

Facing Family Crises

Supporting
One Another
With Love



1999 Family Ministries Planbook

Karen and Ron Flowers

Elaine & Willie Oliver

Bernie & Karen Holford

Gary Hopkins

Lindrey Niles

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A Department of Family Ministries publication.

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Preface

The Chinese symbol for “crisis” brings together two symbols—one for “danger” and one for “opportunity.” The linkages between danger and crisis are not difficult to understand. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child, a disabling accident, a clash of career demands in a dual career marriage, a teen pregnancy, premature widowhood, a significant financial loss or any of a myriad of crises known to the human family, understands well the common physical and emotional responses experienced in moments of danger and crisis. The connections between crisis and opportunity take a little more getting used to. Perhaps in the rear view mirror we can see personal growth and God’s amazing ability to work good out of bad. But at the time, all of our energies are engaged in coping and our minds struggle to make sense of it all. “Opportunity” is not in our mind set.

Family professionals have for a long time researched the traits of a healthy family. More recently we have seen that becoming a healthy family is not so much about reaching an ideal state as it is about developing healthy processes for growth through the seasons and circumstances of life. To minister to families, we must come to understand the processes whereby healthy families prepare for and respond to both the developmental and the intrusive changes which create waves of disequilibrium—crises—in the family system across the lifespan. New titles on the shelves are about *family resilience*. These are some of the questions at the leading edge of family studies: What is it about some individuals and families that strengthens them for times of crisis, carries them through a crisis despite its heavy toll, and allows them to emerge from the other side having grown as persons and stronger as a family unit? How is it possible for these families to grow together rather than be pulled apart by a crisis event? What makes the difference between these families and others who remain in disarray long after the experience?

Over fifty years of research, begun during the Second World War when families were facing crises on every hand, has helped to chart the direction for today’s ministry to families in crisis. We now have a better appreciation for the nature and impact of various crisis events. We are critically aware of the resources upon which a family must be able to draw to cope in healthy ways. And we have greater insights into the importance of a person's perception of a crisis event to whether or not they will be able to respond in healthy ways. Effective ministry to families in crisis calls for a community of faith who is knowledgeable and sensitive to the kinds of crisis experiences which commonly threaten the well-being of families today. It necessitates pulling together as a family of God to create and to connect families with a pool of practical and professional resources upon which they may draw in a time of need. It means extending the care and love and hope which can make it possible for a family to reframe danger as opportunity.

It is with a prayer to this end that this Family Ministries Planbook, *Facing Family Crises*, moves from our desks to yours.

Karen and Ron Flowers
Co-directors, General Conference Department of Family Ministries

Close Companions

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

The close companionship of a husband and wife in marriage helps them to be better equipped to face and endure whatever crises life may bring.

Theme texts

Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:28-30; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience, to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called **Sermon Illumination** that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

Through the years, marriage has meant different things to different people. At times, marriage has served the purpose of joining two communities, nations, or groups together (See Gen. 34:9, 10, 16). For some, marriage has been the means of obtaining legal offspring to perpetuate the family name (See Gen. 30:3-5). Some have wed for the material help, economic security, support or status marriage would provide (See Prov.31:10-29). (1) Sexual lust has been another motivation for marriage (Judges 14:2, 3; 2 Sam. 11:2-4). The need to be dependent upon someone, the need to care for someone, the need to have power over someone, or the need to escape an oppressive situation in one's family have been factors in the reasons others have married.

One Flesh: A Couple Identity

At the heart of the divine design for marriage is the nurture, the emotional and spiritual support, which the couple provide for each other as their lives come together. Throughout Scripture we find the *oneness*, the *couple life* of the married pair addressed from different perspectives, all of which combine to give us an understanding of God's plan for oneness in marriage.

Marriage as partnership. The account of the first marriage followed the divine recognition of the human being's solitary situation, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). The *helper* (Hebrew *ezer*) is one who offers encouragement and strength in the human realm just as God provides help and support as our divine Helper (Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 70:5; 121:1, 2) "Companion" or "partner" (New English Bible) accurately conveys the meaning. (2)

Marriage as one-flesh. In the pronouncement of Gen. 2:24, God indicates the special relationship which He intends for marriage, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to

his wife, and they will become one flesh.” God’s intent for marriage was the formation of a new entity. Their “one flesh” is an intimate union, the formation of a new, unique organism characterized by loving attachment. (3, 4) Jesus reaffirmed and amplified the Genesis text. He gave special attention to the idea of two being one. Citing the Genesis passages which described how God brought together the first husband and wife, He concluded, “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6).

Marriage as covenant. The marital union rests on a covenant, a solemn pledge of agreement which husband and wife make with each other before God and their human community (Mal. 2:14; compare Prov. 2:17). The marriage covenant calls for the highest form of choice-making. It is a commitment which, paradoxically, represents a choice to give up some choices (Stanley, 1998). The words of the woman in the Song of Solomon, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Sol. 2:16 KJV) and “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song of Sol. 6:3 KJV) speak of this kind of commitment and may reflect actual words used by couples at that time in making their wedding pledge.

Marriage as wholistic oneness. “One flesh” includes the physical joining of husband and wife sexually. This is part of God’s created plan for men and women within the covenant of marriage. He pronounced maleness and femaleness as “very good” (Gen. 1:31) and, despite humankind’s fall into sin, He has not changed His mind. The Creator intended married sexuality to provide a joyful, pleasurable union of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18, 19). (5, 6) Joining together physically, however, is never just a purely physical act. “In the Biblical view, human beings are always considered as psychophysical wholes. They cannot be split into separate parts of soul and body, mind and spirit. They are always one, with the whole person engaged in any act.” (Achtmeier, 1976, p. 157). The physical union symbolizes a comprehensive intertwining of two hearts and two spirits. “God does not . . . wish us to join bodies without joining lives” (Achtmeier, 1976, p. 160). (7)

Marriage as a sacred circle. The married pair have a boundary around them which sets them apart from other couples. E. G. White refers to this boundary as a “sacred circle” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361). However, husbands and wives do not cease to be individual persons. Marriage does not replace personhood. (8) It is important to remember that also, the sacred circle, which establishes parameters around the married couple, is not intended to be a rigid barrier which cuts the couple off from support. (9)

Marriage as a new “us” creation. Scott Stanley summarizes the concept of oneness in marriage: “It’s not as if the two are to become one blob, wherein one or both identities are lost. Rather, the two form a new, highly prized identity of “us” that is to be nurtured and protected” (1998, p. 8).

Growing In Oneness

Effects of sin. Sin profoundly affects God’s design for “one flesh” in marriage. Couple life cannot exist without the investment of the two in the relationship, yet the togetherness of many couples has suffered because of self-centeredness on the part of the husband or wife. Self-interest has overshadowed the mutuality of dedication, service and support toward one another that should be present. Sin resulted in struggles for control by one over the other.

Marriage is a beneficiary of the gospel. The good news is that Christ has bridged the gulf between humanity and God and the gulf between human beings which was created by sin (2 Cor. 5:18, 19) and marriage is a beneficiary. “Marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64). The walls that divide us have

been surmounted by Christ. Paul declares that all male-female gender conflicts, which are often expressed in the home as well as in the Church and in society, have been transcended in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Paul exalted the crucified Christ as the source of reconciliation (Eph. 2:14-18). What is true for all alienated relationships is true also for marriage: “To create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace” (Eph. 2:15 NEB). We are reconciled in “one body” (Eph. 2:16). That is the spiritual fact upon which the apostle can say that there is now “one” where there was “two.” In Christ the way is open for couples to experience “one flesh” as God intended in ways they could not know apart from Him. **(10)** The call of the gospel is for us to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph. 4:15).

Vital signs of a healthy oneness. We want our marriage relationships to be healthy, strong and growing in Christ. What are the “vital signs” that we can monitor to evaluate marital health? In *Traits of a Lasting Marriage*, long-time Christian counselors, authors and relationship seminar leaders Jim and Sally Conway (1991) list ten characteristics reported by 186 middle-aged Christian couples in the U.S.A. as being significant to a lasting healthy marriage: (1) lifelong commitment, (2) mutually satisfying communication, (3) spiritual vitality, (4) effective conflict resolution, (5) energy from friends, (6) sexual intimacy, (7) time to laugh and play, (8) realistic expectations, (9) serving each other and sharing leadership, (10) personal growth. Let us check the pulse of our marriages as we look specifically at the top four of these characteristics.

- *Lifelong commitment.* Commitment is a positive decision made by a couple to stay together, to love and affirm each other, to grow as persons, and to make their marriage an expression of their desire for each other’s happiness (Conway, 1991). Numerous authors and researchers have found commitment to be a high priority in successful marital relationships. **(11)** Commitment is closely related to the Biblical concept of covenant. Jack and Judith Balswick (1991) see optimal marital functioning as being modeled after the characteristics of God’s relationship with humanity. Foremost among these is commitment that is “based upon a mature (i.e., unconditional and bilateral) covenant” (p. 33). **(12)**

- *Mutually satisfying communication.* One researcher, Dr. Roy Rhodes, a Dallas, Texas psychologist, reveals that the average couple married ten years or more spends only 37 minutes a week in close communication (Conway, 1991). Communication “is not simply the ability to talk; it also implies that you are understood and accepted by the other person . . . [It] includes a willingness to share myself with another person and a desire to understand that other person” (Conway, 1991, p. 64). God created the first couple to be naked and unashamed—emotionally, as well as physically. Sin drove human beings into hiding, from God and from each other. By His grace, and with the development of better skills that do not come naturally, we can shed this inherited legacy of hiding our inner selves behind tattered fig leaf garments and become more open and vulnerable with each other. **(13)**

- *Spiritual vitality.* This refers to “a faith beyond ourselves, a trust in a personal God who loves us and is concerned for our best good. This faith is an intimate personal relationship, as opposed to the mere acceptance of a certain creed or belonging to a religious organization” (Conway, 1991, p. 86). Research indicates that couples who are more religiously inclined and from same-faith backgrounds have an edge when it comes to keeping marriages strong and avoiding divorce (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). **(14)**

- *Effective conflict resolution.* In contrast to types of marriages where one spouse is subordinate to the other or where spouses are seldom expected to interact at a personal level, a “one flesh”

companionship-type marriage encourages couples, as equal partners, to move ever closer emotionally to each other to become more and more open and vulnerable with each other. Yet with increasing closeness, conflict inevitably develops. This paradox is confusing and is accompanied by sufficient pain to turn many couples away from the pursuit of greater intimacy. “Conflict resolution is the vital key to effective growth in love and intimacy,” wrote David Mace, pioneer marital therapist and founder of the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (Mace, 1982, p. 30). We are blessed today to have many Christian counselors and marital growth specialists providing training in interpersonal relationship skills. By God’s grace they are helping couples to recognize and avoid potential conflicts, to resolve conflict earlier and with less trauma, and to understand marital conflict in a new way—as a stepping stone to better understanding and growth in intimacy. Let us not abandon God’s call to one flesh intimacy; let us avail ourselves of tools and skills now available to us that will encourage us. (15)

Facing Life as a Team

As a Christian marriage researcher, Scott Stanley tells us, “People who are the most comfortable thinking in terms of ‘we’ tend to be the most dedicated and happy in their marriages” (1998, p. 162). “Marriage is about commingled lives. Marriage is about sharing and learning to share more. Marriage is about teamwork” (p. 165).

Becoming a team. E. G. White wrote, “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 the afteryears” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 105). Developing an understanding of marriage as “we”—as teamwork—is a significant part of becoming “completely united.” Some couples have a remarkable grasp of the concept from the beginning; for others, such a sense of togetherness is reached slowly, often painfully. Sadly, some never really grasp what being a team is about. May the Spirit inspire each of us as couples today, to reflect on our experience and grow together in this area of oneness.

Illustration. Randy and June were career professionals who had married each other in their early thirties. Dedicated, hardworking, successful individuals and proud of it, they had little time for church or for God, though they considered themselves Christians. Married life was good at first. They enjoyed exercising, hiking, talking and listening to music together. However, they remained highly individualistic in their thinking. Five years into their marriage, two crises developed. First, June’s company decided to move across the country. When she announced her desire to move, Randy didn’t want to discuss it. “When I married you, I never agreed to give up my career,” he declared. “That’s like my whole life, what I’ve worked for all these years!” June retorted that her career was as important as his. As they struggled with the question of whether their commitment to marriage would triumph over their commitment to work, the second crisis came. June discovered she was pregnant. She hesitated to tell Randy, but then she thought, “Enough of this ‘me versus you business.’ He was the father; he needed to know.

Randy’s first reaction was anger. Then he started looking for solutions, “What are our options?” he asked, with obvious implications. His selfishness and reluctance to be on a marriage team showed. June was devastated. Abortion was not an option for her. Her response of immense pain triggered something in Randy. That day he began for the first time to ponder the need to let go of his self-interest. He prayed at work throughout the day, and so did she.

That evening he came to June having done a turnabout in his mind set. Expressing regret for his earlier attitude, he confessed, “I wanted all the best of what we could have together without really wanting to be together. I don’t think being married is all about me or you; it needs to be about us. I don’t

know how to do ‘us,’ but I’m willing to start learning. . . . I think I wanted this marriage only as long as it was good for both of us. I don’t believe that’s commitment. I want commitment. I want you to know I’ll be by your side, no matter what *we* decide to do. Will you *be married with me?* I mean, you and me together.”

June responded with tears and hugs. The couple took what could have been the end of their marriage and made it the beginning of a new life together (Stanley, 1998. Adapted).

Fortified to face crises. The importance of a married couple’s sense of covenant oneness with each other, together with their commitment to God, cannot be overstated. It is significant for their spiritual growth (2 Cor. 6:14; Compare Amos 3:3). It is significant for their parenting. “Parents are to work together as a unit” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 312; Compare Gen. 27). Further, in the midst of life’s crises, their oneness is their best fortification.

Illustration. Patrick Morley tells how his wife’s sister and her husband faced the trauma of breast cancer. Nancy’s annual mammogram revealed a spot that required a biopsy. Fearing the worst, Nancy had asked that the surgeon call her husband Hal with the news of the biopsy results, rather than herself. After an excruciating week of waiting, Hal got the bad news. He had never been so scared. What would he do if he lost Nancy?

He held the grim report within himself all day and through the evening, even as he and Nancy kept an appointment to dine out with friends. When they were alone at last, he drew her close and began, “The doctor called me. We need to have surgery. They did find some cancer.” His use of “we” said paragraphs. They were silent and wept in each other’s arms for long minutes. At last, Hal whispered, “Nancy, I feel a love for you right now like I’ve never felt before.”

The mastectomy was successful. Hal slept in her hospital room, helped her in and out of bed, ran errands for her, cleaned up when her medicine made her nauseous. “We felt a new closeness,” says Nancy. “For the first two months we would just hug and hold each other all the time. Hal said to me, ‘You’ll never know how much I love you and how courageous I think you are.’ That really ministered to me. I realize how precious life is every day. I look at my husband and kids differently. I thank the Lord for giving me life!”

Morley concludes, “When the body of the wife is sick, so is the body of the husband. They are one flesh. When the body of the husband takes ill, so does the body of the wife. They are one flesh. We belong to each other, as we belong to the Lord. How important it is for your mate to have an assurance that you will be there in the dark hour of illness.” (Adapted from *Devotions for Couples* by Patrick Morley. Copyright ©1994 by Patrick M. Morley. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. Available at your local bookstore or by calling 800-727-3480)

Conclusion

In the book of Ecclesiastes we find these beautiful lines about being in partnership:

Two are better than one; they receive a good reward for their toil, because, if one falls, the other can help his companion up again; but alas for the man who falls alone with no partner to help him up. And, if two lie side by side, they keep each other warm; but how can one keep warm by himself? If a man is alone, an assailant may overpower him, but two can resist; and a cord of three strands is not quickly snapped. (Ecc. 4:9-12 NEB)

These verses affirm God's assessment that it is not good for human beings to be alone. Good friendships are so important to the nurture and support that we need as individuals. May God help us to reach out in friendship to others.

And how wonderful are these lines in praise of the companionship a loving Creator designed for marriage! May God open our eyes that we may see how we can be a source of encouragement to one another. May God grant us the strength and ability to lift one another, nurture one another, and keep one another warm! **(16)** May God help us to team together in facing whatever challenges life brings to us. Sometimes, we may have to walk alone in our marriages. If such is your situation, be assured that, through your personal relationship with God, you can do much. When, however, partners are linked with each other *and* with God, that threefold cord is indestructible.

Sermon Illumination

1. "Neither Roman nor Greek civilizations provided an atmosphere that elevated the marital union. The Greek statesman, Demosthenes (3000 B.C.), indicated that it might take several of this lesser order of being—woman—to take care of man's needs: 'Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our person, wives to bear us legitimate children and be our faithful housekeepers.' The wife could be repudiated and simply dismissed for barrenness or even if her husband found her unattractive or uncongenial" (Mazat, 1996, p. 20).

2. "'Helper' is a relational term describing a beneficial relationship, but in itself does not specify position or rank, either superiority or inferiority" (Davidson, 1988, p. 15).

3. "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self; *showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation*" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 25, emphasis supplied).

4. "The Christian idea of marriage is based on Christ's words that a man and wife are to be regarded as a single organism—for that is what the words 'one flesh' would be in modern English. And the Christians believe that when He said this he was not expressing a sentiment but stating a fact—just as one is stating a fact when one says that a lock and its key are one mechanism, or that a violin and a bow are one musical instrument. The inventor of the human machine was telling us that its two halves, the male and the female, were made to be combined together in pairs, not simply on the sexual level, but totally combined (C. S. Lewis, quoted in Brown & Brown, 1980, p. 139).

5. "The woman was made from the rib of the man—originally they were one—and after the creation of the woman they long to become one again" (Achtmeier, 1976, p. 155).

6. "All we are as male or female becomes open to the other, and is made complete by being joined with the inner self of one's mate. We know each other and become one with the other and are fulfilled by each other in a way otherwise utterly impossible, and that knowing and that fulfillment carry over into our whole married life, and strengthen and deepen and periodically refresh it" (Achtmeier, 1976, p. 162).

7. Through this unitive aspect of sexuality, the perpetuation of the human family is provided for as well. In God's plan, procreation is entwined with and springs from the same act of marital union whereby husband and wife find joy, pleasure and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in such a sexual bond that the creation of a new life may be entrusted. Their child is a special expression of their oneness, an offspring of their "one flesh."

8. "Neither the husband nor the wife should merge his or her individuality in that of the other. Each has a personal relation to God. . . . Let the wealth of your affection flow forth to Him who gave His life for you. Make Christ first and last and best in everything. As your love for Him becomes deeper and stronger, your love for each other will be purified and strengthened" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361).

9. The cells of the human body have boundaries which identify and protect them. They also interact with other cells and organisms within the body. The sacred circle around a couple should not become a wall behind which the couple or family are trapped. Excessive isolation can deprive the marriage and the family of much needed companionship and interaction with others—interaction which will help sustain and enhance their life together. The family, though a private entity to be sure, is also dependent upon networks around it for life support. Interactive caring and support among members and households (Acts 2:46; 4:32; Gal. 6:2; James 5:10) characterizes the families of the early Church.

10. "In the most intimate relationships of life, in our kinship with father and mother, brothers and sisters, in married love, and in our duty to the community, direct relationships are impossible. Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in their family relationships . . . nor in the relationships formed in the process of living. Between father and son, husband and wife . . . stands Christ the Mediator, whether they are able to recognize him or not. We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him, through his word, and through our following of him" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 86 quoted in Anderson and Guernsey, 1985, p. 142).

11. "A deep level of commitment and strong interest in promoting each other's happiness and welfare" was among the top qualities of 130 Oklahoma (USA) couples who rated themselves very high in terms of marital satisfaction (Stinnett, Chesser & Defrain, 1979). See also Achtemeier, 1976; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; Smedes, 1988; Stanley, 1998.

12. "When answering the survey question about whether a commitment to stay married had helped hold their marriage together, one husband said, 'Especially my wife's! There were times when my commitment wavered—hers never did, even when I was most unbearable.'

"This man, with a graduate degree and a high income, had suffered from such severe emotional problems during mid-life that he separated from his wife and was finally hospitalized with a breakdown. During his hospitalization, his wife visited him faithfully and did all she could to aid his recovery. After his release, they were officially reunited and have now been married a total of thirty years" (Conway, 1991, pp. 43, 44).

13. Many books on marriage, including those listed in the References below, contain helpful sections on communication. For an in-depth, user friendly textbook on communication, see Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1991.

14. “If Christ indeed is formed within, the hope of glory, there will be union and love in the home. Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 120).

15. You may wish to make available the resource article “Creative Conflict Resolution,” included with this planbook.

16. Christian clinical psychologist and marriage researcher Scott Stanley writes, “On the day that I married Nancy, our pastor added a vow into the ceremony that we had not talked about beforehand. He had me promise to keep Nancy warm. Of all that was said and done that day, those were the words that stood out to me, Nancy, and my mother. Promising to keep Nancy warm encompasses so much” (Stanley, 1998, p. 42).

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How to Love a Son of Thunder

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

With God's help we can keep on loving one another in our families even as we pass through difficult periods in our lives together.

Theme Text

1 John 4:7-11

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience, to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called **Sermon Illumination** that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

A couple of generations ago, it was common for Bible salesmen to go from door to door throughout the United States and Canada selling great large family Bibles. We remember seeing them in our grandparents' homes—big books with heavy, padded leather covers and large print with artistic letters. There were pages for recording births and deaths and weddings and other family events. Many of them had a place for recording your family genealogy, your “family tree.” They became collecting sites as well for photos and postcards and letters from family members.

Often, in the centerfold of these huge Bibles were a number of reproductions of great paintings. One painting that was frequently included was a painting of Jesus and his disciples, seated at a table celebrating the Last Supper. It was interesting that Jesus and the group were only seated along one side of the table. In truth, families in the Holy Land in Jesus' time didn't even use tables like that. But never mind, it was the face of Jesus and the faces of the disciples that captured attention. Closest to Jesus was the youngest of the disciples, hardly more than a boy, with a shy, childlike face. It was John, the son of Zebedee. The painting pictured him leaning on Jesus, his cheek to Jesus' breast.

I. The Son of Thunder

With this painting, “The Last Supper,” renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci has popularized the characterization of John the disciple as a gentle, lovable sort. But the portrait of him in the Gospels is quite different. John was a rough, coarse, high spirited young man. His untamed spirit and hot temper earned for him the nickname “Son of Thunder” or “Thunderman” (Mark 3:17). Hot tempered and easily angered, he was not by nature meek and yielding. He craved power and authority, and he craftily plotted to be chief among the apostles. On one occasion, he and his brother attempted to manipulate Jesus into granting them the highest positions in His kingdom by putting their mother up to requesting it

(Matt. 20:21). This really angered the other disciples and they sputtered about it among themselves until Jesus intervened.

John possessed a spirit of criticism. He was racially and religiously prejudiced, and jealous for his own group. He wanted nobody else stepping on what he considered the private turf of Jesus and the disciples (Luke 9:49). It was John who was angry, indignant and ready to fight when the Samaritans were inhospitable to the Master. In revenge, he wanted to destroy them by fire (Luke 9:54, 55). E. G. White in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 295, characterized him as evil-tempered, critical, proud, violent of spirit, combative, and indignant.

II. Love That Looks Inward

On several occasions, John speaks of himself as “the disciple Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). On the surface these verses seem to imply that John was “likeable” and that Jesus was instantly fond of him. Da Vinci’s painting has probably helped to perpetuate the idea that Jesus loved John because he was so gentle and kind and good. Actually, Jesus loved John *when the very opposite of these qualities ruled his life*.

In contrast to the word “like” or “be fond of” (Greek *philos*) which is used of Jesus’ fondness for Lazarus (John 11:36), John uses a different word in describing Jesus’ attitude toward him. It is the special word in the New Testament for God’s redemptive love (*agape*). John’s gospel frequently showcases this love in action; Paul provides a Christian essay on its qualities (1 Corinthians 13). (1) Jesus commands His followers to love like this (John 15:12), but this is a radical love, unknown to the human heart (John 5:42) except as God’s Spirit pours it upon us (Rom. 5:5).

John’s gospel was written late in his life. It was a time for reflection on his youth and the constancy of Christ’s love for him even in the midst of his unloveliness. The structure of the verb “loved” in these verses in the original language has the sense of “kept on loving.” Wonder of wonders, Jesus kept on loving him in spite of the traits he possessed.

The Lord’s insight. Two verses give us insight into Jesus’ love for His difficult youthful disciple. “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Matt. 12:20).

Looking on the heart. The first verse conveys God’s care for the inner life and well-being of an individual. It is as if Jesus looked at John through special eyeglasses. (2) John and those like him present exteriors with appearances, behaviors and attitudes that are difficult to live with, even offensive. These things which make this person—whether child, youth or adult—so hard to love actually reveal to us important information about what the person is feeling and experiencing inside. Jesus described the close connection between the exterior and the interior of a person elsewhere when He said, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34).

Bruised reeds. John fits the gospel description of “a bruised reed” or “a smoldering wick.” These expressions come from Matthew, who identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah found in Isaiah 42:1-4. Jesus is gentle, compassionate, patient, persevering. He does not snap off the reed bent over by the wind; rather He carefully straightens it, binds it up, so that it can stand against the wind again. The flickering wick, nearly extinguished, He does not snuff out but revives it, and

fans it into a bright flame. Jesus knew that all persons suffer from the legacy of sin which leaves them broken inside. He viewed people such as John as especially wounded within.

Just what has caused the bruising we may not know or fully understand. We do know that the crises of life leave indelible marks on people. Many spend their lifetimes recovering and trying to cope. We know that God intends for mothers and fathers to provide children with physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual nurturance. They need—touching, holding, caressing, a soothing, caring voice of understanding, expressions of love, protection, security, and a sense of belonging. In a very real sense, when this kind of caring is missing or minimal in childhood, individuals face life having to cope with some deficits. When overly strict, harsh, unkind, abusive treatment, or other physical, mental or emotional trauma is added to the absence of primary nurture, additional damage is sustained. All these experiences eventually find expression through an individual's personality and behavior. Parents and others who care for children should be on the alert for the increased needs of young people at times of crisis in their lives. (3)

Unfortunately, human behavior being what it is, people who are hard to love often bring out unlovely qualities in others. It is so natural to respond with cold silence, lecturing, arguing, threatening, ignoring them, or some form of punishment. But not Jesus. While we see only the outward appearance, He takes note of what is needed inside.

How Jesus Loved A Difficult Disciple

The Lord set about to provide John with that for which his heart craved—redemptive love. It is a love that has compassion for the brokenness that people feel inside, a love that accepts, a love offered as a gift. This kind of love expresses itself in some specific ways:

Agape love trusts. Jesus drew John close to Himself, bringing him into the most trusted inner circle of the disciples. Note the repeated references to John being in a small, select group with Peter and James (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33; Luke 8:51). Our Lord shared Himself with John, granting special insights and revelations, such as those on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2ff). Trust is likely to beget trust.

Agape love is vulnerable. Jesus opened His deepest feelings to John and the disciples. When others were abandoning him, He asked, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (John 6:67) In Gethsemane, the Savior made Himself especially vulnerable before John and the others, seeking their support and encouragement (Matt. 26: 37, 38). We are more willing to face ourselves and our limitations in the presence of someone who is transparently honest and vulnerable with us.

Agape love builds bonds of intimacy. Jesus sought a friendship with John and the other disciples, rather than assuming the position of a master with servants (John 15:13, 15). He considered them His family (Matt. 12:49). He communicated freely with them. “Everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). He spent time alone with them (Mark 3:7; 6:31; John 6:3; 11:54). One reference indicates the familial love and fondness which Jesus came to have for John (See John 20:2, where the word for “loved” literally means “the one of whom Jesus was fond”). (4, 5)

Agape love gives responsibility. As He hung upon the cross, Jesus gave to John a most significant responsibility—the care of His own mother (John 19:26, 27). This was not the first responsibility Jesus had given John (see Mark 6:7; Luke 8:51), but it was clearly a most significant one and signaled the depth of trust and attachment He found with John.

Agape love corrects with kindness and firmness. Jesus' love for John reached out to him in rebuke and correction when his course strayed from the values and convictions of Jesus (Matt. 20:22-24; Luke 9:52-56). Following the rebuke, Jesus used the opportunity to clarify the principles of life in His family. (6, 7)

Agape love makes sacrifices. At the cross, with the mother of Christ in his care, John looks upon the crucified One and sees the supreme manifestation of love—Jesus, the very embodiment of love, dying there. He remembers, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). The greatest Lover of the ages has become his substitute, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, the atonement for his sins. With eyes to see truth that only the Spirit can inspire, he recognizes on the cross his hasty temper dying, his revengeful spirit being vanquished, his unbridled prejudice meeting an eternal end. His untamed nature is crucified there. John is crucified with Christ (Compare Gal. 2:20). The Son of God is made to be sin for John (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)—made to be the Son of Thunder, unlovely and unlovable—that in Him, John, and all of us, might be made righteous, might be made loving and loveable. With the Son of Thunder on the cross, he recognizes that he is now God's son, and he falls to his knees in worship before the cross. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” he would write later (1 John 3:1). From that cross flows redemptive, life-changing love that provides for the deepest needs of his soul.

In so many ways, Christ had portrayed His love for John. These touched and changed his heart. “The depth and fervor of John's affection for his Master was not the cause of Christ's love for him, but the effect of that love. John desired to become like Jesus, and under the transforming influence of the love of Christ he did become meek and lowly. Self was hid in Jesus” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 544).

Conclusion

The challenges we face in rearing our children can be great. There will be moments when we may be surprised, disappointed, angry, perhaps horrified, by their conduct or our own as we interact with them at various crisis points along the way. But there is a power in love to change hearts and lives. (8) Two quotations can inspire us:

“You may be evangelists in the home, ministers of grace to your children” (*Child Guidance*, p. 479). Whatever the challenge, whatever the crisis, we are called to minister grace to our children at that time.

The second quotation notes the probable result of manifesting Christ's redemptive love to our young people:

“The more unlovely they are, the greater pains you should take to reveal your love for them. When the child has confidence that you want to make him happy, love will break every barrier down. This is the principle of the Saviour's dealing with man; it is the principle that must be brought into the church” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 198).

May the love of Jesus transform us, soften us, make us more kind and caring. Let its power renew our home and family relationships, especially our relationships with our children, that it might be true of us as He said, “All . . . will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Sermon Illumination

1. The New Testament uses the Greek word *agape* to describe God's love. God's *agape* love differs from human love in at least three ways:

- a. Human love is conditional; God's love is unconditional. It flows from Him independently of our goodness or self-worth (see Acts 15:11; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8, 9; Titus 1:14).
- b. Human love is changeable; God's love is unchangeable. His love never fails (see Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 13:8).
- c. Human love is self-seeking; God's love is self-sacrificing (see Philippians 2:6-8).

The supreme manifestation of God's unconditional, unchanging, self-sacrificing love was demonstrated when Jesus died the second death on the cross for all humanity (see Romans 5:8; Hebrews 2:9) (Sequeira, 1993, p. 27).

2. A family once visited a science exhibit where each visitor was asked to observe a wall-sized colored photograph of an orchard of fruit trees in full blossom. Then, each exhibit visitor was given a pair of three-dimensional eyeglasses to wear. The room was filled with exclamations of, "Oh, how magnificent!" "What a difference!" "I feel like I'm right in the middle of the trees!" It seemed as if the branches had emerged from the picture and stretched over the heads of the visitors. Some thought they might even be able to reach out and grasp the lush blossoms. The 3-D glasses provided a radically different way of viewing and experiencing the portrait.

3. Recent research shows that the loss of a sibling in death is one significant crisis that can result in the manifestation of specific problem behaviors—arguing, demand for attention, disobedience at home, stubbornness, irritability, self-consciousness, and lack of concentration. Preschoolers, aged 4 and 5, and school-age youngsters, 6 through 11, showed the highest incidence of troublesome behaviors.

"Bereaved families . . . should be alerted to children's increased need for attention after a sibling dies, and should be prepared to enlist other family members and friends to help them meet the youngsters' increased and intensified needs" (*Growing Child Research Review*, 1995, p. 4).

4. "The more a parent makes eye contact with his or her child as a means of expressing their love, the more a child is nourished with love and the fuller is his emotional tank. . . . We tend to like people who are able to maintain pleasant eye contact with us. Eye contact is pleasant, of course, when it is accompanied by pleasant words and pleasant facial expressions, such as smiling" (Campbell, 1988, pp. 39, 40).

5. "Appropriate and consistent physical contact is a vital way to give your teenager that feeling and conviction that you truly care about him. This is especially true when your teenager is noncommunicative, sullen, moody, or resistant. During these times, eye contact may be difficult or even impossible. But physical contact can almost always be used effectively. Seldom does an adolescent respond negatively to a light, brief, touch on the shoulder, back, or arm. For example, suppose your teenager is just sitting in a chair watching TV. What a simple thing to briefly touch him on the shoulder as you walk by. . . .

"Even when your teenager is not consciously aware of your physical contact, it registers. Its effect is to help him feel, 'My mother and father love me and care for me, even during these times when relating to them is hard for me'" (Campbell, 1981, pp. 48, 49).

6. “It is not love but sentimentalism that palter with wrongdoing, seeks by coaxing or bribes to secure compliance, and finally accepts some substitute in place of the thing required” (*Education*, p. 290).

7. “Children should not be left to wander away from the safe path marked out in God’s word, into ways leading to danger, which are open on every side. Kindly, but firmly, with persevering, prayerful effort, their wrong desires should be restrained, their inclinations denied” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 391).

8. The teacher had been kind and loving to John, a troubled young African boy very much in need of kindness and love. One day he brought her a friendship gift, a seashell of lustrous beauty. “Where did you ever find such a beautiful shell?” the teacher asked as she gently fingered the gift.

John told her that there was only one spot where such extraordinary shells could be found. When he named the place, a certain bay several miles away, the teacher was left almost speechless. “Why, it’s gorgeous—wonderful—but you shouldn’t have gone all that way to get a gift for me.”

His eyes brightening, the African boy answered, “Long walk part of gift.” (Adapted from Mala Power, *Follow the Year*.)

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Challenges to the Rhythm of Life

by Lyndrey Niles

Theme

In the midst of crises, disappointments, tears and sorrow, our faith can declare, “God is good, all the time.”

Theme Text

Psalm 6

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience, to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called **Sermon Illumination** that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

God is good. In some churches, when the speaker says, “God is good,” the congregation responds antiphonally, “All the time.” Can you do that this morning?

“God is good . . .”

(Congregation responds) “All the time.”

And the reverse is also true, All the time, God is good.

The Rhythm of Life

For many of us, life has developed a kind of rhythm, with good days and a few bad ones, times when we are emotionally up and times when we are down. There are sunny days, and other days when into our lives “a little rain must fall.” *Rhythm* is a good way to describe this ebb and flow. It is “an ordered recurrent alternation of strong and weak elements” according to the dictionary. We’ve accepted that, with the bright and the cheerful experiences, there will be occasional disappointments—perhaps a bout with the flu or some other illness which may bother us somewhat, but will probably not be of too great a consequence. Perhaps we fall short of the money we would like to have at times. Maybe we lose in a sports game or in a table game and someone laughs at our misfortune. We have become accustomed to a certain amount of disappointment that comes along with happier times.

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Then, in the course of this rhythm of life, we get a terrific jolt, some shattering circumstance, which rocks the very foundation of our lives. It shocks us into recognizing our own frailty and finiteness. In the midst of that shock or disappointment can we say, “God is good”? Or *should* we say it?

Negative responses to low points in the rhythm. Not everyone affirms that God is good—all the time. I’m sure you’ve heard somebody say, “I think God has forgotten me” or “God must be dead.” You may have been tempted yourself to murmur, “Life isn’t fair.” Or you may have had the thought, “I wonder what sin _____ (some Christian) must have committed for God to treat him/her like that.” It is not unusual, even for Christians, to wonder in a time of tragedy, “How can a merciful or a loving God allow such a terrible thing to occur?”

I can think of incidents I know about which give us pause, cause us to wonder, as we consider them. There is a young Christian woman in her early twenties who is doing extremely well in a Masters in Business Administration program at one of the top universities in the United States. She has already interviewed with two major international corporations for employment. Then, during her last semester, she becomes ill. Doctors diagnose cancer of the liver. Her days are numbered. If you were in her place, could you say, “God is good?” (1, 2, 3)

These are challenges to the rhythm of life. But, God is good—all the time! Does your response sound a little weaker than it did in the beginning? I hope we can restore that volume, that enthusiasm with which you said it at the first.

A Personal Challenge

A year ago, I was feeling quite good and enjoying life. Then, late last year, while I was visiting relatives in the Caribbean islands, things changed dramatically. After some time on the beach, I had returned to the house for a nap. When I awakened about two hours later, I could not move. I tried for a full ten minutes to get off the couch and could not do it. I called my brother and he helped me to my feet, but I had difficulty standing up and could barely walk. I suddenly knew what it was to be physically challenged.

I returned to the United States and underwent five days of hospital testing. However, after all of that, the doctors concluded, “We don’t know what’s wrong with you. Everything is within normal range.” By then I was getting back a little strength and could walk a little, but it turned out that I could not go back to my job. So for most of these last nine months I have been at home. I still cannot get a definitive answer as to what happened. Life has been up and down.

Confronted by this challenge, I decided in the summer that I was going to lecture a little and just see how it would go. The first morning I sat and lectured to the class. When I wanted to go to the chalk board to illustrate a point, I found I just could not get up out of my chair. I relaxed and, after a while, I succeeded in standing and walking. Later, I talked with the doctor again. He sent me to other doctors. They all tried. At the present time there are differences of opinion regarding the diagnosis and treatment.

Frankly, it has been a bad experience, leaving me to decide what to do with my life. Reflecting on this experience, I came up with the thought for this sermon, “Challenges to the Rhythm of Life.” Under the circumstances, I have had to retire from the university. I plan to seek treatment which will help me restore my strength. But whatever happens, I promise you that I will continue to say, “God is good—all the time.” (4)

Crises in the Life of Job

We don't understand the end from the beginning. We are not sure really why we have these challenges. The biblical character Job comes to mind. I invite you to revisit the book of Job, perhaps reading from one of the more modern translations so it is easier for you to follow the thoughts.

A man of good character. In the beginning we find a splendid character reference for Job given by God Himself, "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8 KJV)? Now this wasn't written by a relative or someone trying to make Job's resumé look good so he could get a job. This is God talking about one of his servants, "There is none like him. A perfect and an upright man. A good guy." We learn of his position and possessions. He had many sheep, donkeys and camels. Most of these camels were used for transporting goods. Perhaps Job owned a moving business. On one of his camels you might have seen a sign "Job and Sons—Movers," "Don't move without calling Job and Sons." He also must have been in the dairy business. He had five hundred she-donkeys and those were for milk. (I'm not making any recommendations to you, only telling you what the record is.) So Job was doing very well. Life had developed a smooth rhythm.

Terrible losses. Then, everything changed. A servant rushed in to report a raid and the loss of his five hundred oxen, five hundred she-donkeys and the servants who were with them. Job could hardly absorb that tragic news before another servant reported, "Fire came down from God" (He just had to put his own theology in there). "It fell and burned up all seven thousand sheep, and all of the servants and I alone am left." That was followed by another devastating report that the Chaldeans had stolen all of his three thousand camels. Job must have had a pretty good heart. Why he didn't collapse and die, I can't explain. Just as he is sitting there and wondering what next, a fourth messenger arrived with the most tragic news of all, that his seven sons and three daughters had died when the building they were in collapsed in a wind storm.

Job worships. Now remember, Job is only human. The Bible tells us that he arose, tore his robe and shaved his head—expressions of sorrow—and fell to the ground and worshipped (Job 1:20). "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (vs. 21 KJV). In other words, Christian friends, in spite of all that we have just enumerated regarding what happened in Job's life in one day, I hear the word of God telling us that this man said, "God is good—all the time." Could you have done that? Could I have done that?

Physical, mental and spiritual agony. The story unfolds with the devil still in control of Job's conditions and circumstances. He hits him with sores all over his body. Poor Job cannot lie down, sit down or anything. Then his wife, his help mate, comes to him and says, "Man, I'm sorry for you . . . Do you still hold to your integrity?" That's an interesting word: *integrity*. And out of her own religious experience she offered this counsel, "Why don't you curse God and die? There's nothing else to live for. Go ahead. Curse him and die" (See Job 2:9). But Job did not follow her advice; he held on (Job 2:10). Then his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, came in with all of their theological reasoning and different points of view, "Job, you are a terrible guy, you have to be guilty of something. I don't know what sin it is, or what it is you've done, but God knows. You'd better straighten your life up." They continue judging Job. Still he holds on and makes that great statement, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 39:15 KJV). After a while, in the later chapters, we find that Job starts to ask some questions. I think the conditions surrounding him were such that he himself began to wonder about God. How could all this happen?

A revelation of God. Then, in chapter 38 and following, God reveals to Job that He has been in control all the time. God is omnipotent. “I have been watching you; I have known of your circumstances.” Job responds to God, “Yes, despite all of this, I’m still your child; I’ll still be faithful.” Then the book ends with chapter 42, when the Lord restores unto Job twice as much as he had before. Three more daughters, seven more sons, a thousand sheep, a thousand donkeys, six thousand camels and on and on. Job’s end was even greater than his beginning.

Lessons from Job

Evil happens. As I thought about all this, I asked myself what lessons I could pull from this book that would help me to understand the challenges to the rhythm of my life. The first one that struck me was this: *evil happens*. There isn’t always a human contributing cause to evil. Tragedies occur which are completely beyond our control. The disciples of Jesus sought reasons for everything, so they went to the Master one day and asked him about a certain blind man, “Master, tell us something, why is this man blind? Was he born blind? Was it because he sinned? Or was it his parents’ sin?” (See John 9:2)? Jesus said, “Neither. It wasn’t because of his sin or his parents’ sin. But that the works of God may be made manifest” (See John 9:3). Now think about that. There are occasions when unwanted things will happen; these challenges will occur so that God’s love, His works, may be made manifest. It is not because of anything you did or I did.

Suffering reveals God’s power and love. While God is not responsible for suffering, suffering can show both the power and the love of God. Whatever the cause of the suffering, God can use that event to remind us of His love, and to show us that His power is greater than evil and pain. God is always able to overcome evil and its consequences. That is something we need to remember.

Care more for and judge less those who are suffering. There is need for more caring and less judgmental behavior when we see others suffering. Don’t get into the trap of saying, “That person must be very bad, very evil to have that kind of suffering.” Passing judgment on human beings is the province of the deity. It’s not our responsibility.

Coping with grief through service to others. Reaching out to serve others can help us in our time of grief. I remember one psychologist saying, “Caring for others who are grieving, and praying for them, will help us to deal with our own pain and our own losses.”

God accepts responsibility for the freedom He has given. Although He was not directly responsible for Job’s suffering, God was willing to accept the responsibility for the great freedom He has given His creation. The book of Job does not tie up all the loose ends, nor does it explain all the causes for suffering. But it is a testimony to one man, Job, and how he responded to his suffering. Suffering will remain with us as a mystery. God will reveal more to us later.

I’d like to stress a quotation from Mrs. White. In fact, it’s such a strong one, it is recorded three different times in her writings. Virtually the same thought is repeated. When we worry about why we suffer, I think this thought should comfort us.

“God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 479).

“He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 578).

When I read this thought, it says to me that, if I knew the end from the beginning, if I knew all that God knows, if I were omniscient, then I would have chosen the events that have occurred just as they did. Do you have that much faith to accept that? Can you really believe and accept that and say, God is good. Call the time?

“God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led. If they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 224).

In other words, when these sad things are happening, there is some purpose beyond your awareness, beyond your knowledge, beyond your imaginings which is being fulfilled, which is working out to God’s glory. And that’s what we’ve got to learn to accept.

Surrender to the divine will. Finally Job sees God. He knows that God possesses infinite power. He knows that God is gracious and he is assured that even though he, Job, may suffer, he is still the child of the Almighty God. He therefore repents, for his vision of God has enabled him to surrender to the divine will and to say that God is good—all the time.

Comforting Texts

Here are some helpful passages of scripture which I’d like to leave with you. I suggest you memorize them. When challenges disrupt the smooth flow of the rhythm of your life, repeat them:

- *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help* (Psalm 121:1 KJV).
- *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee* (Ps. 55:22 KJV). You’ve got to believe in His omnipotence. He knows everything; just go to Him. Cast your burden upon Him; He will sustain you.
- *I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears* (Ps. 34:4 KJV). David didn’t say He delivered him immediately; he didn’t say He did it the same day; he just simply said, “I sought and He heard and He delivered.”
- *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33 KJV). Christ Himself is speaking to His disciples and telling them that the road is not going to be smooth all the time. In other words we need to know that difficult times are coming, not just the mild ones, but the real challenges. However, our Lord Jesus Christ has had experience with this world. He has been tempted in all points and has been victorious over all that can happen to us in this world.
- *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths* (Proverbs 3:5, 6 KJV).
- *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them* (Psalm 34:7 KJV).

- *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward* (Hebrews 10:35 KJV). Don't give up; don't stop coming to church; don't throw away your lesson quarterly. Cast not away your confidence.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, in this world we will face tribulations and disappointments. There will be challenges to the regular rhythm of life. The question is not, *Will they come?* Yes, they will. The question is, *How will you respond?* How will you and I respond to these challenges, these unwanted, unexpected circumstances? What I want to beg of you is that you remain faithful and loyal to your commitment to follow Christ, come what may. Do not permit sickness to discourage you. Do not allow the death of loved ones to destroy your faith in God, regardless of the circumstances in which the persons died. Do not let economic and financial problems limit your loyalty to God. Do not falter because of broken relationships in the family or even in the church. True, these can hurt us and some people will talk about leaving the church because some person didn't speak to them last Sabbath. Don't do that. Do not quit the faith because somebody whom you admire has left the church or is challenging some fundamental doctrine. Christians friends, brothers and sisters, I want you to hold fast like Paul, keep the faith like Job, and say as did Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Have faith, dear friend, in God. For God is good—all the time. Amen.

Sermon Illumination

1. How could a loving God allow Swissair Flight 111 to crash into the ocean, taking 229 lives to a watery grave? An Adventist family had put their son on that flight. In just a few days he was to begin his college studies at our school at Collonges sous Saleve in France.

2. A young man, struggling to provide for his family and to get work for which he is qualified, takes on odd jobs and busses tables at a restaurant, just to earn some money. He learns of an unusual opportunity—with an investment of \$5000 he can become the representative in his area of a certain company. After much effort and prayer he secures the necessary amount as a loan from a bank. He invests the money and, as promised, becomes the representative in his area. However, within six months the company closes down. He is back where he started, only worse off than when he started, for now he has a debt of \$5,000 plus interest. Why were his prayers for the loan answered?

3. A family sends their daughter off to a college some two thousand miles from home. Later they discover that she is not attending college at all, but has run away with a drug-using, non-Adventist lover. She considers him to be sent by God to her and determines to continue cohabiting with him.

4. You may be familiar with the American hotel chain, Holiday Inn. Do you know how that company got started? It began with a man who was fired from his previous job. To provide for his family as best he could, he rented rooms in his home for visitors to sleep and gave them a morning meal—what we call a Bed and Breakfast. Today Holiday Inn is famous everywhere as 'the innkeeper to the world'. The founder is reported to have said, "I am still looking for the man who fired me, so I can thank him."

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Keeper of the Light

A Scrapbook Story of Ellen G. White

Mary's father was the keeper of a lighthouse on the coast of England. The light of these lamps shines at night to guide ships on their way and to keep them from dangerous rocks and shoals. The lighthouse seems to say: "Take care, sailors, for rocks and sands are here. Keep a good lookout and mind how you sail, or you will be lost."

One afternoon Mary was in the lighthouse alone. Mary's father had trimmed the lamps, and they were ready for lighting when evening came. As he needed to buy some food, he crossed the causeway which led to the land. This causeway was a path over the rocks and sands, which could be used only two or three hours in the day; at other times, the waters rose and covered it. The father intended to hasten home before the tide flowed over this path. Night was coming on, and a storm was rising on the sea. Waves dashed against the rocks, and the wind moaned around the tower.

Mary's mother was dead, and although she was alone, her father had told the girl not to be afraid, for he would soon return. Now there were some rough-looking men behind a rock, who were watching Mary's father. They watched him go to the land.

Who were they? They were "wreckers" who lurked about the coast. If a vessel was driven on the rocks by a storm, they rushed down—not to help the sailors, but to rob them, and to plunder the ship.

The wicked men knew that a little girl was left alone in the lighthouse. They planned to keep her father on the shore all night. Ships filled with

rich goods were expected to pass the point before the morning and these men knew if the light did not shine, the vessels would run upon the rocks and be wrecked. How cruel and wicked they were to seek the death of the ships' crews!

Mary's father had filled his basket, and prepared to return to the lighthouse. As he drew near the road leading to the causeway, the wreckers rushed from their hiding place and threw him on the ground. They quickly bound his hands and feet with ropes and carried him into a shed, where he had to lie until morning. It was in vain that he shouted for them to set him free; they only mocked his distress. They then left him in the charge of two men, while they ran back to the shore.

"Oh, Mary, what will you do?" cried the father as he lay in the shed. "There will be no one to light the lamps. Ships may be wrecked, and sailors may be lost."

Mary looked from a narrow window toward the shore, thinking it was time for her father to return. When the clock in the little room struck six, she knew that the water would soon be over the causeway.

An hour passed. The clock struck seven, and Mary still looked toward the beach; but her father was not to be seen. By the time it was eight, the tide was nearly over the causeway; only bits of rock here and there were above the water. "O father, hurry," cried Mary, as though her father could hear her. "Have you forgotten your little girl?" But the only answer was the noise of the waters as they rose higher and higher, and the roar of the wind as it gave notice of the coming storm. Surely there would be no lights that night.

Mary thought of what her mother used to say: "We should pray in every time of need." Quickly she knelt and prayed for help: "O Lord, show me what to do, and bless my father, and bring him home safe."

The water was now over the causeway. The sun had set more than an hour ago, and, as the moon rose, black storm clouds covered it from sight.

The wreckers walked along the shore, looking for some ship to strike on the coast. They hoped that the sailors, not seeing the lights, would think they were far at sea.

At this moment Mary decided she would try to light the lamps. But what could a little girl do? The lamps were far above her reach. She got matches and carried a small stepladder to the spot. After much labor she found that the lamps were still above her head. Then she got a small table and put the stepladder on it. But when she climbed to the top the lights were still beyond her reach. "If I had a stick," she said, "I would tie a match to it, and then I could set a light to the wicks." But no stick was to be found.

The storm was raging with almost hurricane force. The sailors at sea looked along the coast for the light. Where could it be? Had they sailed in the wrong direction? They were lost and knew not which way to steer.

All this time Mary's father was praying that God would take care of his child in the dark and lonely lighthouse.

Mary, frightened and lonely, was about to sit down again, when she thought of the old Bible in the room below. But how could she step on that Book? It was God's Holy Word that her mother had loved to read. "Yet, it is to save life," said she; "and if mother were here, would she not allow me to take it?"

In a minute the large book was brought and placed under the steps, and up she climbed once more. Yes, she was high enough! She touched one wick, then another, and another, until the rays of the lamps shone brightly far above the dark waters.

The father saw the light as he lay in the shed, and thanked God for sending help in the hour of danger. The sailors saw the light, and steered their ships away from the rocks. The wreckers, too, saw the light, and were angry to see that their evil plot had failed.

All that stormy night the lamps cast their rays over the foaming sea; and when the morning came, the father escaped from the shed. Soon he reached the lighthouse and found out how his little girl had stood faithful to duty in the dark hours of storm.

White, E. G. (1949). *Scrapbook Stories from Ellen G. White's Scrapbooks*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association. Used by permission.

Grandpa and the Changing Butterfly

by Karen Holford

Note to storyteller: For this story it is helpful to have pictures or samples of a caterpillar, chrysalis, and butterfly to show the children. A chrysalis would be especially helpful.

Stevey was excited! He loved going to Grandpa and Grandma's place! Mom and Dad would be away for the weekend and he and Grandpa would have the whole farm to themselves! Grandpa would let Stevey feed the animals and ride in the tractor. They had all kinds of fun together! Grandpa and Grandma would go to a really small church on Sabbath. There was only one other boy there about Stevey's age. But the best bit was a little old lady who always had treats hiding in her big black purse for any boy who could answer a Bible question!

Stevey had such a wonderful weekend! For Sunday lunch Grandma even let Stevey make ice-cream the old fashioned way, with her ancient ice-cream churn and lots of ice and cream from the farm cows and fruit from the freezer.

Grandpa had a nap on Sunday afternoon. "I guess this side of heaven I'm still gonna need my beauty sleep!" he said. Stevey liked the way the sun shone through the window on Grandpa's shiny old, bald head and sparkled in his silvery whiskers.

Stevey let him rest and went outside to see Grandma. There he found caterpillars in Grandma's garden creeping about and eating up leaves. Grandma showed him a caterpillar which was turning into a chrysalis, wrapping itself all up in sticky thread. Grandma explained that going inside the chrysalis was a special time in the life

of a caterpillar. When it eventually came out of the chrysalis, it would be a butterfly.

Then they found another chrysalis all finished and hanging on a leaf! Grandma had given him a jar in which to put the chrysalis and some leaves. Stevey wanted to take the chrysalis home and watch as it turned into a butterfly. Stevey thought it was amazing that a caterpillar, a chrysalis and a butterfly were one and the same creature! How could they all be the same when they looked so different? The chrysalis looked just like a dried up old autumn leaf with not a flicker of life in it. Stevey was sure it was really dead, but he didn't want to disappoint Grandma by telling her so!

When Mom and Dad came for him, Stevey was really tired, but very happy. "Next time I'll take you swimming in the river!" yelled Grandpa as they drove away waving. Stevey fell asleep on the way home holding the jar with his chrysalis inside. He was dreaming of owning his own tractor one day.

The next day Stevey watched with his Mom as the chrysalis began to wriggle and split. They took the leaves out of the jar and put them in their garden. Then they sat and watched for ages while the butterfly wriggled and squirmed and pulled its wet, crumpled wings out of that ugly little brown package. The butterfly waited a long time on the leaves until its wings were all dry and could open up. Then Stevey watched as the butterfly spread its wings out wide. He saw all the lovely colors in

the wings as the butterfly flew into the sky for the first time. Stevey thought it was amazing! Like watching a miracle! He thought how much fun it would be to be a butterfly! Much more fun than creeping about like a caterpillar and eating cabbage! Stevey saved the dried up chrysalis skin. It was ugly, but it was kind of interesting. He put it in his special box with an old bird's nest and his special stone collection.

A couple of weeks later, Dad got a phone call. When he came off the phone, Dad was crying real tears. Stevey had never seen his Dad do that before. Dad just sat in his favorite big chair and cried and cried. Mom came and hugged him and Stevey patted his back because he didn't know what else to do. After a little while, Dad pulled Stevey up on his lap and put his arm around Mom. They all had a big hug together. After a long time Dad's sobbing became quieter. Finally Dad was able to explain what had happened that made him cry.

Grandpa had been driving the tractor out on the farm when he had had a heart attack. A heart attack is when a person's heart gets sick and doesn't work properly any more. Lots of times doctors are able to help people who have a heart attack get better. But sometimes when people have a heart attack, they die. Grandpa had died, right out there on the tractor. Grandma missed him when he didn't come in for supper, and that's when she went to look for him.

Now Stevey cried and cried and cried. He loved Grandpa. They had had so much fun together. He would miss him so much. Grandpa had promised to take him swimming in the river next time he visited. Now he couldn't do that. Grandpa had said he would teach him to drive the tractor when he was big enough, and now he wouldn't be able to do that either. But most of all Stevey would miss Grandpa, just friendly, huggy, happy old Grandpa. He would miss the smell of his farm clothes and the tickle of his whiskery

beard. He would miss the way the sun shone on Grandpa's shiny head.

That night in bed Stevey asked his Mom what it was like to die. Mom thought a long while and then she said, "Well, Stevey, death is a difficult thing to understand and talk about. But it's a bit like this. On earth, we are sort of like the caterpillars you found. We can do lots of things, but nothing like all the things God first wanted us to do before sin came into the world. Our bodies here don't last very long. They get worn out and ill and eventually everybody dies. It is sad when people die. We miss them lots and lots, and it hurts inside. But for people who love Jesus, like your Grandpa, dying is not the end of it.

"Next week we will go to Grandpa's funeral and Grandpa will be buried in the ground. I suppose that is a bit like when the caterpillar turns into a chrysalis. The caterpillar probably sleeps and doesn't really know what is happening. The Bible says that death is a bit like when you are asleep. When a person is dead he doesn't dream, or know anything at all. But one day, when Jesus returns, He will take all the dead, chrysalis-sort-of-bodies and wake them all up. He will transform the bodies of people who love Him into something totally new and amazing, something far more wonderful than we can imagine! We will be beautiful and strong and able to fly. We will never be sad or sick again. And we will live forever this time.

"The caterpillar in the chrysalis had to wait a while before it could be changed into a butterfly. We don't know how long it will be before Jesus will come again, but we know that He will. Then Grandpa will be alive and strong. He'll probably get all his hair back again too! And I guess that one of the first things that Grandpa will want to do in heaven is to find you there and take you swimming in a crystal clear river, just like he promised when you last saw him!"

“So Grandpa will remember me and I’ll recognize him, even without his grey hair and whiskers?” Stevey asked.

“Yes, and he’ll recognize you, even if you are quite grown up! With our new bodies Jesus will give us our special memories back. Although we’ll have different sorts of bodies, we will still be just us.

“Would you like to make a special book to help you remember Grandpa and all the fun you had with him?”

“Can we put pictures of me and him in there? Could you write out some stories for me of all the things Grandpa and I have done together? I want to stick my chrysalis in there too. It will help me remember that pretty soon Grandpa won’t be dead any more. And I’m going to draw a

picture of me and him, swimming together in the river in heaven!”

Stevy was sad at Grandpa’s funeral. It was hard to say goodbye. Stevey cried a lot and even after that, when he thought of Grandpa, he sometimes cried again. But when he felt sad, he went to look at his special “Grandpa and Stevey Book.” When he touched the chrysalis and remembered the butterfly flying away so beautifully, he thought of how he and Grandpa would one day swim in that river in heaven, splashing and laughing. Then the smile came back to his face.

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The Dog That Laughed All the Way Home

by Marvin Hunt

As Wayne parked his pickup truck beside his house one day after work, he heard the neighbor lady calling for him to come over to her house as fast as he could. When Wayne got there, he saw his little beagle dog lying on the ground, flopping around like a fish out of the water. The dog was foaming at the mouth and acting crazy. He had a weird look in his eyes.

Wayne carefully picked up his dog and brought him home. He was worried that his little dog had the terrible rabies disease. To keep the little beagle from escaping while he called the veterinarian, Wayne put him in a horse trailer with high side rails that he had in the yard. Then he ran into the house and called the vet. Hurriedly he explained all about the strange way his dog was acting. Sadly, he found out from the vet that the only way to tell for sure if his dog had rabies was to test some of its brain cells. Of course, there would be no way to do this test while his dog was still alive.

Wayne hung up the phone after making an appointment for the vet to see his dog. It looked very bad for his little pet. After making up his mind about what he had to do, he went outside to get the dog out of the trailer. As he walked up, the little beagle got so excited that he jumped clear over the top of the trailer side and landed on Wayne. As the dog struggled to keep from falling, he scratched Wayne's face. Some foam from his mouth fell into Wayne's bleeding scratches. Now Wayne was really worried, because a human can catch this terrible disease from the saliva of an animal who has rabies.

Wayne tied a rope around the dog's neck and loaded him into the front seat of his truck. All the way to the vet's office the dog kept acting crazy. He bit the seat, attacked the gear shift, and kept foaming at the mouth. When he reached the animal hospital, the veterinarian was waiting for them. Wayne pulled his dog from the truck. He seemed more like a wild dog now than a pet. The wise and experienced vet took one look at the little animal and said, "Oh, he's got a bone stuck in his throat! Bring him inside."

Wayne was astonished. He had been afraid his dog would have to die. Instead, the veterinarian simply took his fingers and forced the dog's mouth open. Then he reached down his throat and popped out a bone! It was just a little bone—about two inches long and as big around as a pencil.

Wayne said later that if a dog could sigh with relief, his beagle surely did. Immediately the dog calmed down and stopped foaming at the mouth. Wayne thought he even began to smile, almost like a human. On the way home, his dog sat up on the seat beside Wayne just like a little king, enjoying the scenery passing by.

Thanks to his training, the veterinarian knew just what to do. He saved the dog's life. He had studied and learned all he could about animals, and God had given him the ability and the talent to become a good animal doctor.

Isn't it wonderful that we have special people to whom we can turn when we have special needs? I'm sure Wayne was thankful that

he had a good animal doctor to treat his little beagle friend. I know Wayne was glad he was not alone. When the beagle was so sick, Wayne was very scared. He didn't know what to do. Can you think of specially trained people who help you sometimes with things you cannot do for yourself? A doctor? A nurse? A fireman? I'm sure your mom's and dad's can name lots of special people they have turned to when they had

needs. God loves us and hears our prayers when we are in need. And He provides special people to help us when we are in trouble. Let's be glad for them and thank Him for them.

Adapted from *Children's Stories and Object Lessons* by Marvin Hunt. (1995). Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association. Used by permission.

Marriage Dramas For All Seasons

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Skits are great fun as well as a powerful way to stimulate insight and dialogue. Scripture has preserved a number of scenes from the marriage dramas of several couples. God left us these stories to be told and retold because they are indeed “dramas for all seasons.” Each of them draws back the curtain on couples facing real life situations and crises not unlike those experienced in families every day. Marriage enrichment experts agree on three things. Couples need other couples. Couples can help other couples. Every couple has strengths on which they can build. These dramas can connect us with the wisdom of the past and with each other as we lift the curtain and watch and then make application to our lives today.

How to Use this Resource

These skits may be used as a series of marriage enrichment growth experiences for couples, as part of a worship service, to create discussion in a youth group, in evangelism, as part of a prayer meeting series on Christian relationships, etc. The reflective exercises included after each drama script are designed for couples to share between themselves, either at church or at home. Group discussion ideas are also provided.

Contents

- *Leaping and Dancing and Praising the Lord . . . and the End of Intimacy* (David and Michal)
- *Choosing to Love Again* (Gomer and Hosea)
- *Better than Ten Sons* (Elkanah and Hannah)
- *Growing Together, Growing Apart* (Isaac and Rebekah)

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Leaping and Dancing and Praising the Lord . . . And the End of Intimacy

Based on 2 Samuel 6

Narrator: David has waited for this day with the mixed emotions of trepidation and excitement for many months. He remembers well what happened the last time they had tried to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. The vision of Uzzah dropping in a dead heap beside the ark in the midst of the celebration could never be obliterated from his mind. He could still hear the music halting raggedly in the middle of measures, instrument by instrument, section by section along the procession as word of the tragedy spread through the crowd. . . . But today would be different. God had blessed the household of Obed-Edom because of the presence of the ark. And God would bless the household of David and the nation of Israel when the ark was returned to its proper place in the temple in Jerusalem. Yes, today would be different.

Michal: *[In a monologue as she looks out the window of the palace onto the street scene below. You may wish to devise some props, but this skit can also be very effective with her standing alone at the front, looking down the aisle. She may be dressed in a biblical costume or in modern dress.]*

David has had nothing on his mind for weeks except the moving of that ark! I don't know why he's so anxious to get it here after what happened the last time! But he's not listening to me anyway. . . . They've been gone all day. I don't know what's taking so long.

[To be spoken incredulously.] And David—the King of all Israel—left here this morning dressed like a common priest! He said something about being on an equality with his subjects and lifting up only Jehovah. I think it's going a bit far!

[Peering into the distance as though she sees the procession coming.] Look, there they are now, approaching Jerusalem. . . . *[With disbelief in her voice.]* I can't believe my eyes! I am so mortified! *[Anger begins to build]* After all I've done to protect him. How can he embarrass me like this? How will I ever face the people as the wife of David with him making a fool of himself in the streets? *[Gesturing down the aisle.]* Well, see for yourself! He leaps and whirls like a school boy with no sense! *[With disgust.]* Singing with the commoners. Singing to the gates! "Lift up your heads," all right! Lift up your heads and watch your King act like a stupid fool!

David: *[David, dressed in a simple white robe, enters and walks down the aisle joyfully, calling out to Michael as he arrives.]* Blessings be upon the household of David, for this day the ark of the covenant has been returned to Jerusalem. Blessings and honor and glory be to Him who reigns on high forever and ever!

Michal: *[In an angry, mocking tone.]* What a sight was the King of Israel today! Stripping off his clothes and running around undressed in front of the servant girls like an idiot who takes off his clothes without shame!

- David: *[Responding defensively, getting more and more angry at her rebuff.]* What I did, I did for the Lord! You seem to forget that the Lord chose me to take your father's place! He didn't choose anyone from your family! Get this straight! He appointed *me* to be the leader of His people.
- Michal: *[Turning her back on him in disgust.]* Humph!
- David: *[Continuing to yell at her defiantly.]* So I'll celebrate before the Lord the way I want to. I might even do something worse! Who cares what you think, anyway. Plenty of women like me just the way I am! *[Turning his back on her too.]*
- Narrator: So the Bible records, "And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death."

Group Discussion

1. What feelings is Michal experiencing? What are David's feelings?
2. What personal needs lead Michal to feel and behave in the way she does? [For example, she wants the king to be respected and behave with dignity because she feels his behavior reflects on her; she wants to be first in her husband's affections, etc.].
3. What personal needs lead David to feel and behave in the way he does? [For example, he wants his wife to share his joy in the return of the ark; he needs enough separateness from his wife to be his own person and react to circumstances in his own way, etc.].
4. Why does the myth persist that "good Christians don't get angry?"
5. What happens when anger goes unresolved in close relationships?
6. Reconstruct the dialogue between Michal and David to reflect the following steps toward handling their anger more constructively.

Step 1: Understand that God provided human beings with the capacity for anger because this emotion provides the energy to respond when a person is being treated unfairly or oppressed. In marriage, anger serves as an early warning signal that there is a problem in the relationship that needs to be addressed. Anger also helps people establish and maintain personal boundaries and set a limit on the abuse they will endure.

Step 2: Give one another permission to be angry. Agree in a non-problem time that you will not attack, blame, put down or belittle one another when you are angry.

Step 3: Talk about the deeper needs and feelings that lie beneath the anger that one or both are feeling.

Step 4: Recognize that individuals process anger differently—some process anger outwardly with words and action, others are more prone to store up anger inside until it become intolerable and only then

do they let others know about their feelings. Some want to resolve issues quickly, others need more time. Respect one another's differences and needs in this regard.

Step 5: From time to time, revisit the processing you have done about anger that arises between you. Make sure you have understood one another and have worked out a way to deal with your anger which continues to meet the needs of both of you.

Couple Reflections

[Take a few minutes as individuals to reflect on the following thoughts, jotting down a few succinct reminders of your reflections so that you can share them later with your spouse.]

1. In the family in which I grew up, anger was expressed by . . .
2. Feelings I experience when I am angry with you . . .
3. Feelings I experience when you are angry with me . . .
4. A time recently when I have felt good about how we worked through anger between us . . .
5. Ways in which anger still threatens our intimacy . . .
6. Things I can do toward growth in our ability to handle anger constructively . . .

Choosing to Love Again

Based on the book of Hosea

- Hosea: In the beginning I fought with the idea. You were so attractive. A part of me always wanted you! But there were the persistent rumors! “Her father had his flair for other women,” they said. “And she’s a chip off the old block.” But even as reason cautioned me, I knew I was falling in love with you. If only I wasn’t God’s prophet. Prophets can’t risk a scandal! My mind was so confused. I didn’t want to pray; I was afraid God would say “no.” But I did pray, and God said, “Go and take her for your wife!” Then I thought my problems were all over.
- Gomer: I guess I had a few misgivings about marrying a prophet! But you weren’t anything like a prophet when we were together, and I did love you too. I just knew we would have the perfect marriage, after God said we should get married and all. I wanted things to be different for us than they were between my parents. I promised myself I would be the perfect wife.
- Hosea: I liked being married, but I was so busy with my ministry and all. . . . I guess I just expected you and the children to be there for me when I got home. My work was so draining, I didn’t need trouble at home. But I came to resent your chatter, your nagging, your demands on my time and attention.
- Gomer: And I resented your workaholicism. But who could argue with a man who works for God! I thought I deserved more than I was getting. I washed your clothes. I cooked your meals. I cared for your children. But for what? You never seemed to notice! And worst of all, I could feel your anger. It felt like God himself was condemning me!
- Hosea: The day I came home and found you gone and the children alone was the worst day of my life. I knew a distance had grown between us—a distance I couldn’t seem to cross. But I never dreamed it would come to this! I asked your mother and all your friends, but no one knew—or would tell me—where you were. Only slowly, very slowly, did the ugly picture come together in my mind. You had found someone else. You were gone . . . with another man! Our second and third children were probably not even mine!
- Gomer: I didn’t mean to be unfaithful to you, Hosea, I really didn’t . . . at least not in the beginning. It’s just that I was feeling so inadequate as a wife. I felt like you didn’t want to be with me any more. We never talked about anything but the necessities of everyday living. I know we were both tired and irritable at the end of the day, but I needed your companionship, to feel special in your eyes. I don’t know how it happened, really. It’s just that all of a sudden I found myself thinking about him, looking forward to the next time we would be together. The way he looked at me, listened to what I had to say, touched me ever so gently. . . . He met the needs of my heart, Hosea. . . . But I don’t tell you these things to make excuses. I was so wrong in what I did. I violated our covenant at the deepest level.
- Hosea: At first I felt the sting of rejection. Then I was angry and determined to retaliate. I would find you, drag you back, pen you up so you could not get to your lover. Maybe in your misery you’d realize how good life had been with me! Then in the darkness, loneliness

would engulf me and the sensation of grief and loss would nearly overwhelm me. In those moments my heart refused to believe what my mind knew to be true. Oh, how I ached to have you back!

In one moment I would determine to send the children to plead with you to come home. In the next, I would decide to set out to find where you and your lover were sleeping. I would fantasize about bursting in on you in the midst of your adultery. I would shame you, expose you for what you were! Then perhaps no one would want you. Or maybe I would simply dog your footsteps so you could get no pleasure out of being with other men.

Gomer: I will never forget the day you found me. I was so surprised to see you. I mean, we didn't see prophets often in our part of town! I had slipped from adultery to prostitution by then. My life was no longer my own. Sometimes I thought about you and the children, but home was like another world I had lived in too long ago to really remember.

When I saw you approaching, at first I wanted to run to you and throw my arms around you. I wanted to reclaim all that we had lost and start over like nothing had happened. But something inside me said, "It's over Gomer. Hosea will never want you again. You're a dirty prostitute. This man came only to expose you and make you pay for all you have done."

Hosea: I could never have come on my own. I could never have forgiven you. I could never have faced my part in all that had happened. But God Himself spoke to me, Gomer. He reminded me of how our situation is like what's happened to our nation. He said to me, "I loved you. I called you My son. I taught you to walk. I lifted your load. I bent down to feed you. But you have been unfaithful to Me. You love the wages of a prostitute. But I have forgiven you." Then I heard Him clearly say, "Go, show your love to your wife again. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods."

Gomer: It has been a long road back for us, Hosea. The process of forgiveness is slow and painful. Oh, how my heart aches at the pain I have caused you. I couldn't believe you or God would even *want* me back. How could He love, how could you love me, in the depths to which I had fallen? But you kept urging God's words upon me. . . .

"How can I give you up?
How can I hand you over?
My heart is changed within Me; all my compassion is aroused.
I will not carry out my fierce anger, for I am God and not man,
The Holy One among you. . . .
I will heal your waywardness, and love you freely, for my anger has turned away from you."

Hosea: It was more than either of us could comprehend. We started our lives together with what we thought was a perfect covenant, all those promises we made We didn't know how fragile human covenants are. Oh Gomer, will you be mine? Do not go out with other men. Do not be a prostitute. Keep yourself only for me, and so I will keep myself for you.

- Gomer: I'm ready for that kind of commitment now, Hosea. Ready, even with the certainty of the disappointments and painful experiences known in all human relationships.
- Hosea: We're both ready now because we have discovered together that it is really possible to be both fully known and fully loved. We know now that it is possible for a man and a woman to live together in marriage, not because they are perfect, but because by God and by each other they may be forgiven. We can be bound together by a covenant of love because our covenant draws on God's everlasting covenant for the strength to go on loving.
- Gomer: So I can give myself to you . . .
- Hosea: And I can give myself to you . . .
- Gomer: Because He gave Himself for us.

Group Discussion

1. Reflect on the following lines from a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (Quoted in Mylander, 1986, p. 31):

One fateful day when earth seemed very dull
 It suddenly grew bright and beautiful.
 I spoke a little, and he listened much;
 There was attention in his eyes, and such
 A note of comradeship in his low tone,
 I felt no more alone.
 There was a kindly interest in his air;
 He spoke about the way I dressed my hair.
 And praised the gown I wore.
 It seemed a thousand, thousand years and more
 Since I had been so noticed. Had mine ear
 Been used to compliments year after year,
 If I had heard you speak
 As this man spoke, I had not been so weak.
2. What do you think of the following commentary on wedding vows by Dennis Guernsey in his book *The Family Covenant*? Guernsey believes that wedding vows would be more realistic if they read, "I take you to be my lawfully wedded spouse with the full knowledge that you are weak as I am weak; that you will be unfaithful as I will be, if not in actuality, then in fantasy; that there will be times when you will disappoint me gravely as I will disappoint you. But in spite of all of this, I commit myself to love you, knowing your weaknesses and knowing the certainty of betrayal" (Guernsey, 1984, p. 23).
3. In what ways is forgiveness a *process* rather than an *act of a moment*? Reflect on Louis Smedes notion that we forgive in four stages (Smedes, 1985, pp. 25-28):

Stage 1: Hurt. Forgiveness is not for trivial annoyances. Forgiveness is for the deep hurts which cause so much pain they cannot be merely forgotten.

Stage 2: Hate. At this stage “you cannot shake the memory of how much you were hurt, and you cannot wish your enemy well. You sometimes want the person who hurt you to suffer as you are suffering.”

Stage 3: Healing. In this stage “you are given eyes to see the person who hurt you in a new light. Your memory is healed, you turn back the flow of pain and are free again.”

Stage 4: Coming together. In the fourth stage “you invite the person who hurt you back into your life; if he or she comes honestly, love can move you both toward a new and healed relationship.” Completing this stage depends as much on the response of the other person as upon your own. Sometimes the other person is not interested in the restoration of the relationship. Sometimes the other person refuses to take responsibility for the pain they have caused and chooses to continue the hurtful behavior. Then you will have to grieve the loss of an important relationship for which you had once had high hopes, and find healing alone.

4. Study the following Scriptural passages: Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:23, 24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 12:17, 19; Ephesians 4:31, 32; Luke 5:17-26; 7:41-50; 17:3; 23:34; Matthew 18:21-35. Reflect on these great truths about forgiveness which they convey:

- All that we know about forgiveness we learn from God.
- Forgiveness has both unconditional and conditional aspects.
- God will take care of ultimate justice.
- He has given us forgiveness so that we may find healing from our deep hurts.
- Relationships may be restored whenever His Spirit is allowed to bring healing and growth.
- The fountain of God’s forgiveness is prepared, even before we ask for it.
- Forgiveness brings healing at the deepest levels.
- Forgiveness is not about keeping score.
- Much forgiveness produces much love.
- God has forgiven us an impossible debt in Jesus Christ. He has set the captives—us!—free! In His name we are called to “pass it on.”

Couple Reflections

1. Thoughts about forgiveness that I would like to share with you . . .
2. Times when your forgiveness has been very meaningful to me . . .
3. Times when we have struggled to forgive but have found our way through the process by God’s grace . . .
4. Things I can do to keep God’s gift of forgiveness alive in our marriage . . .

Better than Ten Sons

Based on 1 Samuel 1:1-8

- Elkanah: [Whistling to himself.] Where has the year gone. . . . I can't believe it's time to make our way to Shiloh again. What can I say? I am a man most blessed! I will prepare a sacrifice to the Lord with thanksgiving! And this year [Hannah approaches from behind him.] Oh, Hannah, you frightened me. What can I do for you, my dear?
- Hannah: I just wanted to be with you for awhile. Can I do something to help?
- Elkanah: Well, I'm just making preparation for our trip to Shiloh. Could you bring me that sack over there? I'm trying not to leave everything to the last minute. You know how hectic it gets with the children and all. [Hannah's eyes drop to the floor. She says nothing as she retrieves the sack and hands it to Elkanah. Elkanah doesn't seem to notice. Hannah recovers her composure and speaks.]
- Hannah: I love going to Shiloh. There's something so peaceful about the temple. I love to go there to pray.
- Elkanah: You bring a wonderful spiritual sensitivity to our family, Hannah. . . . Can you bring me the ball of string from that nail? I want to tie this up very securely. You know little Ben will want to carry something. . . . [Hannah again drops her eyes. As she goes for the string, she fights back tears, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. Again, Elkanah is oblivious and chuckles to himself as he continues.] Remember last year when Ben tried to pick up his sack and slipped in the mud, spilling himself and everything from the sack onto the ground? . . . I thought Peninnah was going to Hannah, what's the matter? Why Hannah, you're crying! [Elkanah moves toward her and puts his arm around her shoulders.]
- Hannah: [Struggling to speak.] Never mind. I'll be okay. [She buries her head in his shoulder and begins to cry aloud despite her best attempts to stay composed.]
- Elkanah: But darling, something *is* wrong. Now tell me about it? How can I do anything to help if you don't tell me what's the matter?
- Hannah: There's no point in talking about it any more.
- Elkanah: [Exasperated.] You're jealous of Peninnah again, aren't you? Haven't I told you I love you with or without children? What more do you need?
- Hannah: It's just that it hurts so much to watch Peninnah with her children. I don't begrudge her children, it's just that I want *us* to have children, Elkanah.
- Elkanah: Some things you just have to accept, Hannah. We've tried everything the midwives have told us. Just be thankful it doesn't matter that much to me. Some men would have divorced you, but I love you and I can deal with this. You just have to . . .

- Hannah: But I've prayed and prayed. I just can't understand why it's not happening! And when she makes her snide remarks, it cuts to the bone. . . .
- Elkanah: There, there, Hannah. I should have picked up on this earlier. You haven't been eating lately. But how many times do we have to talk about it? If Peninnah is making life hard for you, all you have to do is come and tell me everything. I will take care of her. And as for you, I tell you every day I love you. And don't I give you double portions at every meal? Don't I spend special time with you? What more can I *do*? What do you want from me? Aren't I more to you than ten sons? . . . I tell you what. We'll see the best midwife in Shiloh when we're there. We'll get you pregnant yet! And if Never mind. God will answer your prayers.

Group Discussion

1. What do you understand of Hannah's pain?
2. Which responses from Elkanah are the most helpful? Which are least helpful?
3. What does Hannah really need from Elkanah?
4. How could Elkanah better convey his love by listening to her thoughts and the feelings behind her thoughts? What is he missing by not listening but rather trying to move toward a solution that seems good to him?
5. How might Elkanah better help Hannah cope with the possibility that God may not say "yes" to her plea for a child? (Of course, in the story in 2 Samuel, God's answer is "yes.")

Couple Reflections

1. Times when you have listened to me and made me feel completely understood . . .
2. Times when you have tried to listen to me, but I'm not sure you really understood, so I need to convey my thoughts and feelings to you again . . .
3. Times when God didn't seem to be listening and you helped me cope . . .
4. Things I would like to do to be there for you in moments of pain . . .

Growing Together, Growing Apart

Based on Genesis 27

Rebekah: *[Rebekah stands apart, angled away from Isaac who sits hunched over in a chair leaning on his staff.]* I just hate it when he goes silent! How can you share with a person, reason with a person, when there's no response? He knows as well as I do the will of God in this matter. And it's perfectly obvious God knew what He was doing! Esau is not fit to receive the birthright blessing. He's headstrong, he's unrestrained, and he's married to those two heathen women who make my life miserable. But Isaac will not listen to reason or revelation! And now he won't even talk to me about it. *[Turning and gesturing to Isaac.]* Look at him over there, bent over more by his burdens than old age. I do everything I can to care for him, but there's no joy in our lives any more.

Isaac: *[In a shaky voice.]* It's a hard thing, getting old . . . feeling time close in around you . . . looking back . . . knowing . . . wishing . . . Looking ahead . . . feeling trapped and pressured . . . and *so* alone! Oh, I have a good wife and a prosperous household. But I have nobody to talk to who would really understand. I just have to do what I have to do by myself. . . . I have loved my wife from the day I laid eyes on her. I wish I could talk to her. But there's just no point. It's easier to keep my thoughts to myself. We have fought about this thing with Jacob and Esau so many times. . . . Oh, how I hate fighting! No matter how clear my thoughts are in my mind, I'm no match for her in an argument! Her thoughts fly like arrows, and my mind goes numb. She's always saying, "God told me this and God told me that." And who can argue with a message from God? But if God had really wanted me to bless Jacob, why didn't he tell *me* and not *her*? Never mind. No one will fault me! Tradition is on my side. *I will* bless my firstborn whom I love before I die! *[Sigh.]* I only wish . . .

Group Discussion

1. Genesis specifically records that, from the beginning, Isaac loved Rebekah [cf. Genesis 24:66]. What can cause a couple who love each other deeply to drift apart?
2. Why do you think Isaac and Rebekah have stopped communicating? How would you help them?
3. How do Isaac and Rebekah resolve the conflicts between them? What problems do you see with Rebekah's methods? With Isaac's? What would you suggest to them?
4. Solomon has great confidence that true love can weather many storms. Read Song of Solomon 8:6, 7. Why is love such a powerful bond? How might Isaac and Rebekah still draw upon their love to bring them together?

Couple Reflections

1. The love I felt for you when we were first married . . .
2. Times when our love has sustained us through difficult experiences . . .

3. Times when we have drifted apart and struggled to communicate . . .
4. Ways I can strengthen our ability to resolve our conflicts in ways that meet both of our needs . . .
5. My commitment of love to you as long as life lasts . . .

Connections That Make a Difference

“Risk-Proofing” Youth in a High Risk Society

by Gary L. Hopkins, M.D., Dr.P.H.
Bruce Heischober, M.D.
with Karen Flowers

Theme

By forming close relationships with our young people, we can help to fortify them as they face peer pressure and personal choices regarding participation in high-risk activities.

Setting

The following seminar is especially suitable for parents and youth leaders. There are a number of separate components in the seminar. You can select what suits the particular needs of your church. **Presentation Helps** are provided for the leader(s) and group exercises and other handouts are found at the end of the materials.

Seminar Materials

You may wish to order the following for distribution to the participants: *Reducing the Risk: Connections that Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth* by R. W. Blum and P. M. Rinehard (See **Reference** section). Up to 25 free copies of this monograph are available by writing: Add Health, c/o Burness Communications, 7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 1401, Bethesda, MD 20814.

Handout #1 *Research on Youth Behaviors-1*
Handout #2 *Research on Youth Behaviors-2*
Handout #3 *Research on Youth Behaviors-3*
Handout #4 *Connections Make a Difference*
Handout #5 *75 Ways to Connect with Children and Teens*
Transparency #1 *Critical Challenges Facing Youth*
Transparency #2 *Connections Make a Difference-1*
Transparency #3 *Connections Make a Difference-2*

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Presentation Helps

Introduction

Children and youth face a number of significant challenges as they make their way through the formative years of life. Some potential difficulties spring from the process of physical, emotional and social development within young people, especially as they interact with family, peers and the wider society. As parents and leaders of youth seek to facilitate their growth, there is cause for concern about the prevalence of emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and attempts, running away, violence, use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, premarital sexual involvement, and unwed pregnancy (Transparency #1 *Critical Challenges Facing Youth*). In this seminar, we want to look at both good news and bad news—at both the areas of strength in youth today and areas where they have a special need for support.

What Research Reports Show

The good news is that between 1980-1990 in the United States, there was an overall decline in several significant statistics:

- juvenile motor vehicle deaths
- use of alcohol
- use of cigarettes and illicit substances
- incidence of some sexually transmitted diseases.

The bad news is that new data released in 1997 (Resnick, 1997) reports these trends:

- teenage cigarette smoking and marijuana use on the rise
- poverty affecting more teens in the 90's than in the last decade
- teen homicide rates up
- teen pregnancy, violence, runaways and suicide are still with us.

Adventist academy student research. A study conducted among Seventh-day Adventist youth attending 69 Seventh-day Adventist academies throughout the United States and Canada in 1994-1995 (Hopkins, Hopp, Hopp, Neish & Rhoads, 1998) measured the extent to which Seventh-day Adventist youth use drugs and alcohol and engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage. There is good news:

- Adventist youth participating in the study reported lower levels of substance abuse than non-Adventist youth attending public school (Table 1) (Handout #1 *Research on Youth Behaviors-1*).
- The number of Adventist students using drugs and alcohol who began to do so before the age of 13 was fewer than non-Adventist youth attending public school (Table 2) (Handout #2 *Research on Youth Behaviors-2*).
- Adventist students were also less sexually experienced than their non-Adventist counterparts in public schools—16.3% (Adventist); 53.1% (Non-Adventist).

The bad news is obvious. Seventh-day Adventist youth are not immune. Significant numbers of Adventist students are using drugs and alcohol. Some begin as preteens. A percentage of nearly one in five Adventist students participating in the study report having engaged in premarital sex.

World church data. In 1994, the General Conference Department of Family Ministries initiated the Adventist Family Study. Data is now in from over 8,000 respondents, eighteen years of age and older. Seven world divisions are represented in whole or in part. This research confirms that concerns similar to those raised by the NAD Adventist academy student study are warranted in the world Church. In one world division other than North America, three out of five respondents reported sexual activity prior to marriage. In another non-NAD division, two in five respondents acknowledged having lived together in a

sexual relationship with a person without being married to that person. While a strong majority of respondents in most divisions disagree with the statement “Sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons is not wrong if they really love one another,” in two non-NAD divisions, close to 40% of respondents believe that this statement is true. In every division touched by the study, at least one in five agree with the statement. These results may well represent a shifting in traditional Adventist beliefs as well as practice around the world.

A Look at the Big Question: WHY?

What is it that makes drug use, premarital sex, and other high risk activities so attractive? Why do young people get involved in these activities? Take drugs, for example. We see the devastating results of drug use every day—in real life, in the newspapers, on the television news. Isn't it logical to assume that people of all ages, after seeing these reports, would determine never to personally experience the devastating effects of the abuse of these substances? Similar questions could be asked about aggressive driving, teen pregnancy, gang warfare, or any behavior that puts a person at high risk. Then why do people participate in high risk behaviors? Let's probe for some answers.

***Small group discussion:** Why do you think people use drugs? Why do young people get involved in premarital sex? What similarities do you find in your answers to both these questions that may provide clues to the more general question, the big WHY question: Why do youth get involved in high risk behaviors?*

There are no simple answers, but let's apply our common sense to these questions one at a time. The insights we gain may have broad application and aid in our understanding of why children and teenagers engage in behaviors with high risk.

Drugs. Let's start with drugs. As far back as history is recorded, people have used drugs. No culture has avoided the abuse of them. There have always been people looking for activities and substances that effectively alter their moods, feelings, and thoughts. On one end of the continuum, kids seek the thrills of amusement parks, paying high fares to get in so they can twirl around until they are dizzy, hang upside down, be thrown around on roller coasters, and take rides which put them on the edge of sickness. On the other end of the continuum, kids seek ever increasing highs through substance abuse. All, to one degree or another, **in search of a thrill.**

Historically, substances found in nature were used as a means of becoming intoxicated or inducing a feeling that seemed to provide **an escape from reality.** These substances were sometimes used in **religious rituals**, a practice which continues until today. People mostly used these substances at home, since they lacked the mobility we have today, and there was little spread from country to country. But as transportation improved and people started moving about the earth more easily, their drugs went with them, for personal use and as commodities for trade. As science also advanced, these naturally occurring substances were altered to form drug derivatives, some of which may be more than 100 times stronger than the original.

Drugs have even been a factor in international warfare. In the 1800's, the marketing of opium in China was the presenting issue of the Opium Wars between the British who occupied India and the Chinese who tried to stop its transport into their country. Drug trafficking has always inspired a

passionate response, in part because of the **large sums of money associated with the sale and use of drugs**.

Today, every drug that has ever been discovered or created is available for abuse. No drug which people have abused has ever been eliminated completely. Trends in drugs of choice may change, but the drugs themselves weather all storms. Substances have always been used, and always will be used, **to alleviate anxiety, produce relaxation, provide relief from boredom, alleviate pain, increase strength or work tolerance, or provide a temporary distortion of reality**.

Premarital sex. So what about premarital sex? What are the obvious similarities between the reasons children and youth do drugs and the why's that may explain significant numbers of youth getting into sexual relationships before marriage? Certainly there is excitement to be found in doing something you've been told not to do, in making sure you don't get caught, in taking the chance you can beat the odds against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. For some, sexual involvement creates a temporary oasis from anxiety and personal pain. Others possess **little or no information** about sexuality or the risks of sexual behavior. Still others pick up on **mixed messages** that swirl about as to whether it's realistic to expect youth today to abstain from premarital sex or whether the Scripture even sets chastity as God's ideal. **Peer pressure** to conform with norms of the group is strong. All youth are impacted to some degree and may well be encouraged to engage in premarital sex by the **sex-saturated media** and **pragmatic "safe-sex" educational campaigns**.

This generation also faces the additional challenge of managing their sexuality for an **extended period of time between the onset of puberty**, which is occurring earlier, and the **completion of educational goals and readiness to take up adult responsibility**, which are occurring later. In the eighteenth century in the Western world, the average age when a girl began menstruating was 16 or 17 years. Since that time, the age of first period has steadily decreased to a current average of 12.8 years. The exact onset of puberty is not as easy to mark in boys, but one thing is sure, among both males and females, interest in the opposite sex is aroused at a much earlier age than before. Two hundred years ago, sexual interest began to awaken in late adolescence, coinciding with the average age for marriage. Today, sexual interest is in full swing in early adolescence, while the average age of marriage in the Western world is delayed considerably by the pursuit of educational goals and the difficulty young adults find in taking up full adult responsibility due to the lack of good jobs.

The implications of these phenomena are significant. Obviously, young people today have to **manage their sexual desires for a much longer period before marriage** than in times past. However, the **cognitive capacities and maturity necessary to manage their sexual behavior wisely are not typically in place in early adolescence**. Early adolescents often have difficulty putting several pieces of information together and then making a decision on the basis of that information. More commonly, they base their decisions on the influence of others. Thus the support of family, church and community to help them make good decisions and to live by them becomes crucially important.

Group discussion: *Take a few minutes to discuss alternative ways to meet the needs which youth are expressing when they become involved in risky behaviors such as chemical abuse and premature sexual involvement. For example, what other experiences might provide the "highs" they are looking for without the risk? How else might their anxiety be alleviated? What other remedies for boredom can you think of?*

Research insights. Recent research reported that a low level of physical activity among high school students was associated with cigarette smoking, marijuana use, lower fruit and vegetable consumption, more television watching, failure to wear a seat belt, and a lower level of importance placed on academic performance (Pate, Heath, Dowda & Trosh, 1996). In addition, young girls who are involved in strenuous physical activity have their first menstrual periods later than average. A vegetarian diet is also associated with a later onset of puberty (Moisan, Meyer & Gingras, 1990).

Group discussion: *What do these research insights suggest regarding more appropriate management of sexuality and avoidance of high risk behaviors? Add to your list additional ideas for ways adults can encourage physical activity and a healthful lifestyle among youth and become involved with them in activities which promote physical fitness. Be careful to include activities besides team sports which are likely to involve only the most talented athletes.*

It's All about Connectedness

More and more researchers today are becoming interested in the reality that, despite negative external influences and difficult circumstances, some young people are more resilient than others. Resilient youth seem to be able to rise above these influences and circumstances and resist involvement in behaviors that put them at high risk. In a recent article in the *Adventist Review*, Bailey Gillespie and Gary Hopkins (Gillespie & Hopkins, 1998) report that the resilience studies of youth return again and again to a common theme: Resilient youth had “at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperament, physical attractiveness, or intelligence. Sounds like the ‘gift love’ Jesus modeled to us during His life on earth” (p. 16).

Think of all the times you’ve said to yourself things like, “It’s not *what* you know, but *who* you know.” Think of the opportunities that have opened for you, or perhaps have been closed to you, because you did or did not have connections in the right places. A huge study of American teenagers released in 1997 has just put your hunches about the importance of connections on a sound research base. It may not be as trite as it sounds to say, “It’s all about connectedness.”

The 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health studied 90,000 teenagers and 18,000 parents across the United States. It provides a basis for understanding (1) the factors which predispose today’s children and youth to involvement in high risk behaviors and (2) those factors which are most likely to protect them from harm. The results of this study puts families, congregations and communities in a better position than ever before to decrease the vulnerability of their children to risky behaviors that threaten their health and safety and to enhance the “risk-proofing” factors that promote their overall well-being.

The conclusion of this landmark study is summed up on the cover page of a monograph (Blum & Rinehard, n.d.) which outlines the research findings:

*Independent of race, ethnicity, family structure and poverty status, **adolescents who are connected** to their parents, to their families, and to their school community are healthier than those who are not.*

The authors continue:

Adolescent health is influenced not only by the strengths and vulnerabilities of individual adolescents but also by the character of the settings in which they lead their lives. These settings—the schools they attend, the neighborhoods they call home, their families, and the friends who comprise their social world—play an important but still incompletely understood role in shaping adolescent health. They do so by influencing both how adolescents feel about themselves as well as the choices they make about behaviors that can affect their health and their future lives.

Small group discussion: (1) Discuss with your workshop peers the most valuable relationships with adults you experienced as a child/teen, relationships perhaps with a parent, teacher, grandparent, or some other adult in your church or community. How did these relationships affect your feelings about yourself and your choices about your behavior? Tell stories and describe experiences.

(2) Then ask yourselves: Is this same level of adult support available to the children and youth of our church and community today? If not, why not? Who are some of the people in the church/school/community that the young people look up to and enjoy? What are they saying and doing that draws the youth to them? How can you broaden the existing network of support?

(3) Take a few minutes at the end of the small group discussion time for personal reflection. You may or may not wish to share everything you are thinking out loud. Ask yourself: Which of the children/youth in our church and community can rely upon me to be that “key adult” in their lives? How much time and energy am I giving to the children and youth in my family? In the church? In the larger community? What would it take to get me involved?

A Closer Look at the Family “Risk-Proofing” Factors

The 1997 Adolescent Health Study detailed a number of family factors which appear to “risk proof” children and adolescents against harmful behaviors. It also highlighted factors which are associated with increased risk. A resounding conclusion to the 1997 study is: *When youth feel connected to their families and when parents are involved in their children’s lives, teens are protected.*

Here are the significant “risk-proofing” factors identified by the study which were associated with decreased involvement of youth in behaviors which put their health, safety and overall well-being at risk:

- Feelings of closeness to their parents.
- Satisfaction with family relationships.
- Sense of being loved and cared for.
- Participation in activities with their parents.
- Parents’ physical presence in the home at key times during the day, i.e., in the morning, after school, at dinner, and at bedtime (though *access* to a parent and parental supervision may be more significant than finding the magical time of day for a parent to be home).
- No easy home access to guns, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs.

- High parental expectations for the child’s educational advancement and school performance.
- Clear parental disapproval of behaviors which put youth at risk.

The Seventh-day Adventist sample from 69 academies also highlighted the importance of parental modeling. Table 3 indicates the strong association between the student’s use of all substances when at least one of their parents used a substance (*Handout #3 Research on Youth Behaviors - 3*).

Some additional points of interest. Of course the individual attitudes, beliefs and past experiences have important effects on each young person’s emotional health and on their choices about personal involvement in risky behaviors. However, since family is the primary place where attitudes and beliefs are developed and many of life’s most significant experiences are lived, there are many implications for the family in these findings as well. For example, the 1997 Adolescent Health Study indicates:

- High self-esteem is generally associated with lower involvement in risky behaviors.
- When religion and prayer are important to an adolescent, they are less likely to smoke, drink or become involved in premarital sexual activity.
- When adolescents work more than 20 hours a week at a part-time job, the positive effects of working—such as increased self-esteem and additional income—seem to be negated by fatigue and excessive discretionary funds.
- Teens who are developmentally “out-of-sync,” particularly those who appear older than their peers, are at higher risk and may need additional support.
- Children who experience learning and behavior problems in school are at higher risk. More study needs to be given to how to help these children. Simple solutions such as keeping them back a grade is associated with increased involvement in risky behaviors.

School connectedness also matters. The significant school factors involve the kind of environment fostered by the school. “Risk-proofing” environments are those in which students feel:

- Fairly treated
- Close to one another
- A part of the school

Small group discussion: Which of the “risk-proofing” factors are the easiest to achieve? Which are more difficult? Make a long list of the kinds of things that help young people feel connected to their families, churches and communities. What circumstances leave the youth of your church and your community the most vulnerable? What will you, your family and your church do to ensure the connectedness of every young person in your midst? Think particularly about creatively filling those crucial after-school hours.

Conclusion: No Shortcuts

Limitations of education. Over the past couple of generations parents and community leaders have tried to get young people to resist involvement in behaviors that put their health and safety at high risk

primarily through education about the harmful effects of such behaviors. This much we have learned. Information is important, and we ought not to leave education undone. But as a solitary means of preventing at-risk behaviors, education alone is not very effective. Think about it. If information was highly effective at motivating us to live healthfully, all adults would exercise (we all know it keeps us healthier and prolongs life); all smokers would quit (the dangers of smoking are well known); all Seventh-day Adventists would be vegetarians (the value of the original human diet has been scientifically verified); no one would be obese (we all know obesity is a health risk); and everyone would wear seat belts (we have all seen enough pictures of accident fatalities where a seat belt might have saved a life). Education is vitally important, but connectedness requires more.

Indispensable value of connection. Connectedness takes time. Connectedness requires genuine interest in young people and their issues. It means going where the kids are. It involves listening as well as dialogue.

Connectedness is about warmth and caring and love and making friends. It is also about setting limits and supervision. It's about building trust and holding on during the hard times.

Connectedness is about mentoring and making wholesome values winsome. It prepares youth to face new situations and challenges. It requires a willing to negotiate and release responsibility to young people, in keeping with their growing maturity.

Connectedness is about getting involved and giving of yourself. It is about looking out for the vulnerable. Connectedness is about helping someone who has made a mistake begin again.

Connectedness is about supporting parents and families. It means opening your family to include others in your circle of caring and fun. Connectedness is about becoming community. It can't happen without people like you.

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Table 1

**A Comparison of Rates of Substance Use by Students in Adventist Academies
with non-SDA Students Attending Public Schools**

Substance Used by Student	Students attending SDA schools	Students attending public schools
Cigarettes	31 %	71.3 %
Alcohol	45.7 %	81.7 %
Marijuana	16 %	37.2 %
Cocaine	3.5 %	4.8 %
Hard drugs (non-cocaine)	7.6 %	18.4 %
Injected illegal drugs	0.9 %	2.4 %

Sources:

Hopkins, G.L., Hopp, J., Hopp Marshak, H., Neish, C., & Rhoads. (1998). AIDS risk among students attending Seventh-day Adventist Schools in North America. *Journal of School Health*, 68 (4), 141-145;

Centers for Disease Control. Youth risk behavior surveillance. *MMWR Surveill Summ.*, 44, 9-11.

Table 2

**A Comparison of Substances Used Before the Age of 13 years by
Students in Adventist Academies with non-SDA Students Attending Public Schools**

Substance Used by Student	Students attending SDA schools	Students attending public schools
Cigarettes	13.6 %	24.9 %
Alcohol	20.2 %	32.4 %
Marijuana	2.5 %	7.6 %
Cocaine	0.6 %	1.2 %

Sources:

Hopkins, G.L., Hopp, J., Hopp Marshak, H., Neish, C., & Rhoads. (1998). AIDS risk among students attending Seventh-day Adventist Schools in North America. *Journal of School Health*, 68 (4), 141-145;

Centers for Disease Control. Youth risk behavior surveillance. *MMWR Surveill Summ.*, 44, 9-11.

Table 3
**Rates of Substance Use by Students Compared to Students' Reports
of Parental Substance Use**

Substance Used by Student	Percent of students using substances whose parents did not use substance(s)	Percent of students using substances whose parents used substances(s)
Alcohol	37.6 %	71.7 %
Tobacco	24.4 %	47.3 %
Marijuana	11.5 %	27.1 %
Cocaine	2.2 %	6.7 %
Hard drug (non-Cocaine)	4.9 %	14.6 %
Injected drug	0.5 %	1.2 %
Overall use of at least one substance	41.6 %	76.4 %

Source: Hopkins, G.L., Hopp, J., Hopp Marshak, H., Neish, C., & Rhoads. (1998). AIDS risk among students attending Seventh-day Adventist Schools in North America. *Journal of School Health*, 68 (4), 141-145.

Connections Make a Difference

Independent of race, ethnicity, family structure and poverty status, adolescents who are *connected* to their parents, to their families, and to their school community are healthier than those who are not.

Adolescent health is influenced not only by the strengths and vulnerabilities of individual adolescents but also by the character of the settings in which they lead their lives.

These settings—the schools they attend, the neighborhoods they call home, their families, and the friends who comprise their social world—play an important but still incompletely understood role in shaping adolescent health. They do so by influencing both how adolescents feel about themselves as well as the choices they make about behaviors that can affect their health and their future lives.

Source: 1997 *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*. Emphasis supplied.

75 WAYS T♥C♥NNECT

With Children and Teens

☺ Preschoolers

- Color together a page in your child's coloring book.
- Make greeting cards from construction paper and stickers.
- Hide a surprise for your young child to find.
- Give a "piggyback" ride to bed.
- Give your child a foot rub or back massage.
- Visit the preschooler section of the library.
- Go to a playground.
- Give a long hug.
- Peel an orange (or prepare another fruit) and share it together.
- Make fun designs with pieces of fruit or sandwiches.
- Let your child put icing on cupcakes.
- Read stories.
- Eat lunch outside under the tree.
- Chase and catch falling leaves.
- Build a snow man.
- Give your child a small watering can to water outside plants.
- Hold hands as you go for a walk.
- Talk about the different things you see that Jesus made.
- Read them their Sabbath School lesson.
- Have them help you pick up toys.
- Give them some of your old clothes to play dress up.
- Throw rocks together in a creek or pond.
- Take flowers to a shut-in.
- Make a tape or video for grandpa & grandma.
- Put a large roll of paper on the floor and make chalk or crayon drawings.
- Have the child help you plant flowers.
- Wrestle on the floor.

☺ School age children

- Allow your child to brush and style your hair.
- Check out some books from the library.
- Make hand puppets of bible characters.
- Do a puppet show together of a bible story.
- Have a pillow fight.
- Bake cookies together.
- Let your child rub your back.
- Team with your child to prepare their favorite menu.
- Decorate your child's bedroom together.
- Ask about your child's day.
- Take a "recycle hike" with plastic bag and pick up soda cans or litter.
- Go on a bike ride with food for a picnic.
- Develop family traditions for holidays.
- Help with homework.
- Pray with your child about a problem.
- Give your child a disposable camera to capture vacation memories.
- Play hide and seek in your house in the dark.
- Plan a special Friday evening meal together.
- Let your child lead family worship.
- Visit your child's school and volunteer to help the teacher for a morning.
- Choose a new craft and make one to give as a gift to a child in the hospital.
- Match paint chip colors with nature objects
- Play Bible charades.
- Take a "tree-top" walk through a forest looking into a mirror held waist high.
- Play tic-tac-toe.
- Drag an open umbrella through a field and talk about what you collect.
- Make an album of family pictures.
- Rake leaves and jump in the pile.

☺ Teenagers

- Go shopping with them.
- Compliment your teen on appearance or performance.
- Go to their sporting events.
- Play board games together.
- Put puzzles together.
- Write a note of appreciation in teen's birthday card.
- Plan a mother/daughter day and/or mother/son day.
- Plan a father/daughter day and/or father/son day.
- Take your teen out to dinner.
- Make a video tape of their special events.
- Take time to listen without giving advice.
- Serve a surprise breakfast in bed.
- Invite their friends to your home.
- Help your teen plan a “back to school” party.
- Be interested in their homework and school activities.
- Help them on school projects.
- Get involved in their hobbies and interests.
- Give a quick “hug” or pat on the back.
- Start a drama club in your church or community.
- Help out at a homeless shelter or nursing home.

Critical Challenges Facing Youth

- Emotional Distress
- Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts
- Running Away
- Violence
- Use of Cigarettes, Alcohol and Marijuana
- Premarital Sexual Involvement
- Unwed Pregnancy

Connections Make a Difference - 1

Independent of race, ethnicity, family structure and poverty status, adolescents who are *connected* to their parents, to their families, and to their school community are healthier than those who are not.

Source: 1997 *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*. Emphasis supplied.

Connections Make a Difference - 2

Adolescent health is influenced not only by the strengths and vulnerabilities of individual adolescents but also by the character of the settings in which they lead their lives.

These settings—the schools they attend, the neighborhoods they call home, their families, and the friends who comprise their social world—play an important but still incompletely understood role in shaping adolescent health. They do so by influencing both how adolescents feel about themselves as well as the choices they make about behaviors that can affect their health and their future lives.

Source: 1997 *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*.

Transparency #3 Connections Make a Difference-2

Disability Awareness Seminar

by Karen and Bernie Holford

Theme

How to help congregations become more effective in ministry to those who are disabled or impaired.

Setting

The following seminar is adaptable for adults or for use as a multigenerational experience in a variety of settings. It is suitable for a church retreat, a family camp, a Sabbath afternoon presentation, a family enrichment seminar, etc. There are a number of separate components in the seminar. You can select what suits the particular needs of your church situation. **Presentation Helps** are provided for the leader(s), and group exercises and other handouts are found at the end of the materials.

Note: The terminology for disability varies from country to country. The appropriate terms also change from time to time. Be sensitive to the use of correct terms. Choose the words that best suit your needs and the group you are teaching. Be aware that disability is a topic that can evoke very strong feelings. Although the activities in this seminar are meant to be enjoyable, as well as learning experiences, be careful that disability is not trivialised or patronized.

Seminar Materials

- Activity Sheet # 1 *Discussion Questions*
- Activity Sheet # 2 *Deafness*
- Activity Sheet # 3 *Blindness*
- Activity Sheet # 4 *Being in a Wheelchair*
- Activity Sheet # 5 *Partial Paralysis*
- Activity Sheet # 6 *Dyspraxia*
- Activity Sheet # 7 *Star Pattern*
- Handout #1 *Draw a Picture*
- Handout #2 *Ideas for Relating to People With a Disability*
- Transparency #1 *Draw a Picture*
- Transparency #2 *Draw a Picture Discussion*

Preparation

- Make copies of handouts as indicated in the materials list.
- Prepare overhead transparencies.
- Make multiple copies of the **Star Pattern** sheets, since this is a popular activity.

Karen Holford, M. A., is a qualified occupational therapist. Bernie Holford, M.Div., is the Family Ministries Director for the South England Conference, Trans-European Division. They work together as a team and have three children.

- Gather other materials for the disability experiences (see instructions for each activity). Copies of activity sheets #2 - 6 may be given to each participant or one copy may be placed at each “disability” station.
- Have a supply of pencils and scrap paper available.

Presentation Helps

Introduction

We know from the Scriptures that Jesus spent much of His time healing people. In fact He spent much more time healing people and ministering to their physical needs than He spent preaching to them! This was His way of showing God’s love to a broken and hurting world.

During His ministry Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy but to save. . . . As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy wherever He went. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 350)

Jesus said, “I am come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). There were “whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house; for He had passed through them, and healed all their sick” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 241).

Thinking about Disability

Let us try to understand a little of what it could be like to be disabled in some way.

Exercise: *Draw a Picture* (Handout #1). Distribute a copy of the handout to each seminar participant or use plain paper and Transparency #1 to display the exercise directions. Make sure everyone understands the instructions. Children who can read and write can also enjoy this exercise. Allow a few minutes for each person to do the exercise. When everyone has finished the task, invite participants to exchange pictures.

When all the pictures have been exchanged, ask everyone to carefully alter the drawing they now have in front of them with a disability or illness of some sort. Indicate the disability by scribbling over the eyes to show blindness, or scribbling over a limb to show that the limb no longer works, or has been amputated. Or write the name of an illness on the picture. Try to think of an illness or disability that will likely be familiar to the owner of the picture.

Return the picture to its owner and reclaim your own picture. Look at your picture. Check with each other to be sure you fully understand the disability you have been given. Think about the disability. How will this disability affect your life? Which of the things that you wrote around your picture would no longer be possible? Which things would be very difficult to do? Which things could you still enjoy doing? Are there new things that you would like to do with your life now that it has been changed by the disability? Think of at least one good thing that could come out of your disability.

Be quiet for a while and think about these questions, then jot down your ideas around your picture or on the back of the paper. When you have finished, find the person with whom you exchanged pictures and discuss the following points (See Transparency #2).

- If it happened today, my disability would change my life by . . .
- My disability would change my plans for the future in these ways . . .
- The kind of support and help I would want to have from other people would be . . .

Discuss as a large group what this experience was like and what you have learned.

Debriefing activity. It is important to debrief the group since the preceding exercise is likely to have been a thought-provoking and emotional experience.

Ask the group members to close their eyes and imagine themselves, with the disability they were given during the drawing activity, sitting and begging by a street in a village in Israel during the time of Jesus' ministry. Imagine Jesus walking by and noticing you. He speaks to you for a minute or two. What do you think He would have said to you? Then He touches you and instantly you are healed! The illness or disability which your self-portrait was given is gone forever! You are strong and fully able once more! You jump up and praise God! Think how you would respond to Jesus in this situation. Think how your healing would have changed your life and the life of your family and friends.

Discussion groups. Divide into groups of eight or less and give each group one of the following questions to discuss for a few minutes (See Activity Sheet #1 *Discussion Questions*):

- As a church we often spend much time preaching and teaching. How can we balance this with practical service in our local communities and among people with special needs, as Jesus did?
- Is it possible that we feel more comfortable as a church helping people who are in difficulty because they practice an unhealthy lifestyle (tobacco, alcohol, drugs, obesity) rather than helping those who did not choose their illness or disability? If so, why?
- If Jesus came through our town today, where would He go to find people who needed help, comfort and healing?
- Jesus was happy to touch and heal the lepers in His day. How do we feel about the AIDS sufferers of our day? What would Jesus say to them and do for them? How can we help them "have life, and have it to the full"?
- When wanting to help people with disabilities and illnesses today, what are some special challenges we might face?
- "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27 RSV). What does it mean that we are all made in God's image? How does the fact that we are all made in the image of God affect the way we relate to people with illness and disability? How can we learn to see the image of God in each person with whom we relate?

Experience a "Disability" Activities

The following activities are designed to help seminar participants understand more about deafness, blindness, being in a wheelchair, partial paralysis, and dyspraxia. Ideally, these activities would be set up around a room, or in several different rooms, where people are free to wander about and try the different

experiences for themselves. Divide into five groups and take about five minutes at each activity station. Come together as a group after about thirty minutes of these activities and talk openly about your experiences and what you have all learned. An alternate plan on a smaller scale would be to have volunteers come to the front of the seminar to try the different activities. Each could be interviewed regarding their experience with the activity.

Deafness (Activity Sheet #2).

Materials required: Several sets of ear-plugs.

Instructions: Find a partner. Each insert the ear plugs and then try to have a conversation together.

Share: How does it feel?

Read and discuss: Mark 7:31-37. The deaf man in this story had friends who cared for him. Why do you think Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears and then spat and touched his tongue? How did the man and his friends feel when he had been healed?

Blindness (Activity Sheet #3).

Materials required: Blindfolds or scarves; pitcher of water and a glass; several potatoes and a vegetable peeler; complete sets of place settings, including glasses and table napkins; paper and pencil.

Instructions: Have a friend blindfold you and watch over you to keep you safe as you try one or more of the following activities. When you have completed them, exchange places with your partner.

- Pour a glass of water from the jug.
- Set a place setting at the table.
- Peel a potato.
- Walk around the room and out of the door.
- Write out your favorite text.

Share: How did your experience of blindness make you feel?

Read and discuss: Matthew 20:29-34. Talk about how these men felt, about how the crowd treated them, and about how Jesus treated them.

Being in a wheelchair (Activity Sheet #4).

Materials required: Wheelchair(s). (These may be rented from a local medical supply store or you may try to borrow one from a local hospital.)

Instructions: Sit in the wheelchair. Try manoeuvring the chair yourself. Have a friend push you around the church or building. Try opening doors and entering rooms. Notice how the wheelchair limits your freedom. Discover what it is like to try get from one floor to another or to use the toilet. Can you see in the mirrors, reach the sinks and the hand towels, etc.?

Share: How did it feel to try to manoeuvre the wheelchair yourself? How did it feel to be pushed? How easy was it to get through the doors in the building? What other challenges and problems did the building present to you? If the wheelchair was electric self-propelled, how did that feel? What new problems did that pose?

Read and discuss: Mark 2:1-12. Although this man was not in a wheelchair, he could not walk and he had to depend on his friends to carry him around. Today he would probably be using a wheelchair. Think about how his friends treated him. Think about how the rulers of the day treated him. How must it have felt when he was healed? Discuss what you think about his life before and after his healing.

Partial paralysis. Paralysis of one side of the body, as in a stroke (hemiplegia) (Activity Sheet #5).

Materials required: Potatoes; peeler(s); scissors; pencils; drawing paper; bread; butter; knives; paper plates; a small tablecloth.

Instructions: Sit on one hand or hold it behind your back. Try using your preferred hand and then your non-preferred hand and observe the difference. Then, using only one hand, try one or more of the following:

- Peel a potato.
- Cut a shape out of a piece of paper (i.e., draw around a plate; then try to cut out the circle).
- Tie shoelaces using only one hand.
- Spread a slice of bread and butter.
- Find your favorite text in the Bible and then copy it onto a piece of paper using your non-preferred hand.
- Fold the tablecloth neatly to fit into a drawer.

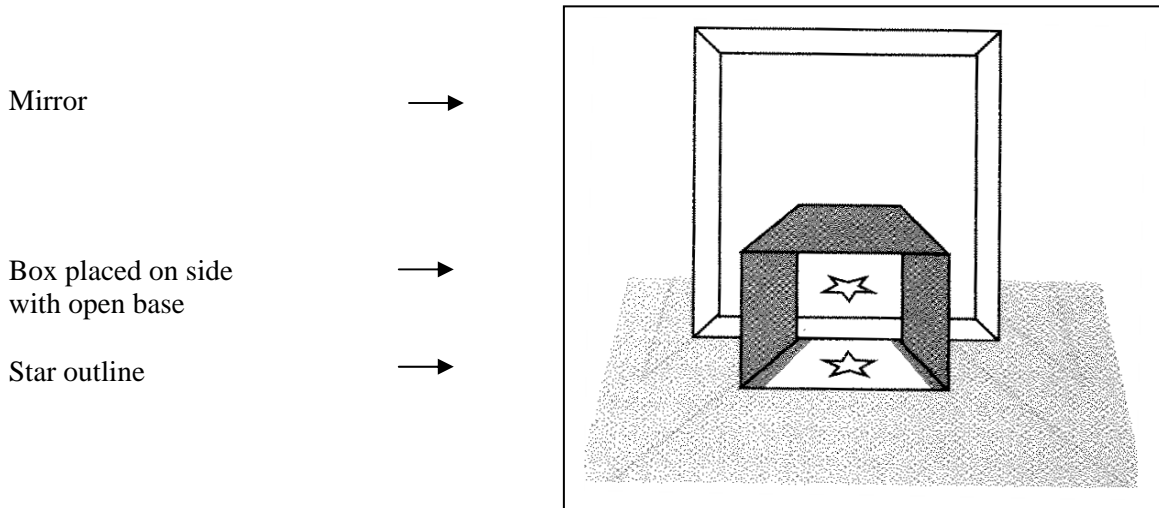
Share: Tell what it was like to undertake normal tasks, but with only the use of one hand or your less-preferred hand. What were your feelings (loneliness, anxiety, sadness, frustration, fear, anger, etc.)? Discuss what it would be like to try to crack an egg, strain vegetables, roll pastry dough, use a telephone, iron a shirt, bathe yourself, put on a pullover sweater, tie a necktie.

Read and discuss: Luke 6:1-11. The man with a withered hand would have had to perform tasks with only one hand. How do you think he felt when Jesus healed him? How did the Pharisees feel about this healing? In what ways might we bring the spirit of Jesus, if not physical healing, to the life of a disabled or impaired person? What good can we do on the Sabbath to be a blessing to such individuals in our communities?

Dyspraxia (Activity Sheet #6). Dyspraxia is a condition in which mind-body coordination breaks down, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks. You know what you want to do, but it's very hard to coordinate your body to cooperate with your intentions.

Materials required: A table; a free-standing table mirror with dimensions approximately 12" by 18"; copies of the star pattern (Activity Sheet #7); pencils; a sturdy cardboard box approximately 12" on each dimension. The ends of the box should be removed (or folded inside to make the box more rigid and stable).

Instructions: Stand the mirror up on the table (lean it against a wall or otherwise prop it up) with the reflective side toward you. Place the cardboard box on the table so that one end is open toward the mirror and one end is open toward the front of the table. Lay one of the star patterns down flat on the table inside the box. Adjust the box and the mirror so that, when you are standing with the box between you and the mirror, you can see the star pattern reflected in the mirror, but you are unable to see the star in the box (See diagram). Now take a pencil and, looking only into the mirror, draw a line between the two border lines of the star. Trace all the way around the star.



Diagram

Space the mirror a few inches behind the box, so you can see the reflected image of the star in the mirror, but not your hands or the star outline inside the box.

Share: How does this feel? Frustrating? Bewildering? How would you feel if every task you faced in your life felt the same way as this?

The Reality of Our Own “Disability”

We may have never considered ourselves disabled because we are free of physical problems or illnesses. However, none of us will reach our full potential this side of heaven. We each have some part of us which is hurting or broken or somehow impaired. This could be a paralyzing fear, uncontrolled anger, painful memories, or other personal challenges. Think about a disability of this type that you may have.

We may also have spiritual disabilities. To our natural hard-of-spiritual-hearing state in which we have difficulty discerning the loving voice of God because of our natural sinful nature, we may also have acquired additional “deafness” through the choices we have made and the circumstances through which we have passed. For instance, we are often blind to the eternal consequences of our actions. We are “half hearted” in our relationship and our service to God. At times, the pain of some abuse in the past may prevent us from understanding God’s will for our lives today.

The good news is that Jesus wants us all to be whole. He loves us even though we are naturally bent against Him. He would love to walk among us today and heal each of us, whatever our problems may be.

It is not His will that any of us function short of our potential in our lives on this earth. He longs for the day when He can restore us all completely to wholeness.

Prayer partners. Find a partner and pray together. Pray that God will help you as you relate to people with various disabilities and pray for each other's "disabilities." Whether you choose to share your personal "disability" with each other or not, pray nonetheless for God's healing and help in the challenging situations you both face. Pray for those whom you know in your family, your church, and your community who are enduring the difficulties both physical and emotional disabilities bring. Pray that you will be guided in thinking of ways to minister to and relate to the people with impairments in your church and community.

Making A Difference Here And Now

Distribute Handout #2 *Ideas for Relating to People With a Disability*. Brainstorm ways in which your church could make changes, even if the changes are small and few, to enable people with disabilities to feel welcome and cared for. Write the ideas on an overhead projector, flip chart or blackboard. Submit your ideas to the appropriate body in your church for further consideration and implementation.

Conclusion

Read Revelation 21:1-7. Soon Jesus will return and take away all our suffering, tears, pain, frustration, illness and disability. Offer a concluding prayer for understanding, healing, and sensitivity. Pray for those who face the challenges of being disabled. Pray that the enthusiasm and interest generated in the seminar will be turned into practical help and caring that will make a difference in other's lives.

References

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Supplementary Ideas

- Show a film about a person's experience of disability, such as *Joni*, the life disability experience of Joni Eareckson Tada.

Note: JONI is a video featuring Joni as herself. The video depicts the diving accident that left her paralyzed and her struggles in the months that followed. It shows how God helped her piece her broken life together again. Available in English and Spanish. Order from JAF Ministries, P. O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills CA 91301, 1 (800) 523-5777. Price \$15.00 plus shipping. Website, www.jafministries.com/.

- Invite a disabled person to talk to the group.
- Hold a buffet-meal after the seminar, where each person is given a specific disability for the duration of the meal, such as blindness, deafness, hemiplegia, being in a wheelchair, etc. Stress the importance of helpfulness and co-operation, understanding and communication.
- For further information, contact Christian Record Services, 4444 South 52nd St, Lincoln, NB 68516, telephone: (402) 488-0981, e-mail: 74617.236@compuserve.com.

Discussion Questions

- As a church we often spend much time preaching and teaching. How can we balance this with practical service in our local communities and among people with special needs, as Jesus did?
- Is it possible that we feel more comfortable as a church helping people who are in difficulty because they practice an unhealthy lifestyle (tobacco, alcohol, drugs, obesity) rather than helping those who did not choose their illness or disability? If so, why?
- If Jesus came through our town today, where would He go to find people who needed help, comfort and healing?
- Jesus was happy to touch and heal the lepers in His day. How do we feel about the AIDS sufferers of our day? What would Jesus say to them and do for them? How can we help them “have life, and have it to the full”?
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Deafness

Materials required: Several sets of ear-plugs.

Instructions: Find a partner. Each insert the ear plugs and then try to have a conversation together.

Share: How does it feel?

Read and discuss: Mark 7:31-37. The deaf man in this story had friends who cared for him. Why do you think Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears and then spat and touched his tongue? How did the man and his friends feel when he had been healed?

Blindness

Materials required: Blindfolds or scarves; pitcher of water and a glass; several potatoes and a vegetable peeler; complete sets of place settings, including glasses and table napkins; paper and pencil.

Instructions: Have a friend blindfold you and watch over you to keep you safe as you try one or more of the following activities. When you have completed them, exchange places with your partner.

- Pour a glass of water from the jug.
- Set a place setting at the table.
- Peel a potato.
- Walk around the room and out of the door.
- Write out your favorite text.

Share: How did your experience of blindness make you feel?

Read and discuss: Matthew 20:29-34. Talk about how these men felt, about how the crowd treated them, and about how Jesus treated them.

Being in a Wheelchair

Materials required: Wheelchair(s). (These may be rented from a local medical supply store or you may try to borrow one from a local hospital.)

Instructions: Sit in the wheelchair. Try maneuvering the chair yourself. Have a friend push you around the church or building. Try opening doors and entering rooms. Notice how the wheelchair limits your freedom. Discover what it is like to try get from one floor to another or to use the toilet. Can you see in the mirrors, reach the sinks and the hand towels, etc.?

Share: How did it feel to try to maneuver the wheelchair yourself? How did it feel to be pushed? How easy was it to get through the doors in the building? What other challenges and problems did the building present to you? If the wheelchair was electric self-propelled, how did that feel? What new problems did that pose?

Read and discuss: Mark 2:1-12. Although this man was not in a wheelchair, he could not walk and he had to depend on his friends to carry him around. Today he would probably be using a wheelchair. Think about how his friends treated him. Think about how the rulers of the day treated him. How must it have felt when he was healed? Discuss what you think about his life before and after his healing.

Partial Paralysis

Paralysis of one side of the body, as in a stroke (hemiplegia).

Materials required: Potatoes; peeler(s); scissors; pencils; drawing paper; bread; butter; knives; paper plates; a small tablecloth.

Instructions: Sit on one hand or hold it behind your back. Try using your preferred hand and then your non-preferred hand and observe the difference. Then, using only one hand, try one or more of the following:

- Peel a potato.
- Cut a shape out of a piece of paper (i.e., draw around a plate; then try to cut out the circle).
- Tie shoelaces using only one hand.
- Spread a slice of bread and butter.
- Find your favorite text in the Bible and then copy it onto a piece of paper using your non-preferred hand.
- Fold the tablecloth neatly to fit into a drawer.

Share: Tell what it was like to undertake normal tasks, but with only the use of one hand or your less-preferred hand. What were your feelings (loneliness, anxiety, sadness, frustration, fear, anger, etc.)? Discuss what it would be like to try to crack an egg, strain vegetables, roll pastry dough, use a telephone, iron a shirt, bathe yourself, put on a pullover sweater, tie a necktie.

Read and discuss: Luke 6:1-11. The man with a withered hand would have had to perform tasks with only one hand. How do you think he felt when Jesus healed him? How did the Pharisees feel about this healing? In what ways might we bring the spirit of Jesus, if not physical healing, to the life of a disabled or impaired person? What good can we do on the Sabbath to be a blessing to such individuals in our communities?

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a condition in which mind-body coordination breaks down, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks. You know what you want to do, but it's very hard to coordinate your body to cooperate with your intentions.

Materials required: A table; a free-standing table mirror with dimensions approximately 12" by 18"; copies of the star pattern (Activity Sheet #7); pencils; a sturdy cardboard box approximately 12" on each dimension. The ends of the box should be removed (or folded inside to make the box more rigid and stable).

Instructions: Stand the mirror up on the table (lean it against a wall or otherwise prop it up) with the reflective side toward you. Place the cardboard box on the table so that one end is open toward the mirror and one end toward the front of the table. Lay one of the star patterns down flat on the table inside the box. Adjust the box and the mirror so that, when you are standing with the box between you and the mirror, you can see the star pattern reflected in the mirror, but you are unable to see the star in the box (See diagram). Now take a pencil and, looking only into the mirror, draw a line between the two border lines of the star. Trace all the way around the star.

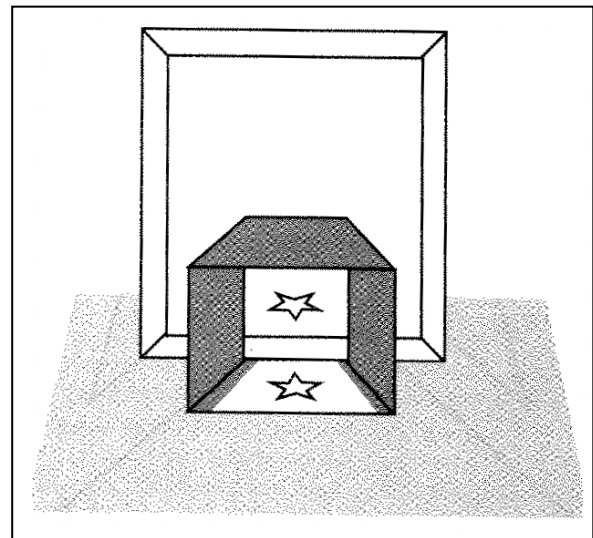
Mirror



Box placed on
Side with open base



Star

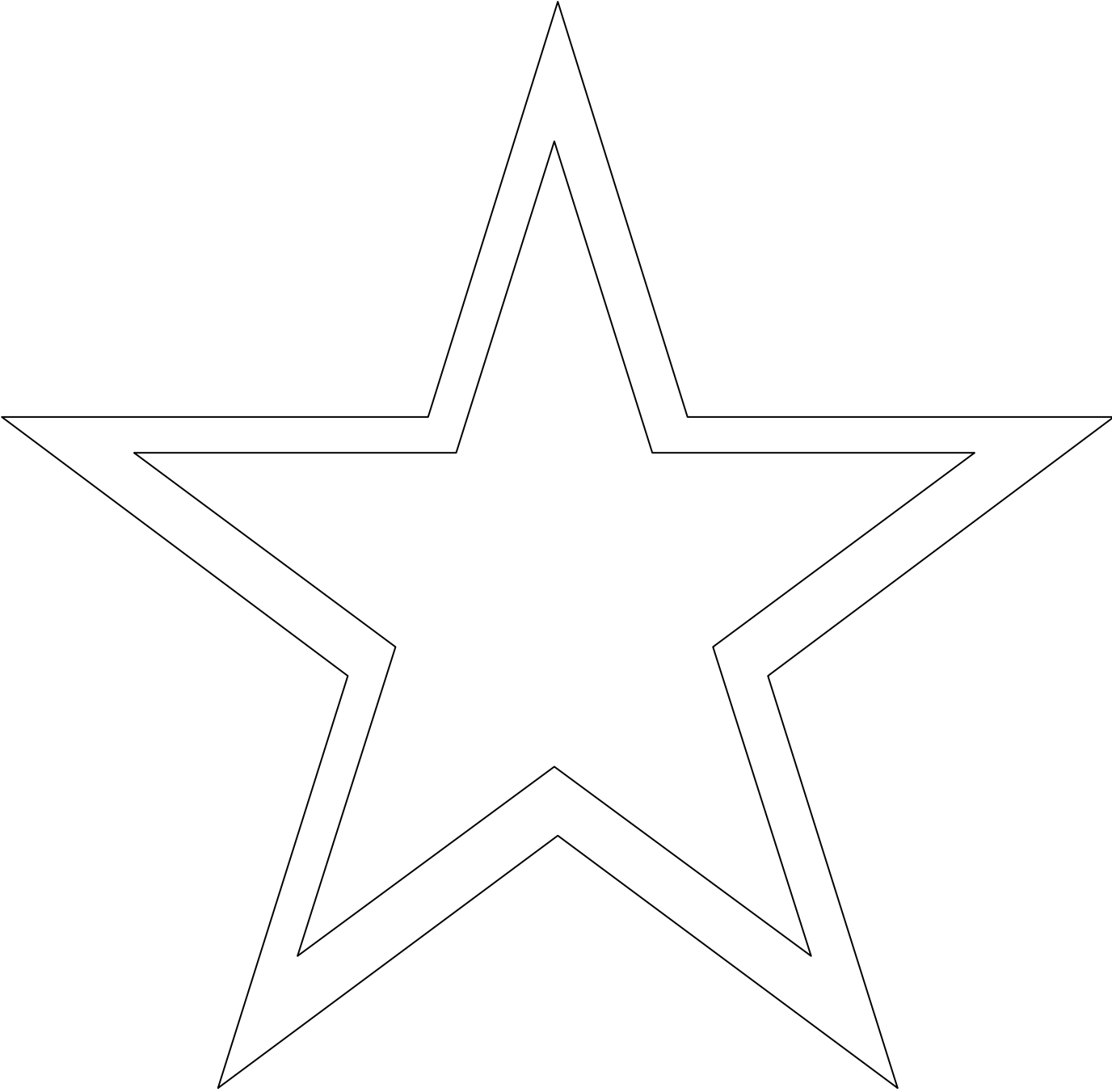


Space the mirror a few inches behind the box, so you can see the reflected image of the star in the mirror, but not your hands or the star outline inside the box.

Share: How does this feel? Frustrating? Bewildering? How would you feel if every task you faced in your life felt the same way as this?

Activity Sheet # 6 *Dyspraxia*

Star Pattern for Dyspraxia Activity



Draw a Picture

Instructions:

- Draw a picture of yourself in the space below. It can be a simple “stick” person, but give the drawing some personal features that will help to identify you.
- Write your name on the picture.
- Around the picture write the things that you enjoy doing, the things that make your life meaningful and worthwhile, the things that make you a unique individual and things that are important to you.
- Exchange pictures with someone when you have finished.

Ideas for Relating to People With a Disability

- Be considerate. If someone is in a wheelchair, or has to remain seated, always sit so that your face is at the same level as their's. It is very tiring, and even intimidating, to talk to someone who is standing up when you are seated. If there is no chair for you to sit on, crouch down, or kneel, rather than bend over the person in the wheelchair.
- Always speak directly to a person with a disability. Ask them direct questions, and assume they can answer, rather than speaking about them with their relative or caregiver. If they are unable to answer, then use their preferred method of communication.
- Speak clearly and slowly to deaf people and avoid shouting to be heard. Make sure they can see your face clearly and that there is a minimum of background noise.
- Be patient. Many people with disabilities take longer to do things. Often they prefer to do whatever they can do for themselves. If you rush them, it can take away some of their dignity and independence, or increase their pain, fatigue and frustration.
- Be willing to enter the world of disabled persons. Spend a day living without speech, or sound, sight, or movement, or whatever. Increase your understanding of the challenges individuals with these disabilities face. Read books, learn how to sign, learn how to use a wheelchair safely, etc. Learn how to care for a disabled person so that their family and caregivers can have a day off from time to time, knowing that their family member is in safe hands.
- Be creative. Think of creative ways to enhance the lives of those you know who are disabled. Get to know the individuals as true friends—their likes and dislikes, their challenges and joys, their hopes and their fears—and use this information to help create special memories and surprises for them. Find ways to make some of their dreams come true, and help them to have life “more abundantly.”
- Be inclusive. Find ways to involve disabled people in your church life. Help them discover their spiritual gifts and talents, and help them to use these in the church. Let them have roles and responsibilities in the church to suit their special needs and gifts. Each one of us has a ministry to discover.

- Be environmentally aware. Make sure that as many members as possible can attend church functions and enjoy them. Do whatever you can do to your church building to insure that a disabled person feels comfortable and welcome there. Think about installing systems that help deaf people to hear better. Think about sponsoring an interested person to learn how to sign. Tape the sermons for people who cannot come to church. Find out how to obtain the Sabbath School Lesson on tape from Christian Record Services and other Bible studies and taped books for blind people. Provide ramps and adapted restrooms. If you have pews, think about where a wheelchair could be placed. Not everyone wants to sit at either the back or the front of a church.
- Care for the caregivers. Think of those whom you know who have to care for sick and disabled relatives. Find ways to relieve them and help them have an improved quality of life as well.

Draw a Picture

Instructions

- Draw a picture of yourself. It can be a simple “stick” person, but give the drawing some personal features that will help to identify you.
- Write your name on the picture.
- Around the picture write the things that you enjoy doing, the things that make your life meaningful and worthwhile, the things that make you a unique individual, and things that are important to you.
- Exchange pictures with someone when you have finished.

Discussion

- If it happened today, my disability would change my life by . . .
- My disability would change my plans for the future in these ways . . .
- The kind of support and help I would want to have from other people would be . . .

A Family for Naomi

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Despite distressing events in families, spirits can be revived and encouraged by a caring church family.

Theme text

Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience, to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called **Sermon Illumination** that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

Her eyes squinted in the haze. Rising up out of the parched landscape in the distance, the walls of an ancient city hugged the people and places and things she had once called home. Exhausted, she slid her sack to the ground and collapsed. She wiped a sleeve across her brow and felt the circulation return to her aching arms and legs.

Memories flooded in. Life had been so full of promise when they left this land. A strong husband in the prime of life, fleeing with his family from the famine-stricken country. She, a woman secure in her husband's love and fulfilled as a mother of two sons. God had smiled on them then, making even their sojourn in a foreign land more of an adventure than a trial. Strange, she couldn't see God smiling now. First, her husband's unexpected death had made her world go black. She had fought her way through it all, coped with the grief, the loneliness, the fear, the overload. She had reared their sons by herself and watched them establish homes of their own. They had been her hope, her future. But when they also died, something inside her had died with them.

Movement beside her reminds her she is not alone in misery. Out of custom her two daughters-in-law, now singles again like herself, had both started on this journey with her. To them she had delivered a careful but pointed speech, one that did not convey any hope for their future with her. She hadn't meant it to be cruel or unappreciative. She did love them. One turned back, but this other had made the arduous trip with a simple, yet powerful determination: “Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.” What people? Didn't she know that her mother-in-law's womb was forever barren, her heirs dead! And what a God her God had turned out to be! Just why had she come anyway? Now there would be two mouths to feed, someone for whom she would have to be responsible when she didn't even know where

the next meal was coming from. And yet there was something about the young woman that made it hard for the older one to resent her quiet presence.

With the worn sleeve she mopped the moisture from her forehead. Then, with great effort, she shouldered the sack again, the miserable sack that held the remnants of the past and her only stake in the future.

Naomi's return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:22) brought joy to the townspeople, but the excitement was quickly chilled by her curt response: "Don't call me *Naomi* (Hebrew for *pleasant one*). Call me *Mara* (Hebrew for *bitter*), because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:21, 22).

The question for us to ponder is: How do you minister to Naomi during the crises in her life?

Crises

Avoiding ineffective responses. Some can identify with the frustrated townsfolk whose warm welcome was chilled by her lament. We may react by:

- *Denying her feelings.* "It can't be that bad. . . ."
- *Preaching to her.* "You know, a true follower of God would never say something like that!"
- *Attempting to reason with her or teach her.* "God isn't like that."
- *Trying to sympathize.* "Oh, Naomi, everything's going to be alright."
- *Relating a similar experience.* "You know, something like that happened to me once."

Generally, such responses are ineffective. It is true that Naomi needs a brighter, hope-filled view of a compassionate God who loves and cares for His children in their times of difficulty (1, 2). However, her feelings of deep emotion tend to prevent her from listening to reason and instruction, or even from fully comprehending Scripture.

Appreciating her situation. The events of a decade have been such as to progressively erode nearly everything that gave her life a sense of meaning and value. According to research, the more of such events an individual experiences, the higher are his or her levels of stress and potential for depression and physical illness. (3) Here is a catalog of what we know about Naomi's life:

- She had faced economic hardship and famine.
- She had moved to a foreign country with a different language and customs.
- Her husband had died; she felt the abandonment of widowhood.
- She had been a single parent and had reared two sons.
- Her sons had married outside the faith, a seeming rejection of the family's religious values.
- Her sons had died, causing great grief and leaving her without blood relatives, without heirs, without income.
- She was aging, and life's options were limited. No longer of marriageable age, there was little prospect for a husband and therefore no probability of more children to replace her loss.
- She had moved again, torn up what roots she had in Moab, and returned to Bethlehem.
- She faced the prospect of having to rehearse this sad tale to all the townspeople of Bethlehem.

Naomi represents all those who have known disruption in their families whether by death, divorce, abuse, financial collapse, emotional stress, disappointment in marriage, disappointment in not being

married, disappointment over the choices the children have made as they have grown older, and, yes, discouragement in their relationships with God and with the church family.

Restoration

Renewing a sense of personal worth. A primary task is to restore in Naomi (and those today whom she represents) a sense of worth, a sense of meaning and value in life. She can be assisted to release her strong, negative feelings—not by attacking them as unreasonable or unspiritual, or denying them, but by just accepting her and her feelings as she is right now. She needs listening without judging and practical help to provide for her immediate needs. (4) This was what was needed by Naomi, and it began to happen soon after she came home to Bethlehem.

The helpfulness of Ruth. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, suffered similar hurts—grief over the loss of a husband, uncertainty about the future, anxiety about leaving her parents’ homeland and emigrating to a foreign country. However, hers was a different reaction. She had a buoyancy about her, an optimism, a dedication, which enabled her to cope. Of her it might have been said as Jesus said of the centurion, “I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel” (Matt. 8:10). She had committed herself. “Thy God shall be my God.” (1:16, 17) Ruth’s understanding and expectations of God were different from those of Naomi and brought about a different reaction to similar kinds of emotional pain and suffering. Ruth represents those who shoulder the trials and difficulties of life as best they can and go on living and loving and finding a compensating joy in service to others. She set about to do her best (Ruth 2:2, 3).

The encouragement of Boaz. It is as the curtain lifts on the next scene in the drama that we are introduced to Boaz, a close relative in Naomi’s extended family. The verses which follow (2:8-16) are some of the tenderest in Scripture, as we watch this wealthy, powerful, yet godly community leader relate to this young immigrant woman, this widow who is struggling to cope and trying to sustain both herself and her mother-in-law.

He cannot take his eyes off her. The hue of her skin, her dress, her hair, her accent, her mannerisms—everything about her sets her apart. So naive, so vulnerable. He feels obliged to protect her. He has heard about their arrival, but he does not put it all together when the stranger appears in his fields. “Who is she?” he asks aloud. With the worker’s answer, he moves unobtrusively toward her so as not to frighten her. Pausing by her side, he speaks to her. His magnanimity knows no bounds. Any decent man, he thinks, would do the same. And every day he finds new reasons to visit the fields.

Notice that he met her needs in a very practical way:

- He helped supply her needs for water, shelter and physical protection.
- He shared his meal with her.
- He gave her spiritual encouragement.
- He spared her embarrassment, but provided the opportunity for her to help herself and Naomi.

The consideration shown by Boaz has a thrilling effect upon Naomi. Her spirits are lifted (2:19). From her lips come the first positive words since the beginning of the story. Hope is revived in her heart as she begins to realize what is happening (2:20). Naomi is experiencing what it’s like to be part of a family. Her family is coming to her rescue. What a good feeling! She is not alone.

Experiencing God’s Redemption.

The near kinsman. The word Naomi uses to describe her relative (2:20) is “kinsman” (Heb. *goel*). Though difficult in our time to fully understand, the *goel* was a provision of the levirate law which was

designed to preserve the name of a dead relative or to buy back land lost when a relative was forced to sell because of financial or other hardships. The *goel* was expected to look after the helpless members of the family.

This kinsman-redeemer concept teaches us that God understands our family needs. When our lives are disrupted in the family, He feels our loneliness, our loss, our need for companionship. He recognizes how much our identity is drawn from our family ties, how much family security and belonging mean to us. He provided a *goel*, a kinsman for Ruth and Naomi and He provides a kinsman for us. This is the great and lasting message of the book of Ruth—Boaz as *goel* becomes a type of Christ (Cf. Job 19:25).

The work of redeeming us and our inheritance, lost through sin, fell upon Him who is “near of kin” unto us. It was to redeem us that He became our kinsman. Closer than father, mother, brother, friend, or lover is the Lord our Saviour. “Fear not,” He says, “for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 327)

Covered by his garment. Then, as Naomi coaches Ruth in the Israelite law, the day comes when Ruth asks Boaz to perform the service of kinsman-redeemer for herself and Naomi, the remaining family of Elimelech.

In a tender scene at the threshing floor, Boaz awakens with a start. Arousing instinctively to protect his investment, his eyes peer into the darkness. Every sinew of his being is alert. He can feel the presence of someone, but who? Where? Why? When? How? Then he sees her. A woman is lying at his feet!

“Who are you?” he cries out in his surprise as his eyes struggle to recognize the form in the darkness. “It is I, sir—Ruth,” comes the halting response. What relief floods over him! His mind races as fast as his heart. “Please spread your garment over me, for you are our near kinsman.”

How could she have known of the ancient custom, or the rite of the goel? Never mind, these questions could be asked later. With excitement, yet tenderness, he responds to her request. “Do not be afraid,” he assures her. “Surely as the Lord lives I will care for everything as soon as it is light. Lie down until the morning.”

The whole scene is a beautiful one. Watch as Boaz gently spreads his garment over Ruth in the ancient symbol of redemption. In the goel she is safe from all that would harm her. In the goel, her every need is supplied. In the goel, life’s meaning and purpose have been restored. In the goel, she is no longer a foreigner, but a child of Abraham.

So it is with us. “But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. . . . Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:13, 19 NKJV).

At dawn he sends her home with a large supply of grain, another token of his love. Naomi’s comment after Ruth’s report signals the confidence she has in her relative: “Sit still, my daughter, . . . the man will not rest until he has completed the matter today.”

True to her expectation, Boaz summons the required citizens for a legal meeting. It is most interesting how he chooses to present the levirate matter to a man who is actually a nearer relative. Clearly a lover’s mind and heart are engaged in the exchange. At first it appears that the other man will play the part of

the kinsman—until he learns of the obligation to beget children by Ruth. With that he withdraws his interest. It is as if he says, “To meet this obligation would greatly complicate my life. Is there anyway you could care for this obligation?” And, though Scripture doesn’t record it just this way, one can easily imagine Boaz’ response as something like, “Well, if you insist!” And you can see, in your mind’s eye, the twinkle in his eye.

The desire of the great Kinsman. So does Christ, the great Kinsman of the family of God, desire to do for every wounded soul, every soul in crisis. He wants to heal the brokenness, restore the value, bind up hurts, bring peace and hope to the troubled heart. He fulfills the demands of the law so He can take His bride, the Church—which is each of us—to Himself. Then He bestows untold blessings to encourage the soul.

Christ shares this work with us. The encouraging work of Boaz as kinsman describes the work we are to perform for one another as fellow kinsmen in the family of God. What Ruth and Naomi needed was the inner peace, security and assurance of being part of God’s family. If Ruth and Naomi needed God, then God needed Boaz to implement His blessing. God uses human beings to carry out His purposes. God needs the Church to be the kinsman-redeemer in very practical ways for members of His family who are passing through crises today.

I believe the church, when functioning properly can provide healing for those who come. Within the church exists the necessary structure, the philosophical framework, and the power to deal with people and their problems. The power exists in the Person of the Holy Spirit. But the church members must be willing to give up their isolation and total pursuit of material comfort in order to become involved in other people’s lives. This is the only way out of loneliness and into community (Hunter, 1978, p. 56).

Conclusion

Because Naomi had a kinsman, her life was restored (4:14-17). In the end of this story, we find her with her grandson, Obed, the grandfather of David, in whose lineage Christ would be born. No longer is she the shattered, distraught, bitter woman who made her way across the red hills toward Bethlehem. As she smiles down at the face of the little one in her arms, the pain of her past has receded. Her present is full of joy; her future and her family’s future are assured. She is secure in the Redeemer. Her story is our story as the great Kinsman is uplifted in our midst and we become the family of God. Can encouraging, uplifting, life-restoring family—to each other.

Sermon Illumination

1. The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. . . . His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. . . . He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace.

Think of this, children of suffering and sorrow, and rejoice in hope (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 12).

2. It is Satan's work to fill men's hearts with doubt. He leads them to look upon God as a stern judge. He tempts them to sin, and then to regard themselves as too vile to approach their heavenly Father or to excite His pity. The Lord understands all this. Jesus assures His disciples of God's sympathy for them in their needs and weaknesses. Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father's heart (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 356).

3. The Holmes' Life Events Scale (see attached table) measures the potential of various events to produce stress and lead to disease. In a pilot study 93% of all major illnesses were associated with a clustering of life changes whose value totaled at least 150 points annually. Not every major life change or crisis produced illness, but several added together could do so. Effects were worse if the individual attributed the cause of the loss to himself.

150 - 199 points annually	37% became ill
200 - 299 points annually	51% became ill
300+ points annually	79% became ill

(Watts, 1976, p. 50.)

4. Brenda Hunter chronicles her life after her husband, a young doctor whom she had helped to get through medical school, announced he was leaving her for a young nurse at the hospital. She was overcome with feelings of low self-worth, rejection, and loneliness. She faced financial impossibilities, children with emotional and physical needs demanding more attention than a single parent could readily give. She writes of the desperation of going to a restaurant to eat, just so she could sit in a room full of people, hoping the waitress would act like she cared, perhaps brush her arm as she passed. She tells of the dilemma of trying to meet the children's needs while she had so many unfulfilled needs of her own, of the drain of being totally responsible for everything—the house, the job, the kids, the car, the food, and on and on.

Then she recalls how she found a very unique and special Christian group in whose midst her healing began. It was one of the L'Abri groups founded near London by Francis Shaeffer, the renowned Swiss philosopher and theologian. There she found Christians that delighted in each other's company—sharing meals, concerns, projects of mutual interest. It was a church where members shared one another's hopes and dreams as well as pain, impoverished finances, problems with children, and important life decisions.

The L'Abri Christians responded in very practical ways with financial help, friendship, a meal, an afternoon of baby sitting. They seemed to know just when it was most needed. One morning, during a time of particular despair, she responded to a call at the door of her room in the hotel where she and her two small daughters were staying. Of this occasion she writes, "A tall, attractive woman said, 'Hello, I've come to take you to my house for breakfast.' She leaned down to talk to the two little girls peering up at her. 'Do you like Cornflakes?' Lynn and Kathy nodded, and we were soon on our way to Katie's home. Little did I know that dear Katie was giving me the first of many rides in her gray car. She would become one of my closest friends."

"It was not until I arrived at L'Abri that I received something I desperately needed and had seldom found in the human arena: real acceptance for who I was. At L'Abri I had no credentials to commend me; no longer a doctor's wife, I was simply Brenda. For one of the few times in my adult life it was, thank God, enough to be Brenda" (Hunter, 1978, pp. 50, 52).

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HOLMES' LIFE EVENTS SCALE

<u>Life Event</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Life Event</u>	<u>Value</u>
Death of spouse.....	100	Change in responsibilities at work	29
Divorce.....	73	Son or daughter leaving home.....	29
Marital separation	65	Trouble with in-laws	29
Jail term.....	63	Outstanding personal achievement.....	28
Death of close family member	63	Wife begins or stops work.....	26
Personal injury or illness.....	53	Begin or end school.....	26
Marriage.....	50	Change in living conditions.....	25
Fired at work.....	47	Revision of personal habits	24
Marital reconciliation.....	45	Trouble with boss.....	23
Retirement.....	45	Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in health of family member.....	44	Change in residence	20
Pregnancy.....	40	Change in schools.....	20
Sexual difficulties	39	Change in recreation.....	19
Gain of new family member	39	Change in church activities	19
Business readjustment.....	39	Change in social activities.....	18
Change in financial state.....	38	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000	17
Death of a close friend	37	Change in sleeping habits.....	16
Change to different line of work.....	36	Change in number of family get-togethers.....	15
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	Change in eating habits	15
Mortgage over \$10,000.....	31	Vacation	13
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	Christmas.....	12
		Minor violations of the law	11

Source: T. J. Holmes and R. H. Rahe, "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale." *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 1967.

Point values were assigned to various events in a person's life, depending on how often, and in what proportion, they accompanied an illness. In a pilot study 93 percent of all major illnesses were associated with a clustering of life changes whose value totaled at least 150 points annually. Not every major life change or crisis produced illness, but several of them together could add up to do so. Of persons with life changes totaling 150-199 points, 37 percent had an illness. When changes totaled 200-299, it was 51 percent; over 300 points, 79 percent became ill. (Virginia Watts, *The Single Parent*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976. p. 50)

Loneliness In Crisis

by Larry Yeagley

I learned to ride my sister's bicycle when I was eight. I leaned it against the wooden milk can platform located at the edge of the farm lane. I turned the left pedal to the up position, climbed to the seat, then pushed myself and the bicycle forward. The lane was straight and level, which meant I didn't have to negotiate curves and hills. Keeping my balance was my only focus. When I wanted to dismount, I slowly coasted to the side of the platform, slammed on the brakes, and leaned the bicycle against the platform. Eventually I learned to start and stop without the aid of the platform. Keeping my balance became almost second nature.

When I went to work for a neighboring farmer, I decided to ride the bicycle to his tomato field. That necessitated taking a blacktop road with a steep hill, a curve, and a one-lane railroad underpass. As I descended the hill I quickly realized that my riding skills did not match the new terrain. Fear gripped me as I approached the curve at a high speed. My front wheel hit loose gravel. I struggled to keep my balance, but I flew over the handlebar and the bicycle plunged into the ditch. My knees were bloody and the bicycle fenders were badly bent. I had experienced a crisis.

Crisis: Prolonged Loss of Equilibrium

Douglas A. Puryear, in his book *Helping People in Crisis* (1979), shows how rapid, displeasing, and undesired changes in a family or in the life of an individual are a threat to balance

or equilibrium. If the usual skills and strategies for handling conflict or change do not resolve the problem and restore equilibrium, a crisis may begin. Crisis is the result of not being able to quickly counteract the changes and conflicts. A crisis can be triggered by a major situation or event as well as by a relatively minor situation or event that is added to an already heavy load.

Another way of expressing *equilibrium* is a *sense of security*. When I was losing my balance on the bicycle, my sense of security was drastically jeopardized.

An individual's sense of security, according to Puryear, depends on his or her relationships with others. These relationships help an individual to meet four basic emotional needs:

- Relatedness to others.
- Support from others.
- A sense of personal separateness and identity.
- Self-esteem derived through input from others.

How loneliness affects crisis resolution. All four of these needs are poorly met when a person is lonely. The sense of security is fragile. Loneliness is a signal that there is a relationship deficiency. It is understandable, then, that loneliness is a real causal factor in poor crisis resolution and also a contributing factor in the genesis of crisis.

In their book *Crisis Intervention: Theory and Methodology* (1974), D. C. Aquilera and J. M. Messick state that a problem will not lead to a crisis unless there are deficiencies in one or more of the following balancing factors: adequate perception (how the problem is viewed), adequate network (a group of close relationships to lend support), adequate coping mechanisms. A lonely person's inadequate network is against him or her before a problem arises. It makes it difficult to prevent or to resolve a crisis when one does arise.

Puryear lists eight principles of crisis intervention: (1) immediate intervention, (2) action, (3) limited goal, (4) hope and expectations, (5) support, (6) focused problem solving, (7) self-image, and (8) self-reliance. The fifth principle is difficult to carry out because the lonely person has little or no social support in place before a potential crisis-producing problem arises. The helping person will need to become a primary, temporary support until an adequate social support network can be developed. The seventh principle presents a challenge for the helping person because a social network is indispensable to the development of a healthy self-image. Lonely people frequently have a faulty self-image due to relationship deficiency.

Even more challenging is the research finding that people in crisis will resolve it in some way, usually in no more than six weeks after the crisis begins. The newly-acquired equilibrium may be adequate and healthy or inadequate and unhealthy. A lonely person is very likely to arrive at an unhealthy equilibrium because support is seldom present.

Opportunity. Crisis is a time when helpers have an open door to help facilitate change. People in crisis are more accessible and the least defensive. They have tried many things without success. Now they are open to new strategies. Now is the time to make a life-changing impact on the family and on individuals.

This brief look at crisis and crisis intervention theory points out the need to understand loneliness and its treatment.

Loneliness

Hunger in famine proportions. In their fascinating book *In Search of Intimacy* (1982), Carin Rubenstein and Phillip Shaver call loneliness a severe hunger in famine proportions. They see it as a sign of societal failure to meet the psychological and social needs of people. Their use of the word *hunger* intrigues me because ordinary hunger signals us that it is time to take nutrition. It is healthy. On the other hand, hunger associated with starvation holds a consequence of far greater magnitude. If conditions do not allow access to nutrition, hunger is simply an omen of death.

Dr. James J. Lynch, professor of psychosomatic medicine at the University of Maryland Medical School at the time of this writing, agrees with this suggestion of mortality rate increase. His books *The Broken Heart* (1977) and *The Language of the Heart* (1985) report excellent research that identifies loneliness as the main risk factor in premature death from all causes. Lynch attributes the malignancy of loneliness to a lack of dialogue. "In its most general meaning, dialogue consists of reciprocal communication between two or more living creatures. It involves the sharing of thoughts, physical sensations, ideas, ideals, hopes, and feelings. In sum, dialogue involves the reciprocal sharing of any and all of life experiences" (Lynch, 1977, p. 217). He goes on to state that trust and commitment are vital to the existence and health of dialogue. Dialogue can be verbal, but it is largely non-verbal. When commitment is broken, the nature of dialogue changes, trust deteriorates, and eventually the relationship dies. When a person has no relationships in which true dialogue occurs, his or her basic human needs are unmet, and loneliness begins its sinister work.

Other definitions of loneliness are based upon various models developed by psychologists. One model shows how being deprived of a community and the broad spectrum of intimacy experienced in that community causes loneliness. Without adequate community and life-enriching intimacy, a person is left to experience loneliness. Another model demonstrates that loneliness results when there is a gap between expectations and reality. The greater the gap, the deeper the loneliness.

Existential loneliness. A third model I have labeled the *existential* model. This model shows that in our rebellious world people experience core loneliness because of our alienation from God, others, self, and the natural world. Sin triggered this alienation. The first human family hid from God, blamed each other for the tragedy of losing a perfect home, became focused on pleasing self, and spread over the land to abuse the gifts of the natural world. As this alienation goes unchecked, loneliness prevents God's children from accomplishing the purposes for which they were created. All of us confront this core loneliness, just as we all are exposed to various disease processes. Loneliness is not an indictment of personal weakness or spiritual failure. It has identifiable causes. With proper intervention a person can get beyond it (Yeagley, 1998).

Societal Causes of Loneliness

- **Promotion of independence and self-reliance.** These qualities are often lauded as an excellent way of making advancements and gaining success. Teamwork seems to have been replaced by individual initiative.

- **Competition.** It begins in preschool and reaches to the home, the workplace, the church, and recreation. Paul Tournier strongly suggests that it makes us enemies instead of friends. Loneliness is the result.

- **Segregation of age groups.** Children spend most of the day with peers. Elderly people leave families for nursing homes and senior

daycare. This deprivation of transgenerational relationships isolates individuals.

- **Suburban sprawl.** For those who can afford them, homes on large country lots remove us from close neighbors and good conversation over the backyard fence.

- **Home entertainment.** Fun at local gathering places has been superseded by computer and video thrillers that are experienced in privacy.

- **Urban crime.** City people avoid unnecessary interaction and stay behind locked doors.

- **Mobility.** Frequent moves shrink support systems.

- **Latchkey children.** Long hours separated from parents is bound to produce loneliness in children and teens.

- **Easy divorce.** Staying and working things out is viewed as being old-fashioned. Personal freedom is touted as healthy. Assuming responsibility for another person and loyally upholding a commitment is not a top priority in the minds of many counselors. Rejection and loneliness rise with the divorce rate.

- **Isolation.** Many factors contribute to the isolation of individuals and families. For example, single parents are too busy for personal development and the development of a support system. Illness sometimes confines a person to the home and prevents socialization.

Personal Deficit Causes of Loneliness

- Lack of social skills
- A retiring nature
- Antisocial behaviors that repulse others
- Narrow range of interests
- Illness that isolates
- Emotional problems
- Unrealistic expectations

Helping the Lonely Person

Support. Since loneliness signals a relationship deficit, the helping person needs to understand that he or she must become a supporting friend to the individual or to the family for an undesignated period of time. It is not appropriate to worry about over-dependency.

The helper's role is to develop a bond and a trust level that will facilitate dialogue. The lonely person will need to lean on the helper until other people enter the support network. Once bonding happens, the helper can assist in widening the support system. This is a long, slow process. Many attempts will be made. Many failures will happen, but the helper must not give up.

I'd like to broaden the term *helper*. Our society has pretty much assumed that a family or person who experiences loneliness must see a counselor. That may be necessary for some, but counselors cannot provide full support for a lonely person for an undetermined period of time, if for no other reason than insufficient insurance coverage. I am suggesting that the term *helper* encompasses the entire church family.

The church often puts most of its energy into church growth. If care is not taken, nurture and caring are in short supply. I do not believe we violate the gospel commission to consider not only how many people we will bring in but also how we will care for them over a lifetime. To do less is irresponsible.

When I personally develop a relationship with a lonely person, I gradually bring other church members into that person's world. I can't meet a person's total needs, so I recruit others to engage in the life of the person. I am acquainted with churches that hire counselors as part of the pastoral staff. These counselors have a goal of engaging the entire congregation in helping roles. Some Christian counselors have even closed their private practices to spend most of their time training members to minister to people such as the lonely. In Seventh-day Adventist churches,

family life coordinators can arrange for some of this training.

Education. Understanding loneliness and acknowledging loneliness are the first big steps toward getting beyond it. The church can provide educational programs designed to help people prevent or get beyond loneliness. I am acquainted with two large churches in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas region where as many as 30 different classes are being held each week. The doors are open every day except Monday. Small churches cannot do this, but I have pastored two small churches in the last 10 years where I held at least 4 classes each year. The pastor can engage other professionals to conduct the classes. Here are a few suggestions for classes:

- *Loneliness 101.* This class defines loneliness, summarize the causes, and look at solutions. Publicity for the class needs to state that attendance does not mean you are lonely. I mention this because I have taught this class without this disclaimer. Some of the attendees wanted me to close the door to the hall so a person passing by would not think them lonely.
- *Principles of Communicating in Conversation.* This class explores the levels of communication, emphasizes topics that evoke conversation, shows how much and when to disclose yourself to another person and how to read body language.
- *Building Self-esteem.* This class is not about selfism, but about a Scriptural way of determining your worth as a child of God. It deals with negative self-talk that is destructive and emphasizes the role of success and achievement in building a healthy self-image. Each student is helped to evaluate assets, liabilities, and goals.
- *Assertiveness Training.* This is not *aggressiveness* training, rather it teaches how

- to treat others with respect and how to protect your own sense of dignity. Attendees will learn how to agree and disagree, how to compliment and receive compliments, and how to handle criticism constructively.
- *Creative Writing*. Lonely people often express themselves in writing with a freedom they do not have in conversation. This class teaches the principles of expression in writing and moves into sharing that writing with others.
- *Principles of Conflict Resolution*. This class emphasizes the art of breaking problems into manageable pieces, followed by organizing and prioritizing action toward a solution.
- *Personal Growth Support Group*. This is a time-limited program that engages a small group in helping one another with areas that inhibit personal growth. Areas such as inferiority feelings, fear of failure, loneliness, difficulty in friendship formation, etc.
- *Lonely Though Married*. This class identifies reasons for loneliness in marriage and explores ways to eliminate it.

First Aid for the Lonely

In addition to finding some good classes that will move a person through loneliness, you might suggest some of these home remedies:

- Admit that you are lonely.
- Keep a journal in which you jot down times of the day when you were especially lonely. Record what you think were triggers to that loneliness.
- After two weeks or so of journaling, review what you have written. Look for the key to your times of loneliness.
- Since loneliness is relationship deficiency, strive to engage in at least one social activity per week.
- Force yourself to engage in that activity whether you feel like it or not. It is easier to act your way into a new way of feeling than it is to feel your way into a new way of acting.
- Many lonely people are sedentary. Push yourself to engage in one active pursuit each day whether you feel like it or not. This could be exercising at a fitness center where you are in touch with people or it could be arranging to walk at the mall with a friend. I ride a bike around my country home. When I see people I stop and talk.
- Try to figure out what societal factors have contributed to your loneliness. Give yourself permission to sabotage them. If you are too independent, decide to ask another person to do something for you. I used to change the oil in our family car, but that was too solitary. Today I went to the Ford garage for an oil change. I had fun chatting with a salesman as he showed me the latest Mercury sports car. I swapped stories with a man in the waiting room about funny things that have happened to us as we have traveled. Depending on the Ford mechanic for an oil change opened doors to relationships and fun conversation.
- Ask a pastor or a relative to help you change your perception of your situation. Decide that you will not allow loneliness to do something to you, but that you will decide what to do with loneliness.
- Build a simple and regular schedule for yourself. Determine that life will not just happen or “unfold” spontaneously.
- Spend half an hour each day planning to do something nice for another person, even though you don’t know that person very well. I

am going to a surgeon for minor surgery next week. At the time of my first visit I overheard the office staff talking about cookies. My wife offered to make two dozen cookies for me to take with me the day of the surgery. What an ice breaker!

Ideas for Using this Material in a Seminar

The material could be condensed into a single 90-minute time period or you could profitably use up to five 90-minute sessions, perhaps meeting once per week. For the condensed version I would suggest that participants be given a copy of *How to Get Beyond Loneliness* by Larry Yeagley (1998) so that they have adequate time to read it before the seminar. This book defines various models of loneliness. It examines the psycho-social-spiritual dimensions of loneliness. Many alternatives are offered.

A five-week seminar would be enhanced by giving participants the additional book, *Why Be Lonely?* by Les Carter, Paul D. Meier, and Frank B. Minirth (1982). This book spells out how loneliness affects various age groups in a variety of loss and change situations. It is a good blend of spiritual and psychological factors.

Any seminar is dull without group interaction. Build group interaction into your plans. Here are a few discussion starters:

- Think of a time when you were lonely during a crisis. What helped you? What did you wish for? What did not help you?
- How can our church foster dialogue in the life of the members?

- Of all the classes under the education section of this seminar, which would help you the most? Why? What classes would you add? What can your group do to get some classes started?

- The book *How to Get Beyond Loneliness* (Yeagley, 1998) refers to breaking the alienation with God, others, self, and nature. Think about your own experience with loneliness. How did these types of alienation impact your experience?

- Did you or any other person attribute your loneliness to a lack of spirituality? How would you make a case for the idea that experiencing loneliness is not a good barometer for judging the state of a person's relationship with God?

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Creative Conflict Resolution

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Conflict is inevitable in close relationships. In the intimacy of family living, we inevitably brush against the boundaries of one another's personal space which we must learn to respect. Family members differ in temperament, in habit, in lifestyle, in point of view, perhaps even in fundamental values. The way each one communicates and deals with conflict also varies. Sometimes, we are able to tolerate a certain degree of dissimilarity. However, it is not unusual for married couples and families to find themselves uncomfortable with the differences which they encounter in one another. Discomfort unresolved will likely heat up into anger. Anger unresolved will likely lead to conflict. That we have such differences, discomfort, anger and conflict is less important, however, than how we deal with the issues that arise.

Many are at a loss for how to resolve conflict, how to work through a problem situation, without damaging relationships. Fear of conflict or denial that it exists may leave us unable to face conflict squarely. Others simply are uncertain how to confront it constructively. One man reported that he knew his parents had conflicts. He had observed that whenever they found themselves in conflict, they always went to their bedroom and shut the door. When they came out, the conflict was seemingly resolved. The time came when he married and he and his wife had their first real quarrel. Not knowing what else to do, he asked her to come with him into their bedroom. He shut the door. Only then did he realize that he had not the slightest idea what to do next! No one had ever helped him to understand what went on behind the closed door!

Common Ways of Dealing with Conflict

Jack and Judy Balswick, in their book *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (1989), discuss five common ways of dealing with conflict. Each style has both advantages and disadvantages and, depending on the situation, may be more or less appropriate.

Withdraw. Some individuals avoid conflict and withdraw from the relationship when conflict arises. They may leave the room, leave the house, or otherwise avoid the discussion. The withdrawal pattern is characterized by low cooperation and low assertiveness. Individuals find it difficult to communicate their own needs or to listen to the needs of others. In its favor, withdrawal allows time for reflection on issues. It may be an appropriate style when the issue is one of low priority. It is inappropriate when it signals a disinterest or lack of mutual concern in the relationship.

Yield. Other individuals accommodate and prefer to yield or submit rather than confront the issue. In this style, there is an elevated sense of cooperation and concern for others, but individuals still have difficulty communicating their own needs and perspective. There is some concern for the relationship, but little concern for self. Yielding may be appropriate when the issue is far more important to one family member than to the others, when the issue threatens a relationship, or when one chooses to put another's concerns ahead of one's own. It is inappropriate when it takes the form of manipulation or is done out of fear of rejection or a need to be liked. Yielding is not appropriate when to do so is not in the other's best interest.

Win. Still others compete to get the upper hand. In this style, assertiveness is high, cooperation is low. Concern for one's own needs and desires is high, but there is less concern for the relationship and very little concern for the needs and wishes of others. This style may occasionally be appropriate when a significant principle must be upheld. However, because it may cause conflict to escalate or cause issues to degenerate to personal rather than principled levels, it is usually inappropriate. Saving face is not a valid reason for using this style.

Compromise. Some try to meet halfway or to negotiate a "you give a little and I'll give a little" resolution. Here there is moderate cooperation, moderate personal assertiveness and a moderate degree of concern for all involved. Compromise may be appropriate when there is inadequate time to collaborate, when issues relate to matters of little consequence, or when no Christian values are involved. It is clearly inappropriate when it leaves family members dissatisfied.

Collaborate. As indicated, there may be circumstances when each of the preceding styles of conflict management may be useful. However, they do not usually prove adequate over the long term. A fifth style usually proves the most satisfactory. It is the *collaborative* style, in which conflict is resolved in ways that take the needs of all concerned into consideration. It seeks a solution which leaves everyone feeling understood and valued.

Steps in Collaborative Conflict Resolution

Collaborative conflict resolution rests on a foundation of mutual respect in marriage and family relationships. For Christians, the active principle in such relationships is *agape* love which is self-giving while at the same time self-respecting: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3, 4). Such love and unconditional regard for one's partner or fellow family member respects the other's needs as well as one's own and is committed to finding a creative solution that leaves everyone comfortable and relationships intact. This style of conflict resolution presupposes that individuals have some skills in communication and listening as well as processing anger. It also requires an investment of time, effort and emotional energy, along with patience and trust that the outcome of the process will benefit everyone.

Step one: Seek to resolve concerns, grievances and potential conflict situations as they occur, without bringing up the past. Accumulating grievances complicates problem-solving. Scripture counsels, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry . . ." (Eph. 4:26). Of course, it may not always be possible to resolve anger or conflict issues in a given day. But the principle is sound: Do not postpone dealing with your feelings and issues. One good businesswoman, who is also wise about relationships, thinks of it as "keeping short accounts." If circumstances prevent you from working on the problem immediately, then agree upon a time when you will. Keep your commitment. Many times, after the emotion has drained away with the passing of time, it is tempting to not bring up painful issues again. However, addressing the problem at a time other than during the moment of crisis is often preferable, since it allows for more objectivity as you work toward resolution.

Stay focused on the concern at hand. The temptation may be strong to bring up other unresolved issues or to focus on your failure to resolve similar concerns in the past. Determine to work on that which is current in the relationship. If there is a sense that the present cannot be addressed without clearing up some unresolved conflicts from the past, then agree on a time when the past issues can be revisited and attended to. Some unresolved conflicts may be of such a nature that a qualified professional will be needed to help you to move forward.

Step two: Use your communication skills to listen and share. Attack the problem, not your partner. Concentrate on what your partner is saying. Listen, not only to the words which are being said but also to the feelings which are being conveyed. Focus on what is being shared rather than on what you want to say next. Your partner needs affirmation that you have heard them. A verbal response with a summary of the thoughts and feelings being expressed is preferable. “I hear you saying . . .” can be a useful phrase in formulating your summary response, especially while you are developing this reflective listening skill.

Allow your partner to express his or her thoughts and feelings as completely as they wish without interrupting. You may need to ask them to pause for you to summarize the thoughts and feelings you have heard, to make sure you have an accurate understanding of the message they have conveyed so far. The key is for you to remember that it is inappropriate for you to share thoughts and feelings of your own at this point. There will be a time for that later. After each summary, an invitation like, “Is there anything more?” or “I’m interested in hearing more about that” encourages further sharing. When your partner has shared his or her complete thought, ask, “May I share what I’m thinking and feeling?” Avoid “you” messages, with phrases like “you always . . .” or “if only you would . . .” or “I think that you . . .,” which run the risk of being perceived as an attack, creating defensiveness and closing down communication.

Use “I” statements to focus on the impact of the issue upon you personally. A simple formula for an “I” statement includes (a) a description of a behavior or a situation that is problematic, (b) your feelings and (c) the tangible effect on you. “When (*identify the problematic behavior which happens without naming or blaming anyone*), I feel (*upset, angry, frustrated, concerned, or whatever the feeling may be*) because (*state the effect it has on you*).” Remember that the way you listen and share are practical demonstrations of your agape love.

What to do with anger. Anger usually occurs when feelings like hurt, disappointment or frustration go unexpressed. Usually we feel angry when we sense someone is attacking us, minimizing us, taking us for granted, manipulating us, or controlling our lives. Postponing the sharing of feelings may result in *vented* anger or anger that is *suppressed*. With vented or suppressed anger there is a high risk for damage to interpersonal relationships.

Vented anger may discharge feelings and provide a quick, temporary release for tortured emotions, but it is detrimental and an ineffective means of winning the support and cooperation of another. It has a high risk of damaging relationships. Suppressed anger has detrimental effects upon health, including greater incidence of heart disease, cancer, accidents, suicide and earlier age of death (Oliver & Wright, 1992). Suppressed anger almost always leads at the very least to low-key hostility in relationships.

While anger is our enemy when it is vented or suppressed, it can become our friend when it is *processed*. Processing anger involves several steps:

- *Acknowledge the emotion.* Give others as well as yourself permission to be angry and to report this anger immediately. Agree *never* to attack, blame, put down, or belittle each other for acknowledging the feeling.
- *Share in a non-problem time.* Allow sufficient time for emotions to calm down. Then revisit the issues or events which stimulated the anger and discuss them.

- *Listen for feelings.* Listen and accept one another, even though the feelings expressed may be difficult to hear. Processing anger gets us back to primary emotions such as the fear, hurt, and frustration that gave rise to the anger. By getting behind the anger we can clear up misunderstandings, clarify expectations, and find better ways of meeting one another's needs, respecting boundaries and preserving each other's dignity and worth.

Step three: Identify the needs of each person involved in the conflict. *Need* refers to a compelling emotional or psychological concern which underlies the problem that is creating the immediate conflict. The presenting concerns, the immediate needs that seemed to precipitate the crisis or conflict situation, are but a manifestation of the internal needs of the persons involved, such as needs for security, acceptance, belonging, or fulfillment. At this step in the problem-solving process, it is important to discover the needs that lie behind the conflict. David Augsburger suggests, "Try on your brother's skin. Listen until you hear his point of view. Then get inside it. See how it fits for size. See how it feels to be there where he or she is. See what love is asking you to do" (Augsburger, 1980, pp. 119, 120).

Consider this family situation: *Martha and John are married and have two school-age children. Martha works part-time during the children's school hours. John works a factory shift from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Martha is one of the strong alto voices in the church choir which is preparing for a special concert. After several evening choir rehearsals for which childcare arrangements have been especially difficult, Martha learns only one day in advance that yet another extra rehearsal is being planned for the following evening. Martha asks John if he could take a vacation day from work to care for the children while she attends the choir rehearsal. He has occasionally done this before when she had an evening appointment at the church. However, company policy regarding time off requires a minimum of 48 hours notice. Further, John believes the choir has had sufficient rehearsals, that Martha knows her part well, and that the extra time in preparation is not really necessary.*

How might we analyze this situation in terms of needs? What are the needs of each family member? At one level, the needs are obvious: John needs to go to work, Martha needs to attend the choir rehearsal and, perhaps most importantly, the children need supervision and childcare. These are the *presenting* needs or concerns that set up the conflict situation. However, when Martha and John consider their needs at a deeper level, they might come up with a list that looks like this:

Martha's needs.

- To be a responsible member of the choir, i.e., to be a dependable person who keeps commitments.
- To know that their children are well-cared for, i.e., to be a responsible parent.
- To be with her choir friends, i.e., to be sociable and have some fulfillment of her social needs.
- To learn her part in context with the others, i.e., to not be embarrassed by lack of information about last-minute changes and instructions about the performance.
- To have her talents and choice of extracurricular activity validated and affirmed, i.e., to have a sense of fulfillment.

John's needs.

- To avoid making out-of-policy requests for special exceptions, i.e., to be a steady, dependable employee who keeps commitments.
- To avert any negative evaluation of his performance that might jeopardize his job, i.e., to have a sense of fulfillment from work and be a good provider for his family.
- To have the family schedule and the children's lives uninterrupted, especially given his difficult work hours and absence from the home in the evening, i.e., to have a sense of adequacy as a parent.
- To spend his vacation time in ways that are more personally satisfying, i.e., to have a sense of personal autonomy.

Step four: Accommodate the other's needs if it is possible to do so without jeopardizing your own needs. Each person should then consider: Can the other's needs be accommodated? Often the exercise of honestly identifying each other's deeper needs will lead to an early resolution of the conflict. The discovery of what is really being felt inside by another person can create a climate of understanding and the desire to give the gift of accommodation. Accommodation is different from yielding. Yielding involves surrendering without confronting the issues and identifying needs. If either person feels as if yielding is taking place, then steps two and three may need to be repeated and the conflict resolution sequence continued.

Step five: Generate alternative possibilities which might provide a solution. "In your association with others, put yourself in their place. Enter into their feelings, their difficulties, their disappointments, their joys, and their sorrow. Identify yourself with them, and then do to them as, were you to exchange places with them, you would wish them to deal with you" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 134).

Once you have a sense of each other's needs and feelings, explore as many alternatives as possible. Look at every possibility you can think of to solve the problem. Generate as many ideas as you can which might provide a solution. Writing these down may help. Be creative. To help stimulate your creativity, try setting a goal of producing at least twenty alternatives. Some alternatives may seem rather far-fetched, but do not evaluate them at all at this point. What appears at first to be outlandish or implausible may later become an integral part of your creative solution. Cooperate together in this brainstorming phase, with each person contributing to the list of possibilities.

In generating alternatives, well-known specialist in communication and conflict resolution Sherrod Miller (Miller, Miller, Nunnally & Wackman, 1991) suggests, "Think openly, small, and positively. Rather than trying to visualize one big solution, generate a diverse list of small positive actions you can actually take as a next step" (p. 96).

Sometimes you may find it useful to set your expectations for improvement in terms of a percentage figure. For example, if you could achieve twenty percent improvement in the situation as a next step, would that be satisfactory? Without really thinking about it, we often set an unrealistic (one hundred percent) expectation and then feel overwhelmed or discouraged when we try to bring about a gigantic solution. (p. 97)

A beginning list of Martha's and John's alternative possibilities might look something like this:

1. Martha could make the decision to forego choir practice.

2. John could make the decision to stay home and care for the children, regardless of consequences.
3. Martha could request the choir director to cancel the performance or reschedule it.
4. John could request the choir director to cancel the performance or reschedule it.
5. Martha could invite the choir to have its rehearsal in her home.
6. John could work part of his shift and leave work early to care for the children.
7. Martha could ask a choir friend to record the rehearsal on an audio cassette, so she can hear the others singing her part and also be informed regarding any special instructions.
8. John could report to his employer that he is ill and take sick leave from work.
9. Martha could explain the situation of the unexpected choir rehearsal to John's employer and ask for John to have the time off.
10. Though they do not like to take the children out of their home on school nights, Martha could take them to choir practice with her.
11. They could fly the children to one of their parents' homes for a couple of days.
12. They could fly one of the grandmothers to come and stay for a few days and be with the children at home while the parents are out.
13. They could ask a friend who has children of similar age to care for their children during the evening. The friend could come to their home or Martha could drop the kids off on her way to choir practice and pick them up afterward.
14. Although they had not done so before, they could ask one of the children's Sabbath School teachers—a single woman who is not in the church choir—to come to their home and stay with the children.

Step six: Evaluate your possibilities. Discard any that are unacceptable to either of you. Pick one or combine several possibilities to produce a solution that all concerned can be happy with. It may be that, in reviewing the possibilities, you will discover additional needs you or your partner are experiencing that did not get expressed in step three. Now that these needs have come to the surface, you may wish to generate additional alternatives which take them into consideration.

In real life, after hearing what choir practice meant to Martha, John decided that she should go. After hearing John's concerns, Martha decided that he should not be called upon again to use his vacation time in this way. John discarded # 8 as dishonest. Several other ideas were unworkable or impractical for one reason or another. Flying the children to their parents' homes was far-fetched, as was paying the expense of airline tickets for an unscheduled trip for grandma. They decided that their value of having the children home every school night may not need to be as rigid as it had been. They considered #10, but Martha did not think she could concentrate well on the rehearsal if the children accompanied her. They gave their children the choice of options #13 or #14. The children chose the option of going to their friends' home while their mother was at choir rehearsal.

Step seven: Pray together. Conflict creates stress, at the very least, and may result in the wounding of one another's spirits. Sharing our feelings deeply is often difficult and emotionally exhausting. Resolving conflict with a mutually acceptable solution restores outward peace, but, depending on the nature of the conflict, healing may take longer. Christians are not left to work out or to live out solutions to life's problems by human power alone. Prayer links us with God and with each other. In your prayer, pray for yourself; pray for the one(s) involved with you in the conflict resolution; pray for your relationship and about the problem you are working out. Thank God for the wisdom He imparts and the power He supplies for us to dwell in harmony in our homes.

Step eight: Reassess the solution. This final step evaluates the effectiveness of the solution. Plan a time, after the solution has been tested—perhaps a week or two weeks later—to evaluate how it worked or is working. You may decide to abandon your solution and start over, to modify it, or to retain it. Growth that has taken place between you may have changed the dynamics of your situation so that the issue is no longer a problem. “If your action is effective, you will feel something positive. When the outcome is pleasing, celebrate! Be sure to give your partner positive feedback for his or her contribution to the solution as well” (Miller, Miller, Nunnally & Wackman, 1991).

In Summary

Every situation of conflict or potential conflict can be a time of growth together. Remember, “strong families are not those which never experience conflict, but rather those which successfully manage conflict when it does arise” (Balswick and Balswick, 1989, p. 211). As couples and families work through the collaborative process, they will steadily improve in their ability to clarify their needs for each other. They will discover that surface needs, the concerns of the moment that seem to create the conflict, are but manifestations of deeper emotional and psychological needs.

Working through a conflict situation requires patience, honesty and a willingness to spend the required time. Conflict can often be avoided by letting your partner know of your needs as soon as possible. Plan for regular times together to talk over potential problem areas and to reveal your needs and feelings to each other. Determine that the relationship you share is worth the time it takes to work out a solution that leaves you both comfortable and close together.

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Facing the Family Crisis of Professional Travel

by Elaine and Willie Oliver

Professional travel has become a way of life for many families today. Recent figures show there are more than 40 million people who travel for work each year in the United States. In spite of the arrival of advanced communication technologies such as e-mail, teleconferences, video-conferences, the Internet and others, there is evidence that overall business travel will actually continue to increase instead of decrease.

Business travel has a profound impact on marriage and family. Many marriages become strained and parents and children become disconnected. A whole gamut of negative emotions are felt by the spouse and family left at home, as well as by the traveling person, including bitterness, resentment, loneliness, abandonment, anxiety, guilt and fear. If these emotions are not handled appropriately, the stress could become so great as to cause a breakdown of family relations and the demise of some marriages.

However, we believe that marriages and families can remain close in spite of the tug of professional travel pulling them apart. For many, it will require first coming to terms with the reality of professional travel as one aspect, large though it may be, of their family life. With dedicated commitment, creativity, extravagant efforts in communication, and a strong faith in God, it is possible for families to triumph in this crisis.

Just a word for those very ambitious, career-oriented people who inadvertently choose work over family: it's time to re-prioritize. Although the rewards may seem worth it, unconsciously neglecting spouse and family will surely lead you down the road of alienation and divorce.

As Christians in the workplace, whether we work for secular or religious organizations, we need to be committed to working for change in those organizational structures which are not devoted to keeping families close. Some corporations are taking steps in the right direction. Many are not. Therefore, we have to be the ones to put our families first. We have to pave the road of change, one day at a time, one person at a time, one company at a time, and eventually, we hope, change will be effected widely. Then, instead of business travel increasing, we will see a decline.

Until that time, we must find creative ways to minimize the threat that professional travel poses to our marriages and families. Married couples and families must be willing to identify and address the issues which endanger their marriage and threaten family stability. By doing so, families can begin to find workable ways of accepting travel as one part of their present (hopefully not forever) lifestyle.

This essay looks at some of the recurring themes, issues and emotions encountered by most families faced with the crisis of professional travel. We have isolated a few and then proposed some workable solutions. These solutions, as we have implemented them, have helped us tremendously as we, the authors, have faced the arduous task of balancing professional travel and family life.

Elaine & Willie Oliver write from the Department of Family Ministries, North American Division.

Absence Makes the Heart . . .

Remember the age-old adage which says, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder?” That might apply to the pre-marriage days! But in marriage, with mortgage payments, car payments, babies, and work, the adage might better be revised according to one author: “Absence makes the heart to wander.” But neither of these accurately covers how the spouse feels who remains at home on a regular basis. Elizabeth Hoekstra (1998, p. 61) proposes a third version: “Absence makes the heart to flounder.”

Emotions at Home

The spouse who remains at home is often left feeling like a fish out of water. There is likely vacillation between feeling angry at being left and missing your spouse terribly. Resentment sometimes builds because one has to carry alone all the responsibilities which might usually be shared by both. Although you might be more than capable of handling life temporarily without your spouse, you’d prefer (since you have one—kudos to single parents) not to go it alone. Also, you hate having to admit how desperately you want and need your spouse’s presence in order to function fully in your day to day activities.

Abandonment. Some spouses, usually women, experience feelings of abandonment. Although they rationally accept travel as a necessary part of business, there is still the feeling of being uncared for or rejected. For a man whose wife travels, he may be her biggest supporter, if they are both career-oriented. However, if for some reason she becomes the sole provider for the family, he may be angry at himself for not being able to provide for his family. This may create tension.

Fear. While their loved one is traveling, the spouse and family at home sometimes become stricken with worry and anxiety, which are symptoms of fear. There is a tendency to rehearse the “what-if’s?” There is the fear of being separated permanently, or the fear of intruders, or of being taken advantage of by others. Satan uses fear to play with our minds. He delights in seeing our lack of trust in God’s ability to take care of us. Remember what God says in Isaiah 41:10, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. . .” (RSV).

Loneliness. Most of us, especially if we are married with children, welcome some time alone. However, feeling lonely is a totally different thing. With loneliness, a sense of desertion replaces welcome solitude. If you normally enjoy your spouse’s company, particularly in the evenings and on weekends, then you will miss his or her presence. What can easily happen is that loneliness can lead to resentment, then anger. What a vicious cycle of emotions! It is helpful to have a supportive network of friends whom you can talk to on the phone or visit. Friends can provide some companionship during the absence. However, try to strike a balance. Don’t ever allow supportive friends to replace your spouse.

Helplessness, frustration and resentment. All too often when one spouse is traveling, things at home begin to fall apart. You find yourself locked out—of your house, the car, or the office. One child gets sick while the other needs to be at soccer or a music lesson. Some large household appliance breaks down and the repair cost seems to be inflated—a “woman’s” price. Feelings of helplessness creep in; frustration fills every bone of your body. Resentment builds because you think that while you are at home trying to cope with all these issues, your spouse is living the good life. Resentment soon leads to bitterness, a deeply embedded emotion that is extremely difficult to eliminate.

Feelings of inadequacy can be common among men who stay home when a wife travels. They may feel they are not meeting society’s standard of how a man should take care of his family. A man may feel

he doesn't measure up and his feelings of masculinity may be undermined. There may also be some frustration at not being able to meet the emotional needs of the children.

Anger. All of the above are primary emotions which lead to anger. It is natural for the spouse remaining at home to feel angry. It just seems as though the one traveling is going off to have a grand old time, especially if they are packing golf clubs and swimsuits or trunks. There are no beds to make, no meals to cook, no children to chauffeur around. They eat out every night; there is a maid to pick up wet towels and make the bed. Somehow, it sounds too appealing to be hard work!

It can be really helpful for family members to examine the emotions which become exposed as they anticipate a trip and the feelings they have while the person is traveling. If we are able to identify and verbalize the emotions we're feeling, it helps to lessen the negative feelings which lead to anger.

Emotions on the Road

It's interesting to note that the traveling person often experiences some of the same emotions as those who remain at home. For men and women, guilt and fear are probably high on the list. The traveling person fears they won't return home, or fears something may happen to the family while he or she is on the road. Guilt follows right behind fear. There's guilt about leaving spouse and children, guilt about missing special programs and daily happenings in the children's lives. The guilt is deepened when you hear reports of car keys being locked inside the car, sick children, faulty appliances, the burden of mutual commitments being borne by one alone, and a totally exhausted spouse.

Loneliness is also very high on the list of emotions. Eating out alone, going back to an empty hotel room, long layovers in airports—all lend themselves to really missing your spouse and children. Then you call home and the family is nowhere to be found. Loneliness soon leads to jealousy. You begin to think your spouse and family don't miss you. Or there might be resentment that they are having a good time while you are away. Of course, for the spouse and family remaining at home, being out of the house or having friends visit may just be a part of the way they cope when they are missing the traveling person.

Reentry is a big issue for the traveling person as well as the expectant spouse and family. Too often, what should normally be a happy reunion becomes bittersweet, leaving everyone with a confusing web of emotions. At reentry, everyone has to readjust and get reacquainted. The needs, agendas, and expectations of both sides may be vastly different. Both parties may think the other is being selfish, when truly they are just looking at things from different perspectives.

Communication is Key

So, how do we manage or even waylay some of the emotions we encounter because of professional travel? Communication is the key. All marriages and family life will deteriorate, whether there is this aspect of professional travel or not, if effective communication does not take place. Actually, some couples do not need business travel to keep them apart. They may work in the same city, and be regularly together in the same house, and yet miles apart in communication. To communicate means to share, to participate, to hold something in common together. No matter how you look at it, communication has to be intentional, when you're together and when you're apart.

Communication when you're together. With the disruption to family life caused by professional travel, moments together as a couple are precious and few. Spend time sharing together as a family, and alone as a couple. Couples should develop a pattern of dating regularly. Conversations should be

meaningful. They won't always be deep, but convey to one another that you're interested in what's going on in daily life.

As mentioned earlier, frequent professional travel also lends itself to bitterness and resentment among couples, especially for the one who remains at home. Couples need to be transparent with one another, sharing their true feelings. The stay-at-home spouse must reveal honestly, but sensibly and kindly, how he or she feels about the other spouse's travel and about being left at home. The traveling spouse needs to share their feelings of being on the road and being away from family so frequently.

When couples are able to freely share fears, hurts, bitterness, and resentments, the door to anger is shut and the heavy burden of these emotions begins to subside, leaving us with peace of mind. Effective communication does not happen overnight. Consider what choices you need to make to strengthen communication with your spouse and children. Is your home conducive to communication? Is the environment open and affirming so family members feel they can communicate freely? Practice solid communication while you're together; it builds a firm foundation for good communication while you're apart. (Hendricks & Cote, 1998)

Communication while you're apart. Communication is also essential to keeping the family close while you're away from each other. It is usually best for the one on the road to do the phoning home primarily because he or she is more of a moving target. Also, many companies provide the traveling person with a calling card. E-mail is also a wonderful tool for communicating and either one can initiate communication this way. However, it should never be a substitute for the human voice if you can help it. Sometimes travel takes you to remote places where it may be very difficult or impossible to phone home or even send e-mail. In those situations, the person traveling should do everything possible to find a way to let the family back home know they are all right.

Hendricks and Cote (1998) propose the following about the importance of staying in touch. It maintains trust and security. Trust must not only be earned, but it needs to be maintained. This only happens when there is regular communication. It also indicates to your spouse and children that they are important enough for you to break away from the demands of work to spend time with them.

Staying in touch helps to overcome loneliness, for the person traveling and for the one who remains at home. It reminds both partners that the relationship is still intact even though they may be separated by distance. Use the opportunity to communicate feelings, not just the negative, but the positive as well. Express your love and support for one another.

Communicating while on the road also provides accountability—a sense of responsibility to your spouse, children, and marriage. In relationships it's easy to become self-centered and caught up with one's own desires, needs, and agendas, especially when something like professional travel keeps you apart. In healthy partnerships, each is concerned with the other's needs, whether they are around or not. Staying in touch while you're apart communicates that family really matters.

God's Plan

It certainly is not God's ideal for couples and families to be separated by professional travel. We were not created to live in isolation. Ideally, husbands and wives are to be companions and partners who need each other and complement one another. We all have the need to be close to another person, to talk to, touch and see. To be sure, it was God who told Adam and Eve not to leave each other's side.

Obviously, professional travel interrupts this communion between husbands and wives. However, trials often provide the Christian with an opportunity to grow into a deeper and more mature relationship with one another and with God. In James 1:2-4 we are encouraged to “Consider it pure joy, my brothers [and sisters] 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.”

We are in no way saying that any couple or family should consider professional travel as pure joy. However, we do need to persevere in seeking God’s will for our lives, our marriages, and our families. We need to persevere in establishing a deep and real relationship with Jesus Christ, where true happiness and fulfillment are found. We must persevere in prayer. Pray together as a couple and as a family; pray silently together and alone; pray before, during, and after trips.

The Promise of Success

The crisis of professional travel is a reality among many families today. More important than the crisis, however, are the decisions we make to confront and creatively handle this dilemma. Families must work out arrangements which are equitable and conducive to a healthy family life. Indeed, the challenge is great, but doable with Divine help. Remember Paul’s secret to success, “I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Here are some tips for spouses who travel often:

- 1) Ask: Is this trip absolutely necessary? Can I accomplish the same results in another way, such as by correspondence, telephone or teleconference?
- 2) Schedule family time and be committed to not giving those dates away. Incorporate the family schedule into your calendar.
- 3) When you are away, speak to your spouse and children on the telephone as often as you can—daily, if possible.
- 4) Send cards, letters, and e-mail. They will be welcomed by the family who remain at home.
- 5) Bring small gifts for your spouse and children when you return from trips. The gifts do not need to be elaborate. It’s the thought that counts.
- 6) Return home early if your meeting permits you to do so. Fees that may be necessary to change your travel reservations will be worth it. Avoid layovers just for the sake of reducing travel expenses.
- 7) Don’t expect things at home to be perfect when you return.
- 8) Resume your responsibilities at home as soon as you return, even if you are a bit tired. Remember your spouse is extremely exhausted as well from carrying the load of responsibilities alone in your absence, especially if there are children.
- 9) If you accumulate frequent flyer mileage which your company allows you to spend, offer to take your spouse with you on one of your trips or on a vacation together.
- 10) Take your family on your business trips whenever possible.

Here are some tips for the spouse who remains at home:

- 1) Make life simple. Don’t over commit. Let unimportant things go unattended. Keep self-expectations to a minimum and reduce stress.
- 2) Establish the best time to call for the traveling spouse and do your best to be available at that time.
- 3) Keep a sense of humor.
- 4) Build a wall of protection for your marriage (this is for the traveling spouse as well).
- 5) Know your spouse’s travel calendar and keep him or her aware of the family schedule.

- 6) Allow positive thoughts of your spouse to invade your thinking.
- 7) Establish a special welcome home ritual for your spouse.
- 8) Try not to indulge in self-pity.
- 9) Don't expect your spouse to resume responsibilities upon arrival home; s/he's exhausted too.
- 10) Be flexible during reentry. Don't make plans contingent on the traveler's schedule. There are too many things that are unpredictable.

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Adam's Peace

by Henri Nouwen

Out of his broken body and mind he offered me a greater gift than I could ever offer him.

I live in a house with six handicapped people and four assistants. We live together as a family. None of the assistants is specially trained to work with people with a mental handicap, but we receive all the help we need from nearby professionals.

When there are no special crises, we live just as a family, gradually forgetting who is handicapped and who is not. All have their gifts, all have their struggles. We eat together, play together, pray together, and go out together. We all have our own preferences, and we all have our problems getting along with someone in the house, whether handicapped or not. We laugh a lot. We cry a lot too. Sometimes both at the same time.

Adam is the weakest person in our family. He is a 25-year-old man who cannot speak, cannot dress or undress himself, cannot walk alone, cannot eat without much help. He does not cry or laugh. Only occasionally does he make eye contact. His back is distorted. His arm and leg movements are twisted. He suffers from severe epilepsy and, despite heavy medication, sees few days without grand-mal seizures. Sometimes, as he grows suddenly rigid, he utters a howling groan. On a few occasions I've seen one big tear roll down his cheek.

It takes me about an hour and a half to wake Adam up, give him his medication, carry him into his bath, wash him, shave him, clean his teeth, dress him, walk him to the kitchen, give him his breakfast, put him in his wheelchair and bring him to the place where he spends most of the day with therapeutic exercises.

I tell you this not to give you a nursing report, but to share with you something quite intimate. After a month of working this way with Adam, something happened to me. This deeply handicapped young man, who is considered by many outsiders a vegetable, a distortion of humanity, a useless animal-like creature who shouldn't have been born, started to become my dearest companion.

As my fears gradually lessened, a love emerged in me so full of tender affection that most of my other tasks seemed boring and superficial compared with the hours spent with Adam. Out of his broken body and broken mind emerged a most beautiful human being offering me a greater gift than I would ever offer him: Somehow Adam revealed to me who he is, and who I am, and how we can love each other.

When I carried him into his bath, made big waves to let the water run fast around his chest and neck, rubbed noses with him and told him all sorts of stories about him and me, I knew that two friends were communicating far beyond the realm of thought or emotion. Deep speaks to deep, spirit speaks to spirit, heart speaks to heart. I started to realize that ours was a mutual love based not on shared knowledge or shared feelings, but on shared humanity. The longer I stayed with Adam the more clearly I saw him as my gentle teacher, teaching me what no book, school, or professor could ever teach me.

The gift of peace hidden in Adam's utter weakness is a gift not of this world, but certainly for this world. For this gift to become known, someone has to lift it up and pass it on. That may

be the deepest meaning of being an assistant to handicapped people: helping them to share their gifts.

Adam's peace is first of all a peace rooted in being. Being is more important than doing. How simple a truth, but how hard to live.

Adam can do nothing. He is completely dependent on others. His gift is purely being with us. Every evening when I run home to take care of Adam—to help him with his supper and put him to bed—I realize that the best thing I can do for him is to be with him. And indeed, that is the great joy: paying total attention to his breathing, his eating, his careful steps; noticing how he tries to lift a spoon to his mouth or offers his left arm a little to make it easier for me to take off his shirt.

Adam says to me: Peace is first of all the art of being. I know he is right because, after four months of being a little with Adam, I am discovering in myself the beginning of an inner at homeness that I didn't know before.

When I cover him with his sheets and blankets, turn out the lights and pray with Adam, he is always very quiet. It's as if he knows my praying voice from my speaking voice. I whisper in his ear: "May all the angels protect you," and often he looks up to me from his pillow and seems to know what I am saying.

Ever since I've been praying with Adam I've known better than before that praying is being with Jesus, simply "wasting time" with Him. Adam keeps teaching me that.

Adam's peace is not only a peace rooted in being, but also a peace rooted in the heart. Somehow through the centuries we have come to believe that what makes us human is our mind. Many people define a human being as a rational animal. But Adam keeps telling me over and over again that what makes us human is not our mind but our heart, not our ability to think but our ability to love. Whoever speaks about Adam as a vegetable or an animal-like creature misses the

sacred mystery that Adam is fully capable of receiving and giving love. He is not half human, not nearly human, but fully human, completely human because he is all heart, and it is the heart that is made in the likeness of God.

Let me quickly add that by "heart" I do not mean the seat of human emotions, in contrast to the mind as the seat of human thought. No, by "heart" I mean the center of our being, where God has hidden the divine gifts of trust, hope, and love. Whereas the mind tries to understand, grasp problems, discern different aspects of reality, and probe mysteries, the heart allows us to become sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of each other. Long before the mind is able to exercise its power, the heart is already able to develop a trusting human relationship.

When I say that I believe deeply that Adam can give and receive love and that there is a true mutuality between us, I make no naive psychological statement overlooking his severe handicaps; I speak of a love between us that transcends all thoughts and feelings, precisely because it is rooted in God's first love, a love that precedes all human love. The mystery of Adam is that in his deep mental and emotional brokenness he has become so empty of all human pride that he has become the preferable mediator of that first love. Maybe this will help you see why Adam is giving me a whole new understanding of God's love for the poor and the oppressed.

The peace that flows from Adam's broken heart is not of this world. It is not the result of political analysis, roundtable debates, discernment of the signs of the times, or well-advised strategies. All these activities of the mind have their role in peacemaking. But they are all easily perverted to a new way of warmaking if they are not in the service of the divine peace that flows from the broken heart of those who are called the poor in spirit.

Adam's peace, while rooted more in being than in doing, and more in the heart than in the mind, is a peace that calls forth community. At

L'Arche the people hold us together as a family; in fact, the most handicapped people are the true center of gravity. Adam in his total vulnerability calls us together as a family.

Adam, the most broken of us all, is without any doubt the strongest bond among us.

Because of Adam there is always someone home. Because of Adam there is a quiet rhythm in

the house. Because of Adam there are words of affection, gentleness, and tenderness. Because of Adam there is always space for mutual forgiveness and healing. Adam, the weakest among us, is our true peacemaker. How mysterious are God's ways!

Excerpted from *Signs of the Times*, May 1989. Used by permission.

The Blended Bunch

by Bruce Barron

Forget the Bradys. Being in a blended family is no laughing matter.

At least the Bradys had Alice the maid to keep everyone sane. My generation grew up with the “Brady Bunch” as its image of a blended family. (In this television sitcom, two widowed spouses each brought three children into their second marriage).

The Bradys had lots of topsy-turvy family escapades, and they frequently had to rely on Alice’s sage advice and mediation skills to help them navigate the bumps. But in the end, everything came out OK; and everyone loved each other. In the old style of light-hearted sitcom, you could count on that.

Real life is seldom so easy. Few people recognize the dynamics that make success so elusive for the blended family structure. As a result, second marriages involving children fall apart 60 percent of the time, an even greater failure rate than first marriages. To overcome these odds, blended families need to understand the unique challenges they face and how, with God’s grace and wisdom, they can be victorious.

Who’s Blending?

By definition a “blended family” is any family involving children from a previous relationship. In earlier times, when both life expectancies and divorce rates were lower, most blended families were created when a widowed parent remarried. Today, however, stepparenting situations usually result from divorce and remarriage. But whether a prior relationship ended in death, divorce or breakup (if a couple never married), blended families experience strains beyond those of nuclear families.

- **No Grace Period.** Most newlyweds have months or years to get to know each other before children enter the picture, but parents in blended families return from the honeymoon—if they have one at all—to find the children awaiting them.

- **Bonding Disorder.** In nuclear families, a husband and wife develop a strong bond with each other and then a mutual bond with their children. In blended families, the bond between biological parent and child predates—and can remain stronger than—any stepparent/stepchild relationship. When conflict arises, parents often side with their biological children rather than with each other, sending mixed signals and creating family chaos.

- **Discipline Patterns.** Parents in blended families must fuse their philosophies of proper parenting and discipline. This is hard in any family, but it’s even harder when children are already accustomed to one parent’s style.

- **Displacement.** Children who previously enjoyed a special relationship with one parent (whether taking over an absent parent’s duties, having Dad’s undivided attention or even sharing Mom’s bed) are now displaced by what they may perceive as an intruding stepparent and usually feel confused and resentful about the change. If both prior families had offspring, birth order changes abruptly (e.g., a child who was the oldest suddenly is not), and children must share their lives and their private space with unwanted stepsiblings.

- **Uncertainty about the Future.** Parents and children who've experienced divorce bring into a new marriage behaviors they learned in what may have been dysfunctional, perhaps even openly hostile families. Often, children have maintained the fantasy that perhaps Mom and Dad could get back together, a dream the new marriage makes impossible. Compounding this tension is the fact child custody is often shared with an ex-spouse who disagrees with—or even intentionally undermines—the blended family's values.

When a parent's death is involved, some things are easier; but some are harder. Children who've lost one parent may be more hesitant to become emotionally invested in new relationships, fearing that they, too, will not last. Also, the deceased parent's memory is treasured; and the new spouse, constantly compared with his or her predecessor, often feels unable to measure up. After all, it's hard for any mortal to compete with a saint.

Where's the Support?

The upshot of all these difficulties is, well, not usually sitcom material. Dick Dunn, head of the singles and stepfamilies ministry at Roswell United Methodist Church in Roswell, Ga., and author of *New Faces in the Frame: A Guide to Marriage and Parenting in the Blended Family* (LifeWay Press), emphasizes that the blended family process takes time and is rarely, if ever, complete.

These families need special support; yet, they often struggle to find it in a Christian community that frowns (quite properly) on divorce. Remarried Christians face rejection by fellow believers who interpret Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9 to classify their remarriage as adultery. Churches hesitate to minister to stepfamilies lest they be seen as condoning or even endorsing the divorces that preceded.

“Christian stepparents often feel as if they're second-class citizens in the church, but they've only made a mistake just as all of us do,” says

Adrienne Frydenger, co-author (with her husband, Tom, a Christian counselor in Decatur, Ill.) of two books on blended families.

Christians who counsel blended families warn against the legalism inherent in denying a second chance to divorced persons who've sincerely repented of past sins. They also point out that a realistic stepfamily ministry in no way approves or encourages divorce.

“People who warn us not to say anything good about divorce haven't been close to a divorce, or they would realize divorced people don't say anything good about it either,” Dunn says. “Divorce is clearly not God's will. But having marriages that don't work is not God's will either.”

“You don't have to be in a stepfamily for long before you realize that it's 10 times harder than a nuclear family,” says Tom Frydenger. “God was being wise, not mean, when He spoke against divorce.”

“If stepfamilies are presented in a totally honest light, you won't have anyone wanting to leave a first marriage in hope of finding a better second one,” says Anna McManus-Gay, a registered nurse currently writing her dissertation on stepfamily dynamics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

Walk This Way

While the dynamics are more challenging, the basic threats to healthy blended family life are the same as for all families, as they come from the same devil's set of tricks: selfishness, jealousy, resentment, guilt. Thus, wise counselors apply many of the same counseling principles.

- **Have a consistent discipline plan and stick to it.** “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matt. 5:37). A stepparent's authority is tenuous to start with and will dissolve completely without the biological parent's firm support.

“Once the children see you as a team, they won’t try to separate you as much,” McManus-Gay says.

- **Don’t wallow in guilt or regret but look forward.** “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Translation for blended families? Don’t be satisfied with bitterness and resentment or be defeated by failure.

JoAnn Johnson, a Campus Crusade for Christ staff member who married a widowed fellow staffer with two children, says she picked her confidants carefully during her adjustment years. “God protected me from forming ungodly ideas by keeping me away from the bitterness many blended families express,” she says.

- **Build each other up.** “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Rom. 14:19). In particular, find ways to make the stepparent/stepchild interaction positive. Dunn suggests when a child asks the biological parent for permission to do something that is clearly acceptable, the parent should defer answering so the stepparent can give the approval.

“You have to build up the stepparent constantly because the children are naturally resenting the stepparent for changing their lives,” he notes.

- **Show forbearance and don’t take things personally.** “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (Col. 3:13).

“Stepparents tend to personalize everything and say, ‘The children are doing this to me,’” Adrienne Frydenger notes. “What stepparents need to remember is that sometimes teenagers act obnoxious simply because they’re teenagers.”

Modeling Christ

Amidst the extra trials Christian blended family members face—suspicious stepchildren inspecting their every move as if under a microscope, family tensions getting under their skin, the black mark of a failed first marriage or a vengeful ex-spouse determined to cause trouble—there’s no substitute for the mature fruit of the Holy Spirit.

“Modeling a good family relationship can be more important than anything else, especially if your children have lived through conflict and family breakup,” says Dick Dunn.

“We tell our children that a big part of the problem in our first marriages was we were not Christians—there was a hole in our lives we’ve since filled,” says McManus-Gay.

“You’ll never be judged more strictly on your integrity than by your stepchildren,” says Adrienne Frydenger. When an ex-spouse is involved, “the Christian family must be as cooperative as possible without giving up its principles. Don’t bellyache to your children; but if the ex-spouse is irresponsible, point it out to them.”

Perhaps the toughest challenge is a permissive ex-spouse who tries to win the kids over by offering them unhealthy freedoms (R-rated movies, alcohol, no curfews, etc.) when sharing custody.

“You have to say lovingly, ‘I can’t control your other house; but at this house, here’s how we behave,’” Dunn advises. “Over time they’ll usually see through the permissive parent’s lures. Even if they don’t, you still have to be who you are.”

There’s Hope

Knowing how hard step-parenting really is could discourage anyone from taking the plunge, especially if they can’t afford to have a full-time

Alice in the home like the Bradys. But the rewards are great as well.

Those entering a second marriage have the advantage of learning from prior mistakes. “The problems are more complex,” says McManus-Gay, “but if you’ve chosen your mate wisely and corrected some of your character defects, you can have a wonderful family relationship.”

Dunn says stepfamilies need four to seven years to build a working relationship, but he adds that *all* major life adjustments take time. For the Frydengers, whose experience as a blended family has helped many others, the bottom line is simple: “It’s harder, but it’s worth it.”

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Stepfamilies: Holiday Style

Holidays can bring out the worst in stepfamilies for several reasons.

- They evoke painful memories of the former family and its once-happy celebrations and traditions.
- Family members bring conflicting expectations and traditions with them from their previous families.
- Scheduling can provoke logistical impossibilities and heated competition among the blended family with one or two ex-spouses and up to four sets of in-laws competing for time. (An uncooperative “ex” can poison the pot still further.)

In their book *Stepfamily Problems: How to Solve Them* (Revell), Tom and Adrienne Frydenger describe some ways blended family members demonstrate their anger and frustrations.

- Children used to fancy Christmas decorations try to bar their new stepsiblings’ homemade ornaments from the tree.
- Two sets of relatives each try to hold a bigger Christmas celebration to attract the kids.
- Parents labor to treat all their children equally, only to have an ex-spouse shower expensive gifts on some of them.
- Brooding kids lament that their own mom and dad can’t be together.

Dick Dunn sees flexibility as a key part of the solution. “You can always celebrate Christmas on a different day,” he says. “There’s no reason you can’t have your big dinner on December 20 and do it any way you want to. We’ve written a new beatitude: ‘Blessed are the flexible, for they won’t get bent out of shape.’”

“Most families take three or four years to create new traditions that express ‘the way we celebrate Christmas now,’” Dunn finds. “When you see them doing that, you know they’re over the hump. As long as they’re still struggling with how their old families used to do things, they’ll feel pain.”

Making Students Bulletproof

Resiliency—the Paradigm of Hope

by V. Bailey Gillespie, Gary L. Hopkins, and Stuart Tyner

Teachers go into the education business because they care about students. They worry about the ravages of at-risk behavior, such as involvement with drugs and promiscuous sex. They create and implement programs to protect their students and provide information about the dangers of life-threatening behaviors, hoping to dissuade youth and young adults from even casual experimentation.

However, the abundance of information has not solved the problem. Punchy governmental slogans (“Just Say No!”), a “war on drugs,” expensive TV ads, strong religious and secular prohibitions, and role-model warnings have all been tried. Yet teens are still involved in behaviors that put them at risk—at an ever-increasing and alarming rate.

Around the world, alcohol and drug abuse continue to contribute to rising medical costs, the transmission of AIDS, violence at school and home, automobile fatalities, sexually transmitted infections, unemployment, reduced work productivity, and antisocial behavior.¹ Is there anything we can do?

Resiliency—Making Your Students Bulletproof

Recently, research has shown that we *can* make a difference, and has shown us how. A new and powerful paradigm arising from behavioral research has inspired hope. It is being called *resiliency*. The paradigm suggests that, instead of just loading on information, we can find dynamic ways to make teens “bulletproof.” We can help them make life-affirming choices that protect them from at-risk behavior.

In scientific terms, *resiliency* means the capacity to maintain competent functioning in spite of adversity or life stressors. Resiliency appears to develop over a period of time, but only with significant environmental support.² Despite severe hardships and at-risk factors, resilient individuals learn to cope and even succeed.³

Attributes of Resilient Youth

Most of us have read that children who are sexually or physically abused, whose parents are alcoholics, or who face severe hardship while growing up are at great risk socially and academically. However, some of these young

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people do quite well. Rather than focusing on the shortcomings of youth who are at risk for academic failure, drug use, or other at-risk behaviors, resiliency studies try to identify factors that account for their success⁴.

Researchers define *resilience* in terms of “hardiness” and suggest that the following characteristics are typical of people who develop a resilient approach to life:

- They have a strong commitment to self and/or to God.
- They are willing to take action and deal with problems. They have a strong ability to use their religious faith to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life.
- They have a positive attitude toward their environment.
- Most have a strong sense of purpose.
- They develop a strong internal motivation that enables them to see life’s obstacles as challenges that can be overcome.⁵

It’s All About Hope

Resiliency seems to be about *hope*. Resilient youth are optimistic that adversity can be overcome, that there is life beyond the obstacles of today. Additional factors associated with resilient youth include the following:

- Easygoing temperament or disposition;
- Intellectual capabilities, especially verbal and communication skills;
- Realistic appraisal of their environment;
- Confidence that their internal and external worlds are predictable, controllable, and hopeful;
- Ability to deal with social problems;
- Sense of direction or mission, such as evidence of a special talent, passion, faith, or strong interest;
- Capacity to understand and respond to others’ feelings;
- Sense of humor;
- Adaptive distancing, such as the ability to think and act separately from troubled caretakers.⁶

Family Protective Factors

Families play a significant part in developing these skills. Here are some important family factors that help protect youth:

- Consistent, warm, positive relationship with a caring adult;
- Positive family environment and bonding;
- High but realistic parental expectations;
- Assigned responsibilities and household tasks;
- Positive parental modeling of resilience and coping skills;
- Extended support networks, including family and friends.

School Protective Factors

The *Valuegenesis* research on Adventist youth in the North American Division revealed that having high standards was a more effective function of *family life* than church or school life. In fact, in some ways, focusing attention on proper behaviors only in the church or school interferes with building a mature faith and getting young people to avoid negative behaviors.⁷

As a secondary family unit, the school provides significant opportunities for students to develop decision-making skills and resiliency. The *Valuegenesis* research reveals nine effectiveness factors we call “potentials” for schools, including student involvement in policy decisions, teachers being caring and supportive, and fair discipline in the context of a Christian faculty.⁸ It is interesting to note that research in the secular community is discovering now what our *Valuegenesis* research explored almost nine years ago.

The Importance of Relationships

One factor emerges repeatedly in research and literature about resiliency, both in the U.S. and other countries: A sincere and enduring relationship with a caring and charismatic adult—someone with whom they identify and

from whom they gather strength⁹—is the *most* significant factor in the lives of youth and young adults.

Where do such relationships come from? The answer seems obvious: older adults or mentors—teachers, youth pastors, and significant others who take the time to form meaningful relationships with young people. Getting such people involved with our students is the most important thing we can do to encourage resilience among youth¹⁰.

A relationship with an individual who provides care, warmth, and unconditional love appears to provide young people with a sense that they can overcome the odds. These relationships can foster self-esteem and a sense of self-worth, which make successful coping more likely.¹¹ One study found that “resilient youngsters all had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence.”¹² International *Valuegenesis* research concurs, showing that loving, supportive families and significant faith dialogue with important others contribute to faith growth and maturity, as well as reduced at-risk behaviors.¹³ The evidence is overwhelming. Resiliency comes from *supportive relationships!*

School as Community

Valuegenesis research indicates that the quality and frequency of parent-child discussions about faith life are significant in encouraging mature faith and building strong, resilient youth.¹⁴ Unfortunately, some students come from poor home environments. In such cases, teachers and pastors must undertake the difficult task of trying to overcome these influences. Other students come from homes where a single parent spends long hours working to support and educate the family, leaving them without

sufficient time to develop meaningful relationships. Their children may be unattended after school, when youth at-risk behavior is the highest. (Research shows that most adolescent girls who get pregnant do so between the hours of 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. in their own homes.¹⁵)

How can the school help build resilient youth? School-based research indicates that educators can create an environment that moderates the effects of the less-than-ideal homes or social environments. It suggests that “resilient kids have an uncanny ability to make school a refuge from society’s ills.”¹⁶ Recent research has explored the benefits of school as a place characterized by supportive and caring relationships, opportunities to participate in activities and decision making, and where norms are shared. When students see their school as a community, they enjoy school more, are more academically motivated, are absent less often, engage in less disruptive behavior, have higher academic achievement, use drugs less, and participate in less delinquent behavior.¹⁷ The climate in school becomes an important factor in building positive “relational” behavior.¹⁸

Applying the Research

It appears that we can diminish or even prevent drug use and other at-risk behaviors by making our schools a warm, caring place where students benefit from relationships with Christ-centered adults. How can we improve on what we provide without overburdening already-busy teachers? Here are some suggestions:

1. *Encourage local churches and pastoral staff members to get involved in the life of your school.* Research indicates that, in some areas, less than 40 percent of pastors show their support for Christian education.¹⁹

2. *Search for people in your community of faith who can help you create a positive sense of school as a community.*

3. *Involve retired church members.* They have much to contribute to the life of your school.

4. *Start with kindergarten.* Identify two warm, caring members from your local church who will come into the classroom between 8:00 and 11:00 each morning to assist the teacher. Their job will be to help the students with reading, math, or other subjects. Most importantly, they will develop relationships.

Next, find two more people to come to school from 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. to do the same thing. Schedule this for every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. If you have enough people to participate, use them every day, all year long.

When the kindergarten students move on to the first grade, have those same individuals continue on with them, to grade one and two and so on. Add additional adults until you have a group of 10 or 12 for each classroom. This will give the students enduring relationships with Christ-centered adults over a long period of time. This could continue through the eighth grade or even into high school. This strategy, or a variation that suits your specific situation, should result in your school producing resilient students.

5. *Ask pastors, youth, and young adults to participate in the life of your school.* If they are not available, appoint honorary “chaplains” from your student body. Perhaps you can organize a group of church members to take on this project as their commitment to Christian education. Their being available at regular times as mentors, teacher’s aides, and counselors can create a significant presence for Christ in your school.

What Might Happen if . . .

There may be additional benefits from applying this process of relationship building to create a positive school community. Community members—including church members—are often critical of schools. By involving the adults from your community of faith, you may enjoy greater support from your local churches. You

may even find that financial support for your school will improve.

Start small. Motivate five or six people at first. Screen everyone, just as a teacher is screened, with background checks, fingerprinting, etc. There are predators looking for a chance to get close to young people. Be careful, but don’t let this stop your efforts.

After implementing the program with a few adults, evaluate your progress. Iron out the wrinkles. Evaluate constantly. Learn as you go. Expand over time.

Does It Work?

Evaluation is crucial. Is the research borne out in actual practice? Try evaluation at three levels.

- Evaluate the teachers’ reactions. Refine the process.

- Evaluate the students’ performance. Compare end-of-year grades and tests with scores from previous years. Also, evaluate student department.

- Evaluate the adults who participate. Are they satisfied? How has this changed their attitude regarding your school? Has it changed their lives in any way?

After evaluating, report your findings. Tell educators in other schools or the newspaper what is happening in your school. Evaluate and refine, and do it better next time.

What Would Jesus Do?

Jesus mingled with people where they lived. He built bridges to people who hurt. He loved unrelentingly and fully. He understood their personal needs, and challenged them to embrace higher values and standards. He motivated them through His passion and compassion to be what they knew they were not. What better model of education than trying to build relationships with those in need?

This generation places much stock in relationships. We must seize the opportunity to

use the research in this area to model in our schools the ministry and lifestyle of Jesus.

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My Father's Pen

by Lori R. Wilson

A year ago my father died
He couldn't stay although he tried
And though his presence I'm denied
His love has written memories on my heart

Some things have changed since he's passed on
His clothes, his favorite chair—both gone
But certain as tomorrow's dawn
The love that's written memories on my heart

I don't remember dates or places
It's harder now to picture faces
What I recall are warm embraces
His love has written memories on my heart

Remembered now are simple pleasures
Our shoreline hunts for buried treasures
Small joys for which time has no measures
His love has written memories on my heart

When I get lonely for my dad
I crowd out recollections sad
With thoughts of good times that we had
His love has written memories on my heart

One day I'll see my dad again
I don't know details, how or when
But this I know, I'll thank him then
For love that's written memories on my heart.

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Recovering from the Losses of Life

Guidelines to Help Others

by H. Norman Wright

What it's best not to do:

Don't try to minimize their pain with comments like, "It's probably for the best." "Things could be worse." "You'll remarry." "You're young; you can always have another one." "You're strong; you'll get over it soon." "You know God is in control." Comments like these might be an attempt to offer hope, but to a hurting person, they sound as if you don't comprehend the enormity of what has happened. These statements don't acknowledge pain and loss.

What it's best to do:

You can offer simple, understanding statements such as, "I feel for you during this difficult time." "This must be very hard for you." "I share your feelings of loss." "I wish I could take the hurt away." Comments like these let the people know you acknowledge their pain and it is okay for them to feel that way.

What it's best not to do:

Don't say, "I'm sorry" and end the sentence. Your hurting friend is probably sorry too, but he can't respond to that kind of comment.

What it's best to do:

Say, "I'm so sorry." Then add, "I know how special he was to you." "I'll miss her also." "I want to help you; I'm available anytime you need me." "I've been praying for you. Is there something specific I should be praying for?"

What it's best not to do:

Don't just say, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

What it's best to do:

Be aggressive with your willingness to help. Ask yourself, *What would I need if I were in a similar situation?* Offer specific things you can do for them: "I'm on my way to the store. What can I pick up for you?" "Would tomorrow be a good day to help you with the laundry?" "Would the children like to come over and play this afternoon?" Most of the time, people in a crisis can't decide what they do need. Besides, they probably don't want to impose.

What it's best not to do:

Don't say, "You shouldn't feel that way."

What it's best to do:

Encourage them to keep a journal or write down their thoughts and feelings. Often, just seeing their thoughts on paper helps them deal with what they are facing.

What it's best not to do:

Do not try to answer when they ask, "Why?" You don't have any answer, and at this time even the true answer may not be apparent. Job's friends didn't help with their responses and Job said, "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).

What it's best to do:

Simply answer, "I don't know why. I guess both of us would like to have some answers at this time. You would especially. I wish I had an answer to give you."

What it's best not to do:

Don't offer spiritual answers as to why they are facing this problem or tell them they'll be stronger afterward. We don't know why tragedies happen and why certain people have to go through such trauma. We do our friends a disservice by offering possible explanations.

What it's best to do:

Agree when individuals express their feelings. Say, "Yes, what happened to you isn't fair and doesn't make any sense," whether or not you share the same perspective.

What it's best not to do:

Don't put the recovery of hurting friends on timetables. Your inference that they are not coping well or should be their old selves by now only hinders their progress. Everyone is different, and recovery varies.

What it's best to do:

Allow them all the time they need to deal effectively with all the phases of their grief.

What it's best not to do:

Don't quote Bible verses as a way to correct or minimize their feelings. Think very carefully, asking yourself if a passage will communicate comfort or condemnation. Never offer spiritual suggestions from a position of superiority or self-righteousness.

What it's best to do:

Give spiritual encouragement from your heart, and include Bible verses that have comforted you at a difficult time. Let them know you will pray for them daily. If you pray with them, keep it brief, reflecting their feelings in the prayer and focusing upon God's understanding of their pain and the fact that He will be their Source of comfort.

What it's best not to do:

Don't say, "I understand" when you haven't faced the same situation. Telling people that everything will be all right when you have never known the depth of their hardship is an empty statement. And they don't need to hear horror stories of people you know who have been through something similar.

What it's best to do:

Be honest about your experiences. If you haven't endured their particular kind of tragedy, say, "I haven't been through what you're facing, but I want you to know I care about you and will support you through the difficult time ahead." If you've had a similar crisis, tell about it briefly, adding that you can empathize with their feelings. Of course, you can't completely understand because you haven't been through the past experiences that laid the foundation for their reaction.

What it's best not to do:

Don't ignore their needs after the immediate loss has subsided.

What it's best to do:

Keep in touch for months, especially at the critical times discussed in this book, letting them know you're praying for them. Ask how they are *really* doing, and send thoughtful notes with encouraging words.

What it's best not to do:

Don't expect unrealistic optimism or levity from hurting persons.

What it's best to do:

Realize that their hearts are full of pain and turmoil. Let them know you will listen to their feelings and want to be part of that pain.

What it's best not to do:

Don't offer clichés or be vainly optimistic to cover up your insecurities.

What it's best to do:

Indicate your love by saying, "I really feel awkward because I'm not sure what to say, what you need, or how to help you, but I want you to know that I love you. I'm praying for you and I'm available."

What it's best not to do:

Don't use "shoulds" or "if onlys" such as "You should give the clothes away." "You should go back to work and get over this." "You should have more faith." "If only you had watched him more carefully." "If only you hadn't been so strict." "If only you ate better."

What it's best to do:

Allow hurting people to make the decisions and take the necessary steps to deal with the trauma. No one can tell another person what to feel or not feel.

What it's best not to do:

Don't offer unasked-for advice. If they weren't solicited, your suggestions may not be appreciated.

What it's best to do:

Respond cautiously and prayerfully with uplifting and edifying ideas when your friends ask for your help in their tragedy. Let them know that you pray for them daily. On occasion, ask how they would like you to be praying for them.

As you have walked through your own losses, you will be better able to help others walk through their valleys of loss. The walk can be so lonely when it is undertaken alone. But when others come along to just be there, listen, weep, and comfort through their presence, grievers are sustained.

None of us walks alone. Jesus Christ has been there and He is with us all of the time to sustain, encourage, and support us. Yes, life is full of losses, but Jesus Christ makes it possible to conquer them.

When Children Have Children

by Janice C. Collins

How will I tell my parents? Will my boyfriend leave me? Will I have to drop out of school? What will my friends say? What will the church think? Should I have an abortion? Is abortion wrong? Will I make a good parent? What about my future?

These are all common questions that arise when a young girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock. She already knows that she has made a big mistake. Now she and her family need a counselor's help in putting the pieces of her life back together.

Over one million teenage pregnancies occur each year in the United States. Approximately 40% of these girls choose abortion, 50% choose to parent, and 10% either miscarry or choose adoption. Regardless of the choice that a young girl makes, there will be pain and loss for her as well as for her family. Consider these three specific areas where a counselor can assist: *forgetting past dreams and plans, forgiving self and others, and focusing on the present need.*

Forgetting Past Dreams and Plans

An adolescent girl dealing with an unplanned pregnancy must forget her past dreams and plans and set new goals for her future. If she parents her child, she will be forced to give up things that other teens take for granted. She will sacrifice new CDs, clothes, movies, prom, and make-up in order to save money for diapers, daycare, and formula. She may graduate later than her classmates or maybe not at all. She will be forced to get a job but may still need welfare and food stamps. Choosing to parent her child will have a significant impact on her future.

Although abortion or adoption will not have such an immediate impact on the girl's life, it will completely change her future. She will feel pain and loss on her child's birthday or the anniversary of her child's abortion and on holidays when her child is not there. She may also have difficulty adjusting to future pregnancies and parenting. She can never go back to where she was. In order to move forward, these girls must forget past dreams and start over.

Sometimes, the ones hardest hit are the family members of the pregnant teen. Parents also have to let go of past dreams for their child and realize that life will go on, but it will never be the same. A counselor can help them grieve this loss and begin to develop new dreams and realistic expectations for the future. Parents need to be encouraged to be practical but not to doubt their child's ability to move forward and excel.

Forgiving Oneself and Others

Pregnant adolescents also need to work through forgiveness. A pregnant teen must learn to forgive herself and others. I have discovered that this is often more difficult for a girl who has been raised in the church. Not only does she have a hard time forgiving herself for making a wrong choice, she also has difficulty believing that God can forgive her. She may deal with huge amounts of guilt for making choices that are embarrassing for her, her parents, and her

church. She may also feel cheapened, used (even if the boy loved her), and unworthy of redemption.

It has been seven years since my pregnancy, yet sometimes I have to remind myself that because of the blood of Jesus Christ, I am worthy in God's eyes. Scriptures such as Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:7, 11-32, and Psalm 103:10-12 were very helpful to me as I began to work through repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

Forgiveness will also be difficult for the adolescent's family. Her parents inevitably will feel loss, anger, betrayal, and lost trust. Most likely, they will feel as though they have failed as parents. These are normal feelings. Parents need to grieve their losses and then choose to forgive as Christ forgave us for our sins. My mother grieved throughout my pregnancy. It is significant to me, however, that her love for me looked past her pain and made her strong enough to be a comfort and support to me during a very difficult time in my life.

Focusing on the Present Need

Although forgetting past dreams and finding forgiveness are essential parts of the healing process, these will be issues for months or maybe years to come. The pregnant teen's most important task is to focus on her present needs, particularly immediate medical care. Studies show that pregnant teens receive only half the level of medical care and treatment that older women receive.¹

The pregnant teen will have to decide whether to choose parenting, abortion, or adoption. Her counselor should be educated on all options. Many girls who choose abortion are traumatized because no one prepares them for the experience. Her counselor should share with

her the different types of abortion and the risks involved, but try to discourage this option as it can be the most devastating. Since at least 50% of pregnant teens choose to parent, counselors should help their clients understand the huge responsibility of parenting. For example, by helping a client develop a detailed budget, a counselor can help a teenager become more aware of how much money it takes to raise a child. Lastly, counselors who deal with pregnant teens should read up on the most recent adoption laws. Open adoption is the current trend and can be the best option for a young girl and her child.

Parents often want to make the final decisions for their child's future. If the child is still very young, parents may have to decide for her. However, a counselor can encourage them to respect her feelings. If they do not allow her to be part of the final decision, she may feel resentful and hold them responsible for the things that happen in her future.

An unplanned adolescent pregnancy can be traumatic for both the adolescent and her family. They will all need to make adjustments in their lives and look toward the future in a different way. There will be pain for everyone involved for years to come. This is a crucial time for the family. A Christian counselor can help them work *together* to mend broken hearts and forgive one another for past failures. Working together to deal with the confusion and uncertainty will not only benefit the pregnant adolescent, it will also benefit the grieving family. It will help them as they begin to put the pieces of their lives back together.

Reference

Rebecca A. Maynard, ed., *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing* (New York: Robin Hood Foundation, 1998).

Annotated Resource List

Books

Balswick, Jack & Judy. (1997). *Families in Pain: Working Through the Hurts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.

The authors offer an honest look at the various points where pain enters our families. Some pain comes at stress points of daily life—marriage, dealing with children, caring for parents. Some pain is related to terrible trauma—death, divorce, addiction, abuse, rejection. Faced with the choice of walking away or covering pain with a smile, the Balswicks show a third way—the path of godly courage that leaves families strengthened. Includes real life stories of individuals who lived through pain with God’s help.

Boulden, Jim & Joan. (1992). *Saying Goodbye*. Weaverville, CA: Boulden Publishing.

This activity book presents death as a natural occurrence and offers writing and drawing exercises to help children cope with feelings of loss and grief when a loved one dies. Also available in an audio, video, and CD version.

Brown, Laurene Krasny. (1996). *When Dinosaurs Die*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Children’s questions about what it means to die are directly addressed in this book. It talks about different ways people die, explains what different people believe happens after death, and offers ways to honor the memory of someone who has died. Its overall positive message is: Grieve, then go on with living.

Buechner, Frederick. (1991). *Telling Secrets*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

With eloquence, candor, and simplicity, a celebrated author tells the story of his father's alcohol abuse and suicide and traces the influence of this secret on his life as a son, father, husband, minister, and writer. Buechner opens to us something of what it means to be human, of how to connect our knowing and sharing secrets regarding our family brokenness with the discovery of the reality of a loving and merciful God in our lives. As he explores his own family secrets, we sense the important part that prayer and community play in our journey toward healing, our spiritual awareness of ourselves, and the presence of God in the midst of our pain and suffering.

Freier, M. Catherin. (n.d.). *When A Parent Dies: Supporting the Children*. Houston, TX: Service Corporation International.

When a parent dies, the children left behind suffer a seemingly unbearable double loss. Not only do they lose their parent’s love and guidance, but they lose their faith in the adult world that was supposed to protect them. This booklet shares experiences, stories and insights that are necessary to help a grieving child heal. It is useful for sharing both with the child and his/her surviving caretaker. The author of this booklet is a Seventh-day Adventist pediatric clinical psychologist at Loma Linda University. *Copies of this booklet are available at no charge by writing to: William Barrett, Public Relations Department, SCI Management Corporation, P.O. Box 130548, 1929 Allen Parkway, Houston, TX 77219. FAX: 713-525-5288.*

Goldman, Linda. (n.d.). *Life & Loss: A Guide to Helping Grieving Children*. Accelerated Development.

This book is a professional approach to working with children who are going through the process of normal grief. It provides practical information, resources, hands-on activities, a model for a goodbye visit for children, and an annotated bibliography. Order by calling: 1-800-821-8312.

Hart, Archibald D. (1987). *Counseling the Depressed*. Dallas: Word Publishing.

The reality of depression cannot be escaped. Everyone will at some time either be a victim to it or called upon to support someone through it. The more it is understood—its causes, its progression, and how to be of help to someone afflicted with it—the more satisfying relationships and ministry will be. This book makes it clear that the serious forms of depression require the expertise of trained professionals. The normal expressions of depression—sadness, grief, discouragement—respond to care and understanding from friends and family. This book addresses the various forms of depression and seeks to raise the level of helping skills of both friends and family, and pastors and family professionals.

Hart, Archibald D. (1989). *Overcoming Anxiety*. Dallas: Word Publishing.

A little anxiety can be good. It can keep you on the right side of the law, motivate you to work harder, even turn you to God. But out-of-control anxiety can sideline you with excessive fears, neurotic behaviors, sleeplessness, panic, or even physical illness. And the more intelligent, productive, and well meaning you are, the more likely you are to suffer from this devastating emotion. The good news is that excessive anxiety can be controlled and prevented. This book can help you recognize if you have an anxiety problem, conquer worry, derail panic, anxiety-proof your children, escape neurotic guilt, avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms, use medication wisely, custom tailor an anxiety-resistant life-style, and more.

Hart, Archibald D. (1993). *Dark Clouds, Silver Linings*. Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing.

Depression is the “common cold” of the emotions. At some time in their lives, two of every ten people will experience depression seriously enough to hinder their normal way of life. It can increase feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and helplessness. But depression doesn’t have to rule your life. In this book, Dr. Hart gives practical guidelines for understanding and treating depression. He helps you understand the nature and causes of depression, cope with depression and overcome its negative effects, know when it’s time to seek professional help, and turn depression into a healing emotion.

Hart, Archibald D. (1995). *Adrenaline and Stress*. Dallas: Word Publishing.

In the fast-paced, pressurized environment of life in the 90's, many people may be hooked on the “rush” they receive from their body’s own adrenaline, and not even know what’s happening. But prolonged adrenaline arousal can lead to stress disease and ultimately to premature death. Heart attacks and other chronic forms of stress-induced illness are the lethal by-products of too much adrenaline pumping through our systems. But there’s good news. You can learn to monitor your own adrenaline arousal. You can change Type-A *behavior* without changing your basic personality. You can cooperate with your body’s need for more and better sleep. And in the meantime you can enhance your creativity and live a longer, happier, healthier lifestyle. This book will help you know how.

Markman, Howard; Stanley, Scott; & Blumberg, Susan L. (1994). *Fighting for Your Marriage*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

This book presents the widely respected and research-tested Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) approach to improving marriage. It teaches couples to discuss difficult

issues safely and clearly, use ground rules to contain destructive arguments and resolve conflicts, and enhance their fun, friendship, commitment, spirituality and intimacy.

Marshall, Sharon. (1990). *When a Friend Gets a Divorce: What Can You Do?* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Broken hearts, abandoned dreams, and shattered values linger after a marriage has ended. The survivor often is besieged by conflicting and unlovely emotions. The author gives help for dealing with people undergoing the trauma of divorce. Caregivers will time and again turn to these chapters, each dealing with a unique dynamic of the various emotions felt by divorced persons.

Newman, Margaret. (1994). *Stepfamily Realities*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

The author, a psychologist, stepmother and co-director of the School for Stepfamilies at the Jansen Newman Institute in Sydney, Australia, has produced a valuable work on the major issues confronting stepfamilies. Managing the complications of stepfamily life, visiting and resident stepchildren, fitting every one in and finding time to maintain a loving relationship is often overwhelming for many couples. Newman explains what is happening, why it is happening, and what to do about it. Using case studies and the experience of working with a broad range of stepfamily situations, she provides valuable insights and practical advice.

O'Connor, Joey. (1997). *Heaven's Not a Crying Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.

A helpful book for parents and those who work with children on the topics of terminal illness, death, and grieving the loss of a loved one. The author unfolds the grieving process in children and provides language to answer children's difficult questions. Not surprisingly, the content is valuable to the parent's own grieving process. The book is not a theological treatise on death or the nature of man. Readers should be aware that, although the author hints at his theological bias when he tells a child that her dead brother is now "in heaven with Jesus," such assertions are almost non-existent in the book. It is much more concerned with ministry to those who are still alive and have to cope with loss.

Rosberg, Gary. (1992). *Choosing to Love Again*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing.

This book offers solutions on how to break the cycle of unresolved conflict that may be present in a relationship. The author demonstrates how to move from offense, hurt, and anger into communion, forgiveness and rebuilding trust.

Stanley, Scott. (1998). *The Heart of Commitment*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The author offers insights into how to cultivate the kind of lifelong devotion that enables couples to have a marriage which thrives, not merely survives. Based on scriptural truth and more than seventeen years of research on marital success and failure, the book includes numerous real-life stories of couples who faced the issues of marital commitment.

Valey, Susan (1984). *Badger's Parting Gifts*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.

This story, for children ages 4-8, is about a beloved old badger who dies. All the woodland creatures loved him and at first feel overwhelmed by their loss. Then they begin to remember, and through their memories find comfort and strength to face the future.

Wallerstein, Judith S., & Blakeslee, Sandra. (1995). *The Good Marriage*. New York: Warner Books. Dr. Wallerstein opens a window on the natural stages of marriage and develops nine tasks you must undertake to make a *good* marriage. She introduces the reader to the intimate interiors of the married lives

of a number of ordinary yet fascinating couples. She explores the countless pressures they face, and illustrates how happy, lasting marriages are challenged and rebuilt every day. In the process she extends hope and help on how, whatever your marriage type, you and your partner can share a joyful, exhilarating and fulfilling lifetime together.

Wright, H. Norman. (1993). *Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.

A well-known counselor, author and lecturer discusses the losses of life, some of which are life-changing—death, divorce, retirement, business failure—and others which affect us more subtly—changing jobs, moving, illness, embarrassing situations. As you encounter any type of loss, you can find hope. Writing from his own experience (he and his wife, Joyce, have suffered the death of their son), the author covers such issues as the meaning of grief, blaming God, learning to express and share grief, ungrieved losses, healthy ways to hold on to something you've lost. Probing study questions are included with each chapter for personal reflection or group discussion.

Yeagley, L. (1995). *Heartache and Healing: Coming to Terms With Grief*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Dealing with such issues as divorce, loss of home, and the emotional pain of problems that simply will not go away, the author show how we can successfully cope with primary losses and secondary losses, or the loss of all those things in our life entwined with the primary losses. Yeagley also discusses the constant grief endured by caretakers such as nurses, physicians, and the families of sick and dying persons, and offers practical ways to deal with it.

Yeagley, L. (1998). *How to Get Beyond Loneliness*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

The author presents loneliness as a condition that can affect everyone from adolescents to the elderly, including husbands and wives in marriage. He shows the connection between human loneliness and alienation from God, self and others. The chapters are filled with practical guidance for combatting loneliness, building and safeguarding intimate relationships, and enjoying creative solitude.

Curriculum Resources

Wright, H. Norman. (n.d.). *A Curriculum Resource on Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Christian Marriage Enrichment, 17821 17th St., Suite 290, Tustin, CA 92680.

This resource provides a course outline for 11 sessions on grief and loss recovery based on the book *Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Each session includes step-by-step instructions, material to share, activities for personal reflection and group discussion, and master copies of overhead transparencies and handouts.

Journals

Healing Magazine. A publication of KidsPeace, 1650 Broadway, Bethlehem, PA 18015-3998. 1-800-25-PEACE.

KidsPeace is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to serving the critical needs of children and teens. Journal articles are targeted toward the adults—parents, teachers, social workers, counselors, and others—interested in helping children and teens develop the confidence and skills to overcome developmental and situational crises in their lives.

Websites

KidsPeace Organization: <http://www.kidspeace.org>

A United States-based national organization dedicated to serving the critical needs of children and teens. Helps children and teens develop the confidence and skills to overcome developmental and situational crises in their lives. Offers a comprehensive range of treatment programs, along with educational services to help families help kids anticipate and avoid crisis whenever possible.

KidsPeace Intensive Treatment Family Program: <http://www.fostercare.com>

A temporary foster care program for children from families in crisis.

The Dougy Center: <http://www.dougy.org>. P. O. Box 86852, Portland, OR 97286. (503) 775-5683. Internet: help@dougy.org.

The Dougy Center was the first center in the United States to specialize in helping grieving children. They publish a National Directory of Children's Grief Services and may be able to help you find professional services in your area. Also available: *Helping Children Cope with Death* (1997). Portland, OR: The Dougy Center. This pamphlet outlines many of the facts and myths of children who grieve. It provides a very concise and excellent summary of children's grief.