

Awake!

OCTOBER 2009



SPECIAL ISSUE

Secrets of
Family
Success

Secrets of Family Success 3-9

We hear so much about what goes wrong in families that fail. But what goes right in those that thrive? The opening series of articles in this special issue of *Awake!* identifies seven secrets of success.

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A House Divided—The Impact of Divorce on Adolescents

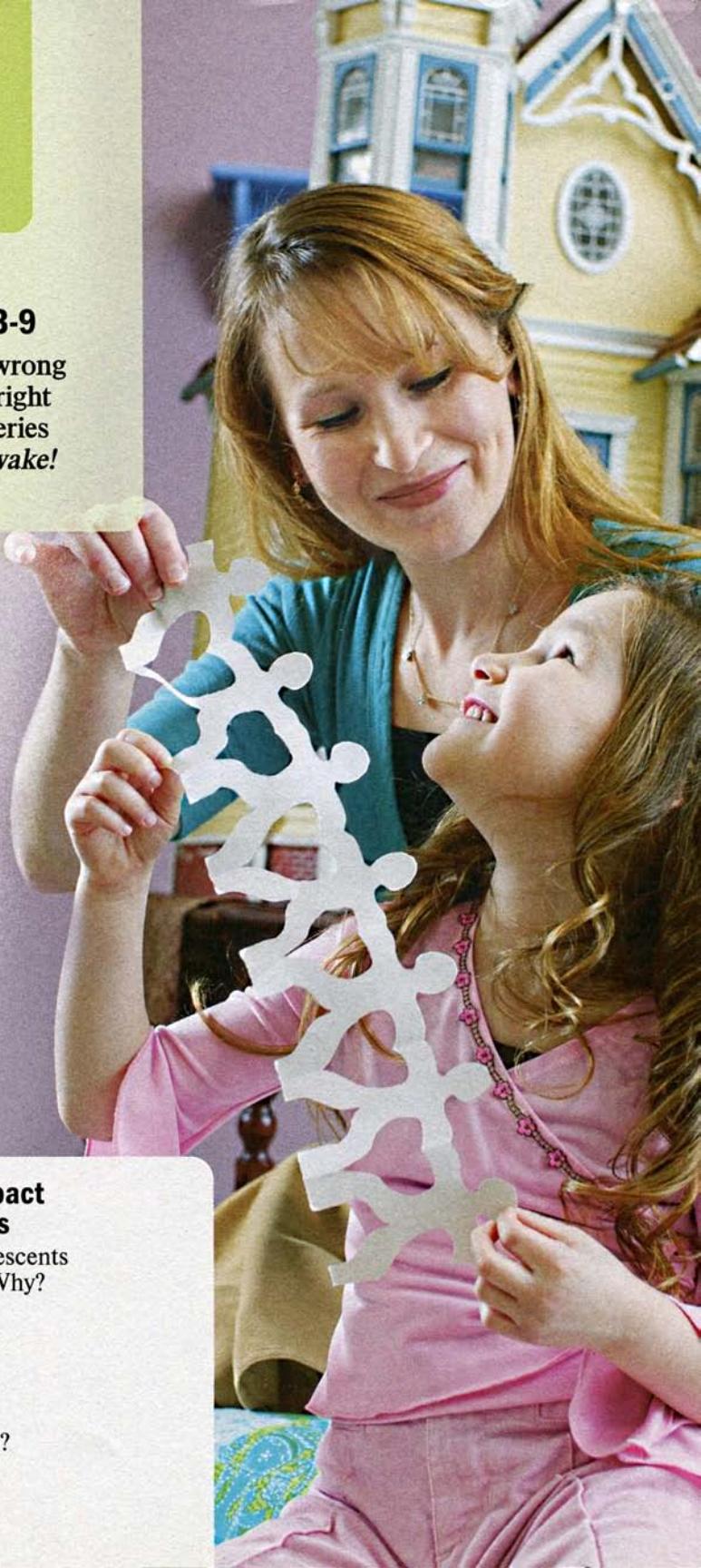
Divorce often devastates adolescents more than younger children. Why?



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You Can Succeed as a Single Parent

Are you raising children alone? Bible principles can help!



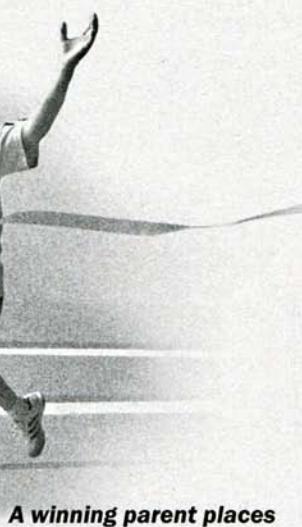
The Right Priorities

"Make sure of the more important things."
—Philippians 1:10.

What this means. In successful marriages, each spouse puts the other's needs ahead of self, possessions, job, friends, and even other relatives. Husband and wife spend plenty of time with each other and with the children. Both are willing to make sacrifices for the interests of the family.

—Philippians 2:4.

Why it matters. The Bible places high importance on the family. In fact, the apostle Paul wrote that a person who does not provide for his family "is worse than a person without faith." (1 Timothy 5:8) Yet, over time, a person's priorities may change. For example, one family counselor noted that many who attended a conference he held seemed more focused on career than on family. He says it was as if they expected to learn "quick-fix techniques" so that they could "check 'family' off their 'to do' list and get back to focusing on their professions." The lesson? It is easier to *say* that we put family first than to *show* it.



A winning parent places high priority on spouse and children

Try this exercise. Rate your sense of priority, using the following questions as a guide.

- When my spouse or child needs to talk, do I give that person my attention as soon as possible?
- When talking to others about my activities, do I often find myself discussing things I do with my family?
- Would I turn down added responsibility (on the job or elsewhere) if my family needed my time?

If you answered yes to the above questions, you might assume that you have the right priorities. But how would your spouse and children rate you? How we see ourselves is not the only yardstick by which our priorities are measured. And that same principle holds true with the other secrets to success that will be discussed on the following pages.

Make a resolve. Think of one or two ways in which you could demonstrate that your family comes first. (For example: Think of cutting back on things that may be intruding on the time that would be better spent with your spouse and children.)

Why not share your resolves with your family? When one member shows willingness to change, the others are more likely to follow.

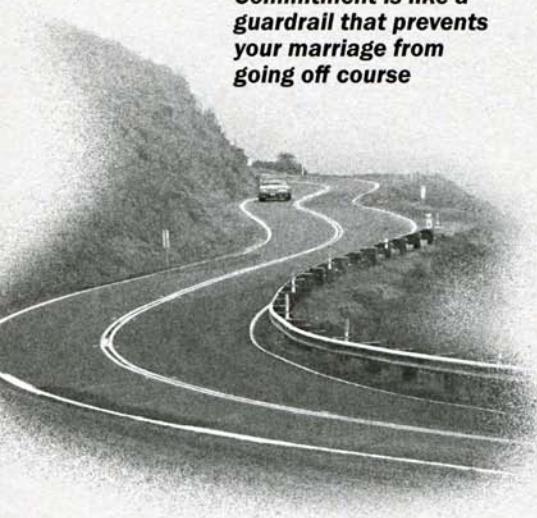
Commitment

"What God has yoked together let no man put apart."—Matthew 19:6.

What this means. Successful couples view their marriage as a permanent union. When a problem arises, they strive to solve it rather than use it as an excuse to abandon the marriage. When spouses have a sense of commitment, they feel secure. Each trusts that the other will continue to honor the union.

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Commitment is like a guardrail that prevents your marriage from going off course



Why It matters. In many ways, commitment is the backbone of a marriage relationship. Yet, after repeated conflicts, commitment can seem more like a trap than a trust. In effect, "till death do us part" becomes little more than a cold contract—one that the mates wish had loopholes. They might not abandon the marriage *literally*, but they could "walk out" in other ways—for example, by retreating into stony silence when serious issues need to be discussed.

Try this exercise. Rate your level of commitment, using the following questions as a guide.

- *When we are in the midst of a dispute, do I find myself regretting that I married my spouse?*
- *Do I often daydream about being with someone other than my spouse?*
- *Do I sometimes tell my spouse, "I'm leaving you" or "I'm going to find someone who appreciates me"?*

Make a resolve. Think of one or two actions you could take to strengthen your commitment. (Some ideas: Write an occasional note to your spouse, keep photos of your spouse on display at work, or phone your spouse each day from work, just to stay in touch.)

Why not come up with several suggestions and then ask your spouse which would be most meaningful to him or her?

Awake!®

THIS JOURNAL IS PUBLISHED for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

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Teamwork

"Two are better than one . . . If one of them should fall, the other one can raise his partner up."—Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10.

What this means. Successful couples respect God's headship arrangement as outlined in the Bible. (Ephesians 5:22-24) Nevertheless, both husband and wife view their marriage in terms of "ours" and "we" rather than "mine" and "me." When there is teamwork, husband and wife are no longer single at heart. They are "one flesh"—a Bible term that describes not only the permanence of the union but also its intimacy.—Genesis 2:24.

Teamwork means that you are pilot and copilot with the same flight plan

Try this exercise. Rate your spirit of teamwork by answering the following questions.

- Do I view the money I earn as "all mine," since I am the one who earned it?
- Do I keep my distance from my spouse's relatives, even though he or she is close to them?
- To relax fully, do I need to be away from my spouse?

Why it matters. If you and your spouse are not a team, minor events may quickly become major issues with each of you attacking the other rather than the problem at hand. In contrast, when you and your spouse are a team, you become like pilot and copilot with the same flight plan rather than two pilots on a collision course. When you disagree, you work out practical solutions instead of wasting time and emotional energy blaming and accusing.



Make a resolve. Think of one or two ways you could show yourself to be more team-oriented with your spouse.

Why not ask your spouse what he or she would suggest?

Languages: Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese^o (audio Mandarin only), Chinese (Simplified), Chitonga, Cibemba, Croatian, Czech,⁺⁺ Danish,⁺ Dutch,⁺⁺ English,⁺⁺ Estonian, Ewe, Fijian, Finnish,⁺⁺ French,⁺⁺ Georgian, German,⁺⁺ Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Igbo, Iloko, Indonesian, Italian,⁺⁺ Japanese,⁺⁺ Kannada, Kirghiz, Korean,⁺⁺ Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Luvale, Macedonian, Malagasy, Malayalam, Maltese, Myanmar, Norwegian,⁺⁺ Polish,⁺⁺ Portuguese,⁺⁺ Punjabi, Rarotongan, Romanian, Russian,⁺⁺ Samoan, Sepedi, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona, Silozi, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish,⁺⁺ Swahili, Swedish,⁺⁺ Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tok Pisin, Tongan, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Xhosa, Yoruba, Zulu

⁺ CD also available.

⁺⁺ MP3 CD-ROM also available.

^o Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

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Respect

What this means. Both troubled *and* successful families have disagreements. But successful families discuss matters without resorting to sarcasm, insults, and other forms of abusive speech. Family members treat one another as they themselves would like to be treated.—Matthew 7:12.



Just as ocean waves can erode solid rock, a pattern of hurtful speech can weaken a family

"Let all . . . screaming and abusive speech be taken away from you."—Ephesians 4:31.

Why it matters. Words can become weapons producing devastating effects. A Bible proverb says: "It is better to be living in a waste land, than with a bitter-tongued and angry woman." (Proverbs 21:19, *The Bible in Basic English*) Of course, the same could be said of a bitter-tongued man. And when it comes to parenting, the Bible states: "Do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted." (Colossians 3:21) Children who are constantly criticized may come to feel that it is impossible to please their parents. They may even give up trying.

Try this exercise. Rate the level of respect in your family by answering the following questions.

- *In my family, do disagreements usually end with one person storming out of the room?*
- *When I speak to my spouse or children, do I resort to using insulting words, such as "stupid," "idiot," or something similar?*
- *Was I raised in an atmosphere in which abusive speech was common?*

Make a resolve. Think of one or two goals you could set with regard to showing respect in your speech. (Idea: Resolve to use "I" statements instead of "you" statements. For example, "I feel hurt when you . . . , rather than "You are always . . .")

Why not let your spouse know of your goal(s)?
In three months, check with your spouse to see how you have progressed.

Think of some limits you can set so that you do not use abusive speech when communicating with your children.

Why not apologize to your children for times when you may have spoken to them harshly or sarcastically?

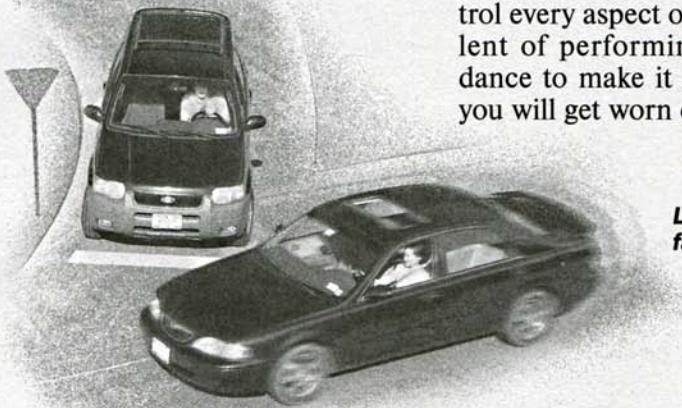
Reasonableness

"Let your reasonable-
ness become known."
—Philippians 4:5.

What this means. In successful families, husbands and wives make allowances for each other's mistakes. (Romans 3:23) They are also neither unduly rigid nor overly permissive with their children. They set a modest number of household rules. When correction is needed, they give it "to the proper degree."—Jeremiah 30:11.

Why it matters. The Bible says that "the wisdom from above is . . . reasonable." (James 3:17) God himself does not demand perfection from imperfect humans, so why should a married couple demand it from each other? Really, nitpicking over minor faults only produces resentment, not improvement. It is best to accept the fact that "we all stumble many times."—James 3:2.

Successful parents display reasonableness when dealing with their children. Their discipline is not excessive, nor are they "hard to please." (1 Peter 2:18) They grant freedoms to adolescents who demonstrate a sense of responsibility. They do not try to micro-manage. One reference work notes that trying to control every aspect of an adolescent's life "is the equivalent of performing a violent and exhausting rain dance to make it rain. There won't be any rain, but you will get worn out."



Like a careful driver, a reasonable family member is prepared to yield

Try this exercise. Rate your level of reasonableness by answering the following questions.

- *When was the last time you praised your spouse?*
- *When was the last time you criticized your spouse?*

Make a resolve. If you struggled to find an answer to the first question in the accompanying exercise but had no problem answering the second, think of a goal you could set with regard to your expectations.

Why not discuss with your spouse what resolves you both might make?

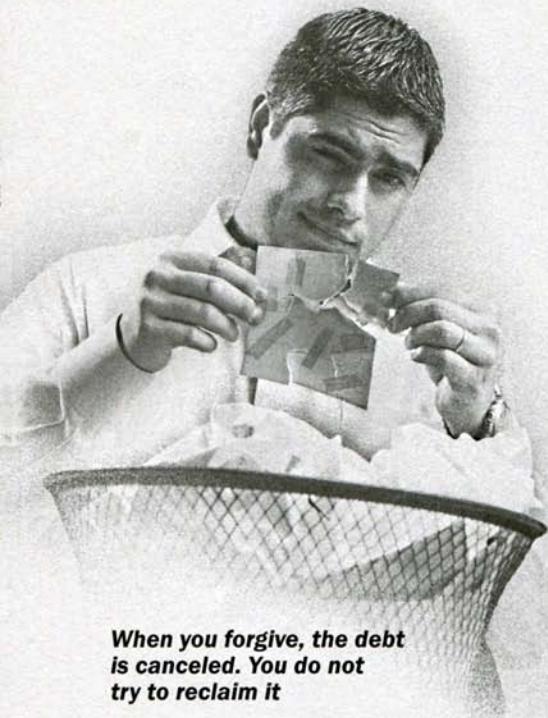
Think of some freedoms you could grant your adolescent as he or she demonstrates a sense of responsibility.

Why not have an open discussion with your adolescent about such issues as curfews?

Forgiveness

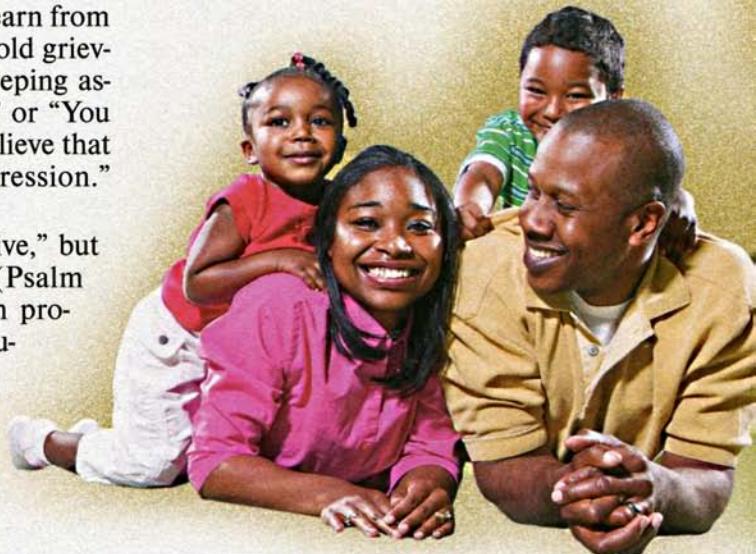
What this means. Successful couples learn from the past; but they do not keep track of old grievances and then use these to make sweeping assertions, such as “You are *always* late” or “You *never* listen.” Both husband and wife believe that “it is beauty . . . to pass over transgression.”—Proverbs 19:11.

Why it matters. God is “ready to forgive,” but that is not always so with humans. (Psalm 86:5) Old wrongs left unresolved can produce layers of resentment that accumulate to the point where forgiveness seems impossible. Each spouse may retreat into an emotional corner—each one remaining callous to the other’s feelings. Both feel trapped in a loveless marriage.



When you forgive, the debt is canceled. You do not try to reclaim it

“Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely.”—Colossians 3:13.



Try this exercise. Look at old photographs of you and your spouse taken earlier in your marriage or during your courtship. Try to rekindle the warmth you felt before problems crept in and clouded your view. Then think of the qualities that first attracted you to your spouse.

■ **What qualities do you most admire about your spouse now?**

■ **Think of some positive effects that your being a more forgiving person might have on your children.**

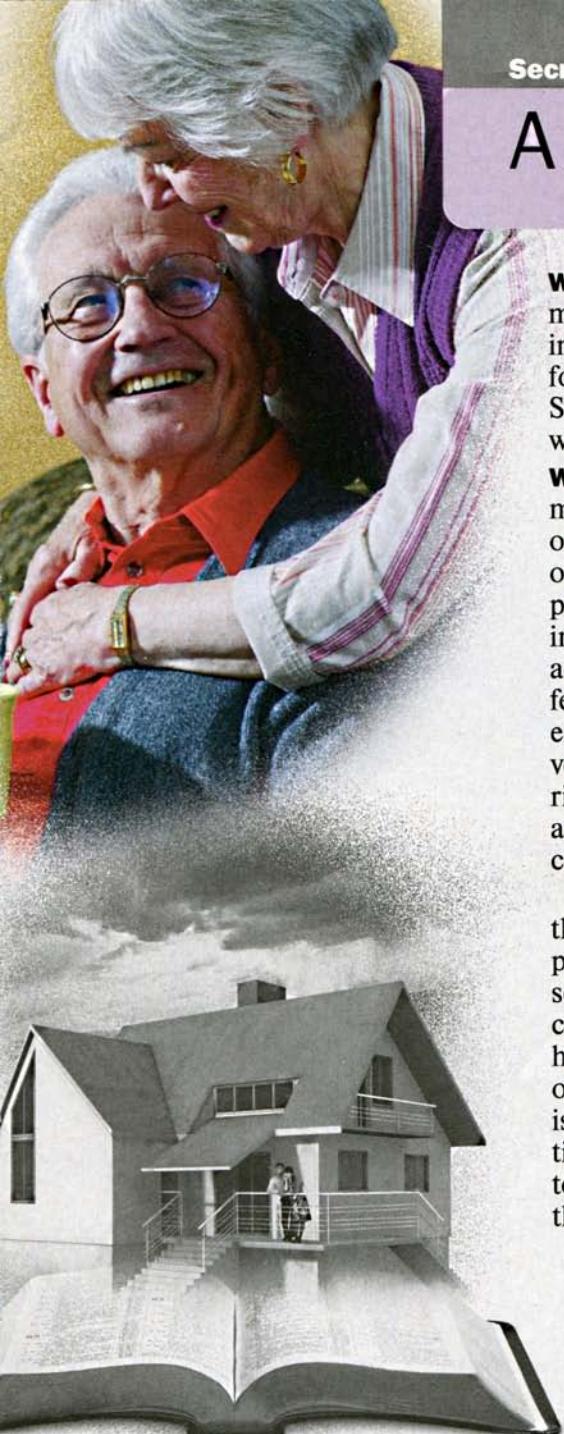
Make a resolve. Think of one or two ways you will determine to keep past grievances out of present disagreements you may have with your spouse.

Why not praise your spouse for the qualities you admire about him or her?—Proverbs 31:28, 29.

Consider some ways you will demonstrate forgiveness with your children.

Why not discuss with your children the subject of forgiveness and how the ability to forgive benefits each member of the family?

A Firm Foundation



With a firm Scriptural foundation, your family can withstand the storms that threaten it

What this means. Strong families do not endure automatically, any more than a house just keeps standing for many decades. A solid structure needs a firm foundation, and the same is true of a strong family. Successful families are built on a source of guidance that works.

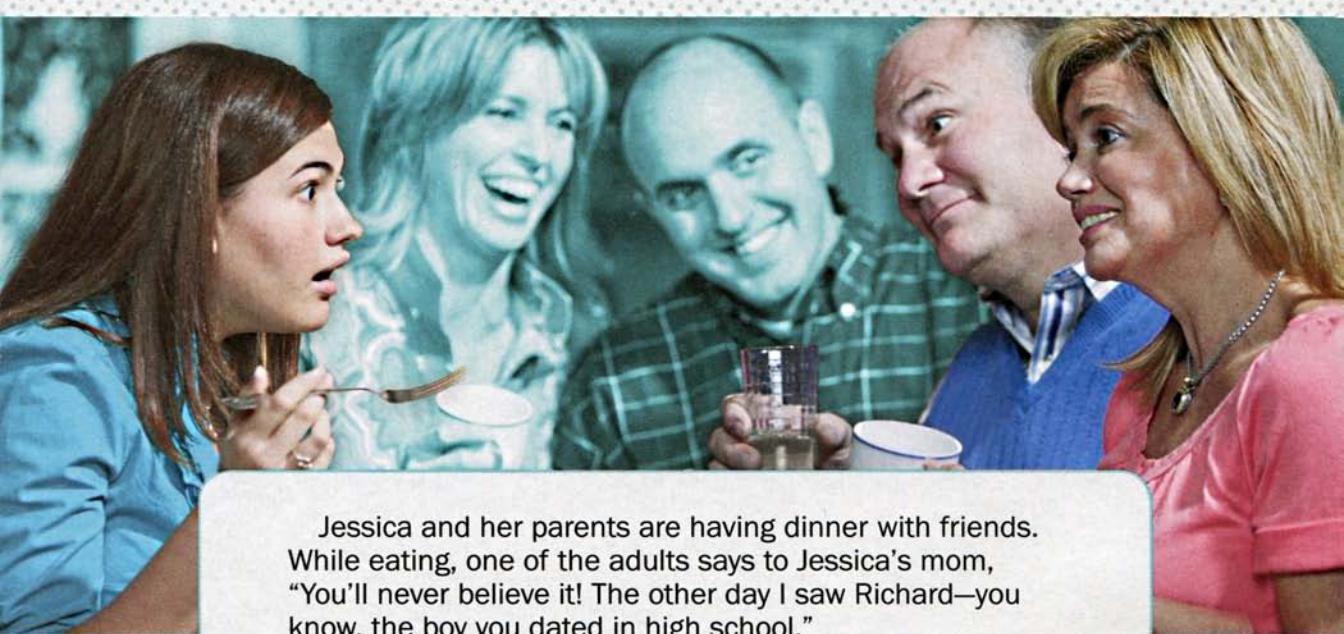
Why It matters. Advice on family life abounds in books, magazines, and TV programs. Some marriage counselors would urge troubled couples to stay together, while others would urge those same couples to split up. Experts even change their own thinking on such topics. For instance, in 1994 a popular therapist who specializes in adolescent issues wrote that earlier in her career, she felt that "children were better off with happy single parents rather than unhappy married parents. I thought divorce was a better option than struggling with a bad marriage." After two decades of experience, though, she had a change of heart. She stated: "Divorce shatters many children."

Opinions are subject to change, but the best advice that can be found will always in some way reflect the principles found in God's Word, the Bible. Reading this series of articles, you may have noted that a Bible principle is given at the top of pages 3-8. Such principles have helped many families to find true success. Like all other families, they experience problems. The difference is that the Bible has provided them with a firm foundation for marriage and family life. We would expect that to be true of the Bible, for its Author, Jehovah God, is the Originator of the family.—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

Try this exercise. Make a list of the scriptures quoted at the top of pages 3 through 8. Add any other Bible texts that have helped you. Keep a list of these handy, and refer to them often.

Make a resolve. Determine to apply the Bible in your family life.

How can I get to know my parents better?



Jessica and her parents are having dinner with friends. While eating, one of the adults says to Jessica's mom, "You'll never believe it! The other day I saw Richard—you know, the boy you dated in high school."

Jessica drops her fork on the table. She's never heard about Richard before!

"Wow, Mom, you dated someone else before Dad? I had no idea!"

HAVE you, like Jessica, ever learned something about your parents that surprised you? If so, perhaps that made you wonder what *else* you didn't know about them!

Why is there often room to get to know your parents better? What benefits could come from learning more about them? And how can you do so?

More to Learn

Why might there be things you don't know about your parents? Sometimes, physical distance is to blame. "My parents divorced when

I was eight years old," says Jacob,* now 22. "After that, I saw my dad only a few times a year. There's a lot about him that I wish I knew."

Even if you've lived with your parents for years, they probably haven't told you *everything* about themselves. Why not? Like all of us, parents sometimes feel embarrassed about mistakes they've made in the past. (Romans 3:23) Also, they may worry that if they reveal their shortcomings, you'll think less of

* Some names in this article have been changed.

them—or feel emboldened to take greater liberties yourself.

Often, though, there are things your parents haven't told you simply because the subjects never came up. A young man named Cameron says, "It's amazing how you can live with your parents for years and still have more to learn about them!" Why not take the initiative to draw your parents out? Consider four benefits you'll likely gain.

Benefit #1: Your parents will probably appreciate your interest. No doubt they'll be pleased that you care enough to ask about their life. And who knows—they may even respond with greater empathy for you and your feelings!—Matthew 7:12.

Benefit #2: You'll gain insight into your parents' point of view. For example, did your parents have less materially in the past? This might explain why they're as frugal as they are now, even if that seems unnecessary to you.

Such insight into your parents' thinking can be helpful. A young man named Cody observes, "By learning how my parents think, I can consider how my words will affect them before I speak."—Proverbs 15:23.

Benefit #3: You may become more comfortable talking about your own life. "I felt uneasy talking to Dad about a boy that I liked," says 18-year-old Bridgette. "But when I did open up to Dad, he told me about the first time *he* fell in love and how great a feeling that was. He even told me about the day he broke up with his girlfriend and how bad he felt. That encouraged me to tell him more about my situation."

Benefit #4: You might learn something. Your parents' life experiences can help you deal with your own frustrations and challenges. "I want to learn how my parents manage to care for a large family with many different physical, emotional, and spiritual needs," says Joshua, 16. "There must be some important lessons there." The Bible poses the question: "Is there not wisdom among the aged and understanding in length of days?"—Job 12:12.

Take the Initiative

If you would like to get to know your parents better, how can you do so? Here are some suggestions.

Choose the right setting. The setting doesn't always have to be formal. Rather, aim for casual conversations. You might toss around a ball, work together on a project, or take a walk or drive with your parents. "I've had good conversations with my parents during road

Ask your parents to show you photographs or other items from their past. These can often spark lively conversations



trips," says Cody, mentioned earlier. "Sure, it's easier just to plug in earphones or go to sleep, but I've found that initiating a conversation is always worth the effort!"

Ask questions. Let's face it: Even in the right setting, your mom probably won't tell you out of the blue about her first crush, and your dad may not mention the time he wrecked the family car. But your parents just might tell you such things if you ask!—For ideas on questions to ask, see the box on page 12.

Be flexible. Often the answer to one question will lead to some other story or topic. You might be tempted to steer the conversation back on track, but resist that urge! Remember, your goal isn't simply to gather facts. Rather, it is to develop a closer bond with your parents, and one of the best ways to do that is to talk about things that matter to them.—Philippians 2:4.

Be discerning. "A person's thoughts are like water in a deep well, but someone with



Ask your parents questions such as the following:

MARRIAGE: How did you and Mom (or Dad) meet? What first drew you to each other? Where did you live after you were married?

CHILDHOOD: Where were you born? How well did you get along with your siblings? Were your parents strict or lenient with you?

EDUCATION: What was your best subject in school? What was your worst? Did you have a favorite teacher? What made that teacher so special?

SECULAR WORK: What was your first job? Did you enjoy it? If you could choose any line of work, what would it be?

INTERESTS: If you could visit any place in the world, where would it be? What hobby or skill would you like to develop?

SPIRITUAL HISTORY: Were you raised as a Christian? If not, what sparked your interest in the Bible? What challenges did you face in conforming to Bible principles?

VALUES: What do you think are the most important factors in a good friendship? in a happy life? in a successful marriage? What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

Try this experiment: Choose a few of the questions above and try to anticipate your parents' answers. Then, ask the questions and compare their answers with what you thought they would say.

insight can draw them out." (*Proverbs 20:5, Today's English Version*) You especially need insight, or discernment, when drawing your parents out on sensitive topics. For instance, maybe you're curious about the sort of embarrassing mistakes your dad made when he was your age and how he would handle things differently if he had it to do over again. But before jumping into such issues, you might say, "Do you mind if I ask about . . ."

Be tactful. When your parents tell you about themselves, be "swift about hearing, slow about speaking." (*James 1:19*) Whatever you do, don't ridicule or insult your parents for what they've just shared. Remarks such as "Wow! I can't believe you did *that!*" or "So *that's* why you're so strict with me!" will *not* make your dad or mom want to open up further. Neither will your sharing personal matters with others outside your family.

It's Never Too Late!

The above suggestions can help you to get better acquainted with your parents while you still live at home. But what if you've already moved away? The same principles can help you reconnect with your parents—or even connect with a parent you never really knew. That's what Ja-

More articles from the "Young People Ask" series can be found at the Web site www.watchtower.org/ype

TO THINK ABOUT

- What subjects mentioned in this article would you like to ask your parents about?
- How might learning more about your parents help you to understand yourself better?

cob, mentioned earlier, has found. Although now living on his own, he says, "I've been getting to know my dad better lately, and I'm enjoying it."

A NOTE TO PARENTS

You're eating dinner with your husband, your daughter, and some family friends. During the conversation, your friend mentions someone whom you dated—and broke up with—before meeting your husband. You haven't shared this story with your daughter before. Now she wants to know more. What will you do?

Usually, it's best to welcome your child's questions. After all, anytime that he or she is asking questions and listening to your answers is time when you are communicating—something most parents desire.

Just how much should you tell your son or daughter about your past? Naturally, you might prefer to withhold embarrassing information. Yet, where appropriate, revealing some of your mistakes and struggles can be helpful to your children. How so?

Consider an example. The apostle Paul once disclosed about himself: "When I wish to do what is right, what is bad is present with me. . . . Miserable man that I am!" (Romans 7:21-24) Jehovah God inspired those words and caused them to be recorded and preserved in the Bible for

our benefit. (2 Timothy 3:16) And we do indeed benefit, for who of us cannot relate to Paul's candid expression?

Similarly, hearing about your good choices and your mistakes can help your children better relate to you. Granted, you were raised in a different era. However, while times have changed, human nature has not; neither have Scriptural principles. (Psalm 119:144) Discussing challenges you've faced—and how you overcame them—can help your teenagers as they work through *their* problems. "When you discover that your parents have faced challenges similar to your own, it makes your parents seem a lot more real," says a young man named Cameron. He

So whether you live at home or have moved away, it's never too late to get to know your parents. Why not try the suggestions in this article to help you do so?

adds, "The next time you have a problem, you wonder if your parents have been through *this* before too."

A caution: Not all stories necessarily need to end with counsel. True, you might be concerned that your teen will draw the wrong conclusion or even feel justified in making similar mistakes himself. But instead of summarizing what you want your child to take away from the discussion ("That's why you should never . . ."), briefly state how you feel. ("In hindsight, I wish I hadn't done such and such because . . .") Your son or daughter can thus learn a valuable lesson from your experience without feeling as if he or she has been given a lecture.

—Ephesians 6:4.

"One time, I admitted to my mother that I felt more at ease with my schoolmates than with fellow Christians. The next day, there was a letter from Mom on my desk. In the letter she told me how she too had felt the lack of friends among fellow believers. She reminded me of individuals in the Bible who served God even when there wasn't anyone for them to be with who would encourage them. She also commended me for the efforts I had made to cultivate wholesome friendships. I was surprised to learn that I was not the only one who had faced this problem. My mother had too, and I was so happy to learn about it that I cried. I was very encouraged by what my mother told me, and I was strengthened to do what was right."—Junko, 17, Japan.

Profiles in Success

PART ONE

As this special issue of *Awake!* has already shown, successful families are not problem free. That fact is hardly surprising, for we live in what the Bible describes as “critical times hard to deal with.” (2 Timothy 3:1) Problems of one sort or another are certain to arise in every family.

Remember, though, that success does not depend on having so-called ideal circumstances. On the contrary, Jesus said: “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.” (Matthew 5:3) Families that fill their spiritual need by following Bible principles have found a secret to success—*despite* their negative circumstances. Consider some examples.



Caring for a disabled child. The Bible places a high priority on caring for family members, including those with special needs. It states: “If anyone does not provide for those who are his own, and especially for those who are members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith.”—1 Timothy 5:8.

On page 15, Victor, a father in South Africa, relates how he and his wife have cared for a disabled child for more than four decades.



Growing up adopted. Bible principles can help a person gain a balanced sense of self-worth—even if abandoned by his or her birth parents. Indeed, the Bible says that Jehovah God is a “helper” to those who are fatherless.—Psalm 10:14.

On page 16, Kenyatta, a young woman in the United States, describes how she has learned to cope with the emotional effects of never having met her birth parents.



Coping with the death of a parent. Losing a mother or a father may leave emotional scars that are difficult to heal. The Bible can help. Its Author, Jehovah, is “the God of all comfort.”—2 Corinthians 1:3.

On page 17, Angela, a young woman in Australia, explains how her relationship with God is helping her to cope with a painful loss.

All families have some challenges to deal with. As the stories on the following pages will illustrate, those who apply Bible principles have found a vital secret that helps them to cope successfully with the challenges they face.

Caring for a Disabled Child

As told by **Victor Maynes**, South Africa



"Ever since his birth, Andrew has relied on us to dress him, bathe him, and at times even help him to eat. He is now 44 years old."



WE SUSPECTED something was wrong when Andrew was not walking after his first year. Then, about that time, he had a seizure. We rushed Andrew to the hospital, where we learned that he had epilepsy. But that wasn't all. Further tests confirmed that Andrew was brain damaged.

After much trial and error, we were able to bring Andrew's seizures under control. For a while, he had to take four different medications three times a day. Of course, his mental disability cannot be improved with medicine. Even now, at age 44, Andrew has the mental capacity of a five- or six-year-old child.

Doctors advised us to put Andrew in a special facility, but we decided not to do that. We were in a position to meet Andrew's needs, so we decided that we would care for him at home, despite the inevitable challenges.

Thus, we have made caretaking a family affair. Our other children—we had two girls and a boy living at home—were a great support, and I am thankful to them! Also, as Jehovah's Witnesses, we have had wonderful support from members of our congregation. At times, they have provided meals for us or have even looked after Andrew as we engaged in the ministry or took care of other matters.

We have always kept close to our hearts the words of Isaiah 33:24, which contain God's promise that one day "no resident will say: 'I am sick.'" We fully believe that God will carry out his purpose to bring about a new world and to wipe out all sickness. (2 Peter 3:13) So we look forward to the day when Andrew will be well. In the meantime, we have faith in Jesus' words that if we put the interests of God's Kingdom first in our lives, the things we need will be provided. (Matthew 6:33) We have always found that to be the case. We have never lacked anything.

Granted, not all are able to care for an ailing family member at home. To those who are doing so, I would first recommend intense and regular prayer. (1 Peter 5:6, 7) Second, give plenty of tender loving care to your child, and never underestimate his or her capacity to learn to love Jehovah God. (Ephesians 6:4) Third, involve your whole family, and allow them to help. Fourth, remember that *your* home is where your child will receive the most love. Of course, circumstances vary. For our part, we have never regretted caring for Andrew at home. To me, he is the most lovable child—the most lovable *man*—I know.

Growing Up Adopted

As told by **Kenyatta Young**, United States



"If you're a stepchild, there's a biological connection. But having been adopted, I don't have that. I don't even know who I look like."



I HAVE no idea who my father is, and I've never met my birth mother. She abused alcohol and drugs when she was pregnant with me. I was put into foster care at birth and was in several foster homes before being adopted at just under two years of age.

My adoptive dad says that when the case worker showed him my picture, he just had to adopt me. I immediately clicked with my new mom. I told her that she was my mom and that I wanted to go home with her.

I remember as a child, though, having the fear that I would do something wrong and would be sent back to foster care. I felt that I couldn't be moody or even get sick the way other kids did. I even tried to avoid catching a cold! My parents kept reassuring me that they loved me and that they weren't going to abandon me.

Even as an adult, I sometimes wrestle with the feeling that I'm not as valued as those who were raised by their biological parents. Just when I come to terms with it all, someone will say to me, "You should be so thankful that you have wonderful parents who found it in their hearts to adopt you!" I am grateful, but such comments make me feel that there's something wrong with me and that it somehow took extraordinary effort for someone to love me.

It's hard for me to deal with the fact that I'll probably never know who my biological father is. Sometimes I'm hurt that my birth mother did not get her life together so that she could keep me, as if I weren't worth the energy. Other times I feel sorry for her. I often think that if I ever met her, I would want to let her know that I succeeded in life and that she should not feel bad about giving me up.

My adoptive parents are Jehovah's Witnesses, and one of the best gifts I have received from them is a knowledge of the Bible. I always find the words of Psalm 27:10 comforting: "In case my own father and my own mother did leave me, even Jehovah himself would take me up." That is certainly true in my case. And there are some positive results of being adopted. For example, I'm fascinated by people—their backgrounds and their lives—probably because I don't know my own, biologically. I love people, and that's really important in the Christian ministry. Being one of Jehovah's Witnesses and talking about the Bible gives me dignity and purpose. When I'm depressed, I get out there and help others. By teaching people about the Bible, I find that I can really connect with them. Everybody has a story.

Coping With the Death of a Parent

As told by **Angela Rutgers**, Australia



"When my dad died, I felt as if someone had cut a giant hole in my safety net. The one person who knew everything and who could fix anything in my life was no longer there."

MY FATHER passed away ten years ago when I was a teenager. Six months earlier, he had surgery, and while he was still in the recovery room, the doctor told us that nothing more could be done. My mom desperately needed more information, my brother fainted, and I felt trapped in a whirlwind of emotions that I couldn't escape. Six months later, my dad died.

I went through a period of conflicting emotions. I wanted my friends to understand what I was going through, but I didn't want to be treated as a victim. So I made an effort not to show them what I was feeling. On the other hand, I felt that to allow myself to enjoy their company would have been to imply that my life had a degree of normalcy, which it did not. I wonder now just what I must have put my friends through!

Do I suffer from feelings of guilt about Dad's death? Yes, I do! I wish I had told him "I love you!" more often. I wish I had hugged him more or spent more time with him. No matter how much I tell myself, 'He wouldn't want you to think that,' it still gets to me.

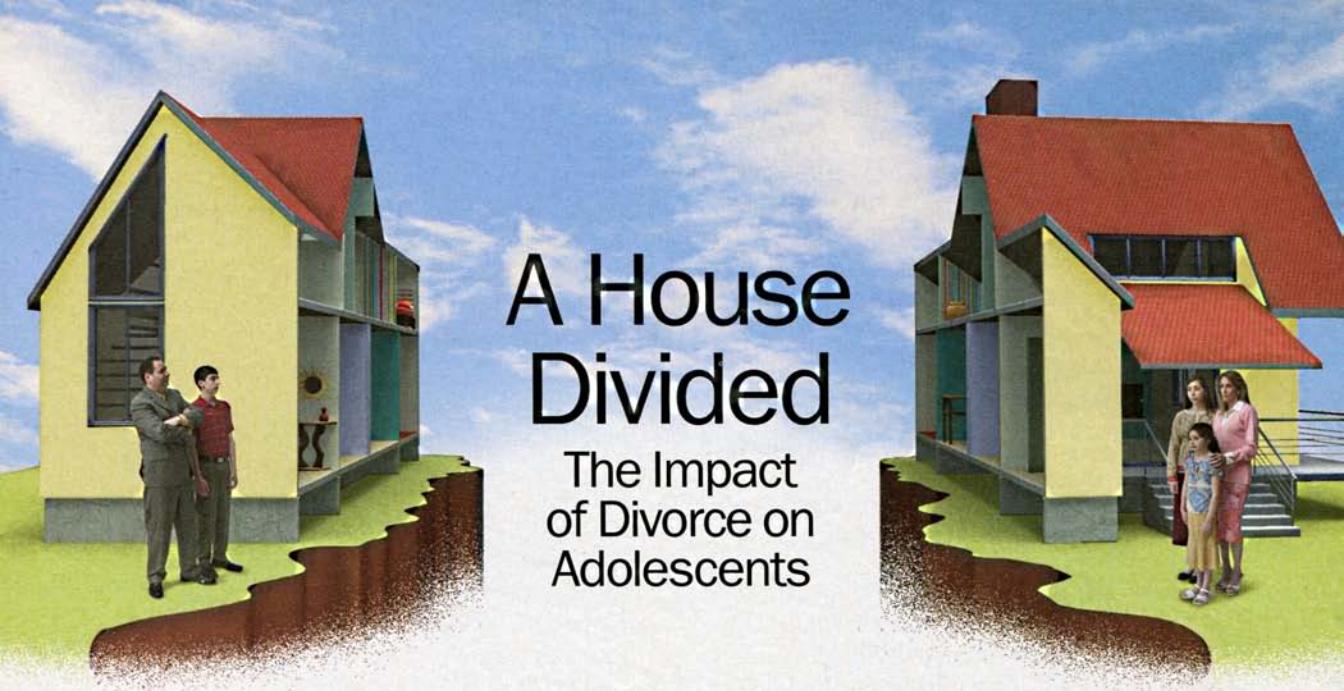
As one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I find great comfort in the Bible-based resurrection hope. (John 5:28, 29) I try to imagine



that my dad has just gone overseas on a trip and that one day he will come home, the exact date being unknown. Oddly, when people said to me, "Your dad will come back in the resurrection," that didn't encourage me at first. I felt, 'I want my dad back right now!' But the illustration of the overseas trip helped. It alluded to the resurrection, while enabling me to cope with the immediate loss.

Fellow Christians have been a tremendous support. I remember one in particular who told me that he was very uncomfortable talking about my dad's death, but he said that he was thinking of me and my family all the time. I hung on to that comment. It helped me through the days when no one said anything, because it made me realize that even if they didn't speak up, they were thinking of me and my family. That meant so much to me!

Four months after Dad's death, Mom got more involved in the ministry, and I could see that her greatest joy came from that. So I joined her. It's amazing how helping others helps you to cope. It has strengthened my faith in Jehovah's Word and his promises, and it helps me even now to focus on the big picture.



A House Divided

The Impact of Divorce on Adolescents

THE experts thought they had it right. 'You need to focus on *your* happiness,' they advised parents in troubled marriages, quickly adding: 'Don't worry about the children. They're resilient. It's easier for them to deal with divorce than to live with two parents who can't get along!'

Yet, some counselors who once sang the praises of divorce have changed their tune. 'Divorce is war,' they now say. 'Neither party walks away without wounds; nor do the children.'

The Myth of Easy Divorce

It could make a hit TV sitcom. The plot? Dad and Mom divorce. Mom gets custody of the children and then marries a widower with children of his own. Week after week the

mismatched family faces one absurd predicament after another—each one being resolved in 30 minutes flat with no shortage of witty humor in the process.

Perhaps the above situation makes for entertaining TV. But a real-life divorce is no sitcom. On the contrary, the process is painful. "Divorce is litigation," writes M. Gary Neuman in his book *Emotional Infidelity*. "Someone is suing someone. The second you decide to divorce, you are giving up control over your child. You are also giving up control over your finances, and perhaps even where you will live. You may resolve your issues in mediation, but maybe not. Ultimately, a stranger called a judge could be the one to tell you how often you will see your child and how much of your money you will keep. Unfortunately, that stranger doesn't think exactly like you."

Often, divorce merely exchanges one set of problems for another. Indeed, everything from living arrangements to financial status may change—and likely not for the better. And then there is the impact divorce has on children.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

- Technology—Blessing or Curse?
- Is It Possible to Love One's Enemies?
- What Can I Wear?

Divorce and Adolescents

Divorce can devastate children, regardless of their age. Some claim that adolescents fare better. After all, the reasoning goes, they are more mature and are in the process of separating from their parents anyway. However, researchers see a flip side to the coin. They have found that because of those very factors, divorce can hit adolescents the hardest.* Consider the following:

■ As they navigate their way toward adulthood, adolescents are highly insecure, perhaps even more so than when they were children. Do not let their independent streak fool you—adolescents need the anchor of family stability as never before.

■ At the very time in life when adolescents are learning to forge mature friendships, divorce teaches them to be skeptical of such values as trust, loyalty, and love. Later, as adults, they may avoid close relationships altogether.

■ While it is common for children of all ages to act out their pain, adolescents are more likely to do so in dangerous ways, in-

* This article focuses on adolescents, but divorce affects younger children as well. For more information, see *Awake!* issues of December 8, 1997, pages 3-12, and April 22, 1991, pages 3-11.

cluding delinquency, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse.

This is not to say that adolescents whose parents divorce are doomed emotionally or otherwise. They *can* succeed, especially if they have a relationship with both parents.* However, it is naive to think that divorce will always be, as some might say, ‘better for the children’ or that it will put an end to all tension between spouses. In fact, some find that they have to deal more with their “intolerable” spouse *after* the divorce than *before* and on much more volatile issues, such as financial support or child custody. In such cases divorce does not end family problems; it simply moves them to a different arena.

A Third Option

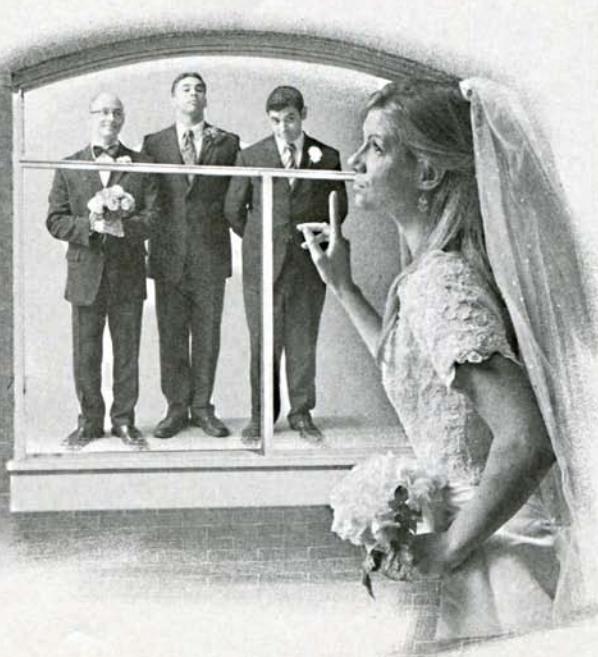
What if you are in a troubled marriage and have thought about divorce? This article has presented compelling reasons to reconsider. Divorce is not a cure-all for marital misery.

But do not misunderstand: The answer is not simply to tolerate a bad marriage. There is another option—*If your marriage is in trouble, why not work to make it better?* Do not

* Admittedly, this is not always possible, especially if a parent has abandoned the family or is in some other way blatantly irresponsible or even dangerous.—1 Timothy 5:8.

'THIS TIME I'LL GET IT RIGHT'

Studies reveal that second marriages have a higher failure rate than first ones, and third marriages fare even worse. In his book *Emotional Infidelity*, M. Gary Neuman points out one reason for this. “If you have difficulties in your first marriage,” he writes, “it’s not all about your poor choice of a spouse. It’s about you. You fell in love with this person. You worked with this person to create whatever you have or don’t have.” Neuman’s conclusion? “It’s better to get rid of the problem and keep your spouse than to get rid of your spouse and keep the problem.”



hastily dismiss this idea by asserting that your marital problems are incurable. Ask yourself these questions:

- ‘What qualities initially drew me to my spouse? Are not those qualities still there to a degree?’—Proverbs 31:10, 29.
- ‘Can the feelings that I had before marriage be rekindled?’—Song of Solomon 2:2; 4:7.
- ‘Despite the actions of my mate, what can I do to apply the suggestions found on pages 3 to 9 of this magazine?’—Romans 12:18.
- ‘Can I explain to my mate (face-to-face or in writing) just how I would like our relationship to improve?’—Job 10:1.
- ‘Can we sit down with a mature friend who can help us set realistic goals to improve our marriage?’—Proverbs 27:17.

The Bible says: “The shrewd one considers his steps.” (Proverbs 14:15) That principle applies not just when choosing a mate but also when considering what to do about a marriage relationship that is faltering. Indeed, as brought out on page 9 of this magazine, successful families also have problems—the difference is in how they handle them.

To illustrate: Imagine that you have embarked on a long journey by car. It is inevitable that you will encounter problems along the way, including severe weather, traffic jams, and roadblocks. On occasion, you may even get lost. What will you do? Turn around and go back or find a way to overcome the obstacle and move forward? On the day of your wedding, you embarked on a journey that was sure to bring its share of problems, for the Bible says that “those who marry will have pain and grief.” (1 Corinthians 7:28, *The New English Bible*) The question is not whether problems will arise but *how* you will face them when they do. Can you find a way to overcome the obstacle and move forward? Even if you feel that your marriage is hopelessly lost, will you try to get help?—James 5:14.



Work to uphold the commitment you made on your wedding day

A Divine Institution

Marriage is a divine institution that should not be taken lightly. (Genesis 2:24) When problems seem insurmountable, remember the points discussed in this article.

1. Try to rekindle the love that you once felt.—Song of Solomon 8:6.
2. Decide what *you* can do to make your marriage better, and then do it.—James 1:22.
3. Clearly but respectfully tell your mate—either face-to-face or in writing—what improvements you feel need to be made in the marriage.—Job 7:11.
4. Get help. You do not have to save your marriage by yourself!

IF A MARRIAGE ENDS

The Bible acknowledges that extreme circumstances may lead to divorce.* If that is the case in your family, how can you help your adolescent children to cope?

Tell your adolescent what is happening. If possible, both parents should do this. Together, let your adolescent know that the decision to divorce is final. Give assurance that he or she is not to blame and will continue to be loved by both parents.

Get off the battlefield—the war is over. Some parents remain entangled in conflict long after the divorce. They become, as one expert puts it, “legally divorced but still emotionally betrothed combatants who have not been able to negotiate a truce with peace.” Not only does this deprive adolescents of their parents—since Dad and Mom always seem caught up in one skirmish or another—but it also encourages them to pit one parent against the other in order to get their way. For instance, a boy might tell his mother: “Dad lets me stay out as late as I want. Why won’t you?” Not wanting her son to defect to the “enemy camp,” Mom relents.

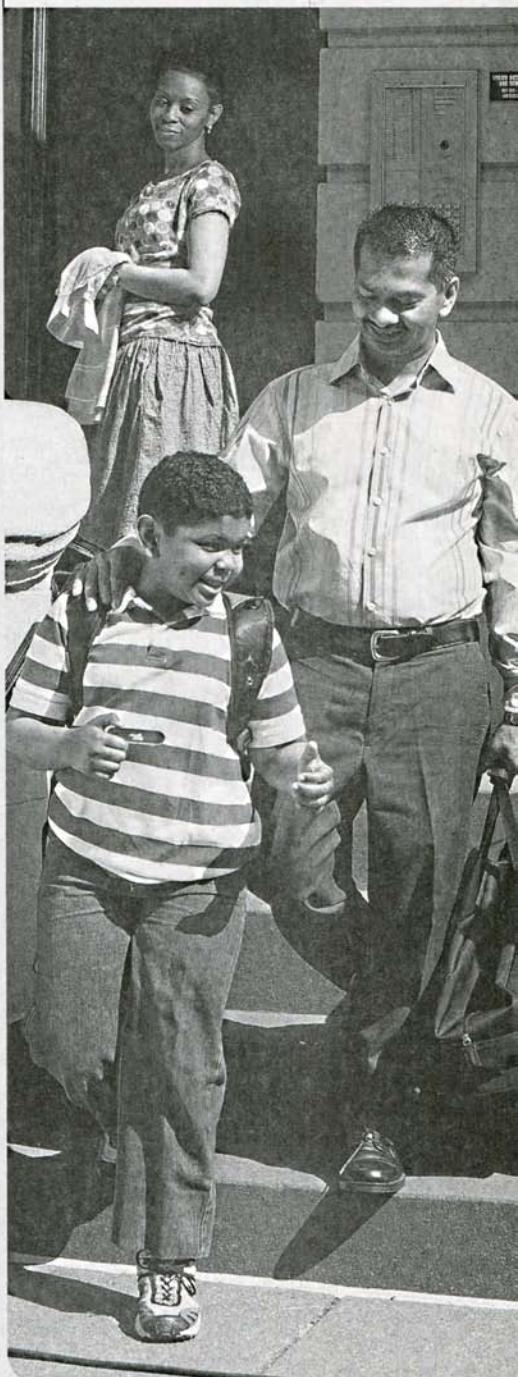
Let your adolescent talk. Adolescents may reason, ‘If my parents stopped loving each other, they may stop loving me’ or ‘If my parents broke the rules, why can’t I?’ To alleviate your adolescent’s fears and to correct flawed thinking, give him or her plenty of opportunity to talk. But a caution: Do not switch roles and look to your adolescent for emotional support. This is your child, not your confidant.

Encourage the adolescent to have a healthy relationship with your ex-spouse. The person you divorced is your ex-spouse but not your child’s ex-parent. Bad-mouthing that person is damaging. Says the book *Teens in Turmoil—A Path to Change for Parents, Adolescents, and Their Families*: “If parents choose to use their children as artillery on the divorce battlefield, they must expect to reap what they have sown.”

Take care of yourself. At times, you will feel overwhelmed. But do not give up. Maintain a healthy routine. If you are a Christian, stay involved in spiritual activities. Doing so will help you and your adolescent to maintain balance.—Psalm 18:2; Matthew 28:19, 20; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

* According to the Bible, only sexual relations outside the marriage provide adequate grounds to end the marriage with the opportunity to remarry. (Matthew 19:9) If unfaithfulness occurs, it is up to the innocent mate—not to family members or others—to decide whether divorce is the best option.—Galatians 6:5.

If you share custody, encourage your adolescent to have a healthy relationship with your ex-spouse



Profiles in Success

PART TWO

As brought out in "Profiles in Success—Part 1," Bible principles can provide families with an anchor in times of despair.* To those who live by his standards, Jehovah God promises: "I shall make you have insight and instruct you in the way you should go. I will give advice with my eye upon you."—Psalm 32:8.

Coping with financial hardship. Money matters are often at the root of intense marital disputes. But Bible principles can help families to put financial issues in perspective. Jesus said: "Stop being anxious about your souls as to what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your bodies as to what you will wear. . . . Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things."—Matthew 6:25, 32.

On page 23, Issachar, in the United States, relates how he and his family coped with financial hardship after their home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

When illness afflicts a family member. Virtually all humans get sick. Often, the condition is temporary and recovery is quick. But what if a family member becomes chronically ill? The Bible says that Jehovah can sustain those who are on a sickbed. (Psalm 41:1-3) How can the family be a means through which Jehovah provides such care?

On page 24, Hajime, a husband in Japan, relates how he and his daughters pulled together to help his wife, Noriko, after she was diagnosed with a devastating illness.

When a child dies. The death of a child is one of the greatest tragedies that a family can face. Jehovah promises to wipe away the tears of sorrow that such terrible losses cause. (Revelation 21:1-4) Even now, he provides comfort for the bereaved.—Psalm 147:3.

On page 25, Fernando and Dilma, in the United States, relate how the Bible strengthened them to deal with the death of their infant daughter.

The Bible is a reliable guide for families who face adversity, as the accounts on the following pages illustrate.

* See pages 14-17 of this magazine.

Coping With Financial Hardship

As told by **Issachar Nichols**, United States



"Hurricane Katrina destroyed our home, leaving behind only a slab of concrete. The school where I worked sat in water for a month and a half."

DURING the summer of 2005, my wife, Michelle, and I, along with our two-year-old daughter, Sydney, lived in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, U.S.A. As Jehovah's Witnesses, Michelle and I had the goal of having as full a share as possible in the Christian ministry. I was a vocational teacher, and the school where I taught was in nearby New Orleans, Louisiana. My schedule allowed me to work three days a week and to devote much of the remaining time to teaching others about the Bible. We were comfortable with our routine. Then came the news that Hurricane Katrina was threatening to strike. We arranged to evacuate immediately.

When the storm was over, our house in Bay St. Louis was ruined and so was the school I taught at in New Orleans. Insurance and government grant money enabled us to obtain housing, but I found it difficult to find a stable source of income. In addition, my wife contracted a viral infection from contaminated water. Her immune system weakened, and she thereafter became infected with West Nile virus from a mosquito bite. Meanwhile, insurance costs and living expenses escalated.

To adjust to our new circumstances, we learned to be more frugal in spending, even on necessities. I had to be less choosy about the type of work I would accept.



I will admit that losing our possessions was not easy for us. But we were grateful to be alive. And the whole experience underscored the fact that material things have limited value. In fact, we were reminded of Jesus' words: "Even when a person has an abundance his life does not result from the things he possesses."—Luke 12:15.

We also realized that no matter how bad we felt about our own losses, there were many who had lost more—some even their lives. That is one reason why, immediately following the disaster, I got busy helping out with relief efforts, giving emotional support to others who had suffered loss.

Throughout this ordeal, Psalm 102:17 has been particularly comforting to us. It states that Jehovah God "will certainly turn to the prayer of those stripped of everything, and not despise their prayer." As a family, we have felt his support!

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2005, Jehovah's Witnesses quickly set up 13 relief centers, nine warehouses, and four fuel depots. Nearly 17,000 Witness volunteers streamed in from the United States and 13 other lands to help with the relief efforts. They have repaired thousands of homes.

When Illness Afflicts a Family Member

As told by Hajime Ito, Japan



"Cooking together was a favorite pastime—until Noriko became ill. Now she cannot eat or drink through her mouth or even talk. She is confined to a wheelchair and breathes through a respirator."

IN May 2006, my wife, Noriko, began having difficulty speaking. That summer she started having problems eating and drinking. By September she was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—a progressive disease that affects the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. In just four months, our life changed completely. And her problems were just beginning.

In time, Noriko's tongue became paralyzed, as did her right hand. A procedure called a gastrostomy enabled her to be fed through a tube, and then a tracheostomy—a surgical opening in the neck to allow the passage of air—rendered her unable to speak. I can't imagine how devastating this was for Noriko, since she had always been so active. We are Jehovah's Witnesses, and Noriko and my daughters had been devoting their full time to the Christian ministry. Now Noriko relies on a respirator to breathe, and she is mainly confined to bed.

Still, this does not stop Noriko! For example, she attends Christian meetings in a wheelchair, with the respirator attached. Her hearing has deteriorated, so my daughter writes large notes for her during the meeting so that she can benefit from the program. And even though Noriko has had to discontinue the full-time ministry, she still writes letters to people, teaching them about the Bible's message of hope by using special equip-

ment that is installed on our personal computer.—2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4.

We have cooperated as a family to help Noriko. Both of my daughters obtained new employment so they would be available to help more at home. The three of us take care of the many daily chores that Noriko used to perform.

Sometimes in the morning when I look at Noriko, she seems tired. I think to myself, 'I would like to tell her to take it easy today.' But Noriko wants to share the Bible's message with others. When I start to prepare the computer for her, Noriko's eyes shine! When she writes, her condition improves. I have come to see the value of "always having plenty to do in the work of the Lord."—1 Corinthians 15:58.

The experience of ALS sufferer Jason Stuart, related in the January 2006 issue of *Awake!*, has greatly helped Noriko to avoid becoming despondent. In fact, when hospital staff members wondered why she had such a positive attitude, Noriko told them about the article, and we distributed copies of it to the staff. My wife is greatly sustained by teaching others about her faith.

Noriko and I have been married for 30 years, but during the past three years, I have come to appreciate things about her that I previously took for granted. I am so happy that I married her!



When a Child Dies

As told by **Fernando and Dilma Freitas**, United States



"The trauma of the death of a child is something that just cannot be explained. There can be no greater pain."

OUR daughter, whom we named Precious, died on April 16, 2006. She was only ten days old. About three months into the pregnancy, it was determined that our unborn child had a serious heart-related condition. As the delivery drew closer, it became apparent that she would die shortly after her birth—if she lived at all. This was extremely difficult for us to accept. We had three healthy children. We could not believe that our baby would die.

After Precious was born, an experienced specialist in chromosomal disorders diagnosed her with a rare condition called Trisomy 18, which affects only about 1 in 5,000 babies. It was clear that she would not survive long. We felt utterly helpless because there was so little we could do. The one thing we *could* do was be with her for the short duration of her life. So that is what we did.

We are so grateful for the ten days that we had with Precious. During that time we and our three daughters bonded with her. We held her, talked to her, hugged her, kissed her, and took as many photographs of her as we could. We even talked about who in the family she most resembled. The specialist who diagnosed Precious' condition visited us every day in the hospital. He



cried with us and told us how sorry he was. He even drew a picture of Precious while he was talking to us for him to remember her. He gave us a copy.

Being Jehovah's Witnesses, we fully believe, as the Bible teaches, that God will restore paradise conditions to our earth and that he yearns to bring back to life on earth those who have died—including infants, such as Precious. (Job 14:14, 15; John 5:28, 29) We look forward to the day when we will hold her and embrace her again. Every time we hear the word "paradise," that hope warms our hearts! In the meantime, we take comfort in the fact that Precious is in God's memory and is no longer suffering.—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.



You Can Succeed as a Single Parent

IT HAS been said that if the two-parent home were an animal, it would likely be on the endangered species list. Consider: There are more than 13 million single parents in the United States alone, the vast majority being single mothers. Research indicates that about half of all children in that country will spend at least some of their youth in a single-parent home.

If you are a single parent, be assured that your family life can succeed. Try to implement the following suggestions.

Avoid negative labels. The Bible says: "All the days of the afflicted one are bad; but the one that is good at heart has a feast constantly." (Proverbs 15:15) True, your life may not seem to be a banquet. But as this verse in-

dicates, cheerfulness is more a matter of the heart than of one's circumstances. (Proverbs 17:22) Little good is accomplished by thinking of your children as doomed or of your home as hopelessly broken. Such labels will only dispirit you and make it more difficult for you to fulfill your parental duties.—Proverbs 24:10.

Suggestion: Make a list of any negative statements you use to describe your situation, and then write down next to each one a positive statement to replace it. For example, replace "This is too much for me" with "I am capable of handling my responsibility as a single parent, and I can get the help I need."—Philippians 4:13.

Budget your money. The wallet is where many single parents—especially single moth-

ers—are hit the hardest. Yet, in some cases financial stress can be eased with effective budgeting skills. A Bible proverb states: “Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself.” (Proverbs 22:3) To avoid financial “calamity,” planning and forethought are essential.

Suggestion: Work out a budget on paper. Keep a record of your expenses for a month and find out where your money is going. Take a hard look at your spending habits. Are you relying too much on credit? Do you buy your children things to compensate for the lack of a second parent? If your children are old enough, sit down with them and brainstorm how money can be saved. It will be good training for them. And they may even have a few practical ideas!

■ Deal peaceably with your ex-spouse. If you share custody, be aware that bad-mouthing your ex to your child—or using your child as a spy to find out what is going on in your ex’s life—is unhealthy.* It is far better to forge a working relationship with your ex regarding discipline or any other issue that affects the welfare of your child. The Bible says: “Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody”—and that includes your ex.—Romans 12:18, *Today’s English Version*.

Suggestion: The next time a disagreement arises, treat your ex as you would a workmate. On the job, you would strive to be amicable with everyone—even those you do not particularly admire. Take the same approach with your ex. The two of you may not always agree, but each spark does not need to ignite a fire.—Luke 12:58.

■ Be a good example. Ask yourself: ‘What values and attitudes do I want my children to adopt? Do I reflect those values and attitudes in my own life?’ For example, are you gener-

* For more information, see the article “A House Divided—The Impact of Divorce on Adolescents,” on pages 18-21 of this magazine.

ally happy, despite your single-parent status? Or do you let your circumstances cast a pall over your outlook on life? Are you stuck in resentment over the way your ex has treated you? Or are you resilient in the face of injustices over which you have no control? (Proverbs 15:18) Granted, those are not easy issues, and you will not face them perfectly. Still, your children are likely to adopt the same attitudes about life that they see you display.

Suggestion: Write down on paper three qualities that you would like each of your children to display when they become adults. Next to each quality, write out what you can do right now to set an example that will nurture that quality in your child.*

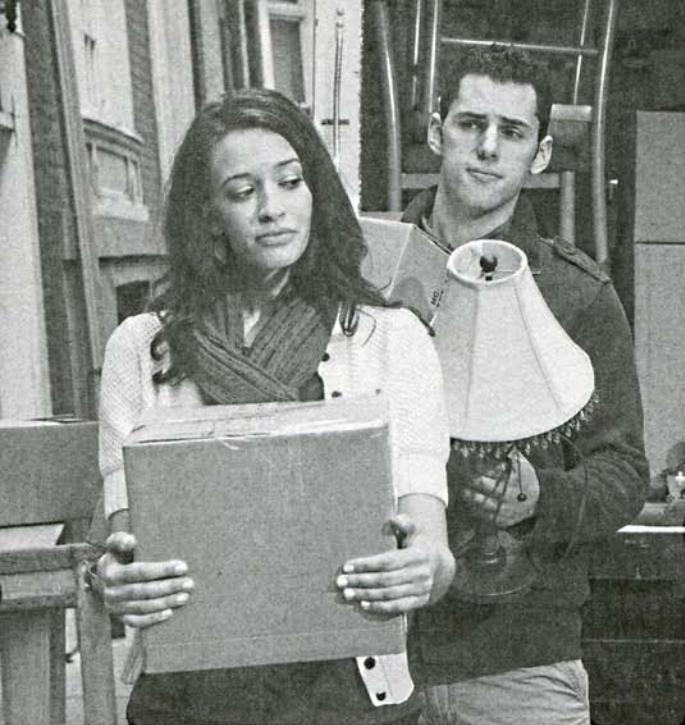
■ Take care of yourself. With a hectic pace of life, it is all too easy to let your physical and emotional health slide. Do not fall into that trap! Taking care of your “spiritual need” is a must! (Matthew 5:3) Remember—a car without fuel will not get far. Neither will you if you do not take time to “refuel.”

There is also “a time to laugh” and “a time to skip about.” (Ecclesiastes 3:4) Recreation is *not* a waste of time. It refreshes you and renews your strength so that you can carry on as a single parent.

Suggestion: Talk to other single parents about how they take care of themselves. While you “make sure of the more important things,” can you also spend at least some time each week doing something that you simply enjoy? (Philippians 1:10) Write down on paper what you would like to do and when you might do it.

* Some possibilities are “respect,” “reasonableness,” and “forgiveness,” which are discussed on pages 6-8 of this magazine.

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Paul. 2. Manna-sesh.—Judges 6:15. 3. Midian.—Judges
1. Corinth. ■ Making a tent. ■ Aquila, Priscilla, and



THE BIBLE'S VIEWPOINT

What About Living Together Before Marriage?

WOULD you buy a suit or a dress without first trying it on? Likely not. After all, if you later found that the garment did not fit, you would have wasted your time and money.

Many people apply a similar logic to marriage. They feel that it is better for a man and woman to live together before making a commitment to become husband and wife. 'If things do not work out,' they reason, 'a man and woman can walk away without having to deal with the complex and costly process of divorce.'

Perhaps some who feel that way have seen a married friend endure an abusive relationship. Or they may have witnessed the traumatic effects of a loveless marriage. As a result, they might view living together as a wise precaution.

What is the Bible's viewpoint on this matter? To answer, we first need to consider what God's Word has to say about the institution of marriage.

"One Flesh"

The Bible promotes a lofty view of marriage, and this is not surprising, for the ar-

rangement was authorized and established by Jehovah God himself. (Genesis 2:21-24) From the beginning, Jehovah purposed that through marriage a man and woman would become "one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) After quoting the passage in the Bible where this is pointed out, Jesus added: "What God has yoked together let no man put apart."—Matthew 19:6.

Granted, some who marry will later divorce.* When this occurs, however, it is not because of some lack in the marriage arrangement itself; rather, it is because of the failure of one or both mates to live up to their wedding vows.

To illustrate: Suppose a man and woman own a car, but they do not maintain it according to the manufacturer's instructions. If the car breaks down as a result, who is to blame? The manufacturer or the owners who failed to perform routine maintenance?

The same principle applies to marriage. When a husband and wife maintain their rela-

* The Bible allows for divorce and remarriage if a mate engages in sexual relations outside of marriage.—Matthew 19:9.

tionship and are determined to work out their problems by applying Bible principles, divorce is far less likely. There is a feeling of security in the marriage because a personal commitment has been made by each spouse. Marriage then becomes the basis for a loving relationship.

"Abstain From Fornication"

Still, some might wonder: 'Why not live together first? Would not testing the relationship before making such a commitment show regard for the sanctity of marriage?'

The Bible's answer is clear. Paul wrote: "Abstain from fornication." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) The term "fornication" refers to all sexual relations outside of marriage. That would include sex between a cohabiting couple, even if they intend to get married. According to the Bible, then, it would be wrong for a couple to live together—even if their intention was to marry later.

Is the Bible's view out of date? Some might think so. After all, in many lands, living together—with or without intending to marry—is considered normal. But think of the results. Have those who cohabit found the secret to family success? Are they happier than couples who marry? Do couples who live together before marriage have a higher rate of faithfulness after marriage? Studies indicate the contrary. Indeed, married couples who previously lived together have been found to experience higher levels of marital discord and eventual divorce.

Some experts would say that such studies are flawed. "People who choose to marry

"SINNING AGAINST HIS OWN BODY"

The Bible states: "He that practices fornication is sinning against his own body." (1 Corinthians 6:18) In recent decades the truthfulness of those words has been underscored by the millions who have died from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. But that is not all. Studies suggest that depression and suicide attempts are more common among youths who are sexually active. Promiscuity also leads to unwanted pregnancy, which in some cases presents a temptation to abort the unborn. In view of the facts, we can conclude that the Bible's moral code is not old-fashioned.

without first [cohabiting] are already a different group of people than those who decide to [cohabit] first," writes one psychologist. She asserts that living together is not the key factor; instead, the issue is "valuing the state of being married."

Even if that is true, it simply underscores the importance of cultivating God's view of marriage. The Bible says: "Let marriage be honorable among all." (Hebrews 13:4) When a man and a woman vow to remain one flesh and then show honor for the marriage arrangement, they have a bond that cannot easily be severed.—Ecclesiastes 4:12.

So to return to the opening analogy, it *does* make sense to try on a suit or a dress before buying it. However, the parallel to that is not living together. Rather, it is taking sufficient time to get to know the person you are considering as a marriage mate. This vital but often overlooked step is one of many secrets of family success.

HAVE YOU WONDERED?

- Why does the Bible limit sexual intimacy to marriage partners?

—Psalm 84:11; 1 Corinthians 6:18.

- What qualities should you look for in a mate?—Ruth 1:16, 17; Proverbs 31:10-31.

Multiple Languages?

Many parents fear that exposing young children to a second language will jeopardize their ability to speak their mother tongue. Yet, the opposite is true, says a research team led by neuroscientist Laura-Ann Petitto in Toronto, Canada. "Neural tissue that you're born with . . . is ready and in place to learn language," says Petitto, "and it can handle multiple languages." In school, bilingual children often outperform children who speak only one language. However, says the *Toronto Star*, "parents must take the lead in teaching young children a second language if they want them to have all of the benefits that come along with being bilingual."

Pornography Disturbs Children

Children are confronted with harmful pornographic and violent Internet videos at an increasingly early age. According to Heinz-Peter Meidinger, chairman of the German Association of Philologists, boys 12 and older often know how and where to find Web sites featuring extreme violence or degrading pornography. While children may appear outwardly tough and unconcerned, inwardly many are shocked and disturbed at viewing it. Meidinger urges parents to be interested in

■ "About one-third of girls in the United States get pregnant before age 20."—CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, U.S.A.

■ A U.S. study of 420 men as "victims of domestic violence" found that "nearly three out of 10 have been battered or otherwise abused."—AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE.

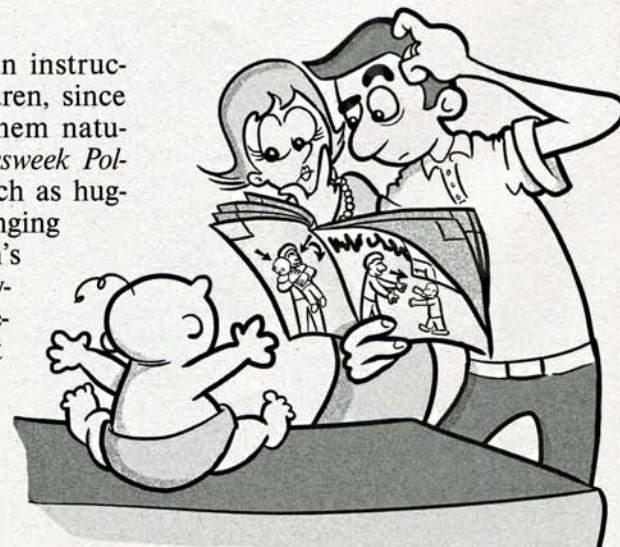
what is on their child's mind and on his or her computer.

Planning for Divorce

A record number of Australians are signing prenuptial agreements that require their partner to meet specific lifestyle conditions, reports Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph*. Prenuptial agreements are contracts that spell out how couples will divide their assets in the event of divorce. Many agreements now stipulate the lifestyle each partner must maintain for the marriage to last. Clauses can define who cooks, cleans, or drives, as well as whether pets are allowed, how much each partner can weigh, who walks the dog, and who takes out the trash. Lawyer Christine Jeffress notes that people "have less expectation that their relationship is going to last forever."

Parents Struggling to Show Affection

"An increasing number of parents need an instruction manual on how to treat their little children, since they are apparently incapable of showing them natural affection," says the Polish magazine *Newsweek Polska*. Parents need to be taught the basics, such as hugging their children, playing with them, and singing to them. These activities are vital for children's balanced development. Research shows, however, that "among Polish families, watching television and shopping took first place in the most common ways that parents spend time with their children." Playing together came in only sixth.



Where Did It Happen?

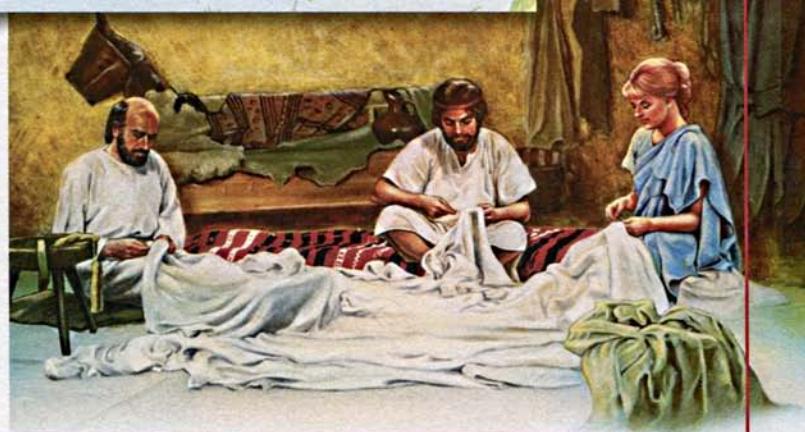
1. In which city did this event take place?

CLUE: Read Acts 18:1-3. Circle your answer on the map.

■ What are the three people doing?

■ What are the names of the married couple, and what is the name of their friend?

FOR DISCUSSION: What is the name of another person that this couple helped? CLUE: Read Acts 18:24-26. What type of work do you think this couple enjoyed most, and why?



Children's Picture Search

Can you find these pictures in this issue? In your own words, describe what is happening in each picture.

From This Issue

Answer these questions, and provide the missing Bible verse(s).

PAGE 3 A person who does not provide for his family is worse than what? 1 Timothy 5: _____

PAGE 5 Why are two better than one? Ecclesiastes 4: _____

PAGE 11 Wisdom can be found among whom? Job 12: _____

PAGE 29 What should a person abstain from?
1 Thessalonians 4: _____

What Do You Know About Judge Gideon?

Read Judges 6:1-7:25. Now answer the following questions.

2.....

He was from which tribe?

3.....

He delivered Israel from which nation?

4.....

True or false? He lived before Moses.

FOR DISCUSSION: What quality did Gideon display when first appointed by Jehovah? CLUE: Read Judges 6:14-16. Do you think that this is a good quality? Explain why you answer that way.





IN THIS ISSUE

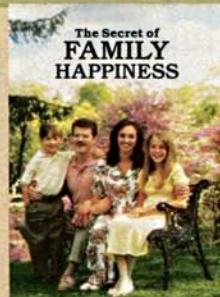
- **What seven factors can help your marriage succeed? See pages 3-9.**
- **How can adolescents get to know their parents better? See pages 10-13.**
- **Is it a good idea to live together before getting married? See pages 28-29.**
- **How can you succeed as a single parent? See pages 26-27.**
- **How can children be helped to cope if their parents divorce? See pages 18-21.**

These are just some of the questions about family life that are addressed in this special issue of "Awake!"

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