

**The Family: The Heart of the Matter**

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## **The Family – The Heart of the Matter**

### Introduction

The world in which we live is in crisis mode. Problem follows problem like waves crashing relentlessly on the seashore. Every where there is a feeling that the planet cannot go on like this much longer. The “experts”—the politicians, the educators, the psychiatrists, the psychologists, the religious leaders—huddle together like doctors around the bedside of an ailing patient trying fruitlessly to diagnose the malady of the patient.

The patient is treated with all kinds of medicines, but none seem to bring relief. It is like the patient who went to the doctor and was being prepared to have his left leg amputated, when he frantically reminded the attendants that there was nothing wrong with either of his legs. It was his eye he came to have tested.

The problems of the world can be traced to the family. If the family is put right, then society will be put right. If society is put right, then the nation will be put right. If the nations are put right, then the world will be put right. The family is truly the heart of the matter. Our work for a better world begins with the family. Let’s save the family and we will save the world.

These messages by my wife Gloria and me and our daughter Dr. Karen-Mae Mitchell address some of the vital family issues as well as provide excellent messages for the younger members of the family. May God bless you as you discuss them.

Jansen Trotman  
Family Ministries Director  
Inter-American Division

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Family: The Heart of the Matter**

**Text:** Mal. 4:4-5. “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

The Family is God's beautiful invention. He designed it with love, wisdom and care. He wants the best for the family. However, Satan is bent on the destruction of the family. As early as Genesis 3, the Bible reveals Satan's diabolical plan to destroy the family. A noted Christian writer has pointed out the following scheme of the devil: "In the family, Satan is at work. His banner waves even in professedly Christian households." *Great Controversy*, p. 585.

The same writer states that "While men are ignorant of his (Satan) devices, this vigilant foe is upon their track every moment. He is intruding his presence in every department of the household... breaking up families..." *Great Controversy*, p. 508.

The good news is that God has a plan for family restoration. The Elijah message referred to in Malachi 4, declares that before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be a movement in family renewal.

When Satan wants to lead a society or nation away from God his first attacks are usually on the family. Numerous examples are in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis.

In Genesis Chapter 3, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought sin into the world. In Chapter 4: 5 –16, Cain and Abel demonstrated sibling rivalry that resulted in Cain murdering his brother. By Genesis 6:1 – 3, we see the Antediluvians completely given over to Satan. God started over with Noah and his family but it didn't take long before one of Noah's sons, Ham, demonstrated that Satan was still at work on the family (Gen. 9: 20 – 25).

God called Abraham out of Ur to start a new godly family line; but even Abraham did not escape Satan's intrusion into the family. Abraham demonstrated lack of faith in God and lied to protect his life (Gen. 16). Abraham's nephew, Lot made the bad choice of living in the wicked city of Sodom and lost his family to the seduction of that corrupt environment; and even the two daughters who escaped the flames of God's judgment on Sodom, ended up in an incestuous relationship with their father. The result of which was the genesis of two of the most wicked nations of antiquity—the Ammonites and the Moabites.

Abraham received God's promise of an heir; but in his zeal and impatience, he ran ahead of God and with the agreement of his wife, cohabited with the maid, Hagar and produced a son (Gen.21). This act of distrust in God created problems not only for Abraham, but for succeeding generations, even to this day. In Genesis 27, we notice that family problems continued in Isaac's

family as favoritism by the parents created tension between the siblings, Jacob and Essau. The feud became so intense that Jacob had to run away from home to live with his uncle, Laban. Jacob reaped the results of his own deception when he was deceived in marriage by Laban. When Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel, the woman he really loved, “Behold, it was Leah.” Gen. 29:25

Jacob’s family problems dominate a large section of the book of Genesis—Chapters 29 – 33. There was rivalry between his wives. There was the betrayal by his children who sold Joseph, his favorite son as a slave to Ishmaelites and told the father that his son was killed by a wild beast. Satan was constantly working to destroy the family God designed to be a blessing. Family problems followed Jacob like wave after wave. His daughter, Dinah was raped, and his sons waged war on the family of the offender.

The book of Genesis ends with hope as we see the family of Jacob restored and the dramatic story of forgiveness, on the part of Joseph, for his brothers. The same Joseph who had been humiliated, disgraced and separated from his father because of the malicious workings of his brothers, found himself in prison because his master’s wife pressed him to commit adultery with her. Joseph refused that seductive woman with the stirring rebuke to her, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” God vindicated this upright soldier and took him from the dungeon and placed him next to the ruling Pharaoh. He was now in charge of all of the affairs of Pharaoh.



God wants the deliverance of the family from Satan's influence. He desires to restore the family to the ideal He designed. The story of the oppression of the families of Israel in the book of Exodus, illustrates how Satan seeks to draw the family away from God, but how God works for its vindication. God raised up Moses as the deliverer and a type of Christ, to demand the release of His people. "Let my people go," (Ex. 5:1; Ex. 8:1) He demanded of Pharaoh. Pharaoh offered several compromises. "Go, but sacrifice in the land" (Exod. 8:25).

When Moses refused, Pharaoh offered another compromise: "Go, but don't go very far" (Exod.8:28).

"No way," said Moses. So Pharaoh said, "You that are men may go and serve the Lord" (Exod.10:11).

Again Moses refused to accept this compromise. So once more Pharaoh offered, "Go, but leave your flocks and your herds behind" (Exod. 10:24).

Moses responded adamantly, "We will go with our sons, and our daughters, our young and our old, our flocks and our herds. So will we go" (Exod. 10:9, 24 – 26). God wants complete and total family restoration! No compromises. With His mighty arm Jehovah humbled Pharaoh and brought the families of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

There was an important lesson for the people of Israel to learn. It was that true family salvation is by the blood of Jesus. On the night of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, every family had to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorpost of each house. God had promised, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12: 2 – 13). God wants all the families of earth to be delivered from the bondage of Satan and be taken to their heavenly home when Jesus comes again. And it is through the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for us upon Calvary's cross, that this is made possible.

When Adam and Eve sinned, and they were ordered to leave the beautiful Eden home, they left with God's promise that He would send the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head and provide salvation (Gen. 3:15). This promise was reaffirmed by Jesus himself in John 3: 14 – 16. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to be baptized at Jordan, he declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." When on Calvary's rugged cross, the Lord of glory died, the promise made to Adam two thousand years before, was at last fulfilled. The serpent's head was crushed. The Savior's heel was bruised. But salvation, full and free, was offered to all. (Matt. 27: 24 – 54).

Our part in God's plan for family deliverance and restoration is simply to accept this wonderful offer. Like the Gadarene demoniac in Luke 8:38-40, we are incapable of helping ourselves. But the weakest human being who cries to Jesus, "Lord, save me," will find that Jesus is willing, ready and able to restore us into our right minds.

"Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty... The grace of Christ and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be, an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love may represent the family of heaven... Through the revelation of His grace, hearts that were once indifferent or estranged may be united in bonds that are firmer and more enduring than those of earth—the golden bonds of a love that will bear the test of trial."

*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 64 - 65

This is the message God wants the families of earth to know. He believes in families and wants happy homes and happy firesides. In the last days, the Elijah message referred to in Malachi 4, a message of heart turning will transform hearts, homes and lives, and prepare us to unite with the family in heaven.

## CHAPTER TWO

**HOW SATAN INVADES THE CHRISTIAN HOME**

**Text:** 1 Pet. 5:8, 9. “Stay alert and be careful because the devil is roaming around like a hungry lion seeking to destroy anyone he can. Stand firm in the faith and resist the devil, knowing that believers everywhere are going through the same things you are.” (*Clear Word*).

In the stories coming from ancient Greece, there is a fascinating one about the fall of Troy. Paris, king of Troy, abducted the beautiful Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, one of the Greek islands. The outraged Greeks combined their forces and determined to set sail for Troy to retrieve Helen. When the Greeks finally arrived, they found a well fortified city of Troy. For ten long years they besieged it but without success. They could not break down the walls of Troy.

Finally, one wise Greek, Odysseus, presented a plan that was accepted. The Greeks erected a huge hollow wooden horse that could hide several soldiers inside of it. They then pretended to sail away. The Trojans thought the wooden horse would bring them good luck; so they brought the horse inside of the city and celebrated their imagined victory. Only two Trojans spoke out against it, but they were ignored.

That night, after most of Troy was asleep or in a drunken stupor, the Greek warriors came out of the wooden horse, opened the gates of Troy to let the returning Greeks in, and they slaughtered the Trojans.

The Christian home is Satan's target and he is bent on destroying it. Ellen G. White alerts us that he tries to break up Christian homes in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 508, 585. We need to always remember that, as Christians, we are at war with the forces of darkness (Rev. 12:17; Eph. 6:12). The weapons in this warfare are not conventional ones (Eph. 6:13-18; 2 Cor. 10:4).

That old serpent called the evil and Satan, is persevering in his attacks on the Christian home. He is artful and deadly. We must not give him a foothold (Eph. 4:27). If you give him a lift, he will take over the car. We must be vigilant at all times (1 Pet. 5: 8). He tries to take over the Christian home, not with a full frontal attack but in subtle, deadly ways. His cunning eclipses that of the fox going after the chicken. He infiltrates the Christian home almost undetected. And then he strikes with deadly and diabolic force. His schemes are many. Here are some of the wiles of the devil:

1. He gets some of us to crowd out spiritual activities with seemingly harmless activities. Never have we been made so busy that we don't have enough time for spiritual activities. There is so much to do. It is not that we are engaging in sinful activities; and that is what makes it so subtle and deceptive. Some of us have made work our god. We enjoy work more than prayer. We live for work.

The time for prayer and religious exercises should be carefully guarded because it is by these means we receive the power to overcome the temptations of Satan. Jesus told his disciples, “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” (Matt. 26:41; Mk. 14: 38) By His own example, Jesus demonstrated that time with God was the most important factor in His life (Lk. 6:12).

It is by prayer and devotional exercises that we keep the devil outside the home. A prayerful home puts the devil to flight. All of the victorious Christians were men and women of prayer. Daniel preferred to die rather than stop praying.

2. Satan invades the home by promoting habits of disorder and uncleanness. The Bible teaches that God is particular about order and cleanliness. When He was leading ancient Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, God gave strict rules regarding the cleanliness of their homes and surroundings (Leviticus 11 – 15). While some of these ancient regulations should be taken in the context of a time when there were none of the modern ways of disinfecting or purifying one’s person or clothing, some of them remain timeless. The principles of cleanliness and orderliness are perpetual. We often say, “Cleanliness is next to godliness,” and order is heaven’s first law. When Jesus healed the unclean, insane man of Gadara, one of the man’s first acts was to clean himself up. (Mk. 5:1-15; Lk. 8:26-35)

Ellen White counsels, “The Lord commanded the children of Israel to wash their clothes and put away all impurity from their encampment, lest in passing by He should see their uncleanness. God is passing by our homes today, and He looks

upon the unsanitary conditions of families and the lax habits. Had we not better reform, and that without delay?" ---*Child Guidance*, p. 106)

“If God was so particular to enjoin cleanliness upon those journeying in the wilderness, who were in the open air nearly all the time, He requires no less of us who live in ceiled houses, where impurities are more observable and have a more unhealthful influence. —*Child Guidance*, p. 106.

3. Satan invades the Christian home by undermining Christian values. Parents should transmit Christian values to their children by example and instruction (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:16-21). In many homes the television has become the surrogate parent and often the values on the screen are in conflict with Christian values.

We cannot depend on the public school to rescue the situation; for many of the teachers do not profess to be Christians. Some even declare that they are atheists or agnostics. We need to take time in our homes to teach the old fashioned values of industry, chastity, modesty, honesty, integrity, fair play, courtesy, economy, simplicity, unselfishness, and thanksgiving.

Children should be taught the dignity of honest hard work. There are no shortcuts to excellence. “Parents cannot commit a greater sin than to neglect their God-given responsibilities in leaving their children with nothing to do; for these children will soon learn to love idleness and grow up to be shiftless, useless men and women.” —*Child Guidance*, p. 122.

Immodest dress has become fashionable and is seen everywhere, even in the church. We should teach our children to “cherish the precious, priceless gem of modesty. This will guard virtue.” —*Child Guidance*, p. 144. Our young ladies are God’s jewels and should not behave as if they are on display on a meat rack in the market. What is the objective of strutting around the town with the neckline and the hemline in a ding dong battle to see which can reach the waistline first? Or with the belly-button exposed? Modesty in dress increases the value of the person, for the dress is still an index to the character. The apostle Paul clearly stated, “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety . . .” —1 Tim. 2:9. (*New International Version*). “I also want the women to be modest and sensible about their clothes and to dress properly...” (*Good News Bible*)

Standards in dress are for Christian men as well. Why do some of our young men feel that walking around with their pants looking as if they are falling off makes them look great? We ought to remember that we are ambassadors for the King of Kings and represent Christ with every article of clothing we put wear.

4. Another way in which Satan invades the Christian home is by introducing spiritualism and witchcraft through books and television. A fleet of books and television shows have presented spiritualism and witchcraft as something innocent, harmless, and fun. Children line up to buy the latest Harry Potter books and the naive parents are happy that their children are interested in reading. This is a major Trojan horse of the enemy of our souls.



The Harry Potter books have become the best selling books of our time, making their author, J. K. Rowling, the richest woman in England. Books on witches and witchcraft have been around before, but somehow the Harry Potter books with their appeal to children, are achieving what others failed to do. Is it merely that J. K. Rowling is an imaginative and colorful writer or is there some sinister force behind her pen?

Witches are exuberant that these books have gained such overwhelming acceptance. According to Steve Wohlberg in *his* well researched *Hour of the Witch* (which I recommend to parents, teachers, and pastors), “Over 250 million *Harry Potter* books have been sold in over 200 countries and 60 languages, with two more books looming on the horizon. How big will Pottermania get? Only God knows.”(p. 24). The series (seven to date) has even received endorsement by some religious authors and leaders. They claim that we can learn spiritual lessons from these books. Isn't this just like Satan? He told Eve in the garden of Eden that she would become more enlightened if she ate of the forbidden fruit. She did learn a major spiritual lesson—that the “wages of sin is death” and that disobedience to God, however enticing, always brings unhappiness and disaster.

Because God saw witchcraft as a most dangerous tool of the devil, in Old Testament times He commanded, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” Ex. 22:18. He calls it “abomination. Deut. 18:9-12. (See also Lev. 20:27; Isa. 8:19-20; Lev.

19:31; 1 Sam. 28:5-24; 1 Chron. 10:13-14.) God is not silent on this matter. His word is clear.

Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books, and a graduate of mythology studies from Exeter University in England, admitted that fully one-third of her material is based on actual occultism. The biggest danger lies in not seeing the danger. Most parents and children see the *Harry Potter stories* as harmless fantasy stories. Real witchcraft is made attractive and desirable. Harry Potter, as a young wizard, has become a hero to many young people. Many kids have been drawn into witchcraft through *Harry Potter*.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Satan is preparing the world for seduction and the final onslaught of spiritualism just before the return of Christ.

In Acts 13:6-12, the apostle Paul did not compromise with Elymas the sorcerer. He rebuked him, calling him mischief maker, child of the devil, and enemy of all righteousness. Let us keep away from books and TV programs that present witchcraft, sorcery and wizardry as desirable. Let us prevent this Trojan horse from invading our homes. We can never be too careful with Satan, the prowling lion trying to invade our homes by any means he can. We must always be on the alert.

The good news today is we do not have to fight him by ourselves. Jesus Christ, the mighty Conqueror, is by our sides to protect us. The angels of heaven are all around us to defend us. Psa. 34:7 declares, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Today, let us renew our allegiance to the Lord of the Universe and receive His protection. Everyone who is not on the side of Jesus is Satan's lawful prey. "He that is not with me," said Jesus, "is against me." Which side are you standing on? Choose you this day whom you will serve and let it be the Lord. And when you do, not only will you have the assurance of eternal life when He comes, but your home will become His embassy, a strong fortress against the forces of darkness, a lighthouse in a dark world of sin, a little heaven here on earth in which to go to heaven.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Before You Say “I Do”**

**Text: Gen. 2: 18, 22 :** “The Lord, God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him... Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”

Marriage is one of the most important facets of your life. As one bright optimist has remarked, "Marriage is the only game of chance in town where both players can either win or both lose." Every step toward a marriage alliance should be taken with serious thought, studied care, and much prayer, for marriage is for keeps. There is no honorable discharge, except death. The great majority of people will follow love until they reach the marriage altar.

#### **Courtship**

Courtship differs from dating in that it is a more formal way of entering into love, engagement and possible marriage. Courtship is goal-directed while dating is not. It is the final or most advanced stage of a love affair. It usually follows a prolonged period of dating. The two lovers have decided that they would like to move toward marriage. The man asks the parents of the girl for their daughter's hand in marriage.

There are several benefits of courtship. The couple is free from the insecurities and competitiveness of the dating period. They get closer to each other and can see each other's strengths and weaknesses clearer. Others get to observe them together often, and

significant others can make observations to the couple. There is usually an informal understanding that the two people are planning to get married.

Pre-marital counseling can be planned to help the couple prepare for marriage. This helps the couple to understand themselves and what each one brings to the marriage. It helps the couple to be realistic about adjustments they must make. It provides an opportunity for the couple to settle questions or doubts they may have.

The couple is assisted in making their final decision, "Should we marry?" During this period, the couple may see more of each other in various settings. They are able to discuss matters at a deeper level than before. Generally, the longer the courtship the better are the chances for a happy adjustment in marriage. However, long periods of courtship are not recommended.

There are some common courtship practices that create problems for a couple contemplating marriage:

1. Keeping late hours
2. Following impulse and blind passion
3. Engaging in premarital sex
4. Violating the rules of modesty and propriety

Couples who want to ensure that they pass through courtship without any regrets will avoid these practices.

### **Engagement**

After the couple has been courting for some time they may decide that they want to get married. The formal decision to get married is engagement. A public announcement often solemnizes the engagement. The period of engagement provides important opportunities for the couple.

Courtship gives time to plan the wedding. It is a public notice to friends and family of the couple's intention to wed. Making a promise public strengthens the intentions to fulfill it.

A secret engagement is no engagement at all. This period offers time for critical and final investigation of each other. Engagement behavior should be kept on a high spiritual, moral and

dignified plain. Engagement is not marriage, and the couple should make sure that there will be nothing that they will be embarrassed about if the engagement has to be broken.

### **How long should engagement be?**

Ideally, six months to one year is a recommended length of time for the engagement period. A shorter period does not facilitate proper planning for the wedding. It also does not afford proper observation of the partners. This is a good time to study each other's strengths and weaknesses. It is important to be objective as you scrutinize the partner. An engagement that is too long puts a heavy emotional and moral strain on the couple.

It is far better to have a broken engagement than to continue with a relationship that has all the indications of disaster and unhappiness in marriage. If during the courtship you discover that there are factors in your prospective mate that will make you unhappy for the rest of your life, this is the time to kindly make an exit from the relationship. It is a mistake of the highest order to marry someone that you are convinced does not have the characteristics you are looking for in a mate. As you analyze the person, you will want to consider four areas of qualities:

1. The things you absolutely must have in your mate.
2. The things you would like in a mate, but you are willing to do without.
3. The things that you do not like but you can live with.
4. The things that you absolutely do not want.

If your prospective mate is deficient in the things that you absolutely must have, or he or she has qualities that you absolutely do not want, it is better to break the engagement than to proceed towards marriage. Marriage is forever; and forever is a long, long time to be married to someone who does not have the qualities that will contribute to your happiness

### **Planning your Christian Wedding**

Discuss your plans with your pastor, very early and make arrangements for premarital counseling. Six months before your intended wedding date is not too early to begin this process. Premarital counseling is not an option, but it is mandatory. It provides a road map for entering marriage.

It is also important for both of you to make an appointment to see your physician. Medical checks are necessary as well as the discussion of other medical concerns that will impact the marriage. Sometimes illness occurs without warning. However, it is better to know the state of health of your intended spouse, than to be faced with medical surprises.

Prepare a sane, sensible budget for the wedding as well as for the first months and the first years of your lives together. This will help to control your spending and greatly assist in managing your income. Consult a financial expert if necessary. Determine early, the number of guests you can afford to invite to your wedding, based on your budget. Six to eight weeks before you planned wedding date is a good time frame for sending out your invitations.

There is no need to have an elaborate ceremony that will put undue financial strain on you. Keep your ceremony Christian, in terms of the dress of the participants and the music played. The object is to have an elegant, beautiful ceremony. With wise planning it is possible to have an impressive wedding on a small budget. The reception should be just as carefully planned as the wedding ceremony.

### **Happy Ever After**

Anyone who has been married for a long time knows that marital adjustment takes time. In *The Adventist Home* we read, “To gain a proper understanding of the marriage relation, is the



work of a lifetime. Those who marry enter a school from which they are never in this life to be graduated.

“However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of after years” (p.105).

There are certain areas that present challenges to married couples, especially in the early years, and those contemplating marriage ought to get as much information and counseling as they can in the following areas:

- |                                     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Money management                 | 8. Family planning          |
| 2. Roles in marriage                | 9. Relationship to in-laws  |
| 3. Expectations                     | 10. Conflict resolution     |
| 4. Fulfilling of each other's needs | 11. Communication           |
| 5. Sexual adjustment                | 12. Religion in the home    |
| 6. Children                         | 13. Avoiding infidelity and |
| 7. Family planning                  | maintaining loyalty         |

If your pastor or counselor is unable to provide instruction in any of the above areas, there are good Christian books on the market and in libraries on each of these subjects. Read, attend seminars and obtain as much information as you can.

"When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing. It guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it

elevates the physical, the intellectual and the moral nature" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46; *The Adventist Home*, p. 26).

God invented marriage and He is the Author of love. There is nothing God desires more than for couples to have happy marriages and happy homes. When we invite Him to be our constant Guest and the Lord of our lives, our success and happiness in marriage are guaranteed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Open Secrets for A Happier Home And Marriage**

**Text:** Psa. 127:1. “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Robert and Margaret were dubbed the couple most likely to succeed. They had everything going for them. He was tall, dark and handsome and captain of the college football team. She was from a wealthy family and was attractive, intelligent and polished. But six months after they got married, they started having serious marital problems. Then after another six tempestuous months, they divorced. It is no secret that many marriages that started off as a happy dream turned into a nightmare before too long. Many marriages end on the rocks because those involved were not aware of the means to an end, the factors that make for success. There are certain principles that if followed seem to contribute significantly to happy and lasting marriages. To be sure the Bible and the God of the Bible want happy marriages and happy homes.

Here are the open secrets for a happier home and marriage: Those who are prepared to pay the price will be rewarded with homes filled with joy.

#### ***Meaningful Family Devotions***

Devotions should be regular, practical, purposeful and pleasant for parents as well as children. Avoid dry, stilted, churchy, and long devotional periods. Involve everyone. The husband should not do all the reading and all the praying. Sometimes other family members may

plan the worship session. The power of a praying family is awesome. Couples that pray regularly together have a much better chance of staying together.

Prayer is the “Super Glue” of marriage. It has a bonding nature. It is difficult for two persons who regularly pray with and for each other to turn against each other.

Here are some guidelines for delightful family devotions:

1. Choose the most agreeable time for the whole family.
2. Designate a pleasant and comfortable area of the house as the place for worship.
3. Have a special signal to indicate the time when the devotions are about to begin.
4. Cater to the interests and needs of the youngest family members in planning for the devotions.
5. Let family members take turns in conducting the family devotions.
6. Keep the worship period “brief and full of life.”
7. Utilize some of the ready-made devotional aids available.
8. Be consistent and regular in engaging in family devotions.
9. Put variety and sparkle in this activity.
10. Keep in mind the purpose of family worship.

### ***Better Couple Communication***

Many marriage experts contend that communication is the most important key to a successful marriage. Good communication requires effort. We need to take time to share our ideas, our feelings, our emotions, our innermost selves with our spouses and also to invite and allow them to do the same with us. Many couples have found that on improving their communication skills many other problems disappeared. More marriages flounder on the rocks of

poor communication than any other challenge. We started communicating from the moment we were born. Yet we are so poor at it.

### **What is involved?**

1. The ability to share feelings. This is a learned ability
2. The ability to listen. This is a practiced skill
3. The ability to settle conflicts. Conflict resolution skills are vital to the success and happiness of any marriage.

The book of Proverbs is filled with precious gems on communication. Study especially Chapters 15 - 18 for important communication principles.

### **Communication keys**

There are many things one can do to improve the quality of communication in a relationship. They include the following:

- A. Set a good time for serious matters.
- B. Don't wait until the problem is too huge.
- C. Get all the facts before reaching conclusions.
- D. Discuss matters as equal partners. Each has rights.
- E. Review regularly your decisions.
- F. Write down agreements.
- G. Have a specific time each month to discuss key issues such as money.
- H. Look for the right opportunity to discuss sensitive topics.
- I. Be careful with the feelings of others.
- J. Rehearse what you will say if it is a criticism.

- K. Find the desire hidden in the criticism and express it positively.
- L. Ask open-ended questions – Do not say, “Was it good?” It is better to say, “Tell me about it.”
- M. A good book could be used for discussion.
- N. Use “I” messages. Don’t speak for the other person; rather express how you feel about the topic.
- O. Engage in active listening. Listen to the message behind the words.
- D. Speak the truth in love. Eph. 4:15
- E. Control your emotions (negative, anger)
- F. Get it all out, but don’t overkill.
- G. Ask for feedback.
- H. Utilize pillow talk, walk and talk, letters, cards.

Good communication enriches the marriage, increases intimacy, and helps the relationship to grow. There can be no meaningful relationship if the communication is poor. Good communication can prevent and solve many problems.

The more a couple practises good communication, the more satisfying their marriage will be. Good communication involves speaking and listening to each other with interest and empathy. It involves the daily sharing of intimate feelings with each other. It involves mastering the dynamics of settling conflict.

### ***Good Conflict Solving Mechanisms***

All marriages will have conflict. Not only are we different from one another in personality, gender, background and experience, but we are also sinful human beings. Areas of disagreement

and disturbance keep popping up. What separates the better marriages from the rest is that they have good strategies for handling disputes. The secret is to agree on the rules before the conflict arises. e.g.: No name calling. No shouting. No interrupting. Never quarrel in bed, etc.

The difference between successful marriages and failing ones is not the absence of problems, but the ability of the two persons to agree, “Yes, we have problems. Let’s sit down and work it out.” Little problems left unattended can lead to major breakdown in the relationship later on. As Solomon says it is the little foxes that ruin the vineyard.

### ***Adequate Social Life and Recreation***

Couples should take time to be social beings. Spending time in social activities and recreation with the family is just as important as spending time praying for them. Unless this is done, life becomes unbalanced and the religious life seems a dull burden. Family outings and picnics as well as activities with larger groups should be regular. Jesus encouraged His disciples to take time away from the pressures of life to rest and relax

Husbands need to take time to be husbands to their wives and fathers to their children. Wives often complain that their husbands spend too little prime time with them. Some husbands also complain that their wives are usually too busy to have fun times with their husbands. Children are often given left over time. Not even the church should rob the family of quality time together. Successful couples ensure that they spend adequate time with each other, not only helping each other with chores, but also doing fun things together.

Happy couples know the value of playing together and going out to entertainment functions together. Families should plan for these special times especially during the holidays. Create many

pleasant memories with each other and with your children. Do not make the mistake of constantly putting off family fun for some future time.

### ***Cooperation in household Chores***

Household chores are not to be one sided. Many husbands seem to feel that it is unmanly to help their wives in the kitchen or with the laundry, and consequently many wives especially those who also work outside the home, are overburdened, overworked and frustrated. The husband who helps with the household chores will bind the heart of his wife to him with strong cords, and will find that he has a more satisfied and fulfilled wife. It is equally distressing for the wife to leave everything on the shoulders of the husband.

The regular tasks of the home should be shared in such an evenly distributed way that neither partner is overburdened or overworked. Children should be given duties in keeping with their ages.

### ***Proper Money Management***

Times are hard and salaries are not big, therefore the husband needs to sit down with his wife as an equal partner and plan how they will manage their income. It is a big mistake for the husband to leave his wife out of the financial planning. Even the older children in accordance with their maturity may be included in the financial councils and decisions making. Because the income never seems adequate to meet all of the needs of the family, there is a greater necessity for careful financial planning. Someone has humorously stated that if the outgo exceeds the income, then the upkeep of the family will become its downfall.



### ***Free Expression of Affection and Appreciation***

A family can survive without lots of money but it cannot survive without lots of love freely expressed in words and deeds. Ellen White observed, "In many families there is a great lack of expressing affection one for another... There is need of expressing love and tenderness in a chaste, pure, dignified way." "Many husbands do not sufficiently understand and appreciate the cares and perplexities which their wives endure." *The Adventist Home*, pp. 198, 224. Spread love, affection and appreciation in your family generously and you will reap big dividends.

The Bible admonishes married couples to pay attention to the intimate side of marriage. God is not pleased when one spouse refuses to meet the other's needs. Intimacy is the closeness that couples experience as they build bridges to each other. This may be accomplished by keeping up the courtship practices all through married life. The big problem with many marriages is that the couples allow boredom to creep in. Couples often drift apart when they put romantic and intimate activities on the back burner. Solomon declares that where there is no wood the fire goes out (Pro. 26:20). This is also true in marriage. Unless the fire of loving closeness is kept burning, the marriage will eventually die.

### ***Cooperation in the Raising of the Children***

The raising of children is a partnership between the mother and the father. No one will deny that the mother usually has more to do with the raising of the children than the father, but the father has a major part to play and should not let all the burden and responsibility fall upon the mother. Many marriages get into trouble when children enter the family. The father needs to study how to share in the raising and disciplining of the children.

***The Jesus Factor***

The greatest resource available to married couples is of course, JESUS. No family can enjoy fulfillment and joy without giving Jesus the central place. In fact, knowing that Jesus is a never failing friend and helper to each family member, and knowing that we can turn to Him at anytime and in any and every situation is worth more than all the money in all the banks in all the world. "The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon your Burden Bearer." *Ministry of Healing*, p. 71

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Growing Through Conflict**

**Text: Romans 12:18:** “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

The Bible admonishes us to “live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). But few mortals have been able to accomplish this feat. Yet the effective functioning of homes, the church or the workplace depends on the ability of people to get along with one another. It is therefore necessary that we learn all we can about handling conflicts.

“A conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both” (Mc Swain, Treadwell, *Conflict Ministry in the Church*, p. 25). Conflicts may range from the mild to the volcanic. When a husband wants to use the tax returns to buy a new television set, but his wife wants to use it to buy a new washing machine, they have a conflict. When half of the church members want to have the church floor carpeted and the other half prefers to have it tiled, there is a conflict. When your supervisor wants you to put in some extra hours on a project and you feel that you can’t give another minute to it, there is a conflict.

There are many reasons why conflicts occur. Sometimes the persons involved came from **different backgrounds**. They may have grown up in different places with **unlike** customs. A husband and wife may have grown up in homes that were vastly different from each other. Each entered marriage believing that the marriage would be much like that of the family of origin. Conflicts came when each expected that his or her mate would feel, think, or behave just like he or she would.

**Different temperament types** will often have conflicts with each other. People may be classified into four general temperament types—leaders, entertainers, influencers, and peacemakers. Sometimes the different types seem to be going in opposite directions. Often each may feel that his or her way is the only right way to proceed.

The **different genders** often don't see eye to eye. Men and women often behave as if they came from two different planets. Men and women were created to be different. We are different in the structure of our brains. We are different in the hormones that influence us. The structure of our cells is different. Our thought processes work differently. It is therefore inevitable that conflicts will take place as men and women interact.

Then there are those persons who are just difficult to get along with. They seem to be placed on this planet to cause trouble for others. David seems to have encountered some of these. He wrote, “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (Psa. 22:12, 13).

How are we to handle conflicts when they arise? Our handling of a conflict will greatly affect the outcome. The goal is harmony and peace, not personal victory. In the resolution of the conflict God should be glorified. Here are some important principles to follow:

**Draw on your spiritual resources:** God wants to help you. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Rom. 12:19. “I will contend with him that contendeth with thee” (Isa. 49:25). “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” Ex. 14:14. God feels honored when we turn over our battles to Him. There is no conflict situation that you can ever be in that God cannot solve for your best good, and for His glory. Even Stephen, while being stoned to death, practiced this principle (Acts 7). Of course, our Lord Himself left us His example (Matt. 26:48-54). “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). Jesus knew the art of turning over His battles to His heavenly Father.

**Reframe the problem:** Try to look at it from a new angle. Try to see the good that can come out of the conflict. Rom. 8:28 states that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (*New King James Version*). This is illustrated in the life of Joseph. Sold as a slave by his own brothers, serving a ten-year jail term for a crime he did not commit, when he was in a position to get revenge, he was able to say to his brothers, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against

me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:19, 20).

**Make a commitment to be a peacemaker:** Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Paul stated, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). “Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. The fruit of the Spirit-filled life is peace (Gal. 5:22). We are called “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

In order to be a peacemaker you cannot focus on the unkindness of others or their irritating ways. Instead, wear them out with love and kindness. The apostle Paul, quoting Proverbs 25:21, 22, encourages us to be kind, even to our enemies. Romans 12:20, 21 states, “Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.” Many difficult persons have been won over by the loving and kind attitudes of the ones they were persecuting.

It is also important in the pursuit of peace not to judge the other person too quickly or too harshly. Try to see the other person’s point of view. Try to be understanding. If you can see the problem through the other person’s eyes, it may make the world of difference.

Peacemakers are not afraid to confront, but they do it lovingly. They are not afraid to speak the truth, but they “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). They exhibit a pleasant and friendly attitude even to the hostile or indifferent. They realize that more flies are caught with honey than with vinegar.

**Take the long view of the situation:** Will it matter a month from now? Will it matter a year from now? Will it matter five years from now? Much that annoys is usually short-lived. Patience will often win the day when fighting and quarrelling are powerless. The apostle Paul was right on target in 2 Cor. 4:17: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

Richard Wurmbrand tells how he kept his sanity while in solitary confinement for fourteen years in Communist Romania. As the prison guard insulted and abused him, Wurmbrand imagined the future conversion of the prison guard and being obliged to call him brother. He imagined meeting him as a saved person in heaven.

The very person who may be your biggest trial now may one day become one of God’s outstanding ambassadors. Can you imagine the excitement when Paul and Stephen meet on the sea of glass? Who would have thought that one of the biggest persecutors of Christians would have become one of the staunchest disciples of Christ—even a martyr?

**Be professional and mature in your behavior, even when others behave childishly:** Don’t let others dictate your behavior by responding in kind. You will often encounter persons whose behavior leaves much to be desired. Many adults will behave like children when they cannot get what they want.

All of us have “hot buttons” or emotional triggers and often when someone touches them, we react negatively. We should be aware of our “hot buttons” and not allow others to control them. If a wife is aware that every time her husband says something about her weight it upsets her, she should brace herself and refuse to get irritated every time the subject of weight comes up. If a husband realizes that every time he even hears that his mother-in-law is coming to visit, he

gets angry, then he needs to prepare himself and not allow his “hot button” to be pushed. When someone acts with maturity and dignity, even his enemies admire him.

Conflict is inevitable. We can use it to help us grow or we can be defeated by it and our spiritual progress can be stunted. The choice is ours not go about in search of conflict, we can see each episode as an opportunity for growth.

“You are God’s chosen race, his saints; He loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body. Always be thankful” (Col. 3:12-15, Jerusalem).



## CHAPTER SIX

### **Youth, Love, and Sexual Relationships**

#### **Text: Ecclesiastes 12:1-7**

The subject of love and sex dominates the fashion industry, the movie industry, the music industry, and the book and magazine industry. Unfortunately, not much good advice is being offered to the young person who has to make sane sexual choices in the midst of the sexual confusion of our era.

There is no intention here to make anyone feel uncomfortable with this subject. It is easy for some who have already made mistakes in this area to feel “I’m hopeless. I’ve made too serious a mistake.” But the good news is that God can make a new person out of you and give you a fresh start. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17.) “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25).

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9).

It is seldom too late to begin a new life with God. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” promised Jesus (John 6:32). If you are one of the fortunate ones who have not yet

made mistakes in this area, stand firm in your resolve to be true to God and yourself in your love and sexual behavior.

As a young person reaches adolescence, his or her sex glands begin to work overtime. The body is now producing more estrogen and progesterone in girls and testosterone in boys as part of nature's program to make the girls more feminine and the boys more masculine. Sexual feelings and thoughts occupy much of the young person's waking hours, and even some sleeping hours. The body of the young woman is being prepared for motherhood, and the body of the young man is being prepared for marriage and fatherhood. Nature chooses to take approximately eight full years before this process is completed.

The problem is further aggravated by the bombardment of sexual stimuli including the following: television, cinema, videos, music, songs, dance, pornographic books and magazines, fashions exploiting sex, advertisements, the so-called sex experts.

Sex before and outside of marriage is presented as normal and even fashionable and desirable. The twofold impression is given: "Everyone is doing it, and it is the thing to do." The consequences are frightening and disastrous: teen pregnancy, teen promiscuity, unwanted babies, teen parents, a pandemic of sexually-transmitted diseases.

**All in the name of love:** Much of the sexual experimentation is carried on in the name of love. The girls engage in sex for which they are not ready in order to get love. The boys play the game of love for which they are not ready in order to get sex.

It is normal and natural that as a young person reaches adolescence that he or she will develop feelings of attraction for the opposite sex. God created us with a built-in time release

mating instinct that develops as we grow older and it usually reaches its peak between ages 18 and 30.

Love is not a game to be played. It is serious business. “Love,” says Ellen White, “is a precious gift which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind.” *Messages to Young People*, p. 435.

A young person can tell the difference between true love and the counterfeit by applying the acid test of 1 Cor. 13:4-8. Love is patient. It knows how to wait. Love is kind. It is concerned about the welfare of the beloved. It does not envy. It is not conceited or proud. It respects the beloved. Unselfishness is a major characteristic of true love. Love is truthful and upright. It is protecting and enduring. Love does not make unreasonable or unrighteous demands of its beloved. Love wants the best for its love object.

**Dispelling the shadows:** There is nothing wrong with sex when it is used as God intended. It was God who invented it. It is to be used honorably within the marriage relationship. “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). God had several good purposes in mind for its use including reproduction, bonding between husband and wife, expression of love in marriage, and enjoyment in marriage.

A box of matches is a lovely invention, but in the hands of a child or arsonist it is frightening and holds the potential for great destruction. So it is with sex. Used as God intended, it is a big blessing. Misused or abused, it brings unhappiness and disaster. Many persons don’t want to play by the rules God has given for the enjoyment of sex, and that is where the trouble begins.

God is against premarital sex (1 Cor. 5:9-12; 6:18). He is against extramarital sex (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Pro. 6:23-35; Heb. 13:4). He is also against all forms of perverted sex, e.g. homosexuality, prostitution, incest (Rom. 1:26-32; Lev. 18; Lev. 20:10-21).

**Problems with misused sex:** When sex is used other than in the way God intended, it results in multiple including the following: loss of virginity; unwanted pregnancy; abortion, if used to terminate pregnancy; unwanted babies; school dropouts; sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS; guilt; diminished self-worth; lowered self-esteem; welfare cases; delinquent children; marital problems later in life; negative Christian witness; and an unfitness for spiritual duties.

**What to do if you have already made a mistake in this area:**

- Acknowledge your mistake and ask for and claim God's forgiveness. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psa. 51:2, 3; Pro. 28:13; Luke 15:18-24; 1 John 1:7-9; Psa. 86:5).
- Forgive yourself as well. God will make a new person out of you. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).
- Pray for strength to overcome all tendency, weakness, or addiction in this area. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).
- Keep away from temptation and situations loaded with sexual stimuli. "Submit yourselves

therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7; Psa. 1; 1 Thess. 5:22, 23; 1 Cor. 5:9, 11).

- Look for worthwhile outlets. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).
- Look forward to your possibilities in Christ (John 8:1-11; Col. 1:10, 11). “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col. 2:6).
- Walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- Always remember you are not alone. There is a Fourth Man in the fire with you (Dan. 3:21-28; Isa. 43:1-3).

**How to handle sexual temptations:** Sexual temptations **will** come your way. In fact, this area seems to be the devil’s specialty. How is a Christian to deal with this pressure?

- Have predetermined standards based on God’s word for your sexual behavior (Dan. 1:8; Psa. 119:9, 11).
- Realize your value as a child of God (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). You are very valuable in God’s book. Do not lower your value by indulging in sin.
- Avoid persons who try to get you to lower your standards or disobey God’s word (2 Sam. 13; Pro. 7:25-27). “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men” (Pro. 4:14).
- Feed your mind with the right view of sex (Phil. 4:8; Job. 31:1). “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right

spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (Psa. 51: 9-11).

- Run from temptation if you have to. “There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9). Do not, like Eve, stay around to listen to Satan proclaim the benefits of sin (Gen. 3:1-6).
- Keep the company of those who could help you heavenward (Pro. 2:20). “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pro. 13:20).
- Ask God for strength and guidance (Isa. 40: 29-31). “The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation (Psa. 118:14).

When the Holy Spirit controls your life, righteous doing becomes a pleasure and living for Christ becomes easy; for Jesus will walk beside you wherever you go.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## DEALING WITH ANGER FORGIVENESS

**Text:** Ephesians 4:26. “Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath . . .”

*Discussion Quiz*  
*True or False*

Write T (True) or F (False) in the blank beside each of the following statements:

- \_\_\_            1.        True Christians are never hurt by what others do to them.
- \_\_\_            2.        Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling.
- \_\_\_            3.        Forgiveness is more beneficial to the forgiver than to the receiver.
- \_\_\_            4.        Anger is always sinful.
- \_\_\_            5.        If one has not forgotten the injury done to him/her, sh/she has not truly forgiven the perpetrator.
- \_\_\_            6.        Forgiveness is surrendering the right to hurt back.
- \_\_\_            7.        There are some injustices that are impossible to forgive.
- \_\_\_            8.        The spirit of retaliation and revenge originated with Satan.
- \_\_\_            9.        Forgiveness is risky business.
- \_\_\_            10.       God does not expect us to forgive everyone who has done us injury.
- \_\_\_            11.       The best way to handle anger is to bottle it up.
- \_\_\_            12.       If I forgive a person I will have to reinstate the person to his/her former position.
- \_\_\_            13.       Praying for someone who has injured me is not only beneficial, it is right.
- \_\_\_            14.       Forgiveness is easier to preach than to practice.
- \_\_\_            15.       If I suspect that my forgiveness will be abused, it is better to withhold it.

Read the Bible references below. What light do they shed on the subject of anger and forgiveness?

Psa.. 103:3; Eph. 4:32; Col.3:13; Matt. 6:12-15; Matt. 18:21; Psa. 86:5; Ex. 4:14; Num. 11:10; James 1:19; Prov. 21:19; Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:36; Luke 6:27-36.

(Answers to True or False Quiz are at the end of the chapter.)

Anger is a basic human emotion like joy, sadness, or fear. Some theorists say anger comes from within the individual. Others contend that frustration creates anger. Still others believe anger is a learned behavior. Whatever the source, how are we to deal with our anger as Christians?

Even saints got angry. Moses sometimes became angry (Ex. 11:8; 32:19). The Bible repeatedly tells of times when God became angry. (Ex. 15:7; 22:24; 32:10, 11; Num. 11:1, 10; 12:9; 22:22; 25:2; Ex. 4:14; Deut. 9:20; Joel 7:1.)

“Be angry and sin not,” Eph. 4:26, suggests that there is a **right** and **wrong** way to express anger. Most of us are guilty of expressing our anger in wrong ways. We need to learn how to deal with our anger appropriately so that we do not sin.

We are all born with the potential to feel and express anger. The way we respond when angry is learned. What situations make you angry? What is your usual behavior when you are angry?

### **The Bible on Anger**

The Word of God has a great deal to say on the subject of anger. Here is a sampling:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Pro. 15:18 | “...he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.”                                    |
| Pro. 16:32 | “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.”                              |
| Pro. 19:11 | “The discretion of a man defereth his anger.”                                      |
| Pro. 27:4  | “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous.”   |
| Pro. 21:19 | “It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.” |
| Eccl: 7:9  | “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” |



|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Eph. 4:26, 27  | “Be angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.”                 |
| Eph. 4:31      | “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.” |
| Col. 3:8       | “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, ... out of your mouth.”  |
| James 1:19, 20 | “Wherefore, ... let every man be ... slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”    |

### **The Many Faces of Anger**

Anger may be displayed in many ways. It may be cold or hot.

***Cold Anger*** may display itself in the following ways:

Silence, Internalizing

Depression, anxiety

Sleeplessness

Self-sabotage

Overworking

False peace

Pretending

Flight

Sickness

Withdrawal

**Hot Anger** displays itself in—

Quarrelling

Shouting, blowing up

Violence

Bullying

Put downs

Tantrums

Cursing, swearing

Verbal abuse ways of dealing with anger will often leave the angry person

Emotional abuse

Competitiveness

These inappropriate ways of dealing with anger will often be disadvantageous to the angry person. In the life of a Christian, the Holy Spirit bears His fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Gal. 22:23).

### **When Anger Becomes Sinful**

The Bible admonishes, “In your anger do not sin” (Eph. 4:26, *New International Version*). When is anger sinful? Anger is sinful when it is accompanied by rage, violence, vengeance, or abusive behavior. Moses sinned when in anger he disobeyed God and struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock as God had ordered.

Solomon warns, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul” (Pro. 22:24, 25). He further declares, “An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression” (Pro. 29:22).

Abusive behavior is prevalent in society, **but it has no place in a Christian home.** The counsel of the apostle Paul is, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour (quarrelling), and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31, 32).

If Christian homes were to live by this rule, peace, harmony, and happiness would flood them. Husbands and wives could make these verses a part of their mission statement and regularly read them until this behavior becomes the norm in their homes.

No man deserving of the name “husband” or “Christian” would be abusive to his wife. And likewise, no woman deserving of the name “wife” or “Christian” would be abusive to her husband. Spouses are for loving, not abusing. If you have ever abused your spouse or children, confess and forsake the behavior as you would any other sin.

One husband asked us, “Do you mean that I should not even spank my wife as I would a child if she were rude to me?” Your wife is not your child. A wife is her husband’s equal. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves His church (Eph. 5:25). “To love and to cherish” is the opposite of abusing.

Children are not for abusing either. Parents need to learn to discipline with love. The widespread evil of abusing children has led many countries to enact laws against abuse. But when the love of God is in our hearts, we do not need the laws of society to tell us not to abuse our loved ones.

Abuse may take many forms. It may be physical (hitting, beating), verbal (saying hurtful and denigrating things to the person), mental or emotional (silence, ignoring, withdrawal, mind

games), or sexual (using sex in inappropriate or harmful ways). Any form of abuse is out of place in the Christian home. No one deserves to be abused. Do not tolerate it. If you are abused, or if you are an abuser, get help quickly.

### **How Is the Christian to Deal with Anger**

No matter how saintly we are, there will be times when we become angry. What are we to do at such times? Your wife just put a huge dent in your new car. Your neighbor's dog just destroyed your flower garden. Your co-worker has spread a falsehood about you. Pretending to be not angry will not solve the problem. Face up to it. Here are some suggestions that work:

First, admit it; recognize it; verbalize it.

Second, Identify the source. Why am I angry? What is causing the feeling of anger? The one toward whom we may be displaying the angry feelings may not be the cause. There may be a root cause somewhere else. Retrace your steps. Is there a specific event that caused it?

Third, determine if you have a right to be angry. Get all the facts.

Jonah was angry because God was merciful (Jonah 3:10 - 4:11).

Henry's wife, Susan, expected him to pick her up from the supermarket at 4:00 p.m. He turned up at 5:00 p.m. She was very angry until she learnt that the car broke down and he had tried desperately to contact her to alert her.

Fourth, ask yourself, "What is the most appropriate way to express this anger?" Moses made the big mistake of expressing his justified anger in an inappropriate way (Num. 20:7-12). It may be necessary to wait until your anger subsides before expressing yourself.

Fifth, deal with the root cause. If it is something that you have control over, correct it. If you need to confront someone else, do so with dignity, professionalism, class, and love.

Sixth, ask God's help to express your anger in the best way. Sometimes the best way is to bury it at the foot of the cross. It is sometimes better to suffer an injustice than to inflict upon ourselves the torture of retaliation. Jesus, when He was reviled, reviled not again.

Seventh, forgive the offender. Jesus is the supreme example of this. On the cross He pleaded for forgiveness for His executioners (Luke 23:34). He admonishes us to do the same (Matt. 6:14, 15; 18:35). Divine help is available for dealing with anger (Phil. 4:13). If a person wants to be helped in overcoming a bad temper and uncontrolled anger, God is ready to help. He did it for Moses who became the meekest of men. He did it for James and John, the Sons of Thunder. He will do it for you.

But it is not enough simply to control our anger; it is also necessary to forgive those who made us angry. One of the hardest Christian principles to practice is forgiveness. It is natural to want to hurt back those who hurt us.

Jesus, however, set a high standard for those who bear His name. In His timeless sermon on the mount, He declared, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on

the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:38-48).

Forgiveness is not always easy, but it is always right. Some hurts go deep down. A spouse whom you have loved dearly for years leaves you for another person. Your best friend in whom you confided, betrays you and tells others the carefully guarded secret of your life, and now everyone knows about it. At the church election someone deliberately told a lie to the nominating committee that caused the members to decide against electing you for a certain position. Your child, in whom you invested for many years becomes pregnant out of wedlock during her third year of college and has to drop out of school.

It must have been hard on Jesus when His disciple, His treasurer Judas, went out and sold Him to His enemies for US\$25.00. It must have been hard on Jesus when all His disciples abandoned Him when He was arrested and needed their support. It must have been hard on Jesus when many whom He had helped and healed joined with the crowd and shouted, “Crucify Him! Let Him be crucified.” It must have been hard on Jesus when those He came to save nailed Him to the cross. But Jesus responded to these ultimate insults with a plea for their forgiveness.

Stephen, when he was being stoned to death, also begged the heavenly Father to forgive his persecutors.

Forgiveness is not always easy, but it is always beneficial. One brother became ill when another member of his church spread a falsehood about him. He was filled with anger and desire for vengeance. The more he dwelt on the injustice that was done to him and the unkindness of

life, the more ill he became. However, when the brother released the matter to God and started praying sincerely for the offender, not only did the peace of God fill his heart, but also the illness disappeared.

Forgiveness does not mean that we completely forget the wrong that was done to us, but we give up our right for retaliation or vengeance. We no longer dwell on the injustice with feelings of anger and pain. We turn the matter over to the righteous Judge who says, “Vengeance is mine” (Rom. 12:19).

Feelings of forgiveness may not be instantaneous, depending on the depth of the hurt. But time is a great physician. As we keep going to God, He will provide the healing and the spirit of forgiveness. We do not have to feel guilty because the hurt does not disappear overnight. However, when we have experienced hurt we must eventually rise above it, like Joseph, and genuinely forgive those who injured us. This is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit who produces His fruit in our hearts (Gal. 5:22-25). When we are truly surrendered to the Holy Spirit, He enables us to love even our most terrible enemies.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother (of sister) abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14-15). “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20).

When we have been severely hurt we should see it as a challenge and a test and determine that we will not allow the hurt to destroy our joy. The apostle James gives this encouragement, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know

that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4, NIV).

We should ask God specifically for His sustaining grace to see us through the hurt (2 Cor. 12:7-10). There is no trial that you can face that God cannot give you the strength to bear it (1 Cor. 10: 13).

Do not allow the hurt to make you become bitter and lose faith in mankind, in God, or His church. “Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger . . . be put away from you,” is the counsel of Paul (Eph. 4:31).

Make your persecutor a matter of prayer. “Pray for those who mistreat you,” says Jesus (Luke 6:28). Praying for one’s enemies is not just to effect a change in the enemies, but it does wonders for the one who does the praying. Focus not so much on the hurt but on God’s deeper work in you through the hurt. If we look long and hard enough we can see what God is trying to do for us and in us.

We do not have to wait for the one who has wronged us to seek our forgiveness in order to offer it. While Stephen was still being stoned, he prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors (Acts 7:54-59). There is a freedom that the soul receives when one extends forgiveness. The peace of God floods the chambers of the soul and the spirit soars on joyful wings.

In the parable of the two debtors, Jesus shows that there is no one who has wronged us as terribly as we have wronged God. And if the great Jehovah can forgive us for our many sins against Him, we can also forgive those who have wronged us (Matt. 8:23-35).



Our God is a forgiving and merciful God. We rejoice in the assurance of sins forgiven through the blood of Jesus. Let us truly be ready to forgive others as we expect God to forgive us.

*Answers to True or False Quiz*

*1. False 2. True 3. True 4. False 5. False 6. True*

*7. False 8. True 9. True 10. False 11. False 12. False*

*13. True 14. True 15. False*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **THE CHALLENGE OF DIVORCE, SEPARATION AND SINGLENESS**

**Text:** Mal. 2:14-16. “And why isn’t God pleased? It’s because he knows that each of you men has been unfaithful to the wife you married when you were young. You promised that she would be your partner, but now you have broken that promise. Didn’t God create you to become like one person with your wife? And why did he do this? It was so you would have children, and then lead them to become God’s people. Don’t ever be unfaithful to your wife. The LORD God All-Powerful of Israel hates anyone who is cruel enough to divorce his wife. So take care never to be unfaithful!”

Divorce and separation problems are among the most major challenges facing the Christian church today. In the United States, there are more than five million divorced or separated persons and the number keeps growing steadily. Since 1975, there have been more than one million divorces each year; that is, more than four thousand per day.

The church has not remained unaffected by this societal trend. Apart from those who become members of the church after they already have been divorced or separated, there are those who for various reasons after they have been baptized do go through the trauma of divorce or separation. We need therefore, to come to grips with this challenge. What the statistics do not reveal are the broken dreams and shattered lives that will never be the same again after a divorce experience. Marriage counselors, therapists and even lawyers are now saying that divorce as a solution to marriage problems is a cure that is often worse than the disease.

### **Why Do People Get Divorced or Separated?**

Depending on the research we examine, the following are the responses given when divorced people are asked why they got divorced:

Unrealistic expectations

Communication breakdown

Failure to find happiness in the marriage partner

In-law problems

Alcoholism

Belief that they married the wrong person

Fights about money

Different growth rates of partners and the changes they go through

Society's changing attitude and rules regarding marriage and divorce

The ease with which divorce can be obtained and the absence of the stigma

Lack of emotional intimacy in marriage

Sexual dissatisfaction in marriage

Infidelity of the partner

Childrearing disagreements

Differences in cultural backgrounds

While each of the above may be a factor contributing to the eventual divorce, they may be seen simply as the branches of the tree. The real root of the problem is human selfishness.

As someone has wisely stated, "At the heart of every human problem is the problem of the human heart." To this I would add "The *selfish* human heart." What the selfish person in marriage

does not realize is that one's selfishness is also robbing the selfish one of all that the person wanted for himself or herself. The selfish person is also hurt.

Two poor friends were always looking out for the interest of each other. If one had an apple and the other had none, the apple was lovingly shared with the friend. If one had a dollar and the other had no money, the dollar was unselfishly divided between them both. God was so pleased with the love and unselfishness displayed by these two friends that He sent the angel Gabriel down to reward them. Gabriel greeted the two poor friends and told them of God's desire. They could be rewarded with any one wish they could make. One would make the wish for any boon he wanted, but the other friend would get twice as much. They pondered on all the good and precious things they could wish for. Then one said to this partner, "You make the wish". "No", said his friend, "I prefer if you make the wish."

Back and forth they argued; for neither wanted to make the wish since each now secretly desired to get the twice as much. They began to fight over the issue. When they paused for breath, one said to the other as he stood huffing, "You want me to wish, OK, I'll wish. I wish I were blind in one eye."

What amazing truth is embedded in this story! Selfish persons are so intent on hurting others that they do not often realize that they are also denying themselves of great blessings and that they are hurting themselves too.

### **Can This Marriage be Saved?**

A popular magazine carries a regular feature entitled, "Can This Marriage be Saved?" Most persons in troubled marriages have asked themselves this question. The fact is that the real problem is not with marriage but with the people. The big difference between successful, happy marriages,

and failing, miserable ones is the ability of the two persons in the former situation to say, "Hey, we have got a problem. Let us work it out."

Marriage problems do not go away by ignoring them, pretending they do not exist, or wishing them away. They go away when the two persons sit down, face the problems and resolve them.

### **The Effects of Divorce and Separation**

"The way to divorce," someone has expressed, "is paved with false assumptions." Many people pursuing divorce as a solution, wake up to find that the grand new life they had hoped to experience was only an illusion.

Immediately after the divorce, some may even experience what someone has labeled "the post divorce high." Feelings of exhilaration and freedom flood the recently divorced, until reality sets in. Considerable research in numerous studies has provided us with abundant evidence that divorce is never painless or successful. There are always serious effects to contend with. The most common are the following:

**Economic Effects.** A divorce costs dollars and cents. But even quite apart from legal fees which may be quite formidable, there may be moving expenses, property settlement, alimony and child support costs. Then two persons who have lived together for years may discover that living apart becomes more costly for each than living together. While men do not generally fare as badly as women, research has shown that usually there is a decline in disposable income for both men and women.

**Health Effects.** The anguish and stress of divorce have been associated with such ailments as asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, genital herpes, peptic ulcer, colitis and depression.

In 1967, Holmes and Rahe developed the Social Readjustment Rating Scale for determining the impact of stress on a person. The death of a spouse received the highest rating and a divorce came next as the most stressful event a person can experience.

**Emotional Effects.** These include the following:

- A. Loneliness. Half of the clothes closet is empty and so is the bed.
- B. Guilt Feelings. *Did I cause it? Whose fault was it?*
- C. Self-esteem problems. *He (she) didn't love me. Something must be wrong with me.*
- D. Fear of relationships. Each is afraid to trust again and also experiences the fear of being hurt once more.
- E. Anger and resentment. "I hate him (her) for what he (she) did. I'll never forgive him (her)."
- F. Self-pity. There is the temptation to feel sorry for one's self—the *poor me* syndrome.

**Sexual Effects.** The death of a marriage does not mean the death of sexual feelings and urges. Many divorcees, especially men, engage in casual sex to fill the void. But the problems associated with casual sex are too high a price to pay for the few moments of pleasure. Sexually transmitted diseases are a frightening possibility. Many divorced women agonize with an unwanted pregnancy. Sex without love is brutal to one's self-esteem.

**Effects on Children.** Much has been written on the impact of divorce upon the children. Fifty (50) percent of divorced couples have children. These children are the major victims in the divorce over which they had no say or control. Many regress to the behavior of earlier childhood. Some experience nightmares. Others become unmanageable and rebellious. Still other children

become discipline problems in school. School performance deteriorates in others. Even adult children of divorce are not exempt from the impact of divorce.

Challenges are also faced by most singles, whether they were never married, divorced or widowed.

## I. Facing the Challenges and Needs of Singles

A. **Loneliness.** Humans have a built-in need for companionship. We are social beings. It is common for humans to experience loneliness. Loneliness, however, is often a state of mind. Marriage is not a cure for loneliness. Some of the loneliest people are married. There is no loneliness that is as bitter and terrible as being trapped in a bad marriage. Here are a few helpful pointers to combat loneliness:

1. Value Solitude. Learn to enjoy your own company.
2. Cultivate an attractive personality and disposition.
3. Develop interpersonal skills. Make the effort to meet people.
4. Engage in a variety of hobbies.
5. Become involved with social groups and organizations.
6. Date with care.
7. Form discrete friendships with both sexes.

B. **Self-esteem.** The need for a positive self-concept is crucial for the proper enjoyment of life. You are not half a cookie. Singleness is not a disease or crime. For some, it may even be the

better way. Don't let others make you feel inferior or abnormal because you are single. You don't need marriage to give you value. You are complete in Him. Col. 2:10.

Low self-esteem often affects divorcees. The one who initiated the divorce does not escape this either. It is important for singles to build or repair their damaged self-esteem, for it impacts upon every department of life. Always remember that you are of great value as a person. Your marriage may have failed, but you are not your marriage.

C. **Sexual pressures.** The need for intimacy is normal and natural. Many "wolves" feel that singles are all bursting with desire. Good old "nature" takes care of sexual tension. Sexual energy can be redirected. Premarital or extramarital sex creates more problems than it solves. 1 Cor. 6:18. In handling sexual pressure one needs to have a sound code of conduct. Set boundaries for behavior. Don't take chances. Rely on divine power when confronted with human pressure.

D. **Getting over the hurt.** Forgiving your ex-husband or wife is a major but necessary hurdle for a divorce. Putting guilt behind you is necessary if you are to move forward. In many cases, the church has not always been very sensitive to the needs of the divorcees, but now more and more congregations are reaching out to these hurting people and are recognizing that they need the love, care and compassion of the church. Even when one has been at fault, we should follow what Jesus teaches us by His example in His dealing with the woman caught in adultery. We must still reach out to them (John 8).

The decision to start dating again and to remarry should not be made hastily. A reasonable amount of time should elapse, care should be exercised, and counsel sought before rushing headlong into a new relationship or a new marriage.



E. **Single parenting.** Ninety per cent of single parents are women, unwed, divorced or widowed mothers. Raising children alone is not easy. The single parent needs to work hard at not taking out frustrations on the children. Don't overcompensate. Have a balanced approach to disciplining your child. Finding a father image for your sons will help considerably, but great care needs to be exercised here. Daughters need a father figure too.

F. **Finding joy in singleness.** Singleness and perpetual sadness are not intended to be synonymous. One can use certain strategies to enjoy life:

1. Realize that God never places you where His grace cannot keep you.
2. Understand that you don't have to feel sorry for yourself. There is no shame in being single. Both Jesus and Paul were single.
3. Know that it is far better to be single and happy than married and miserable.
4. Be aware of the great advantages of being single. It is a gift(1 Cor. 7:7-9).
5. Realize that you have a unique opportunity to devote yourself to the service of God. 1 Cor. 7:32-34; Matt. 19:10,11; Matt. 12:46-50.
6. Let God guide you into the purpose for your creation. Claim His promise to do this (Pro. 3:6; Psa. 84:11).
7. Realize that marriage is not the recipe for happiness. If that were the case, King Solomon would have been the happiest man because of his numerous marriages and multiple wives. He confessed that that was not a guarantee for marital happiness (1 Kings 1:1-3).
8. Find a fulfilling career. Engage in work you enjoy and love it. Be on the look out for career opportunities. Also be committed to upgrading your skills.

9. Learn to enjoy being alone. Fill your days with worthwhile pursuits. Being alone does not mean being lonely.

10. Develop good friendships with both sexes. Everyone needs friends. Be careful about your choice of friends.

11. Learn to love yourself. Repeat the self assuring statement, "I am happy to be me." Build your self-esteem.

12. Refuse to be exploited. Remind yourself of your value as a child of God.

13. Keep your options open. Never say you will never get married. Many married people decided to get married late in life.

14. Take special care of yourself. Your health is priceless.

15. Know that Jesus is your greatest resource and your best help in living the single life. Phil. 4:19,

## II. Ministering to the Singles.

One of the biggest challenges of the church and society in general, is the mushrooming body of singles in our midst. Pastors, elders, and church committees need to direct more of their energy and resources to this issue. Singles do not necessarily want to be treated as a separate group in the church as if they have some sort of disease or disability; rather singles want to be included as much as possible in the life of the church.

**Affirm the singles.** Singleness should not be considered as an incomplete state. The Apostle Paul referred to his singleness without apology. "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I." (1 Cor. 7:7,

8). One way of affirming singles is to be sensitive to their needs as well as their presence in the congregation on special days like Fathers' Day and Mothers' Day.

The attitude of the church needs to be revised to accommodate the different family structures that now exist in our congregations. The traditional nuclear family is not the only model of a family today. Divorce, death or any other unfortunate circumstances can alter the structure of a family. We can no longer portray a family as comprising of a mother, father and children. A family may consist of children and their grandparents. A father and his children may be another type of family. Still another type of family may have a mother, a grandmother and children. A single woman may have adopted a child. Those two become family. Thus there are multiple variations of the composition of a family. They all need our support through sensitivity and compassion. The establishment of support groups, seminars, workshops and various activities planned for singles can contribute to a meaningful life of a single person.

### III. How to Avoid Divorce

Some persons are afraid of marriage because they think that divorce is lurking around the corner. Others live in constant fear that it is impossible to have a happy marriage until death. Nurture a positive approach to marriage. Here are a few guidelines:

#### 1. Recognize that divorce is not inevitable.

While many persons are getting divorced every day (4000 in USA), there are many who are making a success of marriage. You can make it too.

#### 2. Know that you have all the resources of God on your side if you want your marriage to succeed. Jesus reminds us that from the beginning of creation He who made us made and female ordained the permanence of marriage (Matt. 19: 3 – 9). Our God is able and willing to keep us in our

marriages because He declares that He hates divorce (Mal.2. 14 – 16). We also have the promise that our heavenly Father will provide the wisdom needed for all of our situations. We need only to ask for it (James 1:5). When the difficult times face us, we will not be alone. God has promised to be with us through it all (Isa. 43:1 – 7).

3. Realize that all marriage will have rough spots or high seas at times, but all marriage problems have solutions. A marriage that is placed in God's hands is bound for success. Did not Jesus say, "...with God all things are possible"? (Matt. 19:26). We need to believe in God's power to bring us success, even in cases where things seem humanly impossible (Mark 9:23; Luke 18:27).

4. Be aware that divorce as a solution for a marriage problem is often worse than the disease it was intended to cure. Numerous studies on the impact of divorce on the parties involved clearly show that divorce is never "successful". It is one of the biggest tragedies a person can experience. Its impact on the ex-husband, ex-wife and children is nothing short of disastrous. This is why divorce should be considered as a last resort.

5. Understand that suffering and disillusionment are the usual companions of the divorcee who thought that the divorce would be the dawn of a brighter day. Divorce is like a nightmare from which most never awake.

6. Know that most marriages are worth all the effort it takes to save them, when you consider the investment of time, energy, love, money and life that was put into the marriage. In a divorce you lose many intangibles that can never be regained or replaced.

7. Be prepared to work hard for success in marriage. Good marriages do not just happen. "To gain a proper understanding of the marriage relation is the work of a lifetime... However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely

united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of after years." *The Adventist Home*, p. 105

8. Don't hold unrealistic expectations of each other or of your marriage. Be reasonable and fair with each other. Bring love to bear on every issue. Build love where it is weak or absent. The power of love should not be underestimated. The wise man endorses this. "...but love covereth all sins" (Pro. 10:12). Review the characteristics of love as listed in I Cor. 13: 4 – 8. Let love guide your actions. "... but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:1).

9. Don't wait until your problems are overwhelming to seek professional help. It is often the "little foxes" that ruin the vineyard. Utilize the human help available.

10. In advance of a conflict or crisis, discuss and agree on your strategy for handling conflict situations when they occur.

11. Do not discuss the details of your marital problems with others, except in a professional, confidential capacity. (Consult a pastor, counselor, or trusted mutual friend). Maintain your "sacred circle". Many people will try to get the details of your problems to make juicy gossip.

12. Realize that the difference between successful marriages and failing ones is not the absence of problems or conflicts, but the ability of the two partners to say, "Let's work it out."

13. Reaffirm your commitment to each other and to the permanence of marriage. "Never harbor the thought that your union is a mistake or a disappointment." There is no honorable discharge from your marriage vows but death. Paul, the apostle make this very clear in Rom. 7: 2, 3).

14. Keep the doors of communication open, practicing the principles found in Proverbs Chapters 15 to 18 and James 1:19.

15. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and He will direct and help you. Study the following texts and you will find them very helpful: Prov. 3:5, 6; Psa. 27, 28, 34, 37, 62.

### **"Life Isn't Fair But God Is."**

Many people have not gotten what they wanted or deserved from life. But there is the need to pick up the broken pieces and try again. It is comforting to know that God will never leave you nor forsake you. Here are some very reassuring texts: Isa. 43:2; 41:10, 17 - 20; Pro. 3:5, 6; Psa. 84:11; Rom. 8:28.

"When We really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God."

*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 101.*

### PRAYER FOR THE DIVORCED

God, Master of Union and Disunion,

Teach me how I may now walk

Alone and strong, heal my wounds;

Let the scar tissue of Thy bounty

Cover these bruises and hurts

That I may again be a single person

Adjusted to new days.  
Grant me a heart of wisdom.  
Cleanse me of hostility, revenge and rancor.  
Make me know the laughter which is not giddy,  
The affection which is not frightened.  
Keep far from me thoughts of evil and despair.  
May I realize that the past chapter of my life  
Is closed and will not open again.  
The anticipated theme of my life has changed.  
The expected story's end will not come.  
Shall I moan at the turn of the plot?  
Rather, remembering without anger's thrust  
Recalling without repetitive pain of regret,  
Teach me again to write and read  
That I may convert this unexpected epilogue  
Into a new preface and a new poem.  
Muddled gloom over, tension days passed,  
Let bitterness of thought fade  
Harshness of memory attenuate.  
Make me move on in love and kindness.

*(Source Unknown)*

## CHAPTER NINE

**Getting Along in the Family of God**

**Text:** Psalm 133:1. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Several families were camping in one of the larger parks in the United States. As darkness fell, they noticed that five-year-old Agnes was missing. They began a frantic search of the thick underbrush. People went in several directions but with no success. Soon it became too dark to continue the search. The long, chilly night dragged on and as soon as it was daybreak the search continued. Then someone suggested that they all hold hands and comb the pasture. They were not at it long when someone stumbled upon the lifeless form of Agnes, not too far from the camp. She had died from the long exposure in the chilly night. As her dad picked up the lifeless body, he exclaimed, “Why didn’t we join hands before?”

The great burden of Christ was for the unity of His followers (John 17: 21). “That they all may be one,” He prayed. All heaven is waiting for the fulfillment of that prayer; for when it happens we will move the world.

The great burden of the apostles was also for unity among believers. They believed in its power. They practiced it. They preached it. In Acts 1:14 it is recorded, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” In Acts 2:1 we are told they were of “one accord in one place.” In Acts 2:45 the



writer states they were of “one accord in the temple and house to house.” The early Christians were of “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32).

The church of Jesus is “one body” (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 13; Eph. 4:3, 4). Believers ought to be of “one mind” (2 Cor. 13:10; Phil. 2:2-5; 1 Pet. 3:8). We should be controlled by “one Spirit” (Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 12:13).

**Oneness is not sameness.** Although church members belong to one body, we are not all the same. The apostle Paul states very clearly that there are diversities of ministries in the church (1 Cor. 12:4-6). The church is characterized by variety in races, languages, and nationalities (Acts 2:5-8; Rev. 14:6; Rev. 7:9, 10). But while we may be different, we have a oneness in Christ that transcends all of our differences. We are like different instruments in an orchestra, like the different keys on the console of an organ, like the colors of the rainbow. We harmonize and produce the best music when we work together. We present the best picture as we blend together.

In Christ’s kingdom there are no divisions based on differences in sex, race, nationality, tribe, skin colour, geography, or political preferences. We acknowledge that we all have one Father (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5, 6). If we sincerely pray, “Our Father Who art in heaven. . .,” then we ought to behave like brothers and sisters. God has “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

As children of God, we are one in hope, one in doctrine, one in love, one in purpose, and one in fellowship with Christ (Matt. 23:8; Gal. 3:28). The closer we get to Christ, the closer we come to one another. Christ knew that the strongest argument in favor of Christianity would be the unity of His followers. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that

they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). A divided body is doomed (1 Cor. 12:22-27; Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24, 25).

A successful basketball team had to learn how to coordinate their efforts with one another. An army would easily be defeated if the soldiers are not united. The same is true of the church of the living God. Unity will give it power and victory.

Satan is the author of divisions and disunity. He knows that divisions will hurt our Christian witness. Who would believe we are Christians if there is bickering and strife among us? Divisions weaken the church. They absorb energy and resources that could be utilized in the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. Divisions breed unhappiness among the church members. Show me a divided church and I will show you a very unhappy church. Divisions prevent the Holy Spirit from working. Without a doubt, divisions dishonor God.

There are several things that cause divisions and disunity in the church:

**Pride and bigotry** will top the list. It was Lucifer’s pride that caused confusion in heaven. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isa. 14:12-14). It must not be so among us. Selfishness, greed, and covetousness are major causes of division among God’s people. The sons of Jacob allowed their selfishness to so control them that they sold their own brother, Joseph, into slavery (Gen. 37). It must not be so among us.

**A competitive spirit** also creates disunity. This caused a lot of friction among the disciples of Christ. "... But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many ..." (Matt. 20:20-28). Even at the time of Paul the believers made a big deal over whose followers they were, Paul, Apollos, or Peter (1 Cor. 1:12). It must not be so among us.

**Envy and jealousy** have contributed greatly to divisions in the church. Aaron and Miriam allowed their jealousy of Moses to dethrone their reason (Num. 12). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, in their desire for position and preeminence, ridiculed the servant of God, Moses. Their envy, jealousy, and rivalry incurred the wrath of God. Num. 16. It must not be so among us.

**Gossiping and tale bearing** have done untold damage among the brethren. Solomon declares, "A gossip separates close friends" (Pro. 16:28, NIV). "He who covers over an offence promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Pro.17:9, NIV). "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Pro. 26:20).

Churches have been ripped apart because of the tale bearing of members. Only eternity will reveal the total extent of the damage to lives, to families, and to the church that gossiping tongues have caused. No wonder the apostle James has so much to say regarding the misuse of the tongue in James 3. He warns, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (Jam. 3:6, NIV).

Instead of working on the side of disunity and division, we should work with Jesus on the side of unity and oneness. We can accomplish this by a number of methods:

**Encouragement:** “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1). Many come to church weighed down with the pressures of life. A word of encouragement from a fellow church member may mean the difference between giving up or going forward. “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad”(Pro. 12:25). Set yourself a goal of encouraging at least seven persons a week.

“Down in the human heart,

Crushed by the tempter,

Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.

Touched by a loving heart,

Wakened by kindness,

Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.”

**Acceptance.** God’s church is comprised of all kinds of people. All races, languages, nationalities, and peoples are invited and accepted into its fellowship. Each member of the body of Christ should learn to accept those who are different from himself or herself. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Jesus illustrated this principle in the way He treated the woman at the well in Samaria. The disciples spurned her because she was a Samaritan and a woman. The town folks spurned her because she was poor and promiscuous. Jesus reached out to her because He saw a potential subject of His kingdom, a potential child of God (John 4).

In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), Jesus showed how the Samaritan—not the priest nor the Levite—risked his life and generously gave of his resources to save the “certain man” who was robbed, beaten up and left on the roadside for dead. Jesus said that that is how Christians ought to behave. What a wonderful Church we would have if every member were a good Samaritan!

**Empathy.** We need to feel with others, to identify with their pain and heartaches, as well as with their successes. Paul, the apostle, encourages, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

Sometimes a fellow member may have achieved some noteworthy goal, but instead of rejoicing with the member and celebrating the achievement, others try to diminish the triumph by making it seem like a trifle. “He was just lucky.” “She got the promotion because she is the boss’s favorite.” “My child did even better than that.”

At other times a brother or sister may have met with some misfortune and instead of weeping with the member, his or her brethren gloat over the misfortune. “It serves him right. He was too proud.” “Let me see what she is going to say now that *her* daughter is pregnant out of wedlock.” “Now that her husband has left her, we’ll see if she still feels that she is Mrs. Important.”

Why is it that in the church bad news spreads so quickly and good news crawls so slowly? In the world of nature, only the most detestable creatures feast on filthy stuff. Let us decide that we would be propagators of the good news.

**Loving-kindness.** This quality is one that the psalmist frequently used to describe God’s attribute to undeserving sinners. God “crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies” (Psa. 103:4, NJKV). It is His loving-kindness that draws us to Him (Jer. 31:3).

As children of our heavenly Father, we too need to exhibit loving-kindness to each other. The love and compassion of Christ will be seen in His followers. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22, NKJV).

“Let love be without hypocrisy ... Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:9, 10, NKJV).

Christians may be excused for not having abundant wealth or great intellect, but no Christian can be excused for not having enormous love. This is the major identifying mark of a disciple of Christ. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). In fact, the follower of Christ does not wait for a reason to love, but like his Master he loves even his enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-29).

Love, of course, is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It brings with it an abundance of other virtues such as joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is even further amplified in 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

Why is a united church so important? The world is ripe for the spread of the everlasting gospel, but our witness will be seriously diluted if we are not united. Jesus prayed for this unity of His followers in His last recorded prayer. For it is by this the world will believe that Jesus is the Christ. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21-23).

Time is running out for the world. Catastrophes such as the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, on September 11, 2001 make us aware of the lateness of the hour. Satan

will not wait for us to get our act together. He knows that the time is short. “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev. 12:12). It is time for the church to also recognize that time is short.

Let us press together as one Man’s children.

Let us press together in love for one another.

Let us press together in preparation for heaven.

Let us press together in defense of truth and righteousness.

Let us press together to evangelize the world.

Let us press together!

## **CHILDEN'S STORIES**



## The Children's Messages

This section is prepared especially for the children. The stories deal with matters that interest and affect children everywhere. Each chapter presents a different concept. Therefore it is a good idea to use only one chapter at each children's meeting.

Each message has a theme, a main text and two activity sessions.

1. The **“Warm up”** Activity. This exciting activity comes *before* the lesson (sermon), and is intended to prepare the children for the concept that will be presented in the lesson. You will not want to omit this.
2. The **“Making It Real”** session is *after* the lesson. The purpose of this is to help the children think about what was presented in the lesson. The children will enjoy this.

Dr. Karen-Mae Mitchell, who is an excellent children's story writer, wrote most of the stories in this section. You will find her stories exciting and very appealing to children. I also thoroughly enjoyed my contribution to this portion of the book.

It is my hope that both the children's leaders and the children will enjoy and be blessed by the spiritual lessons presented.

Gloria Trotman

Children's Ministries Director,  
Inter-American Division

## CHAPTER ONE

**Whose Heart is it Anyway?**

**Theme:** I give my heart to Jesus.

**Text:** “My son [daughter], give me your heart, and let your eyes keep to my ways.”  
Pro. 23:26(NIV)

**What You Will Need:**For “Warm-up Activity

Hearts made of red construction paper; pencils or fine tip markers; a picture of Jesus pasted onto a large sheet of construction paper and put on the wall.

For “Making it Real”

A heart for each child; a picture of Jesus for each child; glue or scotch tape; slips of paper with one of the following written on each slip:

Obey our parents  
 Help at home  
 Treat our brothers and sisters unkindly  
 Call people bad names  
 Share our toys  
 Visit sick people  
 Use dirty words  
 Do things to help elderly people  
 Are kind to little kids  
 Treat animals kindly

**Warm-up Activity:**

1. Give each child a heart and a pencil or marker. Ask each child to write his or her name on the heart and stick it on the construction paper that is on the wall.
2. Tell the kids that Jesus loves them very much and He would like them to love Him, too. When we tell Jesus we love Him and do the things that make Him happy, we are giving our hearts to Him.

**The Lesson:** *(You will need the following texts written out on strips of construction paper to be put on a board, one at a time: 1 Sam 16:7; Pro. 4:23; Eze.36:25)*

The other day I was in a balloon store and it was beautiful! There were all kinds of balloons but I liked the heart-shaped balloons best. Balloons shaped like hearts were everywhere—large balloons, small balloons, balloons with writing on them and plain balloons. Some of the balloons were so large that they had three or four tiny balloons inside of them. Oh, those heart-shaped balloons were beautiful.

When God made us, He put a heart into each one of us. We cannot live without our hearts. That is why everybody is talking about getting exercise so that our hearts can stay healthy. When a person has a sick heart, the doctors work very hard to get him or her some special medicine, or they put something inside the body to help the heart work better. In September, 2006, a six-month old baby, Miles Coulston got a new heart. That is called a heart transplant. That baby needed a new heart so that he could get better. He did.

Have you ever felt your heart beat? Sometimes when you are sick and you go to the doctor, he says, “Let us listen to your heart.” Then he puts his stethoscope to your chest and puts the end of it to his ears and he can hear the “Duh-dup, duh-dup, duh-dup...” Isn’t God wonderful to make our hearts!

When we talk about the heart we do not always mean the organ in our chest that pumps the blood throughout our bodies. When we talk about the heart we sometimes mean our mind. We mean the things we think about.

The fourth grade boys had a plan for after school next Tuesday. They were going to stand in front of Mrs. Todd’s house and throw stones. They did not like Mrs. Todd. Someone had said that she was a horrible old woman. They said she kept children locked up in her house. Some kids said that she had a big, bad dog that chased kids. Nobody had ever seen the dog, though. Why did she live alone in that old house and come outside when it was almost dark and

walk around her house muttering to herself? She was weird. She was not OK. She wore a black hat that almost covered her eyes and the children felt that she had no hair. Then she walked with an old stick. They did not like Mrs. Todd. They did not like her old house either. They were going to stone that house.

Tuesday afternoon came. Two boys crouched outside her fence and waited. They were going to scare that “witch.” Jimmy was just about to throw his first big stone when Tony grabbed his hand. “Stop! You’ll hit her,” Tony whispered.

There, walking around her yard with a basket was Mrs. Todd. “Who’s there? Is somebody there?” shrieked the scratchy voice of Mrs. Todd.

The boys dropped their stones. They were thankful that they did not hit the lady. “Well, we were just passing by your house,” replied Jimmy, almost shaking with fear. *What was this witch going to do to him now?*

“Well, let me see who you are? How many of you are there? I think I heard voices.”

The boys came out of hiding, one by one. They stood in front of Mrs. Todd, nervous and scared.

“Well, I was hoping to see some children today. You see, I picked some mangoes and put them in this basket, with the hope of giving them away to any children who passed by my house. You see, I do not come outside until late evening because the hot sun is not good for my skin. But I thought that if I was going to find children passing after school, I needed to come outside earlier. I am so glad you boys came by. Here, you can have these mangoes. And the next time you pass by my house please open the gate and knock on my door. There is no need to hide behind my fence.”

The boys were speechless and ashamed of themselves. This was no witch. This was a lady with a kind heart. The Bible tells us that we cannot know people well by just looking at them. God knows if they are bad or good because He knows their hearts.

“For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7, *The New King James Version*). *Put text on board.*

It is important to have good things in our hearts. That means that our thoughts must be pure. We do bad things if we have bad thoughts in our hearts and we do good things if we have good thoughts in our hearts. How do we get bad or good thoughts in our hearts? If we watch dirty movies and videos and read magazines that have cruel stuff, we will have terrible things in our hearts. One little boy killed his baby sister. When the police officers asked him why he did that terrible thing, he said he wanted to do what he played in his video game. What we put in our hearts or minds, we will do. That is what the Bible says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro.4:23). *Put text on board.* That means that we have to be very careful with what we put in our hearts because we will do what is in our hearts.

But we have exciting news! God can change our hearts. In fact He can give us new, clean thoughts and make us want to do good things only. This means we can each get a new heart. “A new heart also will I give you... (Eze. 36:26). *Put text on board.* This means a new life, too because we will do what Jesus wants us to do.

### **Appeal:**

We have talked a lot about hearts. We do not want bad hearts. We want new, clean hearts. We cannot make our hearts clean by ourselves. Jesus will do that for us. All we have to do is give

our bad hearts to Jesus and say, “Jesus, here is my heart. I give it to You. Please keep it forever and change my whole life. I love you.”

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, Thank you for giving me a new heart. I want to love You forever. Please help me. Amen.

**Making it Real:**

1. Hold up each slip of paper with the things that children who have and do not have Jesus in their hearts do. Ask, “When Jesus is in your heart, will you....?” (*Wait for the children to respond*).
2. Give each child a heart and a picture of Jesus. Ask the children to paste the pictures of Jesus in the hearts. Each child will take his ‘Jesus in my heart’ home with them.

## You First

**Theme:** God can help me to be unselfish.

**Text:** “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”  
Romans 12:10, NIV

### What You Will Need:

#### For “Warm-up Activity”

Fill 2 piñatas or large bags with many inexpensive novelty items. Party favors are good for this, as are cute pencils, erasers, stickers, etc. Also reserve some of the small items which you will not put in the piñata or bag. (If very young children attend your program, be sure that the items in the piñata or bag for the younger group are not choking hazards or otherwise unsafe for them.)

#### For “Making It Real”

You will need a few slips of paper with the scenarios printed on them to give to the groups.

### Warm-up Activity:

1. Divide the children into 2 groups – younger children and older children. (The idea is keep the smaller children from being trampled by the bigger, more aggressive ones.)
2. Have each group stand in a circle. Empty the contents of the piñata or bag for the children to help themselves. (Most children will probably rush to get as many things as possible for themselves. Give some of the items that you reserved to children that did not get any during the scramble so that everyone has at least one item.)
3. Ask: How did you feel when you were trying to get the gifts? How did it feel when you realized that other children had more things or fewer things than you did? Discuss the fact that people – children as well as adults – often want the most and the best things for themselves.
4. Explain that Jesus’ way is different. He wants us to put others first.

**The Lesson:**

What does it mean to be unselfish? (*Wait for response.*) When we are unselfish, we choose what is best for someone else, even if it means not getting what we would like for ourselves. This is sometimes pretty hard to do.

Rachel and Jonathan were bubbling with excitement as they got into the car after school. “Guess what, Dad?” Jonathan asked eagerly. “The circus is coming to town next month! A group of students from school will be able to go!”

“Is that so?” Dad responded with a smile. “Which students will be going?”

“Well, anyone can go,” Rachel answered. “Anyone who buys a ticket..”

“Oh, I see,” Dad said. “What do the tickets cost?”

“They are just \$15 each,” Jonathan said.

“Fifteen dollars each, huh? That means it would cost \$30 for both of you to go. I’m sorry, kids. I know you’d love to go to the circus, and I wish you could. But we just don’t have \$30 right now. Since I was laid off from my job last month, there just isn’t any extra cash.”

The kids’ faces fell. They were quiet for several minutes. Then Rachel spoke up.

“I have an idea. Jonathan and I could earn the money for the tickets.”

“How would you earn the money?” Dad questioned. “I can’t even afford to pay you for doing extra chores or odd jobs around the house the way I sometimes do.”

“We could do little jobs for our neighbors and friends. Our aunts and uncles might be able to find some chores for us to do, too. Please let us try to earn the money, Dad. We’ve never been to a circus before!”

“Well, OK,” said Dad, doubtfully. “I just don’t want you kids to be disappointed.”

“We won’t, Dad. It’s worth a try. We’ll start working today,” Rachel assured him.



That very afternoon, Rachel and Jonathan started looking for ways to earn the \$30 for the circus tickets. They washed cars for two of their neighbors. Over the next few weeks, they worked very hard. Jonathan helped Mr. Hale across the street with some gardening. Rachel spent Sunday afternoon playing with her little cousin, Michael, so his mother could get some house cleaning done. Jonathan helped his uncle clean the garage. Rachel helped her next door neighbor put some old pictures into a photo album. Each time, the kids put the money they received into a jar in the kitchen which they had labeled, "Circus."

Finally, it was the night before the circus trip. Rachel and Jonathan would have to take the money for their tickets to school the next day. After dinner, they sat down with Dad in the kitchen to see how much money they had earned.

"I'm really proud of you both," Dad said. "You've worked so hard these weeks. I hope you'll be able to go on your trip."

They opened the jar and began to count the money. Five dollars, ten, fifteen, seventeen, twenty, twenty-two dollars. That was it. Twenty-two dollars. It was more than the fifteen dollars for one ticket, but less than the thirty dollars that they needed for both of them to go.

Everyone was quiet for a moment. Then Rachel broke the silence. "You go to the circus, Jonathan. I can go some other time."

Jonathan looked at his sister with wide eyes. "Are you sure, Sis? Do you mean that? I know you want to go to the circus as much as I do. And you worked just as hard as I did to earn the money."

"I'm sure," Rachel nodded confidently. "I really want you to go."

“Thank you, thank you, a million times, Rachel!” Jonathan said sincerely, giving his sister a big hug. “I’ll always remember this. I’ll go call Jeremy and let him know I’ll be able to go!”

Jonathan left Rachel and Dad sitting at the kitchen table. Dad could see the tears in Rachel’s eyes. He reached over and squeezed her hand. “Are you OK, Rachel?” Dad asked tenderly.

“Yes, Dad,” she answered softly.

“I am so proud of you,” Dad said, giving Rachel a hug. “You are so thoughtful and unselfish. You put your brother’s wants ahead of your own to let him enjoy something that you wanted just as much! What made you do that?”

“Well, I haven’t always done that,” Rachel admitted. “There have been many times when I wanted to be first. Sometimes I pouted if I didn’t get to choose the TV program to watch. There were times when I wanted to have the first turn riding the bike or playing the game. Sometimes, I even hid the last cookies so I could have them all to myself.”

Rachel thought for a moment before continuing. “But last week in Sabbath School, Mrs. Miller talked about doing things ‘The Jesus Way.’ She read to us from Mark 9 about the time that the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus told them that things were different in His kingdom. Jesus said that the real way to be great was to be a servant of all. The way Jesus looks at it, the one who is ‘first’ is really the one who thinks more about what other people need.”

“That’s wonderful, Rachel,” Dad responded, beaming. “So you decided to unselfishly put your brother first. There’s no better place to practice doing things ‘The Jesus Way’ than right here at home.”

**Appeal:** It often seems more natural to take the best for ourselves. Because of sin, we often have a selfish, ‘me first’ attitude. But Jesus’ way is different. He wants us to put others first. In God’s kingdom, He tells us, the greatest person is the one who is a servant of all. When Jesus was on Earth, He showed us how He wants us to live. He was not afraid to put others ahead of Himself, even if it meant washing the disciples’ dusty feet.

Being unselfish goes against what I feel like doing. I can only do it with God’s help. If you would like God to help you to do things His way, to put others first, please join me in prayer.

**Prayer:** Dear God, Sometimes I want the best and biggest and most for myself. But I know that’s not Your way. Please help me to be unselfish. Help me to put others first, starting with those in my family. Give me a heart like Yours, the heart of a servant. I love You and want to be more like You every day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Making It Real:**

Divide the children into groups. Give each group one of the following scenarios. Give them a few minutes to practice role-playing their scenarios, then let them present it to the entire group of children. Emphasize “The Jesus Way,” putting others first.

1. You are watching your favorite video. Mom is trying to fix dinner, but the baby is crying.
2. You are reading a new book, but your little sister needs some help with her homework.
3. You and your brother both got to the cookie jar at the same time, but there is just one cookie left.

4. You have been saving your allowance for a new game, but Sunday is Dad's birthday and you don't have a present.

## CHAPTER THREE

**My Parents and Me**

**Theme:** God can help me to honor my parents.

**Text:** "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12, NIV

**What You Will Need:**For "Making It Real"

For each child's coupon book, you will need several rectangular slips of paper for coupons and 2 pieces of construction paper for the book covers. You will also need a stapler, pens or pencils and crayons or markers. If desired, stickers, glitter and glue, or other decorative items can be used to make the coupon book even more attractive.

**Warm-up Activity:**

## Bible Game: Bible Parents

Give the following clues for the children to guess which Bible parent is being described.

1. My wife and I were the first parents on Earth. (Adam)
2. My three sons helped me build a big boat. (Noah)
3. I became a mother when I was about 90 years old. (Sarah)
4. I made a basket boat for my son to hide in. (Jochebed)
5. I gave my favorite son a colorful coat. (Jacob)
6. My Son was born in a stable. (Mary)

**The Lesson:**

Today's text tells us to honor our parents. But what does that really mean? Let's see if we can get some ideas as we listen to our story.

"Is it time, Mom? Can we go over to see Grandma and Grandpa Cruz yet?" Josh and Julia asked for at least the tenth time that afternoon.

Grandma and Grandpa Cruz were a retired couple that lived right across the street from Josh and Julia. They weren't really Josh and Julia's grandparents. Mr. and Mrs. Cruz had

children and grandchildren of their own who lived very far away. But Grandma and Grandpa Cruz loved spending time with Josh and Julia.

Josh and Julia looked forward to visiting the Cruz home. Grandma Cruz loved to bake, and she always had delicious, homemade treats to share. Grandpa Cruz loved to tell stories. He also liked to ask the kids Bible questions then help them find the answers.

“Yes, you can go now. They are expecting you,” Mom answered with a smile.

“Yippee!” they shouted in unison, racing for the front door.

A few minutes later, Josh and Julia were sitting with Grandma and Grandpa Cruz at their kitchen table, enjoying warm cinnamon rolls with milk.

“So here’s our question for today,” Grandpa Cruz said as they were finishing their snack. “The Bible doesn’t tell us a whole lot about Jesus’ childhood. But how do you think Jesus treated His parents when He was a boy? What kinds of things did He do?” *(Allow the children to offer their answers before continuing with the story.)*

“Hmmm,” Josh murmured, wiping his mouth with a napkin. “I remember the story of how Jesus spent a long time talking to the church leaders when He went to the temple with His parents. He really knew a lot about God and the Scriptures. He must have listened carefully to His parents in family worship and whenever they taught Him about God.”

“That’s true,” commented Grandma Cruz. “I never thought of it that way. But Proverbs 1:8 (NIV) says, ‘Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.’ So Jesus would have really listened and learned what His parents taught Him – about God, about how to live, and about other things too.”

“Jesus would have known that the commandments say to honor your parents (Exodus 20:12), so I’m sure He would have done that,” Julia added. “What does ‘honor’ mean, anyway?”

“To honor someone means to show them respect,” Grandpa Cruz explained. “We show our parents respect in many ways. Can you think of some?”

“We can talk to them in a way that shows that we love them,” Josh offered.

“That’s right,” agreed Grandma Cruz. “The words we use, our tone of voice, even what we do with our hands and eyes when we talk to our parents can show that we want to honor them as God has instructed us to. I believe that Jesus would give His parents His full attention when they spoke to Him. I’m sure He wouldn’t roll his eyes or turn away while they were talking to Him, even if He didn’t agree with what they said.”

“I guess honoring our parents also includes obeying them,” Julia added. “I’m sure Jesus would have done whatever His mom or dad asked Him to do. And I bet that He did it right away, without complaining.”

“That’s right,” Grandpa Cruz said, nodding. “Colossians 3:20 (NIV) tells us, ‘Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.’ And in Luke 2:51, we learn that Jesus was obedient to his parents.”

“And He must have been pretty helpful, too,” Josh said thoughtfully. “He probably helped Joseph in the carpenter shop and Mary in the home – without even waiting to be asked.”

“When I think of honoring someone, I also think of showing them appreciation,” Grandma Cruz mentioned. “I love it when my children and grandchildren and you two show your love with hugs and thank you’s and other kind words and acts. I bet Jesus probably brought Mary flowers from the garden. He probably thanked Joseph for helping Him fix a toy. Parents like things like that. They like to hear things like, ‘I love you,’ or ‘You’re a great mom.’ ”

“I remember one of the best gifts I ever got,” Grandma Cruz continued. “My children made it for me when they were about your age. It was a book of ‘appreciation coupons.’ In fact, I think I may still have it around here somewhere.”

Grandma Cruz left the table for a minute, then returned with a cardboard shoebox. “These are some treasures from my children,” she said, opening the box carefully. She looked around inside, then pulled out a small booklet. She smiled as she held it up. The cover was made of reddish construction paper. The white pages inside were turning yellow because the little book of coupons was now so very old.

“Here’s the coupon book,” Grandma Cruz explained. “There’s a coupon here for ‘twenty hugs.’ This next one is for ‘breakfast in bed.’ Here’s one that promises to help me with anything I choose. Even though I got this so many years ago, I still remember how good I felt when my children did each of these things for me.”

“I have an idea!” Julia said suddenly. “Why don’t we make a coupon book like that for our parents? They really do so much for us and we often don’t show them how much we appreciate them.”

“That’s a great idea!” Josh agreed. “Grandma Cruz, do you have paper and markers that we can use to make it now?”

“I certainly do. I’ll get them right away,” she answered.

“I think what you kids are doing is great,” Grandpa Cruz said as they started cutting the construction paper for the coupon book. “Anytime is a good time to show your parents that you appreciate them.”

“And we’ll try to remember to honor them in other ways too, like being attentive, respectful, obedient, and helpful,” Julia promised.



**Appeal:**

Sometimes we all forget to treat our parents the way we should. We may talk to them in a disrespectful tone of voice. We may disobey. But God has commanded us to honor and obey them. God can help us to do just that. Would you like to join me in asking for His help right now?

**Prayer:**

Dear Father in Heaven, Thank you for our parents. Please forgive us for the times we haven't honored them as we should. Please help us to be respectful and obedient. Please help us to show our parents our love and appreciation. We love you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Making It Real:**

Give the children the following instructions and help them as needed: Make a coupon book for your parents like Josh and Julia did. Write on slips of paper some things you would like to do for your parents. Make a cover with construction paper and staple it together with the slips of paper you have written on. Decorate your coupon book with crayons, markers, or whatever you would like.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**Peace is Not for Cowards**

**Theme:** God can help me to get along with others in my family.

**Text:** “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,…” Colossians 3:15, NIV

**What You Will Need:**For “Warm-up Activity”

You will need the following: sheets of blank paper (1 for each child), pencils, crayons/colored pencils.

For “The Lesson”

You will need a picture or figurine of a white dove.

For “Making It Real”

You will need a few children’s items (toys, books, etc.) and a TV remote control to use as props for role-playing.

**Warm-up Activity:**

Give the children the following instructions:  
Did you know that Jesus was once a child just your age? Imagine that Jesus was your age and lived in your home. Draw a picture of Jesus playing with your brother, sister, friend, or you.

**The Lesson:**

*(Show picture or figurine of dove.)* Who can tell me what kind of bird this is? Yes, this is a dove. Can you think of any Bible stories with doves? *(Allow children to respond.)* You remember that Noah sent a dove out of the ark after the flood. Also, after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down over Jesus’ head like a dove. So sometimes, people use pictures of doves to make us think about God’s Spirit.

At other times, people use pictures of doves to mean something else. Doves are often used to make us to think about peace. What is peace? *(Wait for response.)* We have peace when

people get along well with each other – working, playing, and living nicely together. The opposite of peace is war or fighting. People get hurt when countries or adults or children choose fighting or quarreling instead of peace.

Daddy could hear angry shouts coming from the family room where eleven-year old Brian and eight-year old Emma were choosing a video to watch.

“Did not!”

“Did too!”

“Did not!”

“Did too!”

“You chose the DVD we watched the last time, so now it’s my turn!” insisted Emma angrily.

“No I didn’t! I want to choose the DVD today!” retorted Brian.

Daddy came into the family room just in time to see Emma and Brian having a not-so-friendly tug-of-war with the DVD in both of their hands. Brian gave a sudden hard tug, pulling the DVD from Emma’s grasp as Emma stumbled backward. She bumped into the table behind her, falling as Mom’s favorite vase crashed on top of her. The delicate vase broke into what seemed like hundred pieces. Then Brian noticed blood oozing from a cut on Emma’s cheek.

“Emma, Emma, you’re cut! Are you OK? Oh, Emma, I’m so sorry!” said Brian tenderly.

Daddy looked closely at the cut. He cleaned it up, but it was still bleeding. “This looks like a deep cut, guys. Emma will be fine, but we’ll need to go to the Emergency Room. She’ll probably need stitches.”

The ride to the hospital was mostly quiet, interrupted occasionally by Emma's sobs and Brian's apologies.

"It's OK, Brian. It was my fault, too," Emma said softly. "We had such a big quarrel over such a little thing. I'm sorry too."

"You know," Dad interjected, "many big quarrels and fights start over really little things. Satan is always around, tempting us to bicker and fuss, to argue and fight. And there will always be things others do that annoy us. There will always be opportunities to fuss and fight if we choose to. But God's way is different. In Matthew 5:12 (NIV), Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.' He wants us to choose to get along with each other, even when our brothers and sisters do things that make us upset."

Daddy was right. In Colossians 3:15 (NIV), we are told, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts," We have peace in our families when we get along well with each other, living and playing nicely together instead of arguing or fighting. Remember our dove? The dove reminds us of peace. The dove also makes us think about the Holy Spirit. I like that. It helps me to remember that God's Spirit can help me to choose peace. God's Spirit can help me to be nice to my sister, my brother, my parents, my friends, and everyone else. God can help me to be a peacemaker by sharing instead of grabbing things for myself. He can help me to speak softly to my sister or brother instead of shouting. He can help me to use my words to tell my brother and sister what I would like instead of hitting them. He can help me to wait for my turn instead of pushing and shoving. He can help me to ignore my brother's and sister's teasing instead of calling them names.

And do you know what? God's way is not always easier, but it's always better. Not only is Jesus happy when we choose peace, but we'll find that we are happier, too. The Bible tells us

in Proverbs 12:20 (NIV), “There is... joy for those who promote peace.” Sometimes it might seem like shouting or pushing might get us what we want faster, but real joy comes from doing things God’s way. Being angry, getting hurt, or losing friends from quarrels and fights is not fun.

**Appeal:** I can’t be a peacemaker on my own. Sometimes, I want to shout, or push, or hit, or call someone names. But God has promised that I can do all things with His help. I want to ask Him to help me to choose to ‘promote peace’ - especially at home. Let’s ask God to help us now.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive us for the times when we chose to quarrel or fight. We choose today to let your peace rule in our hearts. Please help us to be loving and kind in our families even when others make us upset. We love You and ask you to make us more like You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Making It Real:**

Let the children act out the situations below. In each case, an adult does something that a sibling might do to annoy his brother or sister. The child practices being a peacemaker. **(Do not let children play the part of the annoying sibling.)** You can make up more scenarios if you wish.

1. Your brother grabs a toy that you are playing with.
2. Your sister bumps into you on purpose.
3. Your sister keeps standing in front of the TV when you are trying to watch it.
4. Your brother pulls your hair.
5. You and your sister both want to hold the TV remote control.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Chasing the Grumps Away**

**Theme:** God can help me to have a joyful attitude.

**Text:** “You will fill me with joy when I am with you.” Psalms 16:11, NIrV

**What You Will Need:**For “Warm-up Activity”

You will need the following items: paper plates or circles of light-colored construction paper (2 per child), crayons or markers,

For “Making It Real”

You will need the following items: plastic sandwich bags or small brown paper bags (1 per child), crayons/markers, decorative stickers, 3X5” blank index cards or slips of paper (about 5 per child), pencils.

**Warm-up Activity:**

Have each child draw a happy face on one plate or circle and a sad face on the other. Ask them to hold up the happy face if you describe something that would make them feel good and the sad face if you describe something that would make them feel bad. Read the words and phrases below.

|                 |                |                  |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Ice cream       | Mosquito bites | Balloons         |
| Summer vacation | Skinned knees  | Birthday parties |
| Homework        | Picnics        | Bedtime          |
| Best friends    | Tests          | Gifts            |

Explain that good things and bad things come and go, but God can give us joy through our good times and our bad times. We can choose whether to whine and complain or to have a joyful attitude.

**The Lesson:**

What does the word “attitude” mean? (*Encourage responses.*) Our attitude has to do with the way we feel. Often, our attitudes affect the way we behave. What are some words we can use to describe someone’s attitude? (*Encourage responses. They may include words like happy, cheerful, pleasant, positive, negative, grumpy, cranky.*) Can my attitude affect other people? How? (*Wait for responses.*) Let’s see what we can learn about attitudes from our story.

“Alisa!” Grandma called from the kitchen one Sunday morning. “We’re ready for breakfast!”

Alisa frowned. She had just gotten all her teddy bears lined up in a row so that she could pretend they were in school. She didn’t want to go for breakfast. But she knew that Grandma, Grandpa, and her brother Jackson were waiting for her. She put on her robe and slowly went to join them at the kitchen table.

“Good morning, Alisa,” Grandpa said cheerfully. “Grandma made your favorite breakfast – banana pancakes.” Grandma and Jackson added their “good mornings.”

“Good morning,” Alisa mumbled, not looking up. “Banana pancakes aren’t my favorite anymore.”

Grandpa asked the blessing on the meal, then they began to eat.

“Yum!” said Jackson enthusiastically, after his first bite. “This is delicious, Grandma. Thanks for the great breakfast.”

“You’re welcome, honey,” Grandma answered, smiling.

“Hey, Alisa,” Jackson said to his sister, “I was thinking that we could go riding our bikes this morning. It looks like a really nice day outside.”

“Whatever,” Alisa said sulking. Jackson looked at her, surprised at her mood.

“Is something wrong, Alisa? You don’t seem too cheerful this morning,” Grandma said in a concerned voice.

“No, I’m OK,” Alisa answered. She didn’t sound OK.

“Well, then, now that we’re finished breakfast, would you please help me with the dishes?”

“Oh, all right,” Alisa answered with a groan. “Why do I always have to help with the dishes, anyway?”

Grandma quietly started clearing the table. Jackson helped her.

A few minutes later, Alisa was drying the dishes when Grandpa walked into the kitchen. “How’s my sweetie pie?” he asked, patting Alisa on the back.

“Why do you keep calling me that babyish name?” Alisa snapped.

Grandpa looked hurt. “It never seemed to bother you before,” he said softly. “I didn’t know you felt that way.”

Alisa was quiet. She knew she should say that she was sorry, but she didn’t.

After the dishes were done, Alisa sat in the family room reading a book. “Ready to go bike riding with me?” Jackson asked hopefully, playfully tousling her hair as he walked by.

“Just leave me alone,” Alisa responded irritably. “Can’t you see that I’m reading?”

“Boy, you sure are grumpy today,” Jackson said, puzzled. “I guess I’ll go see if Reuben wants to go riding.”

It was a long morning for everyone as Alisa continued to be cranky and irritable. She snapped whenever someone spoke to her and sulked the rest of the time. Eventually, she went to her room and shut the door.

Alisa heard a knock at her bedroom door. “May I come in?” Grandma asked.

Alisa opened the door without saying anything. Grandma stepped inside the room and sat on Alisa’s bed.

“You don’t seem to be in a very good mood today, Alisa. Would you like to talk to me about it”? Grandma seemed concerned.



After a long pause, Alisa answered, “I don’t know. I guess I just started the day in a grumpy mood and it won’t go away.”

“We all feel unhappy sometimes,” Grandma said. “Sometimes we feel bad because of something that has happened. At other times, we can’t figure out why we’re in a grumpy mood. But did you know that we can choose to have a good attitude? We don’t have to stay cranky and make everyone who lives with us miserable.”

Alisa looked puzzled. “Do you mean that I am grumpy today because that’s what I chose?”

“Well, the grumpy feelings may come, but we can choose what to do with them. We can choose to let the grumps stay or to be pleasant instead,” Grandma explained.

“You see,” Grandma continued, “God wants us to have a joyful attitude. Psalm 4:7 (NIRV) tells us, ‘You have filled my heart with great joy.’ God wants to give us His joy which can stay with us all the time and help us to be cheerful. When we are cranky, we aren’t the only ones who get hurt. It affects the whole family. When you whined when I asked you to help and when you snapped at Grandpa and Jackson, it didn’t make us feel too good.”

“I know, Grandma,” Alisa admitted, “and I’m sorry. I want my attitude to show God’s joy instead of making me *and* my family miserable. Will you help me?”

“Sure, Alisa,” Grandma smiled. “Let’s ask God to give us His joy right now.”

Together, Grandma and Alisa prayed, asking God to put His joy in their hearts, to help them have a joyful attitude that would make others happy to be around them. After they prayed, Grandma got another idea.

“I just thought of something, Alisa,” Grandma said. “Sometimes when I feel unhappy, it helps me to ‘count my blessings.’ I think of things that God has given me that I can be thankful

for. Sometimes I write them down. When I think of all the good gifts God has given me, it's hard to keep sulking and feeling miserable. Would you like to try making a list of things you are thankful for?"

Alisa looked doubtful. "I can't really think of anything," she said.

"Sure you can," Grandma said confidently. "God gave you a brother who's fun to play with, a healthy body, lots of great toys,"

"And my best friend Carrie, and wonderful grandparents, and even banana pancakes for breakfast!" said Alisa excitedly. She was starting to feel better already.

"You're catching on!" said Grandma. "Would you like to write them down?"

"How about if I draw pictures of the things I am thankful for?" suggested Alisa. "I love drawing."

"That's a great idea! See how many things you can think of to draw. Put the pictures of things you are thankful for in this bag," said Grandma, reaching for an empty paper bag on the floor. "Then maybe the next time you have a case of the grumps, you can look at the pictures to help you feel joyful again."

"I can think of so many things that I can't wait to start drawing!" said Alisa, reaching for her sketch pad and pencil. "Then I'll go downstairs and tell Grandpa and Jackson that I'm sorry I was so grumpy today. From now on, I'll choose to let God fill me with His joy."

**Appeal:** Sometimes we allow ourselves to be cranky and irritable. Our bad attitudes can make us and our families miserable. Phillipians 4:4 (NIV) tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always." God can give us His joy that nothing can take away. Would you like to join me in asking God to help us to have a joyful attitude?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, You have given us so many good gifts. But sometimes we forget to be thankful and we whine and grumble instead. Please fill us with Your joy. Help us to have cheerful attitudes that will help to create a pleasant atmosphere in our homes. We love you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Making It Real:**

1. Divide the children into groups.
2. Give each group a stack of index cards or slips of paper.
3. Give each child a small bag. Ask them to label the bag, "My Thankful Bag", and decorate it with crayons or markers and stickers.
4. On the slips of paper, the children are to draw pictures of things for which they are thankful. Each child may use as many slips as they would like or as time allows. Give them time to share their drawings with their groups.
5. Explain that it is easier to have a joyful attitude when we remember how much God has blessed us. Encourage them to keep adding drawings to their "Thankful Bags" at home. When they feel like complaining or whining, they can pull out the drawings and remember how much God has given them to be thankful for.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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| Best friends    | Tests          | Gifts            |

Explain that good things and bad things come and go, but God can give us joy through our good times and our bad times. We can choose whether to whine and complain or to have a joyful attitude.

**The Lesson:**

What does the word “attitude” mean? (*Encourage responses.*) Our attitude has to do with the way we feel. Often, our attitudes affect the way we behave. What are some words we can use to describe someone’s attitude? (*Encourage responses. They may include words like happy, cheerful, pleasant, positive, negative, grumpy, cranky.*) Can my attitude affect other people? How? (*Wait for responses.*) Let’s see what we can learn about attitudes from our story.

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“Well, then, now that we’re finished breakfast, would you please help me with the dishes?”

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“You see,” Grandma continued, “God wants us to have a joyful attitude. Psalm 4:7 (NIRV) tells us, ‘You have filled my heart with great joy.’ God wants to give us His joy which can stay with us all the time and help us to be cheerful. When we are cranky, we aren’t the only ones who get hurt. It affects the whole family. When you whined when I asked you to help and when you snapped at Grandpa and Jackson, it didn’t make us feel too good.”

“I know, Grandma,” Alisa admitted, “and I’m sorry. I want my attitude to show God’s joy instead of making me *and* my family miserable. Will you help me?”

“Sure, Alisa,” Grandma smiled. “Let’s ask God to give us His joy right now.”

Together, Grandma and Alisa prayed, asking God to put His joy in their hearts, to help them have a joyful attitude that would make others happy to be around them. After they prayed, Grandma got another idea.

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for. Sometimes I write them down. When I think of all the good gifts God has given me, it's hard to keep sulking and feeling miserable. Would you like to try making a list of things you are thankful for?"

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"Sure you can," Grandma said confidently. "God gave you a brother who's fun to play with, a healthy body, lots of great toys,"

"And my best friend Carrie, and wonderful grandparents, and even banana pancakes for breakfast!" said Alisa excitedly. She was starting to feel better already.

"You're catching on!" said Grandma. "Would you like to write them down?"

"How about if I draw pictures of the things I am thankful for?" suggested Alisa. "I love drawing."

"That's a great idea! See how many things you can think of to draw. Put the pictures of things you are thankful for in this bag," said Grandma, reaching for an empty paper bag on the floor. "Then maybe the next time you have a case of the grumps, you can look at the pictures to help you feel joyful again."

"I can think of so many things that I can't wait to start drawing!" said Alisa, reaching for her sketch pad and pencil. "Then I'll go downstairs and tell Grandpa and Jackson that I'm sorry I was so grumpy today. From now on, I'll choose to let God fill me with His joy."

**Appeal:** Sometimes we allow ourselves to be cranky and irritable. Our bad attitudes can make us and our families miserable. Phillipians 4:4 (NIV) tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always." God can give us His joy that nothing can take away. Would you like to join me in asking God to help us to have a joyful attitude?



**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, You have given us so many good gifts. But sometimes we forget to be thankful and we whine and grumble instead. Please fill us with Your joy. Help us to have cheerful attitudes that will help to create a pleasant atmosphere in our homes. We love you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Making It Real:**

1. Divide the children into groups.
2. Give each group a stack of index cards or slips of paper.
3. Give each child a small bag. Ask them to label the bag, "My Thankful Bag", and decorate it with crayons or markers and stickers.
4. On the slips of paper, the children are to draw pictures of things for which they are thankful. Each child may use as many slips as they would like or as time allows. Give them time to share their drawings with their groups.
5. Explain that it is easier to have a joyful attitude when we remember how much God has blessed us. Encourage them to keep adding drawings to their "Thankful Bags" at home. When they feel like complaining or whining, they can pull out the drawings and remember how much God has given them to be thankful for.

## CHAPTER SIX

**COOPERATION is a Big Word**

**Theme:** God can help me to work together with the other people in my family.

**Text:** “If a family is divided, it can't stand.” Mark 3:25, NIrV

**What You Will Need:**

For “Warm-up Activity:” You will need the following: strips of cloth for use as blindfolds and for tying hands together, large paper plates, body parts made from construction paper (eyes, noses, mouths), and tape (double-sided tape will work well). Put tape on the back of the body parts so that they can be stuck onto the plate at the appropriate time.

For “Making It Real:” Have several jigsaw puzzles for the children to work on in groups. Choose puzzles that are easy enough to complete in the allotted time. You may want to have a few puzzles of varying degrees of difficulty so that you have some that are appropriate for each age group at your program.

**Warm-up Activity:**

1. Select two children to work together.
2. Child # 1 is to be blindfolded with a strip of cloth.
3. Child # 2 is to have his/her wrists tied together with a strip of cloth and is instructed not to use his/her hands.
4. Mount paper plate face on wall with tape.
5. Give child #1 the construction paper eyes, nose, and mouth.
6. Instruct the team to work together to attach eyes, nose and mouth to the paper plate face.

(This activity may be repeated as desired with other pairs of children.) Discuss how this task would be difficult for one of the children to do alone, but easier if they work together.

**The Lesson:**

What does “cooperation” mean? When we cooperate, we work together as a team.

Cooperation often makes it easier to get something done than if one person tried to do it alone.

Can you think of a time when you had to cooperate with others? (*Encourage responses.*)

It was Sunday morning and the Martinez family was enjoying a delicious breakfast of homemade bread, scrambled eggs, and fruit salad.

“It looks like a beautiful day outside,” Mom commented as she served some fruit onto six-year-old Rosa’s plate.

“It certainly does,” answered Dad. “The weather report says that it should be warm and sunny all day.”

“Hey!” exclaimed twelve-year-old Jose’, his eyes lighting up. “Why don’t we have a beach picnic? It’s been such a long time since we’ve done that.”

“Oh, yes, let’s do that!” Maria chimed in excitedly. She was ten years old, and beach picnics were her favorite activity.

“Well,” Mom answered cautiously, “it’s already nine o’clock. We still have all our Sunday chores to do. You kids all have homework. The beach is an hour away. I’m not sure we can get everything done in time to go for a picnic today.”

“Aw, Mom,” Jose’ responded. “We can do it.”

“Are you sure, kids?” Dad questioned. “We can’t go until everything is done here at home. We’ll really have to cooperate and help each other if we want to finish in time. Are you willing to work quickly and diligently to get it all done? There won’t be any time for fussing or dawdling.”

“We’ll do it! We’ll get it all done in time,” Jose’ said confidently. “Won’t we, girls?”

“Yes! Yes!” Maria and Rosa answered excitedly.

“All right, then,” answered Mom. “Dad wanted to finish some cleaning up in the yard. I will clean up the kitchen, do some ironing, and get a picnic lunch ready. You kids can start with your homework. Jose’, please help Rosa with hers. Then you will all need to clean your rooms and work together to fold the clean clothes in the laundry baskets. OK?”

“OK, Mom. We’ll start right away,” answered Maria, as the others nodded in agreement.

Mom put on some music to help get everyone moving. For the next couple of hours, the house was filled with a buzz of activity. Homework was done without delay. The rooms were cleaned without complaining. Jose' and Maria finished their rooms first. Then, together, they helped Rosa put her toys away. There was cheerful chatter as the kids folded all the laundry, eagerly anticipating their afternoon at the beach. Soon the work was all done. The kids piled into the minivan as Dad loaded the picnic basket and blankets into the trunk.

“Great job, kids!” said Dad, buckling his seat belt.

“I think we got our chores done in record time!” Mom added.

“We really got things done faster when we worked together,” Jose' said thoughtfully.

“And it was more fun, too!” Maria chimed in.

“Now we're off to the beach!” Rosa squealed with excitement.

The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV), “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.” Our bodies are made of lots of different parts that work best when we use them together. Try to write your name with a pencil without using your thumb. It's not so easy, is it? Each part of our bodies has a special job to do. God made these parts to work together.

Our families are also made up of different people who are good at different things. Families can get more done and have more fun when everyone works together as a team. We call that “cooperation.” When we don't cooperate, you could say that our family is divided. As Mark 3:25 (NIV) tells us, “If a family is divided, it can't stand.” We don't want to have divided families. We want to cooperate with each other. We want to work together and help each other. Then we can do great things for each other and for God, and have fun at the same time!

**Appeal:** Sometimes I haven't always cooperated with the people in my family. Sometimes I am selfish and I think first about what I want instead of what others in my family may need.

Sometimes, in my family, we don't always work together to do what God wants us to do. But God's Word tells me that my family can't be strong unless we cooperate. I don't want to have a divided family that can't last. I want God to help me to be more cooperative. Would you like to join me in asking God to help us to work together in our families?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, We know that it is Your plan for families to work and play together. We know that our families cannot be happy when we work against our parents, our sisters, and our brothers. Please help us to cooperate with each other so that our families can be happy and strong. We want to do great things for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Making It Real:**

Divide the children into groups. Give each group a jigsaw puzzle to work on as a team.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**God's Big Family**

**Theme:** God wants me to be part of His family.

**Text:** Matthew 6:9 “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” (KJV)

**What You Will Need:**For “Warm-up Activity”

One or two family albums for display; a large poster on the wall with magazine clippings of families (Have families of different races, single parent families, families without children, families with a sick child, etc); a large blank sheet of paper on the wall with a border to make it look like a large picture frame; crayons and pencils; slips of paper and glue or scotch tape.

For “Making it Real”

Construction paper (1 per child); jumbo-sized craft sticks or popsicle sticks (3 or more per child); regular-sized craft sticks or popsicle sticks (3 or more per child); markers; glue.

**Warm-up Activity:**

1. Have each child draw and color a picture of himself or herself.
2. Above the large “picture frame” on the wall, put the words, “God’s Big Family.” Let the children stick their pictures on that picture frame.
3. Explain that God made a big world with lots of different kinds of people and He wants us to love one another and live together as one happy family.

**The Lesson:**

It was a bright, sunny day and Ms. Gomez, the fifth grade teacher came into the classroom with a huge box. She put the box on a chair beside her desk and asked the children to guess what was in the box.

Hands went up all over the room. “Beach balls!” shouted Mike from the back of the room.

“I don’t think so,” replied the teacher. “Who else would like to guess?”

“New books for our library. I just know it,” was Patty’s attempt.

“No, I am so sorry. I wish we really got some new books for our library,” said Ms. Gomez, shaking her head. “Well, let’s have a few more tries.”

“Hamburgers!”

“Jump ropes!”

“Tee-shirts!”

“Stuff for the walls of our classroom!”

“Maybe bags of potato chips,” suggested Carlos, with a mischievous smile on his face.

“Really, Carlos, you made a good guess,” answered the teacher as she started opening the box and leaning it so the class could barely see inside the box.

There were twenty-one brown paper bags—one for each of the twenty students in fifth grade and one bag for Ms. Gomez.

“You see, boys and girls, each of these bags has potato chips, a cookie, a sandwich, an apple and a little box of juice. We are going on a family picnic!”

“Yippee! Yes! A picnic!” The class was all excited and they began chatting so loudly that they could hardly hear what else Ms. Gomez was saying.

“Now children,” continued the teacher after everybody was quiet, “this is not just a picnic. This is also one of our class assignments. Today we are going to be talking about families. Mike, Al, Miguel, Sarah, Anna, you will be each in charge of a family. I would like each of you to pick three other students to become part of your family. Then we will go outside and choose our “picnic” spots on the lawn.

The five leaders started picking their families. One by one the children were put into “families.” Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen children were in families. Then there was

silence. Jeremy and Maya were still in their seats. They did not have a family. Nobody picked them—not Mike, not Al, not Miguel, not even Sarah nor Anna.

Tears rolled down Maya's cheeks. This was not the first time that the kids did not want her with them. Whenever she tried to play with them, they would tell her that she was too slow and they did not like her old sneakers and some of the jeans she wore.

Jeremy shrugged his shoulders as if he didn't care. He was always in a fight because the boys called him ugly names. Jeremy's father had left the family and his mother was very poor. Many days, Jeremy was hungry and asked the children to give him some of their lunch. The children did not like that.

Realizing that they were the last two leaders to pick their fourth family members, Miguel and Anna began to complain about being "stuck" with Jeremy and Maya. "I don't want either of those two in my family," pouted Anna.

"Yeah," said Miguel. "Jeremy is weird and Maya dresses funny."

As the two continued to complain about the situation, they did not realize what was happening around them. One by one, the family members they had chosen had quietly begun to gather around the two rejected children. Before long, it was Miguel and Anna that stood alone.

"Do you see what has happened?" Ms. Gomez said. "It seems as though you two have forgotten what Jesus said about loving one another. When we love one another, we care about people's feelings so we do not want to hurt them because we are family." Ms. Gomez did not say another word.

"I am so sorry," Anna apologized. "Please forgive me, Maya and Jeremy."

"Yes," agreed Miguel. "I guess I was not treating you like a brother and sister either. I hope you can forgive me. Jeremy, will you please come into my family?"



And Maya, I would like to have you in my family,” invited Anna. “Please, please.”

The whole class cheered. It was a happy class that collected their picnic sacks and hurried to the picnic lawn.

When Jesus was on earth His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. This is how Jesus began His prayer: “Our Father, which art in heaven...” (Matt. 6:9). If we say “Our Father” it means that we are all brothers and sisters. So then we are all one big family.

Think of your own family. Although the members of your family may resemble one another, they are different. That is how it is with the family of God. We may look different, but we are still family. In the family of God, there are children of different races. Some of us are tall and others are short. There are fat people and skinny people. Some of us are strong and others are weak. There are smart people and not so smart people. In the family of God there are some people who are sick and then there are healthy people. Each family member is unique. Each family member is special to God

When Jesus came to die for our sins, He did not choose to die for some and not for others. Jesus came to die for all. My Bible says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16). Yes, Jesus died for God’s big family. Isn’t that a lot of love? This is the kind of love that Jesus wants us to have in our families and for our neighbors too.

**Appeal:** Sometimes we are nice only to those we really like. If people do not look like us, we think we should not love them. The love that Jesus puts in our hearts makes us love everyone because He made us all. It is not good to love only those who are popular and cute and smart. When we think of being like Jesus, we will choose to love everyone because we are a part of

God's family. Would you like to ask Jesus to help you treat your own family and God's big family with love?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for making families. Thank you for my family and for the big family of the world. Please help me to love everybody.

**Making It Real:**

Give each child the following:

- 1 sheet of construction paper
- 3 jumbo-sized craft sticks (popsicle sticks)
- 3 regular-sized craft sticks (popsicle sticks)

Provide glue and markers. Instruct the children to think of people outside of their own families who are part of God's family. (e.g their teachers, the mailman, the kids next door, etc.). Children are to use the markers to draw faces on jumbo sticks to represent adults and on regular sticks to represent children. Glue the sticks onto the construction paper and label the "stick people" with the names of the persons they represent to make a family.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**Recipe for a Happy Family**

**Theme:** God has shown us how to have happy families.

**Text:** “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” Psalms 127:1, NIV

**What You Will Need:**For “Warm-up Activity”

You will need the following items: sheets of blank paper (1 per child), construction paper (1 sheet per child), pencils, markers or crayons, and glue.

For “The Lesson”

For the first part of the lesson, you will need a large bag containing the following items: picture of big house, picture of nice car, toy, shoe, wallet, and “No Rules” sign. For the recipe part of “The Lesson,” you will want to have an assistant (“chef”) to pour and mix the ingredients. You will also need the following items: Bible, apron, table, mixing bowl, large spoon, 6 small bowls containing pretend “ingredients” (you may use confetti, sand or anything colorful for “ingredients”), cake pan, and ready-made cake (large enough for each child to get a slice).

For “Making It Real”

You will need more paper (1 sheet per child) and construction paper (1 sheet per child), pencils, markers or crayons, and glue. (Optional – items for decorating picture “frames”, such as glitter or stickers)

**Warm-up Activity:**

1. Have each child draw a picture of his/her family.
2. Mount the picture on construction paper to give the effect of a frame.
3. Decorate the picture and frame with markers or crayons.

**The Lesson:**

Everyone wants to have a happy family. But what makes families happy? Let’s see if we can find anything in this bag.

*(Open bag and remove items one at a time as they are discussed.)*

Here's a picture of a big house. Linda and her family just moved to a new house. She has a comfortable bed with a nice, fluffy, pink bedspread. In her room is a shelf with cubbies to hold all her stuffed animals. She has a nice box that Mother had decorated for her to put her smaller toys in, too.

Some people think that having a big, fancy house will make their families happy. Do you think that's the way to have a happy family? It is nice to have lots of space to play. It's great if everyone has his or her own room. But lots of families who have big houses are still not happy.

Here's a picture of a car. Michael's family just got a new sports utility vehicle. He and his brothers can each sit beside a window. They all have their own cupholders. There is even a DVD player so they can watch their favorite videos on long trips.

Do you think having nice car will make a family happy? It is nice to be able to get around in a comfortable car. But having a nice car won't make sure that my family is happy.

Here is a toy. Mark's friends love to play at his house because he has so much stuff. He has three toy boxes full of toys and a whole shelf full of CD's, DVD's, and video games. He has a big screen TV and a computer in his room.

Some children think that their families will be happy if everyone has lots of stuff. It's fun to have a lot of things to play with. But that won't make sure that a family is happy.

Here's a shoe. Melissa has a big walk-in closet full of clothes and shoes. She has twelve pairs of jeans and eight pairs of sneakers. Every time her mom and dad go to the store, they buy more clothes for her. Melissa loves having lots of clothes.

Some people think that having lots of shoes or clothes is what makes a family happy. Getting new clothes or the latest sneakers is fun, but it won't make a family happy.

Here's a wallet with some money in it. Albert's family has a lot of money. They can buy whatever they want and Albert gets an allowance every day. His family goes on long vacations to fun places.

Lots of people think that if they had all the money they wanted, they would have a happy family. The parents wouldn't even have to work! It's nice to be able to buy all the things we need. But money doesn't make sure that a family will be happy.

This sign says, "No Rules." Carrie's parents had to go out of town for a while. Carrie stayed at home with a babysitter who let Carrie do whatever she wanted. Carrie stayed up all night and watched TV. She ate chocolate chip cookies for breakfast every morning and ice cream each day for lunch. No one ever asked her to do any chores. Then one day, Carrie had a terrible stomachache and a big headache! Having no rules is not the way to have a happy family!

So, if none of these things make a happy family, what does? How can we make sure that our families can be happy?

Let's check with the One who made families – God. In His Word, the Bible, He tells us how to have happy families. We are told, in Psalm 127:1 (NIV), "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain." That means that only God can help us to have strong, happy families.

How many of you like to help your mom or dad in the kitchen? I think it's a lot of fun to cook and bake. I just love to get out a cookbook and try a new recipe.

Well, today, we are going to do some baking. We will make a "Happy Family Cake." We will use the Bible as our cookbook. Let's see if we can find the recipe in it for our "Happy Family Cake". Our chef will help us with this.

*(‘Chef’ enters, wearing an apron. He/She stands in front of a table with mixing bowl, spoon, cake pan, and pre-measured “ingredients” in small bowls.)*

We’ve already learned about some of our ingredients this week. Let’s start our recipe by looking at Joshua 24:15 (NIV): Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

So the **first** ingredient in a happy family is choosing God as your Lord. That means deciding, as a family, that you will serve and obey God, that you will live His way. When you choose God, things may not always go the way you want them to, but because you know God will take care you, you can still have a happy family. So let’s make that the first ingredient in our Happy Family Cake:

**2 cups of choosing God first** *(Pour sand or confetti from first small bowl into mixing bowl.)*

Let’s look for the next ingredient in Romans 12:10 (NIV): “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

So the **second** ingredient is putting other family members before yourself. When we do things Jesus’ way, we no longer think, “Me first!” Instead of trying to get the best for ourselves, we think more about what our parents and brothers and sisters need. This is being unselfish.

Let’s put unselfishness in our Happy Family Cake:

**1 cup of unselfishness** *(Pour contents of second small bowl into the mixing bowl.)*

We will find the **third ingredient** in Exodus 20:12 (NIV): Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

God has given our parents the responsibility of leading our homes. So He expects us to treat our parents with respect and love. God commands us to obey our parents as they do what

God says is right. A family cannot be happy without this important ingredient. We'll want to put respect and obedience for parents in our Happy Family Cake:

**1 cup respect and obedience** (*Pour contents of third small bowl into mixing bowl.*)

Our cake is coming along nicely. We have a few more ingredients to go, though. The next one will help to keep our cake soft and moist. We'll find it in Colossians 3:15 (NIV): "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,..." So our **next ingredient** is peacemaking.

In families, there are so many times when we can annoy each other. It is easy to argue and fight. But God wants us to choose peace instead. He wants us to work and play together nicely rather than bickering and fighting. God's Spirit can help us to be peacemakers even when it isn't easy. Let's put a bit of peacemaking in our cake:

**1 tablespoon peacemaking** (*Pour contents of fourth small bowl into mixing bowl.*)

A cake without sugar wouldn't be very sweet, would it? This **next ingredient** really helps to make our families sweet, so we don't want to leave it out. Psalm 16:11 (NirV) says, "You will fill me with joy when I am with You." God will fill us with His joy when we spend time with Him.

When we let God fill us with His joy, we can have a good attitude. Instead of being grumpy and irritable, we can be cheerful and pleasant. Then the other people in our family will feel happy when they are around us. Let's sweeten our cake with some joyful attitude:

**3 tablespoons joyful attitude** (*Pour contents of fifth small bowl into mixing bowl.*)

This **last ingredient** helps to keep the cake from falling apart! In Mark 3:25 (NirV), we learn that "If a family is divided, it can't stand."

Families are made up of different people who must work together as a team if the family is to be strong. When we help each other, we get more done and have more fun! This is called “cooperation.” Let’s use some cooperation to hold our cake together.

**2 teaspoons cooperation** (*Pour contents of sixth small bowl into mixing bowl.*)

So now we will mix all our ingredients together: Choosing God First, Unselfishness, Respect and Obedience, Peacemaking, Joyful Attitude, and Cooperation. We’ll put the batter in a pan and bake it in the oven. (*Mix ingredients briefly with spoon, then pour into cake pan and put pan out of sight.*)

Have you ever walked into the kitchen when your Mom or Dad was baking something really good? The whole room, maybe even the whole house, was filled with the wonderful smell. Sometimes even the neighbors can smell it. Everyone around knows that something delicious is in the oven and can’t wait to taste it.

*(Bring out pre-made cake to show the children.)*

When we follow God’s recipe for having a happy family, it won’t be a secret for long. Others around us will know it. They will be able to tell from our the way we treat our parents, the way we get along with our brothers and sisters, and the joy on our faces that we have something special in our families. They will want to learn more about our God, to “taste and see” that He is good!

**Appeal:** When we follow God’s recipe for happy families, life in our homes will be a lot more fun. And even better, we will be preparing our family for heaven! Today, I want to choose to follow God’s recipe so that my family and I can enjoy God’s joy here on earth and spend forever in Heaven with Jesus. Would you like to join me?



**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us in Your Word how we can have happy families. We want to have happy families on earth that show other people Your love and Your way. We want our families to be ready to go to heaven with you. Please help us to follow your instructions. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Making It Real:**

Have each child draw a picture of his/her family in Heaven. Mount the picture on construction paper to give the effect of a frame. Decorate the picture and frame with markers, crayons, or other items if desired. Serve slices of cake to the children.