family to have a purpose?
5. How would you describe the elements of a functional family?
6. How do strong families give kids an edge in school?
7. How do strong families empower their members?
8. Why is it important for families to have boundaries for its members?

chapter twelve

The Power of Self-Talk

A painfully shy man fell in love with a young woman. He sensed that she felt the same way, but he couldn't find the courage to ask her out.

Finally, he decided he would mail her a love letter every day for one year, and then ask her for a date.

Faithfully, he followed his plan, and at year's end he was courageous enough to call her – only to discover that she had married the letter carrier.

If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven't been in bed with a mosquito. Pride is tasteless, colorless, and sizeless. Yet, it is the hardest thing to swallow.

What causes us to procrastinate, or to allow pride, or low self-esteem, to strain or destroy our relationships? I happen to believe that it is our self-talk, which controls our behavior and emotions to the point that we do not act in certain ways because of fear, pride, or self-worth issues. The first thing that we must understand is that we can control our self-talk and our mindset, but we don't try. The apostle Paul tells us to control our thoughts and recognize the power we have to do so. He tells us that we should think on those things that are truthful and positive in our lives (Philippians 4:8).

We also need to control our imaginations. We often imagine and fantasize about things that are unhealthy or

self-defeating for us spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. Paul tells us that we can bring our thoughts into obedience to, and agreement with the knowledge of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). The word of God is the standard of truth in this text and anything that contradicts it in our thinking must be subdued and rejected, if we want to live a functional and faithful life in Christ.

The power of the mind continues to amaze even the casual observer. The brain is much like a computer. It has access to a personal library of thousands of thoughts and pictures, ready to expose them on the imaginary monitor screen in our heads at a moment's notice. The mind can recall, at will, any programmed belief system that is in that personal library. Some of the belief systems are true and some are false.

The brain does amazing things, but appears unable to distinguish the difference between a truth and a lie. If a person believes that something is true, the brain will accept it as truth. All that is required is repetition of that belief for the brain to record it as truth for all time. Just like a computer's hard drive, whatever you have saved in your mind will stay there until you change it.

Confronting our Belief Systems

Most belief systems are formed in childhood. Once accepted, these beliefs are recorded as true, even if they are not. *Belief systems*, then, are those collections of beliefs that the brain has recorded (after much repetition) and recalls at will, because we use them when needed, and believe them to be true. These belief systems have a direct relationship to how we see our world and how we think our world sees us.

The apostle Paul established the principle of changing our behavior and feelings by changing our thoughts. Paul stated, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2).

Belief systems, then, cause us to perceive things as threats, whether real or imaginary, and threats cause us to get angry. Since anger is a defense mechanism, we react to many perceived threats automatically, often causing a lot of heartaches and problems in our interpersonal relationships. Our reaction, then, to perceived threats are automatic and programmed in our brain. We learned such automatic reactions to threats from the angry behavior of the significant people in our lives when we were children, and because certain temperaments are prone to different anger responses. We usually do not challenge these responses. They become automatic, like driving a car.

When we first learned how to drive a car, we were unsure of the depth perception and the use of the pedals, shifting gears, and steering, etc. After several tries, we repeated the information on how to drive enough times that the brain recorded it as a programmed belief system. That is why those of us who learned how to drive a car, do it now automatically, without thinking about it. The brain has the ability to record those belief systems in our subconscious mind, and they will stay there until we challenge them with another belief system.

If we were to drive in England, we would quickly realize that driving over there is different than in America. In England, we must now drive on the left-hand side of the road, and the steering wheel is now on the right-hand side of the car. After repeatedly telling our brain that we are learning new information about depth perception, steering, and working the pedals, etc., it will finally override the old information, and now subconsciously recall the new. Such programming is necessary for the changing of the subconscious mind.

Thus, belief systems are the most important factors in our *mental* and *emotional* life. They determine what we see as positive and negative in our lives. Belief systems determine what we perceive as threats in our lives, and therefore, our

feelings and *actions* as well. If these belief systems are lies, then we will see events in our lives as threats that are not really threats at all, and we will be motivated to be angry and defensive in our relationships. This is the danger of the lies we tell ourselves. They create in us emotions and behavior that is self-destructive and damaging to our relationships. Remember that Jesus said, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).

Do you remember the story of Jason and Judy in chapter two? Jason was the perfectionist who had to have everything in the house perfect according to his standards. It had reached such a state that Judy was ready to divorce him. Her statement of frustration was, “I can’t live this way any longer. I feel like a slave in my own house and I don’t love him anymore.” After several weeks of counseling, it was evident that Jason’s big lie (he had been telling himself frequently) was, “Unless things are in a certain order and tidy, I cannot feel good about myself and find peace.” It was evident that this lie was programmed in his subconscious mind through the continual *task orientation* his parents demanded of him when he was a child, and it had controlled his life ever since. When he addressed this lie and eventually replaced it with the truth, he said to me, “I have never felt more secure in my relationship with God, and my family.” Of course Judy was very relieved and pleased to see the changes that Jason was making with his expectations of the family. We cannot underestimate the power of our self-talk.

How Do We Find Truth?

Biblical principles come from God and they apply to every facet of our lives. Paul goes on say, *the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.* Thoughts determine the heart and the mindset of sinful man,

and change in those thoughts must come first before change in behavior can be a reality.

The wisdom of God supersedes the wisdom of man. Again the apostle Paul said: *Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world* (I Corinthians 1:20)?

Great thinkers and scholars over the centuries have attempted to define truth, what it is, and what it means in our lives. When Jesus told Pilate, during His trial before him, "...I came into the world to testify to the truth," Pilate responded by asking, "What is truth" (John 18:37, 38)? Jesus was trying to tell Pilate, *I am the truth*, which establishes God's Word as the only, absolute truth for all mankind (John 6:14; 17:17).

The only other standard for truth is *reality*. I realize that this standard can be subjective, but we must be rational in our thinking in all situations, especially those situations that involve husbands and wives or parents and children. The Bible doesn't address everything specifically. If our understanding of reality does not contradict the Bible, it can be a logical standard for truth, although it must a times be relative in its application.

Lies often destroy three things in our lives: (1) Identity, (2) Values, and (3) Relationships. When we tell ourselves lies, we redefine what we are and distort our identity. We tend to try to be somebody else, causing emotional dissonance, and it creates in us the propensity to make bad choices. Lies also destroy our values, because we lose sight of the proper distinction between good, moral choices and bad choices. The lies we tell ourselves about our self-worth also destroy relationships, because we become too sensitive to rejection, and many times we make bad choices to avoid it.

Some of what we tell ourselves is not in word form. Our thoughts are often images or attitudes, without words attached to them. We may feel uncomfortable and isolated in crowded places but never actually put these feelings into words. We

may be fearful of a thing and avoid it without really knowing what's going on in our belief systems at all. Remember that as a Christian, our joy in life does not depend on circumstances, but on a deep, abiding relationship with Christ, and a trusting hope in His providence and our salvation (Philippians 4:11).

Dealing With Self-Talk

When we have problems in life, we too often focus on changing our feelings and/or behavior instead of addressing the thoughts (or self-talk), which are most often the problem. At this point we often try to control our feelings and behavior and in doing so, we lose sight of the real problem.

I am convinced that most of our behavior is preceded by feelings, which are preceded by thoughts. If I were to use the analogy of the *disease vs. the symptoms*, the disease would be the thoughts and the symptoms would be the feelings and behavior. We would quickly change doctors if the one we were seeing treated only the symptoms of our disease and not the disease itself. This illustrates the importance of challenging our thoughts when we are having strong feelings that create problems, or when we are engaging in self-destructive behavior.

Self-talk refers to words we tell ourselves in our thoughts. It is what we say to ourselves about how we see ourselves, how we perceive our world, and how we think our world sees us.

A *self-destructive belief* is a lie that we tell ourselves and that we believe is true. It is a lie, or a series of lies, programmed into a belief system that we have come to believe as true over a period of time. When we wonder why we feel the way we do, this should be our first warning sign that something is wrong with our belief systems.

Dr. William Backus in his book, *Telling Yourself The Truth*, states that such lies are “the direct cause of emotional turmoil, maladaptive behavior and most so-called ‘mental

illness.” Phrases such as, “I always make mistakes,” or “I’m never going to be loved by anyone,” are good examples of absolute statements that cause us to over-exaggerate an experience, or a situation. We will believe these lies when something happens in our life that is negative, and the brain recalls them automatically.

Our self-talk has a hold on us, and when we believe these lies they are not truly appreciated or realized, as such. We seldom challenge our self-talk, because we have a tendency as human beings to accept it as truth. You can then see how self-talk can cause us to speak in ways that reflect lies we may be telling ourselves; lies that create dysfunctional communications, and destroy relationships. All the time this is happening, we think that we are being guided by the truth.

Beware of Absolutes

Absolute statements, in the majority of cases, are lies we tell ourselves to release us from the responsibility of dealing with issues or problems. We can recognize absolute statements by the absolute words in them, such as: “never,” “always,” “everybody,” “can’t,” “must,” “nobody,” and “forever,” etc. Absolute statements do not allow for exceptions or variables. They are statements that are automatically believed, and we rarely challenge their truthfulness. Some absolute statements may be true, such as, “I’ll never be a rocket scientist,” or “I can’t see myself as a professional athlete.”

In our conversations with others, we have a tendency to use absolute statements as lies that help release us from our responsibilities. If we believe such statements about ourselves, we set ourselves up for negative feelings, low self-worth, and self-destructive behavior.

I believe that the negative and distorted statements people tell themselves are from Satan (Acts 5:3; John 8:44; II Corinthians 11:14). The mind accepts these statements

without question and then, like poison in our system, these lies corrupt our belief systems causing us to make bad choices and create painful, emotional consequences. Like a computer “virus,” these lies destroy us spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and mentally. If God is telling us, *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*, doesn’t this principle also apply to our self-talk as well (Ephesians 4:29)?

I’m sure we could all find something about our lives we would like to change. No one’s life circumstances are perfect. But what are we telling ourselves about these circumstances? If we want to have JOY in our lives that God has promised us, we must reject the lies we tell ourselves and replace them with the truth (Philippians 4:4-13). Our circumstances may not change, but our *belief systems* can change and make a difference. Feelings are just feelings and they do not have values attached to them, they are neither *good nor bad, right nor wrong*, just feelings. The thoughts that cause negative feelings, and ultimately bad behavior, must be changed. Once thoughts are changed, the feelings will follow.

Recognizing, Removing, and Replacing

There are certain steps a person can take when dealing with a serious problem that seems to be caused by what that person believes about himself/herself. There are four steps you can take when your self-talk is causing you trouble in areas such as: emotional discomfort, personal relationships, self-worth issues, and anger issues, etc.

First, you can and must recognize the behavior in your life that is self-destructive or damaging to relationships.

Second, on a daily basis you should write down in a journal the disruptive feelings you are experiencing, and the events that caused them. Because feelings are symptoms of what we are

thinking, they should be analyzed before we deal with our thoughts, which are the disease. From this journal you should be able to see a pattern of feelings during certain circumstances, and reflect on the possible belief systems that you might have that are lies, and are affecting your feelings and behavior.

Third, you should chart those belief systems by writing down the possible lies on one side of a sheet of paper, and the possible truth statements on the other side. Once you are able to recognize the possible lies you are telling yourself, you must remove them from your subconscious mind by repeatedly telling yourself the truth statements that are the opposite of those lies.

Fourth, you should set aside about ten minutes each morning to review the statements of lies and truths on your chart and pray about them, asking God to help you remove the lies from your memory and replace them with truth statements. This process does two things: (1) It helps to red flag the lies you will probably tell yourself during the day when something happens that prompts the brain to recall them automatically, and (2) it also allows God to be involved in the process of answering prayer and giving you the wisdom and peace only God can give (Philippians 4:6, 7; James 1:5-8). You need to practice telling yourself truth statements in place of lies for as long as it takes for it to become as natural as breathing.

This is the same process that a person goes through when he/she is converted to the Lord. The apostle Paul said, “you were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Before we were converted to Christ, we believed lies such as: “I don’t need Christ right now,” or “God doesn’t really exist,” or “I must be perfect to become a Christian,” etc. When

we finally decided we needed Christ in our lives, we began to recognize the lies we were telling ourselves, and began removing them, and replacing them with the truth. The step of replacing lies with the truth may take some time and, we must be willing to be patient, allowing the process to be completed. When Paul told those who were liars to tell the truth, he didn't simply tell them to stop lying. He told them they needed to become "tellers of truth." He told those who were thieves that, not only should they stop stealing, but that they must find gainful employment and give to those in need (Ephesians 4:25-28). The principle in this passage is that we must practice the things we believe in order for them to become a habit.

It is self-evident as to how important our self-talk is in our relationships. When it comes to husband/wife relationships, parent/child relationships, or relationships between siblings, we must confront our self-talk. We must realize that we may be operating on belief systems that we believe to be true, but are lies that have been programmed in our subconscious mind, and are creating problems in our relationships. Such willingness to confront our thoughts and feelings, and analyze their truthfulness, requires that we be responsible in our relationships. It requires of us that we care about knowing the truth and that we seek the truth because, we know that it will set us free (John 8:32).

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define the *power of self-talk*?
2. What is meant by the term, *absolute statements*?
3. Why is objectivity so important?
4. What is the *four-step process* of dealing with the lies we tell ourselves?
5. How does self-talk impact our relationships?
6. What is the programming process that creates our *belief systems*?
7. What three things do lies destroy?
8. How do we find truth?

chapter thirteen

The Home of the Soul

Christian homes are built on faith and prayer. They are also built on the belief that the Bible is the word of God and that a family that prays together stays together in the Lord. Members of a Christian home know where the power for living comes from and though they face trials and tribulations as others do, they trust in the Lord to get them through life.

An unknown author puts it into perspective with this heartfelt prayer:

Lord Sometimes. . .

You allow Breakages, so You can Rebuild;
You allow Wounds, so You can Heal;
You allow me to Walk in Darkness,
 so that I see Your Light;
You allow me to be Perplexed, so I seek Your Truth;
You allow me to be Empty, so You can Fill Me;
You allow me to be Lonely,
 so I can see what a Friend You are;
You allow me to Learn hard Things,
 so I can be a gentle Teacher;
You allow me to be void of Feelings,
 so I learn to walk by Faith;
You take away my future Plans,
 to Teach me to Live one Day at a Time;
You allow me to suffer Pain

so I may be Sympathetic to the Hurts of Others;
You allow me to see the Futility of Life,
so I will see Everything is Loss,
Compared to the Excellency of Knowing Your Son, Jesus.

Most homes can be improved, and even those that are considered Christian homes can grow and develop and become better. The home is the most conducive place for improvement. The environment of a good home – especially the Christian home – is that of rest, peace, love, patience, understanding, attachment and joy.

It is possible that the only heaven some people will ever experience is their own home. The expression “heaven on earth” has been used in reference to the home. This does not mean that it is in any way comparable to heaven itself, but the Christian home has the capability of being the finest experience man has ever had on this earth.

This relationship in the mind of man between heaven and home is not accidental. It is not something that man originated or invented. This is another example of God’s planning and His way of introducing a common vocabulary to help His creatures to really be able to appreciate heaven and its meaning.

The original Garden of Eden is a type of heaven (Revelation 2:7; Genesis chapters 2 & 3). The original garden was a place of sinlessness and holiness. Heaven will be a place where no sin is known and where absolute holiness will forever characterize its inhabitants. It is a place of beauty and splendor, one of communion and fellowship with God. Eden was a real paradise of God. Heaven is the paradise of God and there life will be lived to its fullest and best.

Heaven is described as a place. Jesus said that he was going there to prepare a place for those faithful disciples who loved him (John 14:1-6). It’s a real place just as much as Seattle, New York, Tokyo or any other place in the world.

Heaven is as real as earth. It is situated in a certain location, as is earth (II Peter 3:13).

Not only is heaven a real place, it will also be the eternal home of those who are faithful to Christ. They will have real bodies that cannot decay or feel pain or grow old (I Corinthians 15:35-57). They will have the same kind of body as Christ's body (I John 3:2). The fact that they will have bodies means that they will have a distinctive and recognizable form (Philippians 3:20, 21). They will not simply be spirits floating around the clouds. The Lord said that a spirit has not flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Spirits are not of the same nature as a recognizable body, which has a distinctive form.

The comparisons between the home and heaven are readily seen in the sense of the relationship between God and man. It can also be seen in the family relationships that will occur in heaven. The Bible tells us that heaven is a place where there will be no tears, and no pain. It is described in a way that reveals a comforting Christian home. A place where there is security and support, and a place where there is unbelievable love and acceptance. It is a place where our relationship with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and other saved souls will be a joyous experience (Revelation 21:1-4).

A Christian Home Prepares For Heaven

The Christian home is ultimately the place to prepare people for the heavenly home. Certainly the ultimate purpose of an earthly home for a Christian couple is to prepare the family for a heavenly home. Even though our home is a social unit; even though it is a part of our everyday life, it is God's intention that its fundamental purpose be to teach, to train and to prepare for better living here, and ultimately the home beyond (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). This training is done in many ways. The very exposure and introduction to heavenly and spiritual characteristics help us all to better understand, and

greatly anticipate, the heavenly home. The home on earth, however, is a formal and specific training ground for the teaching of the truth.

Fathers and mothers need to be especially engaged in the training of their children, using heaven the eternal home, as a specific motive and model. Is it asking too much of a husband and a wife, a father and a mother, to furnish all the spiritual guidance for the household? Think of the strength and guidance that can come to a home when both parents are Christians. However, this is not always so. How could a companion go about converting the other to Christ (I Corinthians 7:16; I Peter 3:1-6)?

Here are some suggestions:

1. Never compromise your convictions – this never works.
2. Be patient and longsuffering.
3. Do not move faster than your spouse wants to go.
4. Be firm, uncompromising, but kind and loving.
5. Never provoke your spouse by a nagging spirit.
6. Respect others for their convictions even though you may disagree with them.
7. Never try to *drive* or *force* your religion on another.
8. Show a genuine interest in other matters pertaining to his/her welfare, in addition to his/her soul.
9. Remember that you married with the knowledge that your companion was not a Christian.
10. Remember to always be joyful, thankful, and in prayer for your non-Christian partner (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

It is preferable of course for both husband and wife to be Christians and follow the admonition of the Bible when it says,

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up

meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

The services of the church are designed to *build up*, to *edify*, and to *strengthen* the Christian – this in turn will strengthen the family, if all will attend. We cannot expect our children to be devoted to Christ and worship of God if we as parents do not set the proper example. Consider the damage done to children when one parent goes one way religiously and the other goes another way or no way at all. Doing things as a family adds strength to a family, and worshiping together is one way of doing this.

Reading good Christian books and magazines is a good way to influence the family for the cause of Christ. An individual is known by what he reads, or by what he subscribes to. Every home needs a good Bible, Bible dictionary, a concordance, and some good commentaries on the Bible. Children need books adaptable to their age level. Each child needs his or her own Bible to call his very own. Even small children love to have a small testament to carry to Bible class and worship services. Christian parents need to set the example. If Bible class and worship services are not important to parents, they will not be important to their children.

As Christian parents, you also need to set the example in the movies and television shows you watch and the music you listen to. You need to set the example in regards to the kind of recreation you involve the family in.

Dressing Modestly

In the very beginning of creation, man and woman were naked and they were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). But after they had sinned, they were aware of their nakedness and

were ashamed, and made coverings for their bodies with fig leaves. Yet, God did not think the fig leaves covered enough or were not dependable and He provided clothes for them (Genesis 3:7, 21). God has since required modesty in dress for both men and women. God also requires that women not dress like men and men not dress like women, because He wants to emphasize a distinction between the sexes (Deuteronomy 22:5). In the Bible, moral issues fall into three categories:

1. Things that are *right*, because God commands them.
2. Things that are *wrong*, because God forbids them.
3. Things that may be right or wrong according to circumstances, conscience, influence, or moderation (Romans 14:21-23).

The matter of apparel and nakedness in relation to our spiritual well-being and relationship with God comes under this third category. When it comes to sins of the heart, the Bible clearly states it is wrong for a man to look at a woman or vice versa, and have sexually stimulating thoughts about the other (Matthew 5:27, 28; 15:19, 20). We are responsible, if the way we dress causes others to sin (Luke 17:1, 2; Philippians 4:8, 9; Proverbs 11:22).

The following points reflect this:

1. The person provoking evil thoughts is guilty of sin (Genesis 9:20-27).
2. It is wrong to cause another to stumble (Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8:13).
3. The emphasis of the Christian life should be the opposite of one provoking others to sin (Exodus 20:26; 28:42, 43; Romans 13:14).
4. Ask yourself why you dress the way you do.

The Christian home should be a place where these Bible principles are taught and modeled by the parents. Some people ask, “What does it mean to dress modestly?” Modesty is the Christian principle that should guide all clothing worn by Christian men and women (I Peter 3:1-6). Clothing is a symbol of character. Our clothing reveals our attitudes just as an artist’s painting reveals his mind. One who dresses carelessly is usually sloppy in other areas. The person who dresses in such a way as to emphasize sexual attraction is reflecting lustful intent and is rejecting what God says is the essence of true beauty (James 1:13-15; I Peter 3:3, 4). Webster’s definition of modesty is, “Observing conventional standards of proper dress and behavior; free from coarseness or indecency, and chaste in thought and conduct.” The apostle Paul concurs with this definition (I Timothy 2:8-12). We do not, today, have to be covered from head to toe, but we must have a regard for what is proper and good. Short skirts, bathing suits, tight clothing (on men or women), low necklines, or any apparel, which will in general arouse erotic impulses, is not modest.

God planned sex to be used to attract a husband and wife to one another and to hold them together through the years. God knew there was a need to limit public sexual display in order to stimulate the appetite for sex in marriage (I Corinthians 7:1-7). We can dress to encourage sexual interest or we can discourage it. If we truly walk by the Spirit, we will have no problem distinguishing the difference between modest and immodest dress (Galatians 5:16-18).

Women can and do tempt men by the way they dress. Some people have a greater than average urge to make the opposite sex look at them, by means of clothes or the lack of them. Some of these people are fully aware of this. Others of them don’t admit it at all, even to themselves. It is generally believed by social scientists that men are more sexually aroused by sight and women are aroused by touch.

Because there is such an emphasis on how a person looks in our society, there is a rash of eating disorders and other kinds of pathologies that our young women (some young men as well) are engaged in. It is imperative that parents stress the beauty of the inner person and developing a relationship with God as opposed to emphasizing the materialistic and lustful aspects of their lives. Parents in Christian homes need to emphasize a spiritual walk with God rather than material and social success in the world (Romans 12:2).

Dancing

The Bible records a number of instances in the Old Testament, in which dancing by men and women had been viewed as simply an expression of religious enthusiasm or rejoicing over some great victory. Following the deliverance of the children of Israel from the hand of the Egyptian oppressor, “. . . *Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing*” (Exodus 15:20). Jephthah, returning from his victory over the Ammonites, beheld his daughter coming out to meet him “*dancing to the sound of tambourines!*” (Judges 11:34). The Bible also says, when David brought the Ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David, and that he “. . . *danced before the Lord with all his might. . .*” (II Samuel 6:14).

Dancing can also be a vehicle to express what is suggestive and lewd. When Moses came down from the mount after receiving the Law from God, he broke the tablets of stone. He said to Aaron, “*What did these people do to you, that you led them into such a great sin*” (Exodus 32 19-26)? Many scholars believe that the Israelites were dancing in a lewd and lustful way to the Egyptian gods, and that was upsetting to Moses.

This dance then, was one of unrestrained abandon, possibly characterized by the obscenity so often associated with heathen

practices. Something of this same lewdness and suggestive behavior must have been evident in the dancing of the daughter of Herodias. Appearing before a group of men, she so played upon the emotions of Herod that he promised her anything she might ask. She acted upon her murderous mother's suggestion and asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Matthew 14:6-12; Mark 6:24).

The Sin of Lasciviousness (Sensuality)

It is evident that even though the word *dance*, in the sense in which we use it today, does not appear in the New Testament, the idea which it represents is mentioned and condemned (I Thessalonians 5:21, 22). Children of God must not engage in any form of dance or entertainment that arouses sexual desire from or towards another person other than their wife or husband (Matthew 5:27, 28).

Vine says that in the Greek language the word for *lasciviousness*, means, "excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness; the prominent idea is shameless conduct." We can see then that dance supervision in schools can never be successful because the evil can be inherent in the situation provided by the dance.³⁹

The purity of the Christian life, and therefore the Christian home, is dependent on the example and moral principles of the parents. They set the moral tone for the family in regards to what their children will understand is *righteous* behavior. The Christian's first concern, with regard to the dance, ought to be to evaluate his/her attitude towards decency. Paul says that we should be, "*innocent about what is evil*" (Romans 16:19).

The average person of the world will freely admit the basic appeal of the dance. But what does he or she think when they

³⁹ W. E. Vine, 650.

see a Christian engaging in the same practice but professing no harm in it (I Corinthians 8:9).

During my thirty some odd years (as of this writing) of ministry I continue to see parents who allow or even encourage the dance or immodest apparel for their children, and then wonder why their children get caught up in promiscuous behavior or leave the church (Galatians 5:19-21; NASB).

Christianity is Not License

Christianity has never been license to do evil (Galatians 5:13). If one who professes to be a Christian does evil, that evil does not become righteousness simply because he does it (Romans 6:1-4). Nothing can be more incongruous than to see a Christian doing what even the world knows Christians ought never to do (I Corinthians 5). It is tragic that sometimes the world has a higher conception of Christianity than Christians. It is foolish and ungodly for a Christian to engage in something that even the world already knows is lustful and could cause others to sin (I Thessalonians 4:3-8).

If you are not troubled with unlawful thoughts, and lustful desires while dancing, can you not see how you are influencing others (Matthew 5:13-16)? Do you honestly believe that you can effectively represent Christianity to the world by supporting and encouraging what good people through the years have condemned as something that encourages evil (I Peter 2:11, 12)? Can you impress lost people with their need for salvation while conducting yourself like one of them?

Entertainment

Other considerations for the Christian today are movies and television. Actually there is very little difference in the rating systems for movies and TV programs today. If ungodly language, illicit sexual content, or severe violence are seen and

heard in the movies or television programs, it is an evil influence regardless of the rating.

Compared with twenty or even ten years ago, would we have believed that some of the present material on TV or in the movies would have been acceptable for public consumption? It is a sign of a nation that is degenerating morally (Romans 1:18-32). We are gradually becoming accustomed to the darkness, and we need to realize it, and determine to rid our homes and families of such influences (Ephesians 5:10, 11). Such explicit material is a threat to our senses. When we watch movies or TV that exploit sex or violence and use foul language, we have a tendency to accept it as normal behavior, excuse it and lose our sensitivity to what is *right* and what is *wrong* (Hebrews 5:11-14).

The sheer volume of sex and violence, to which our society is being exposed by means of television and the movies, results in people losing their sense of *shame* (Jeremiah 8:12)! Christian families must walk by faith and lean on the Lord and trust in His word, not fleshly desires (II Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17).

Pornography

Pornography is everywhere in our cities, in the bookstands, the video shops and even on the Internet. I am always amazed in my counseling ministry how many Christian young men struggle with pornography. This is a sin because it gives the impression that moral standards are no longer valid. It would be impossible to estimate the amount of influence that this sensuousness has had on the thinking of our young people with regard to sex and their relationships with one another.

Pornography is a sin because it undermines the thinking and standards of those involved and lowers them to the level of animals. Christians cannot afford to be involved in it in any way. Pornography is degrading to people because it treats

people as objects. It doesn't build integrity in persons made in God's image. It is harmful because it, and the fantasies that accompany it, create a lust for illicit sex. It is harmful because it is linked to violence in many forms. Pornography has a correlation to rape, wife abuse, murder, and other felonies. Many sex abusers have testified to the fact that they fed their lust on pornography (e.g., Ted Bundy).

Lust is a sin against man and God. Pornography harm the family by destroying relationships. Like other sins, pornography is addictive and progressive. Pornography is a self-destructive sin. The word pornography comes from the Greek words *porneia* meaning, "fornication; illicit sexual behavior" and *graphei* meaning, "writing" (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Thus, pornography applies to illicit sexual behavior portrayed in the media – magazines, books, music, films, videos, sexual paraphernalia, and the Internet.

The apostle Paul condemns the activity of the Gentiles who had rejected God, by describing their activity as "*Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality (porneia), wickedness, covetousness and maliciousness*" (Romans 1:29; NKJV). Therefore, biblically speaking, pornography can be defined as "media presentations, which implicitly or explicitly present language or actions that are intended to, or tends to produce a sexual arousal in a person, which then creates illicit sexual thoughts and behavior." Some forms of dancing could be included in this category.

In our society, the judgment of what constitutes pornography depends wholly on the culture's majority opinion. Majority rule does not determine *right* from *wrong* in God's world (Matthew 7:13, 14). All decisions based on personal taste are destined to cause confusion, contradiction, and legal gymnastics when it comes to defining involvement in pornography or any other deviant behavior. The nature of God and the will of God emanating from His nature are the only

criteria for absolute moral judgments. If one rejects God, there is no absolute standard by which to judge deviant behavior (Isaiah 55:7-9). It all becomes a matter of personal taste, regardless of how repulsive one finds some actions to be.

Drugs and Alcohol

Alcohol is a habit-forming drug, and should be listed with narcotics. Prolonged drinking actually whittles away at the brain (Proverbs 23:29-33). Smoking is also addictive. The average smoker either does not know or does not care that smoking is hazardous to your health. The estimated number of teens engaged in drugs, alcohol and smoking in our culture is staggering.

The Bible tells us that we should not put ourselves under the influence of anything that can become a bad habit. We must reject anything that affects our ability to function, controls our behavior or destroys our health (I Corinthians 6:12, 19, 20). Anyone familiar with the teaching of the Bible knows that drunkenness is sinful (Galatians 5:19-21).

Israelite priests were not to take strong drink or wine (Leviticus 10:8, 9). Rulers of Israel were warned against strong drink, because it distorted their ability to think and judge clearly (Proverbs 31:4, 5). Excessive drinking weakens the moral sensitivities of men and women and often leads to sexual promiscuity (Esther 1:10, 11; Habakkuk 2:15). Alcohol does not make people able to do things better, but it does make them less ashamed of doing them badly (Isaiah 5:11; NASB).

When it comes to drinking socially, it is assumed by some that because Jesus drank wine that one's use of it cannot be wrong as long as it does not become intoxicating (Matthew 11:19; John 2:1-11). Even if we think social drinking is acceptable, we must be a good example and not cause someone to fall (Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8:9). Today's wine, with its strong alcoholic content, falls into the category of *strong*

drink, which is always forbidden in Scripture (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-33; Isaiah 5:11). The evidence of the destructive nature of alcohol and drugs is beyond question. The only question for parents today is, “are you going to allow drinking or drugs in the home?” The studies on substance abuse reveal that if parents engage in alcohol or drugs the chance of their children becoming addicted is very high.

The Christian Home is a Refuge

The Christian home is a refuge against the abuses and evils of the world. It is to be the home of the soul of man. God designed the home to be a bastion of righteousness and civility. He intended for parents to train up their children in the ways of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). If Christian parents today believe that they have no responsibility for their children’s future moral character, if they believe that the home has no responsibility for their child’s destiny, they are sadly mistaken. The Christian home truly is the home of the soul, because it has more of an influence on the destiny of the human soul than any other institution in existence. May God bless Christian homes and increase their tribe.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can a home be like heaven? If so, how?
2. How does a Christian home prepare one for heaven?
3. Why is dressing modestly so important to a person’s character?
4. How would you define the sin of lasciviousness?
5. Why is pornography so dangerous?
6. Does the Bible condemn *social drinking*? Explain its dangers.
7. What verses, in the Bible, would you use to argue against smoking?
8. How is the Christian home a refuge?

chapter fourteen

The Abundant Life

In his book, *Seize The Day* Danny Cox tells an interesting story about a time he and his wife took a hot air balloon trip early one morning in Africa. As the balloon rose gracefully, they saw a herd of wildebeest running frantically across the vast expanse below. The herd stopped suddenly and began looking around as if they were confused. Danny asked their pilot why the herd had stopped and what they were looking for.

He told them that the wildebeest, which migrate by the millions across the grassy African plains, are not good learners. An entire herd will take flight at the slightest indication of danger. They will run wildly for a short time and then stop, forgetting why they began running in the first place.

Meanwhile, lions, which are good learners, simply follow the stampeding wildebeest herd at a leisurely pace and wait for them to stop. When the wildebeest forget why they are running, it's dinnertime for the lions. Their guide said that wildebeest are so memory-challenged that they will even walk up to a sleeping lion and sniff at it. The lion wakes up and has breakfast in bed.

The poor stupid wildebeest—they keep running around and forgetting why they are running in the first place. I think that many of us are like the wildebeest. We scurry around our world and forget what is really important. Then we are tempted

to let sin and destruction eat us alive. Jesus promises us that if we follow Him we will live life to the fullest, have a purpose for living and be on guard to withstand and reject the destructive influences that face us.

Jesus proclaimed that He was the Good Shepherd and stated, *"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly"* (John 10:10; NASB). The Christian home was designed by God to help us live life to the fullest and enjoy the abundant blessings of God. When we live a fast-paced life, always seeking material things and physical pleasure, we miss the true meaning of life.

Happiness

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reveals his effort to evaluate life in the real world. Having great wealth, power, and wisdom, Solomon set out to test life. He used a keen mind (given him by God) in a search for the best that life has to offer. He tried to discover how to maximize happiness and minimize sorrow. He sought to experience the sensual pleasures of life to the fullest. He sought to understand the world and wanted to unravel its mysteries and discover the meaning of all its workings, both good and evil.

Although Solomon was deeply disappointed by what he discovered about life, he concluded that life is better than death. And, indeed, in spite of all our suffering, virtually everyone chooses life over death. Yet, he also discovered that the abundant life is only found in the Creator. It is only experienced in a relationship with God and in a family with the support system to sustain all who enter it.

Solomon said,

Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:4-).

It is good, Solomon said, to partake of life and its activities, remembering that true survival comes from obedience to the Lord. But he also advised accepting one's lot in life and avoiding excessive ambition, for the gains of this life are vanity. Moreover, Solomon found that God knows precisely what He is doing with the world. He has His own lofty reasons for whatever happens, and He has limited our power to comprehend.

Today, we need to heed the advice of the inspired Solomon. In our families we need to emphasize the fact that life is short and to be lived to the fullest. When we say life to the fullest, we don't mean, "to just eat, drink, and be merry." We mean that every family that seeks to be a Christian home must put their priorities in order. Happiness comes, not from the possession of things, or the lusts of the flesh, but the possession of the Spirit of God in our lives (Ephesians 5:17-20).

Solomon also said,

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold. She is

more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy (Proverbs 3:13-8; KJV).

Solomon is not emphasizing the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom of the Lord as Solomon views the world. The apostle Paul said, *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world”* (I Corinthians 1:20)?

All is Vanity!

Solomon’s failure to find bliss was not a personal one. He failed because of the very nature of life. Solomon discovered the nature of the world. It is a divided world at war with itself. It is a world where order and disorder are in continuous conflict, and there is no sure defense against its evils but through the Lord. Paul said,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-2).

Solomon said,

*Again I saw vanity under the sun: a person who has no one, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, **For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?** This also is vanity, and an unhappy business (Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8; RSV).*

The divine wisdom of both Solomon and Paul tell us that the pursuit of happiness is vanity, futile when it is focused on this world. The Christian home is the place where the wisdom of God shines and is recognized as above all the wisdom the world has to offer. Only then will true happiness become a reality and the Christian home a place of solitude and happiness.

The apostle Paul said,

. . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

The Truth about Anger

What is anger? Many people try to ignore anger or try to make it a sinful emotion that God has condemned. Some people feel that we should never get angry and that if we can rid our life of anger, we will be happy. The problem of anger in our lives cannot be dealt with so simply. Like taxes, anger doesn't just go away, even if we decide it ought

to. The truth is that anger is not always bad. God is angry at times (Psalm 7:11; Exodus 4:14; Deuteronomy 29:27). Jesus experienced anger when he saw the hard hearts of the Pharisees and later when He cleansed the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 3:5; John 2:17).

The apostle Paul got angry many times and one time he got angry with the church at Corinth for not getting angry with the man who was living with his father's wife (I Corinthians 5; II Corinthians 7:8-11). There were other times when the apostle got angry with individuals or churches but he always had their best interests at heart (Galatians 2:11-4; Acts 16:18; 17:16). We do not see Paul getting angry in a vengeful way or with jealousy in his heart. Paul points out the fact that we need to engage in righteous anger and act accordingly when faced with sin in the church and the world.

The simple emotion of anger is not always harmful or unloving. It is what we do when we are angry that has moral significance. Next to love, anger is the most common emotion experienced in life. Many psychologists believe that anger is the primary emotion experienced by a person in depression.

It is easy in our culture to tell ourselves that we can't control angry feelings. There is a difference between *expressing* anger and *venting* anger. There is a difference in being *assertive* and being *violent* when expressing anger. Venting is basically a concept, held by some psychiatrists and psychologists, which asserts that our emotions are like a steam boiler, which must release pressure by releasing steam to avoid an explosion. I have never seen any research or experimental evidence to confirm this theory. In fact, this theory flies in the face of Scripture. The Bible tells us that we can release our emotions in an acceptable way.

In the book of James, we find a Scripture that encourages us to "*be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become*

angry, for mans anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19, 20). In my experience, people who have been counseled to use objects or the therapist himself as a target for their venting, have been void of the desire to control their emotions. This process does not encourage self-control. In fact, I believe it does just the opposite. It encourages a lack of self-control.

Whether it is an adult venting or a child throwing a temper tantrum, all venting should be discouraged. I believe that acceptance of venting in our society has caused us to experience a culture where *road rage* is common. Expressing our feelings with control and a caring attitude should be taught as proper behavior.

Anger is defined in most textbooks as, “*an emotional response of the mind and body to a stimulus.*” Paul wrote, “*In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold*” (Ephesians 4:26, 27). He is telling us, by inspiration from God, to deal with the issue of anger before the day is over. How we deal with our anger is at the heart of the issue of self-control.

Paul makes it plain that we can control our anger, and we had better control it or it will cause us to sin. Anger is an emotional response to a stimulus and when the stimulus is withdrawn the anger responses will cease. That is, if we don’t tell ourselves how unfair and unjust life is.

Dealing with Anger

Anger is an emotion of displeasure and a defense mechanism against a perceived threat. There is no sin in becoming angry, but when anger continues for more than a day without being dealt with, it begins to develop into sinful anger (Ephesians 4:26, 27). Anger can be painfully violent. Wise

men will seek ways to turn it into positive expressions. *Righteous anger* then is, “anger that is under control and for the right reason.

Solomon said that the best defense against anger, once aroused, is to calm it down, perhaps with a gentle word, or perhaps by confronting the person who aroused the anger with positive communication. Solomon said, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*” (Proverbs 15:1).

Many times in our daily lives we experience irritations and frustrations. The wise keep control of their emotions, but there are those who indulge themselves in ventilating their anger. Anger, when unchecked, can destroy relationships in the family. Christian parents must learn how to express their feelings without blaming others for them. They must learn how to work through problems without screaming and hollering. They must learn to validate each other’s feelings and to express their anger in controlled ways that reveal a righteous spirit. These are qualities that characterize a Christian home.

Solomon says: “*A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again*” (Proverbs 19:19); “*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared*” (Proverbs 22:24, 25); “*An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins*” (Proverbs 29:22). And finally, “*Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools*” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

It is evident in Solomon’s wisdom that those persons we allow to become our friends can and probably will influence us greatly. Paul says, “*Do not be misled: **Bad company corrupts good character***” (I Corinthians 15:33). Christian parents need to be warned, “watch out who your kids are acquainted with.” If

your child is close to another child, who is prone to anger, promiscuity, delinquency, or violence, beware of the admonition of the apostle Paul. Unbridled anger does not produce in us the qualities of an abundant life. The right use of anger takes great self-control. If you as a parent have not controlled your anger in front of your children, you can be sure that they will have a hard time learning how to control their anger when they are adults. Unrighteous anger will destroy relationships and a healthy, spiritual relationship with God. When we as Christian parents model an effective way to express angry emotions and validate other people's feelings, we will go a long way towards helping our children to learn the same.

Christians Must be Accountable

Of course, Christians are not above making bad decisions in personal relationships outside and inside the family. They can make bad decisions, due to faulty interpretations based on the lies they may be telling themselves, and when they do, they must be accountable.

One of the weaknesses of Christians, in some cases, is the reluctance to acknowledge their own mistakes or sins and accept accountability. The tendency is for mom and dad to support one another and not call each other to be accountable. What develops, then, is what I call the *bunker mentality*. This is where the parents *circle the wagons*. They begin to perceive threats to their authority, and they then see others as the enemy, resorting to a controlling style of behavior that threatens and polarizes the members of the family. There must be a check and balance system in place that requires parents and children to willingly confess their faults to one another (James 5:16). I am not talking about a calculated witch hunt, but a transparency among the family members that allows them to model

accountability to each other. The work of parents is not so much focusing on who may be at fault in a divisive matter, but what they can do to help all the members of the family.

The Fear of the Lord

As I close this book, I can't help but ponder on the *fear of the Lord*. It is not a negative concept, for the Bible says that there is great wisdom in the fear of the Lord. Solomon said,

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

The Lord's discipline, when we submit to it, produces spiritual growth in righteousness (Hebrews 12:7-11). Effective punishment produces discomfort. If wrong actions result in discomfort, wrong actions will be feared. The Lord is the ultimate avenger of all wrongdoing. Fear of the Lord, then, means to abhor wrongdoing and its consequences. Such fear is developed when we recognize the harm it produces. It encourages internalized control – self-discipline. This orientation of mind enables wisdom to begin. By developing a healthy respect for the consequences of doing wrong, we are able to bottle up and restrain behavior. It captures and contains the raw energy of a free life.

Discipline and a healthy fear of the Lord create in us self-control by purifying and cleansing us of our natural wildness and they help us develop humility and openness to the will of God (James 1:21).

We realize that *perfect love* will overcome fear, but until we reach the maturity of the Father, we need the fear of the

Lord, not to be terrorized, but to respect and honor Him and His word and to remind and motivate us to be faithful to Him (Matthew 5:48; I John 4:18).

The apostle Peter tells us how to gain the abundant life here on earth and the eternal life in heaven when he says,

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (II Peter 1:3, 4).

The apostle Peter goes on to say that if we add to our 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; and to brotherly kindness, love; we will possess the qualities that assure us of eternal life in heaven (II Peter 1:5-11).

The Christian Home Helps Provide for the Abundant Life

There is no greater institution (other than the church) created by God and enjoyed by man than the Christian home. It is here that we first learn of pain, it is here that we first learn of a comforting word, it is here that we first learn of walking, talking and the joy of fellowship with our family. It is here that we first learn the purpose in life. It is here, if the home is committed to the Lord, that we first experience the abundant life. It is here, if we see faith in the hearts of its members, that we first see Jesus and ultimately, if faithful, we will be with Him in the heavenly home.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe the *abundant life*?
2. How did Solomon receive his wisdom?
3. Why did Solomon believe that all of life is vanity without obeying God?
4. What was Paul's secret for finding contentment?
5. How would you define *happiness*?
6. Why is the *fear of the Lord* important in our daily lives?
7. What is the truth about *anger*?
8. Why is the Christian home so important in living the *abundant life*?

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About the Author:

Ken Wilson has been a minister and family counselor for over 30 years. He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree in Bible and Ministry from Bethany Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Cornerstone University in Clinical Pastoral Counseling.

He is a Licensed Pastoral Counselor and a Board Certified Clinical Supervisor with the National Christian Counselors Association, a charter member of the American Association of Christian Counselors, and president of Agape Counseling Center. Dr. Wilson is a registered Marriage and Family Counselor in the state of Washington.

He has spoken at workshops and seminars in numerous states and foreign countries and was the pulpit minister for twenty years with the Lakeview Church of Christ in Tacoma, Washington. He is the author of published books: *The Power of Biblical Thinking*, *The Christian Home*, *Faith That Makes A Difference*, *The Fundamentals of Christian Counseling* and *Creating Biblical Leaders*.

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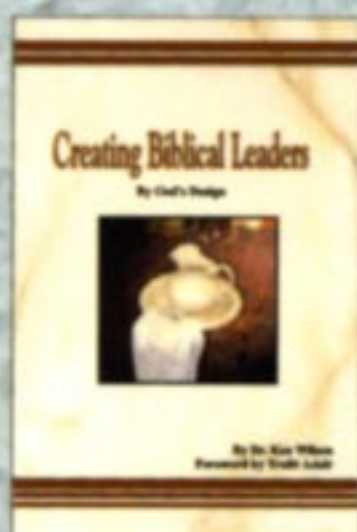
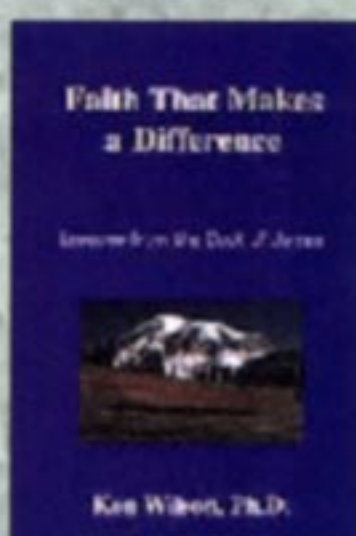
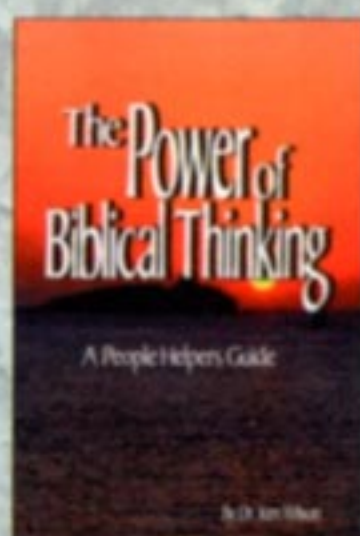


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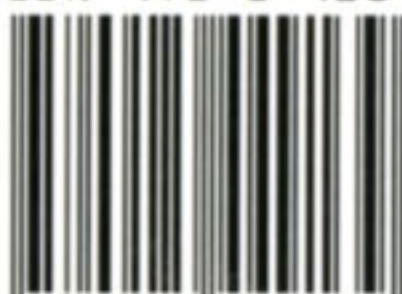
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