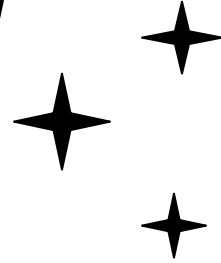


It Takes a Family

*Discipling Children
and
Teens for Christ*



Family Ministries Planbook

Karen and Ron Flowers

with

Roberto Badenas, Bernie & Karen Holford,
Gary L. Hopkins, Joyce W. Hopp, Elaine & Willie Oliver,
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A Department of Family Ministries publication.

Prepared by Karen and Ron Flowers
Software formatting by Emmi Bergmann

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Preface

We spent last Sabbath with our son Jeff. He works with his wife Pam in Azerbaijan, making small loans to farmers and small business owners who are looking to better life for themselves and their children. Perhaps it's how far away he lives and how few the days we spend together relaxing around a fire anymore. Perhaps it's that we're on the other side of fifty. We're not sure. But we found ourselves looking across the room at him, smiling to ourselves about the fine young man he has become. Our younger son Jon will be home for the American Thanksgiving holiday next week. He's bringing a young woman for us to meet. We can hardly wait. Somehow, when it's all said and done, family is what matters most.

We never dreamed in the midst of diapers and trips to the library, science projects and college tuition bills that parenting adult children would have such rich rewards. We wonder how the two of us could have conceived a brilliant geneticist and a profound philosopher-historian, both of whom are way smarter than we are put together. But they're ours, and we're proud as punch.

Of course there are still the nights when sleep is elusive and we find ourselves wishing ourselves more perfect as parents. The most important questions of life loom large in our sons' minds. Dialogue with them is stimulating, pregnant with ideas and challenge to rethink and probe. Sometimes the talk is comforting, other times disquieting. But always there is peace—peace for ourselves and peace to extend to those we love—because the words of the evangel ring as clearly today as they did on that star-spangled night two thousand years ago: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to humankind on whom his favor rests.” Do you catch the full import of the evangel's song? God's favor rests on parents, and on children, full stop! Not because we are perfect. Not because we have gotten it all together. Not even because we are trying hard. God's favor rests on our families because of Jesus Christ. As Ellen White rejoiced as she contemplated the scene of Christ's baptism,

And the word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.’ Eph. 1:6 The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, ‘This is My beloved child in whom I am well pleased’ (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 113).

It is from this glorious vantage point that we begin and end our parental journey as disciplinarians of our children and teens for Jesus Christ. But for our children's deliberate, persistent, ultimate choice to separate themselves from the saving grace of Jesus—a decision only they can make as persons of free will—“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children” (Isaiah 49:22, 25).

Courage and peace!

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

Impressive Marriage

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Parents' modeling of marriage can profoundly influence children's beliefs and attitudes toward marriage as well as their present and future well-being.

Theme Text

Deuteronomy 6:6

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 or sermons 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 text, superscript numbers ^{1, 2, 3} will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the **Sermon Illumination** section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children" (Deut. 6:6).

When Moses spoke these words for God, the Ten Commandments had just been restated in Deut. 5:7-21. Here and elsewhere in Scripture we find much instruction regarding marriage, for it is an important part of God's plan for His people. Marriage is to "be honored by all" (Hebrews 13:4). Jesus reaffirmed God's creation plan for marriage and made it a symbol of the relationship between Himself and His church (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 2:19, 20; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 21:2). Parents today, as in the time of Deuteronomy, have a responsibility to impress upon their children the will of God, including His will for marriage. The marriage of their parents has a profound influence upon children. It is one of the most significant ways in which children learn God's will regarding marriage.

"These Commandments" and Marriage

If we were to fully explore the Ten Commandments, we would find truth in each one that applies to marriage. For example, the first commandment "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7) calls for us to make God central in our lives. Marriage is safe and secure when God is the focus of the attention and worship of marriage partners. When God occupies this central position in their hearts, couples prioritize their lives according to His wishes. They highly prize marriage for it was created by God. They seek His leading and guidance in the choice of a marriage partner and allow Him to bring growth into their marriages. They look to the cross of Jesus for the secret of their unity, for only as we are in union with God through

Jesus Christ can we be truly one with a spouse. Jesus Christ made us one with God and brought humanity together through His body on the cross (Eph. 2:14, 16).

Take the sixth commandment as another example. Jesus brought out its depth of meaning, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder . . .’, but I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Matt. 5:21, 22). Husbands and wives, in their love for each other, their love for God and obedience to God, will surely not murder or physically harm one another. Nor will they harm one another emotionally or spiritually. They will seek instead to help one another enjoy life in its fullness. They will avoid thoughts, words and actions that would attack or malign the other person. They will “study to advance the happiness of each other” (*Adventist Home*, p. 106). They will learn to process their feelings of anger in constructive ways, rather than expressing anger in destructive ways that weaken or damage their relationship.

Commandments about adultery and covetousness. In a similar way, each of the commandments can shed light on marriage. Let us look, however, at the commandments regarding adultery and coveting another’s marriage partner, because these address marriage specifically. These two commandments define the human duty to respect and honor the bond upon which the family as a social unit is built—the marriage relationship. “To be untrue to this sacred union or to lead another to do so is to despise that which is sacred and to commit a crime as well. . . . The commandment applies with equal force to both husband and wife (Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8)” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, 1, 1953, p. 606).

These two commandments show that sexual desire is a part of adult human experience. Furthermore, they indicate that human nature is not naturally faithful to a sexual partner. We are, as Donald Joy puts it, “an *imperfectly bonding species*.”¹ We understand from these commandments, however, that we are not to function at the level of instinct alone. We are free moral agents. God has given us the power of choice. He intends that marriage should reflect His bond with His people—a bond based on the intentional choice, the willful decision, to select one partner and then to be faithful to that partner. The phrase “the wife of your youth” used elsewhere in Scripture (Prov. 5:18; Isa. 54:6; Mal. 2:14) conveys the idea that, even when the two marriage partners grow older, their commitment is to continue. Even with passing years, a husband is still to be ravished (“intoxicated”- Prov. 5:19 NKJV margin) by his wife’s charms.

Again, Jesus helps us to see the full force of this seventh commandment: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28, 29). Lust is the thought of evil “loved and cherished;” it is finding “pleasure in dwelling upon scenes of impurity” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 60). This added insight on adultery by Jesus along with the tenth commandment relating to covetousness helps us to understand our true condition.

The tenth commandment “strikes at the roots of the other nine. . . . This prohibition is fundamental to human experience in that it penetrates to the motive behind the outward act. It teaches us that God sees the heart . . . and is concerned less with the outward act than with the thought from which the action springs” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, 1, 1953, p. 607). Our human capacities to form faithful, permanent bonds are weakened by sin. We are prone to adultery in

our hearts and to covetousness. We need God in our lives and the working of His Spirit within us in order to maintain our promises to each other.

Good news for us and our children. The apostle Paul says that his reflection on the tenth commandment, “Do not covet,” made him understand his true condition. He was dead in sin. Only then did the gospel of spiritual resurrection to new life in Christ come as good news to him (Rom. 7:7-11, 24, 25; 8:1, 2). By faith he acknowledged Jesus Christ as His Savior and considered himself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 5:6-10; 6:11). Christ’s perfect life insures that the righteous requirements of the law will “be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). This is good news for us and our children, not only for the experience of married life, but for all of Christian living.

Why “Don’t Do as I Do, Do as I Say” Doesn’t Work

How shall we impress these truths upon our children? Children watch the people around them. This is a primary way in which they learn how they should behave and decide what things are important to them. They observe the things people do, what they say, and how they act. At home, they pick up their understanding about marriage and married life by seeing how father and mother treat one another.² They are keen to read the emotional temperature of the home. Over time, they decide who they like and who they don’t like, and after whom they will pattern their lives. In short, children identify with people and imitate them. They absorb the values and beliefs of these people.

Many parents say to their children, “Don’t do as I do; do as I say.” However, what children see you do, they do. In fact, the more often they see you do what you do, the more firmly it is imbedded in their minds. “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7). “Sit—walk” and “lie down—get up” convey the idea that our modeling of Christian values goes on all the time. We are never “off duty” as far as our children’s watching is concerned.

Children will pick up your passion. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts” (Deut. 6:5, 6). “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds” (Deut. 11:18). Notice the emphasis on “*your* hearts.” “These commandments . . . upon *your* hearts” puts emphasis on the parent’s personal spiritual experience. “Heart” means thoughts, emotions, and the very center of one’s being as far as the Hebrew Scriptures were concerned. The religion of Jehovah affects the behavior and outward actions of a person, but it is concerned first of all with the condition of the heart, the inner spirit of the believer. The New Testament has the same idea: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

Parents’ own hearts should be “warm with the love of Christ” as they endeavor to share spiritual things with children (cf. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 196). Their love for God springs from their memories of His love in the past (cf. Deut. 4:37; 7:8; 10:15), it testifies of their current experience with His love (cf. Deut. 23:5), and it proclaims their faith in the promises of His love in the future (cf. Deut. 7:13). A parental passion for God stands as a prerequisite for parents who would pass on a faith heritage about Christian marriage to children.

What if our modeling isn't perfect? It can be frightening to realize the extent to which our children copy our behavior. Sometimes we wish they wouldn't imitate us. We know ourselves to be far from perfect. Paul had the right idea: "I urge you to imitate me" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17). He was not being conceited, haughty or over-confident, but was acting as a true spiritual mentor, leader, and parent (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15—where he likens himself to a father). Paul knew and publicly acknowledged his weaknesses. For example, to his follower, Timothy, whom he calls "my true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), he writes,

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Tim. 1:15, 16)

Here is hope for us as parents. Our task is not really to provide a model of perfection to our children. Faithful Christian married couples will surely make mistakes and have imperfections, but amid these they endeavor to guide their children to the one perfect Savior they have found so that the young may meet Him and trust Him for themselves.

What Christian modeling means. ▪ It means endeavoring to walk closely in Christ's footsteps by the power of His indwelling Spirit. Mistakes will be made to be sure, but we acknowledge our mistakes saying, "I was wrong," "I made a mistake." We take responsibility for our failings and shortcomings, and accept the consequences that inevitably come from them.

▪ It means showing our young people what Christians do when they have conflicts and differences. It means that we endeavor to get behind what has caused us to be angry with each other and to clear it up so we can grow in our closeness to one another. It means taking the road of rebuilding the relationship rather than seeking revenge. It means entering the process of forgiveness and saying, "I'm sorry," "I apologize," "Please forgive me," and keeping open the possibility of beginning again.

▪ Modeling Christian marriage means demonstrating how Christian couples handle their disappointments, showing that it's part of life to sometimes experience discouragement or doubt, but portraying how God through His Word brings comfort and peace and reassurance. Ultimately, modeling means being real, allowing our children to see God at work in our lives making new people for His kingdom amid the brokenness of our lives.³

Lasting Impressions

The most important thing a father can do for his children, someone has said, is to love their mother. Jay Kesler (1998) describes his experience:

After Janie and I had one of our first meals together as husband and wife, I got up from the table, walked around to where she was sitting, thanked her for the meal, and told her I loved her. At that moment it dawned on me that my father had finished every meal exactly that way. Without saying a word to me, my father had taught me that husbands were supposed to behave that way with their wives.

As a small boy, I often saw my own parents show affection for each other and I always felt very secure about it. Only after I was married, however, did I realize how deeply this had been ingrained in me. To have this tradition in one's family is a marvelous thing. (p. 3).

Kesler has formed a parenting principle out of this: "Love your spouse more than your kids." "This solid relationship between husband and wife is a foundation stone on which teenagers build their concepts of love, fidelity, loyalty, trust, confidence, authority, assurance, and a whole range of human values that we cannot communicate with words alone. It is where a healthy emotional life begins for teens" (pp. 6, 7).

Insights from broken homes. Some of the most profound insights regarding the critical importance of the parents' relationship have come from studies of the lives of young people and adult children whose parents experienced marital breakdown. Judith Wallerstein (1989, 2000) has studied children of divorce extensively and has followed several individuals since 1971, interviewing them first as children and then at intervals into their adult years. Her research has revealed just how critically important the parents' relationship is to their offspring. In *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (2000) she writes:

A central finding to my research is that children identify not only with their mother and father as separate individuals but with the relationship between them. They carry the template of this relationship into adulthood and use it to seek the image of their new family. The absence of a good image negatively influences their search for love, intimacy, and commitment. Anxiety leads many into making bad choices in relationships, giving up hastily when problems arise, or avoiding relationships altogether. (p. xxix)

One of the young women in the longitudinal study was Tanya. At the 10-year interview, she made a rather unusual request to see the records Dr. Wallerstein had kept on her and her family. Wallerstein (1989) writes,

As we talk, it gradually becomes clear that what she wants, in a sense, is to hear some good news about her parents' relationship with each other. She specifically asks, "Did they ever love each other? Did they ever hug and make up after they fought?" It seems terribly important for her to have access to good memories about her parents' marriage. Lacking a good memory of parents who could love each other, she feels greatly handicapped in her own capacity to believe in a loving relationship with a man.

. . . The children of divorce seem driven by this need to know that their parents once loved each other, in order to confirm a sense of inner goodness in themselves and their origins.⁴ (p. 164)

Conclusion

Each person will hear this message from his or her own perspective. Some of us today are divorced parents with children for whom these insights may add weight to the burdens you already carry. May God's grace surround and support you. The decision to divorce is never easy and you have surely done the best you could do in a very difficult situation. We are just coming to understand the consequences for children better. Our enlarged understanding can

help us to minister to them more effectively. Though the negative aspects of our former marriages may make it difficult for us as divorced partners to talk about our marriages with them, let us for their sakes try to impress upon them all the positive characteristics that we can possibly recount. This may open new lines of communication and open the door for better relationships.

Some may be experiencing difficulty in marriage, perhaps contemplating divorce. The research helps us to understand that what may seem best for parents may not always be best for children. Divorce is not a temporary experience for them. This gives us cause to weigh even more carefully our adult decisions that have such lasting repercussions for them. While some marriages may have reached the place where restoration of the relationship is impossible or ill-advised, an abundance of resources exists today to help troubled couples resolve marital distress and to grow in their relationship. Our efforts to attend to our children's needs may open the door for our marriages to be strengthened.

There is a need for all of us whose lives and marriages are healthy and growing to be a source of encouragement for one another. Let us open our homes in hospitality more, let us mentor our youth more and with the grace-filled boldness of Paul invite others to follow us, even as we follow Christ. Let us show forth to our children and to others that He is in our hearts. Let us trust His Spirit to make the right impression.

Sermon Illumination

1. People who study the pair-bonding patterns of the warm-blooded Creation species . . . report among other things, that some species are so fiercely and exclusively monogamous that if a mate dies, they never re-mate, and live out a solitary existence. These are the *perfectly bonding* species and include golden eagles, marmoset monkeys, ring doves, coyotes, and wolves, among others. But biologists and anthropologists agree that while humans are distinctly monogamous, we are an *imperfectly bonding* species. That is, we are attracted to the idea of one exclusive lifelong bond, but we are vulnerable to distraction by seductive environments or relationships. (Joy, 1985, p. 150).

2. A man grew up watching how his parents handled conflict. 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!

3. Allen and Mark came home from their elementary school one day with the startling news that the mother of one of their classmates had left home the day before. The hand-written note she had left behind said simply that she was moving to a far away city and never coming back. The husband and father had done his best to console his now motherless children, but the heartrending story of this supposedly strong Christian family spread throughout the school. Like all their school friends, Allen and Mark were sad, confused and anxious. They knew their own parents had disagreements at times. Hearing the anxiety in their voices and sensing the need to

reassure their children, Allen and Mark's mother and father planned a special family worship that evening. They took out their wedding pictures and showed their boys. They played the cassette tape of their wedding service. Then, as their sons watched with wide eyes, they repeated their vows to each other, reaffirming their marriage commitment for "as long as we both shall live." The boys went off to bed that night still sad for their friend, but without the additional weight of anxiety about whether they might come home from school one day and find a similar note.

4. "Younger children of divorce in particular used interviews at one or another of our follow-ups to go back to a parent and request a more positive retelling of the marriage. One young woman in her twenties calls her mother after a fifteen-year follow-up to say, "Mom, I want to talk to you about Dad, but this time I only want to hear something good." She later reports with excitement, "And do you know? They loved each other once." (Wallerstein, 1989, p. 164).

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Power to the Young

Mentoring Youth for Enlarged Discipleship

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Parents have a unique responsibility and opportunity to mentor their youth and equip them for a successful transition to adult discipleship.

Theme Texts

Deut. 15:13, 14; John 20:21

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 or sermons 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 text, superscript numbers ^{1, 2, 3} will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the **Sermon Illumination** section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

A passage of Scripture that has important implications for parents is Deut. 15:13, 14. The verses are actually part of the Law of Moses pertaining to servants. When a servant had reached the maximum term of six years of service permitted under Israelite law he was to be released. His master was instructed: “Do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally. . . . Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you” (Deut. 15:13, 14). Individuals who were thus sent out from households were to be given the wherewithal to live life on their own. Today we are not thinking about servants being released, but about the preparation of youth for the time when they set out for life on their own. If such a practice pertained to servants in Old Testament times, how much more should parents and those who are guardians of children today take an active approach in equipping young people for the commencement of life on their own? How much more does the instruction apply: “Do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you.”

Helping youth to make the transition into adulthood must be more than just a passive “letting go” of them. It must be a time of actively outfitting maturing adolescents for the future. Far more important than the financial and material resources with which they leave home are their less intangible assets: a clear self-identity that springs from belief in the gospel, assurance that they are loved by parents and by God, a compelling sense of mission and purpose in life, and the social and relational skills so necessary for forming relationships and establishing families of their own. Jesus sent forth the disciples saying, “As the Father has sent me, I am

sending you” (John 20:21). He gave them a mission, a purpose, and a sense of His confidence in them. He promised the Holy Spirit as a Comforter and Helper (John 14:26).

Parenting that Empowers Youth

The apostle Paul urges us to “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11). This New Testament counsel applies to child-rearing, the building up and equipping of disciples in the home, just as surely as it does to the encouragement of fellow believers in the church. Taking a cue from verses such as this, Jack and Judy Balswick think of the process of Christian parenting as that of building up young people, *empowering* them for maturity:

“Empowering can be defined as the attempt to establish power in another person. . . . Empowering is the process of helping the other recognize strengths and potentials within, as well as to encourage and guide the development of these qualities” (1987, pp. 44, 45).

The power of touch and affirming words. This kind of encouragement and building up of young people is also described by Gary Smalley and John Trent (*The Blessing*, 1986) as the outcome of the Old Testament custom of blessing one’s offspring. By the touch of parents’ hands and by their parents’ spoken words, adult children received affirmation of parental acceptance. They knew they were highly valued as persons. They sensed the special future ahead of them. Contemporary young adults need such appropriate touch and such spoken words of affirmation from their parents. Christian families need to incorporate special times with their young people when youth can be uplifted in this way.

Dependent, independent or interdependent? Some parents prepare their children for *dependence*. This can occur when parents hold on emotionally too tightly, not allowing their children to grow in their personal autonomy and individual decision-making. Some parents need to be needed so badly that they determine to keep their children dependent upon them. Other children are reared for *independence*. Development of maturing children as self-governing individuals and healthy separation from their families is very important.¹ Maturity is not defined only by the achievement of separateness and self-governance, however. True maturity includes learning to live with others, becoming a functioning part of the community; being separate, yet connected. Parents must give attention to rearing young people who are *interdependent*, who will as adult individuals give themselves back to the community.

“A Christian family helps its children become individuals not only for their individual fulfillment or successes. The Christian family has the God-given vocation to nurture individuals who will live with a vision and concern for the whole of humanity” (Lee, 1986, p. 133).

What We Learn from Biblical Examples of Mentoring

The Word of God records a number of relationships where older adults mentored those who are younger. Among these are the relationships of Elizabeth and Mary, Barnabas and John Mark, Jesus and John. Through observation of these biblical relationships, parents, guardians and youth leaders can understand how better to relate to young people to help them fulfill God’s plan for their lives, to develop a vision and concern for humanity and to learn how to live interdependently. Despite differences in circumstances and personalities, several characteristics are common across these stories: older, more experienced followers of God take younger

believers under their wings, inspire confidence, provide counsel, and share responsibility with their younger associates.

Elizabeth and Mary. Within the drama of the Savior's first coming we see a striking example of mentoring. Elizabeth, the aged mother of the Messiah's forerunner, John, is a mentor for the young Mary, the mother of the Messiah Himself, Jesus. Luke 1 records their relationship and shows how God put them together to be a blessing to each other. Troubled by the arrival of the angel Gabriel and the announcement, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (vs. 31), Mary questions how this can be, given her virginity. Gabriel's reply indicates that her child will be an extraordinary being, a unique union of the divine and human, a Holy One—the Son of God. Knowing how important it would be for Mary to have support to absorb this startling news, God through Gabriel tenderly points Mary toward Elizabeth—someone she will be able to talk to and confide in about her mysterious pregnancy, someone within her family who will be able to affirm her faith and confirm that "nothing is impossible with God" (vs. 37). Elizabeth herself, barren through all her years has also experienced a miraculous pregnancy, though one of a different kind. Now in her old age, she is six months pregnant by her husband Zechariah with a child whom Gabriel had indicated would be a herald of the Messiah.

After this reference to her relative, Mary responds, "I am the Lord's servant . . . may it be to me as you have said" (vs. 38). Mary lost no time in connecting with Elizabeth. The very next words in Luke's account indicate her eagerness to be with this kinswoman who must have been very special to her: "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth" (vss. 39, 40). Elizabeth was a "kindred spirit of Mary" (*Adventist Home*, p. 242). With her, Mary found a soul-mate, one in whose presence she was not questioned, made to feel ashamed, or tempted to doubt. Rather, by Elizabeth she "is congratulated for her faith and for the high honor that has come to her" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, 5, 1956, pp. 685, 686): "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (vs. 45). These are gracious words that meant so much to this young woman. They affirmed Mary as a person and reinforced her faith in God's providence. In the encouraging climate of this home, she spent the first trimester of her pregnancy, probably staying through the birth of Elizabeth's and Zechariah's baby, John.²

Mary's association with Elizabeth gave time for the two women to support each other, to reflect on their common experiences—with Gabriel, with the divine intervention in the inception of their pregnancies—to contemplate God's purposes for the sons they would bear, to prepare for motherhood and, most of all, to worship and pray together. It was while she was with Elizabeth that Mary composed the inspired prayer poem that has been called the "Magnificat," from the Latin Vulgate translation of "magnifies" (vs. 46). It is a majestic, joyous song that reflects thankfulness and trust in God and a profound understanding of Old Testament Scripture regarding the salvation history of God's people and His redemptive plan (Luke 1:46-55).

Barnabas and John Mark. Barnabas started out as Joseph, an elite estate owner from the island of Cyprus. While in Jerusalem, he heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and his life was changed. He sold his valuable property and gave the proceeds to the fledgling church. For this caring gift and his qualities of encouragement, the disciples named him "Barnabas," which means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36, 37). He appears from time to time in the early

chapters of Acts—as the person who introduces Saul (later named Paul) to the church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27), as an evangelist sent from Jerusalem to work in Antioch with others from Cyprus who were there (Acts 11:22), as the one who invites Saul to join the evangelistic team in Antioch (Acts 11:25), and as one of the delegates sent from Antioch with a monetary gift to relieve the struggling church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29, 30).

From all the accounts of him we discern that Barnabas was optimistic about people. He possessed the rare gift of discerning worth in others. He was quick to recognize the potential of an imperfect person. “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (Acts 11:24). No wonder that, with him involved in spreading the good news, a virtual evangelistic explosion ensued in Antioch. What would it be like to have such a person in a family? One of the most poignant stories of the New Testament involves the mentoring relationship between Barnabas and his nephew, John Mark.

Mary, the sister of Barnabas, and her son, John Mark (cf. Col. 4:10), had a house in Jerusalem. It was a regular meeting place for prayer. When Peter was released from prison he went straight there and shared the story of his miracle with the believers (Acts 12:11-17). Barnabas and Paul likely stayed in Mary’s house when they brought the relief offering from Antioch. When the two evangelists returned to Antioch, they took John Mark with them (Acts 12:25). Subsequently, when Barnabas and Saul were ordained for special overseas missionary work, John Mark accompanied them as their assistant (Acts 13:5).

All went well at first in Cyprus, but on the mainland in Perga difficulty befell the team and John Mark left them (Acts 13:13). This may not have been the first time he had fled from a difficult situation. The account he would later include in his gospel – of the youth fleeing naked from the scene of Christ’s arrest – may be autobiographical (cf. Mark 14:51, 52; *SDA Bible Commentary*, 5, pp. 654, 655). The full effect of Mark’s disappointing departure from Perga became clear when Paul and Barnabas planned their next missionary journey. Barnabas insisted that the young man accompany them again. Paul disagreed, believing that he was not dependable. But Barnabas did not give up on his youthful relative. The team split up. Paul chose a new partner, Silas, and Barnabas took John Mark (Acts 15:36-39). Where did Barnabas take John Mark first? Together they went back to the family’s ancestral homeland of Cyprus where they had had a good first mission experience. Barnabas knew something about taking a discouraged young person back to the place where he “last saw the light.”³

How we need to build up and encourage the next generation! How we need to expose them to the maturity of faith that older ones possess. With the decision to take John Mark as his companion, Barnabas exits the narrative of the early church. Of him we hear nothing more. Was he successful in reclaiming Mark? Yes! John Mark is perhaps Barnabas’ greatest legacy. Rescued for the work of ministry, Mark later worked with Peter. It is commonly understood that Mark’s gospel, the earliest of the four, reflects in large part Peter’s preaching. In later years, Mark would also become a trusted friend and co-laborer with Paul (2 Tim. 4:11).

Jesus and John. John was a rough, high-spirited young man called “son of thunder” by Jesus (Mark 3:17). He once tried to secure power by convincing his own mother to intercede with Jesus on his behalf (Matt. 20:21). He thought that the Samaritans who spurned Jesus deserved to be burned up (Luke 9:54, 55). In his old age he reflected on these younger years

and remembered the continual love of Jesus for him. He was “the disciple Jesus loved” (literally, “kept on loving”) (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20).

Jesus loved John in spite of the traits he possessed, no doubt seeing the deep need for love that was present inside the young man. He drew him into the most trusted inner circle of the disciples. Jesus spoke of their relationship as a friendship (John 15:13, 15). These were His family (Matt. 12:49) and with them He communicated freely and spent time alone (John 6:3; 11:54). Jesus actually developed a fondness for John (John 20:2).⁴ To John, He granted special insights and revelations, such as those on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2ff). Jesus knew that trust is likely to beget trust. In Gethsemane, Jesus sought John’s support and encouragement (Matt. 26: 37, 38). Youth are often more willing to face themselves and their limitations in the presence of someone who is transparently honest and vulnerable with them.

Jesus’ love for John reached out to him in rebuke and correction when his course strayed from the values of Jesus (Matt. 20:22-24; Luke 9:52-56). Following the rebuke, Jesus did not shame John, but used the opportunity to more clearly clarify the principles of life in His kingdom family. As He hung upon the cross, Jesus gave to John a treasured responsibility—the care of His own mother. This showed the depth of trust and attachment He found with the young disciple (John 19:26, 27). The love of Jesus for him was not wasted on John. The outcome of Jesus’ mentoring him is history, not only in the experience of church leadership which John gave, but in his contribution of five of the New Testament books—his gospel, three letters and the Revelation.

Conclusion

The experience of John with Jesus is no doubt the epitome of the biblical mentoring experiences. Not only are the principles of caring, teaching, disciplining, and empowering dramatically demonstrated, but the story is even more powerful given that this mentored one was exceptionally difficult to love. Not every parenting or mentoring experience turns out so favorably, a painful fact which Jesus Himself knew all too well because of His experience with Judas. Perhaps the best part for us today is that this grandest of all Mentors is still accessible. He is available to parents, who can call upon Him for help to guide their youth. Parents may also have their own needs to be parented or re-parented because of the abandonment or heartache they knew as children. Jesus brings healing and restoring love to the hungry hearts of parents.

Jesus is there as well for youth, who are struggling mightily with issues within themselves or in their relationships and who may never have a parent or mentor to guide and prepare them or walk beside them in their journey into adulthood. Both parents and children can find Him in His Word, call upon Him in prayer as the risen Lord and experience His comforting and encouraging presence through the Spirit.

Sermon Illumination

1. “The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government. . . . To direct the child’s development without hindering it by undue control should be the study of both parent and teacher. Too much management is as bad as too little” (*Education*, pp. 287, 288).

2. “It is possible that Mary remained with Elisabeth till after the birth of John, though Luke’s narrative seems to imply that she left prior to that time. It would seem out of character for Mary to leave at the very time Elisabeth would be most in need of her sympathetic and tender ministry. It is probable that Luke here mentions Mary’s departure at this point in order to complete that portion of the narrative dealing with the visit of Mary to Elisabeth. Another instance of this literary device, common throughout both OT and NT, occurs in ch. 3:20, 21 where the imprisonment of John is introduced into the record before the baptism of Jesus, though it actually occurred afterward. The fact that Mary is not mentioned by name in ch. 1:57, 58 in no way implies that she did not participate in the incident here related” (Comment on Luke 1:56 in *SDA Bible Commentary*, 5, p. 688).

3. “When temptations assail you, as they surely will, when care and perplexity surround you, when, distressed and discouraged, you are almost ready to yield to despair, look, O look, to where with the eye of faith you last saw the light: and the darkness that encompasseth you will be dispelled by the bright shining of His glory. When sin struggles for the mastery in your soul, and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, go to the Saviour. His grace is sufficient to subdue sin. He will pardon us, making us joyful in God” (*Messages to Young People*, pp. 107, 109).

4. The original Greek text uses here a form of *phileo*, a word for love that expresses “fondness for,” “affection,” and “friendship” as distinguished from *agape* which is used in John 13:23, etc.

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Breaking the Pattern

by Larry Yeagley

Theme

While God can and sometimes does work by His abundant grace even in the midst of the unhealthy human relationship patterns of conflict and crisis in families, by the power of this same divine grace these faulty patterns can be changed to more healthy, gospel-centered ways of relating. The light of His love can be made to shine more clearly in our homes and churches.

Theme Texts

Rom. 15:4; Heb. 12:1, 2

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 or sermons 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.

Introduction

Imagine yourself traveling down the road with all your possessions in a moving van, in a cart or perhaps in sacks on donkeys. You have convinced all your family members to go with you, but you have no answer for their question, “Where are we going?” In fact, where you’re headed you’re not exactly sure. No specific house or land of your own awaits you at journey’s end. You are, in fact, leaving the only home you have ever known. All seventy-five years of your life have been spent there. Think of the trauma and loneliness you’d experience! I know I’d be traumatized and lonely. I’d probably weep during most of the trip. I can’t imagine ripping up roots developed over seven and a half decades. Yet that was the scenario in the life of Abraham (Gen. 11:31).

Facing Crises through Faith in God

Abraham left Ur behind him. It was a modern city then, with the finest amenities known at the time. After weeks of travel, he and his family came to Haran, some 600 miles or nearly 1000 kilometers away. Here they intended to stop and rest for a while. It was lovely there. Time passed. Then God called Abraham to move on:

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Gen. 12:1-3 NASB). So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran” (Gen. 12:1-4 NASB).

By now, however, many of those with him had been lured by Haran’s beauty into settling there permanently. Many of his family chose to remain. Imagine that parting! First Abraham had

left Ur, his native homeland, and now once again he was leaving behind a substantial part of his family. What a heartbreaker! Yet Scripture says he followed the call of God, facing these life crises with exemplary faith (cf. Heb. 11:8):

“So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran” (Gen. 12:4 NASB).

Grieving and lonely, this faithful follower of God arrived in Canaan. There the Lord spoke again, “To your descendants I will give this land” (Gen. 12:7 NASB). Abraham worshipped God there, building an altar to Him who had led him thus far. However, all was not well in Canaan, this land the Lord pledged to him. A famine was raging. In hope of finding food, Abraham took his household further south to Egypt.

Faltering Faith

Facing fear. Reaching the border of the powerful Egyptian nation, Abraham experienced emotions that challenged him in a new way. So far, he had manifested great faith as he left the comforts of Ur and of Haran, parted with close family members, and survived the hardships of travel. Here in Egypt, however, fear for his life suddenly gripped him. Sarah, his wife, was very beautiful and Abraham worried that Egyptian men would desire her.

Taking counsel with his fears, he convinced himself that the Egyptians would likely kill him to get her. He devised an elaborate scheme and presented her to them as his sister. Abraham was willing to lie and compromise Sarah’s integrity for his self-preservation. Sure enough, Pharaoh himself was attracted to her. Thinking that she was Abraham’s sister, the Egyptian monarch took her into his harem, giving Abraham an abundance of gifts in exchange.

Can you imagine how humiliated, rejected, and used she felt as she was ushered into Pharaoh’s palace? Her grief and loneliness must have been overwhelming. Providentially, God did not abandon Abraham despite this failure to trust in Him. God sent plagues upon Pharaoh and his household. Eventually, the Egyptian king discovered the deceit and quickly released Sarah. He gave a stiff tongue lashing to Abraham and deported him and his family.

Facing childlessness. Back in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah settled and continued to try to start a family. They must have had many troubling conversations, as month after month went by and Sarah could not get pregnant. Ordinary strategies for conceiving a child were ineffective. Their hopes of having a baby were crushed as the time of Sarah’s menopause came and went. The distraught wife, attempting to relieve the terrible burden and stigma of childlessness and to achieve some level of normalcy in their family, came up with a plan. “Sarah said to Abram, ‘Now behold the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid’” (Gen. 16:2 NASB). Her idea was to use a surrogate—in effect to have her husband impregnate her maid and then, since the servant was hers, she could consider the child as hers. It was an ill-fated plan, one that would have repercussions for millennia. Abraham fell for it. “And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. So Sarah treated her harshly, and she fled from her sight” (Gen. 16:2-6 NASB).

Their way of handling their problem was to take matters into their own hands and try to resolve it. In doing so, they compromised their marriage and sexual union. Instead of helping with the stress felt in the home and their marriage, the plan only made matters worse. The grief and loneliness of infertility were now compounded by jealousy and hostility. Sarah was not only harsh with Hagar, she also laid the responsibility for her misery on her husband. “May the wrong done me be upon you” (Gen. 16:5 NASB)! Attempts to resolve their issues apart from faith and trust in God resulted in distrust, irresponsibility and assignment of blame on someone else.

Praise God, He is longsuffering. He made a covenant with Abram (and changed his name to Abraham) (Gen. 17:1-9). God kept His covenant, giving Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age as He has promised (Gen. 21:1-3).

Facing marital loneliness. I have concluded that Abraham and Sarah must have experienced what some psychologists call “loneliness though married.” This appears to be the case because of what happened after Sarah finally did bear the miracle son. God commanded Abraham to take the boy to Mt. Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. But from all that is recorded in Scripture, there is no evidence that Abraham and Sarah talked together about this most strange directive. They evidently had stopped communicating. Abraham quietly left home early in the morning with Isaac. I can only imagine how Sarah felt when she discovered she had not been apprised of such an unthinkable mission. Despite this, God used the experience of Abraham’s trust and faith on Mt. Moriah as an illustration of how righteousness comes (Rom. 4:1-5). Certainly, the faulty patterns in Abraham’s life show that righteousness does not come from human accomplishments.

Faulty patterns repeated. As further evidence of the fallenness of the flesh, Abraham once again fell into the deceptive pattern deployed in Egypt. He passed off Sarah as his sister—in order to save his own skin (Gen. 20:1-18). This time it was Abimelech, king of Gerar, who took Sarah. Again, God mercifully protected her by giving the king a bad dream. On this occasion also, Abraham received a severe scolding from a king. Negative patterns had become deeply imprinted upon his thinking.

Infectious Trans-generational Patterns

Like father, like son. Among the descendants of Abraham, we see some of these same patterns continuing across the generations. For example, when Isaac married Rebekah, she was thoroughly devoted to him, but the same experience of rejection, humiliation, and depersonalization that Sarah, her mother-in-law, had twice suffered were to befall her also. Jacob deceitfully passed off Rebekah as his sister (Gen. 26:6-10). Where have we heard that story before? When faced with fear, Isaac responded in exactly the same manner as his father before him.

Faulty communication, more deception and manipulation. Eventually, Rebekah directed much of her devotion toward her son, Jacob. One wonders to what extent the deceptive tactics of her husband influenced her deception of him in Gen. 27. In that episode, she collaborated with Jacob in deceiving Isaac, so that he would bestow the birthright blessing, not upon the elder son, Esau, but on the younger son, Jacob, her favorite. When the older brother returned from his hunting trip expecting to receive the blessing and found it taken by Jacob, he was outraged at his brother’s trickery.

The self-made crisis led to untold heartache. Faced with Esau's murderous threats toward Jacob, Rebekah instructed her favorite son to flee to his Uncle Laban's house in Haran. To get Isaac to go along with her plan, she presented herself as depressed over Esau's Hittite wives (Gen. 27:46). In this way the patriarch would dispatch Jacob to get a wife for himself within the family line in Haran. Scripture does not reveal how this couple resolved their situation, but Isaac and Rebekah had to live with the results of the communication break-down between them, their distrust in each other that had developed, and the fallout for the whole family relationship. Rebekah surely felt intense loneliness after Jacob's departure. Never was she to see her favored son again. Jacob grieved the separation from home and family. Years would pass before the two brothers would be reconciled. Yet they were finally reconciled and God continued His covenant line through Jacob, despite the sad family experiences through which the family passed.

Dysfunctional patterns continue. Nor did Jacob fare very well in Uncle Laban's house. Leah became Jacob's wife by the trickery of Laban. Only on condition of Jacob's promise to work a second period of seven years did the deceitful Laban grant him Rachel, his first love, as his wife also. Fourteen years of servitude and a lot of unhappiness were but the first installment in a lifetime of heartache. "My years have been few and difficult," he would later tell Pharaoh (Gen. 47:9). Jacob distrusted Laban. Leah felt rejected and lonely knowing that Jacob loved Rachel more. Rachel was jealous of her childbearing sister and angry with Jacob for not getting her pregnant. In a bid to secure a greater portion of their husband's affections, the two sisters repeated the mistake of Sarah, their grandmother, giving their maids to Jacob as surrogates to bear children for them.

The account of this family, the people of God's covenant, goes on to tell how the destructive force of favoritism played out again in the next generation. As his parents did, so did Jacob in favoring Rachel's children and outfitting Joseph with designer clothes while his half-brothers were sent out to tend the livestock. Destructive rage, similar to that which Esau directed at his mother's special son, now erupted toward Joseph as his brothers sold him into slavery and then lied to their father, telling him that his favorite had been devoured by a wild beast.

Systemic, trans-generational crises. By now it can be clearly seen that this family system is wracked by crises, treachery, betrayal, dishonesty, loneliness, and distrust. Patterns of unhealthy behavior and attitudes are carried from one generation to another. As the patterns go unchecked, they tear apart personal peace and family stability. Some suffer in silence, some are victims of violence, and strong resentments separate groups almost irreparably.

How Dysfunctional Patterns Can Be Broken

There is a bright spot in the story. Joseph, the victim of violence, breaks the pattern. Certainly he was fearful, lonely, grief-stricken in a strange land, and treated unfairly in captivity. In spite of all this, Joseph clung to God. People of influence noticed the noble traits that made him stand out head and shoulders above the rest. He became second in command in Egypt, brilliantly managed the crop surplus in the time of plenty, and cared for the nation during the famine. It was during the famine that the group of travel-weary men showed up at the commodities office. His brothers! Oh, how he must have longed to embrace them! They had been in his forgiving heart for years. Gen. 45:1-15 tells the story of how he eventually revealed himself to them.

Joseph arranged for the whole family to move to Egypt and settled them in Goshen. It is

interesting to note that Jacob, however, still held to his pattern of favoritism. He told Joseph he would give him one portion more than his brothers (Gen. 48:22) and thereby included the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own sons. Later, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh would take their places on an equal basis with the other tribes of Israel.

Breaking the pattern through grace and forgiveness. Jacob did not break the pattern of distrust within the family either. After his death, the brothers came fearfully to Joseph, offering themselves as servants, thinking that he would surely wreak revenge upon them now that Jacob was no longer alive (Gen. 50:15-18). But Joseph consistently demonstrated a gracious, forgiving attitude toward his family. “So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Gen. 50:21 NASB). Here is a precious portrayal in the Old Testament of what the gospel of God’s love can do in the human heart.

This breath of fresh air, this force for change in the family system of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should bring courage to us when we face crisis, loneliness, and disappointment. While God can and sometimes does work by His abundant grace even in the midst of the unhealthy human relationship patterns of conflict and crisis in our families, by the power of this same divine grace these faulty patterns can be changed. We can relate in more healthy gospel-centered ways. The light of Jesus’ love can be made to shine more clearly in our homes.

Conclusion

Churches too, like families, sometimes develop and sustain negative patterns that keep the membership in constant upheaval. One small church faced seemingly insurmountable problems. An autocratic head elder insisted that his solutions be followed. During a particular crisis, he went so far as to build a new church, financing it with his own money. When the building was completed, few followed him there. All but a handful of the members chose to remain in the one-room school house. The local people knew about the squabbles in the church and refused all invitations to attend services in either the new facility or the old school house. Today there is no Seventh-day Adventist church in that community.

For over four decades of pastoral ministry I have spent much of my time working with families who faced crisis after crisis caused by unhealthy patterns of conflict resolution. They disregarded God’s claim on their life and took matters in their own hands. If you live in such a family or church, Joseph holds out hope to you. By God’s grace the negative patterns can be broken. Our God still works miracles. He changes churches, homes, and individual hearts. He is eager to restore tenderness, peace, and love to all troubled relationships. Thank God for His healing and restoring power toward that which is broken.

God's Hats

by Karen Holford

This story uses hats to help children understand more about God.

- *The story will be most effective if you are able to illustrate it with actual hats. Most of these hats can be borrowed or purchased inexpensively at a toy or clothing store. A makeshift judge's wig can be made from yarn.*
- *The hats are used to help the children understand the kind of person God is. You can ask the older children to help you think about the different hats and to suggest ways in which each hat can tell us something about God. You may want to involve the younger children by inviting them to volunteer to wear or hold the hats for the others to see as you talk about them. Be sensitive to the fact that some children may not want to put a hat on their heads. Let the children decide whether to wear the hat or just hold it for everyone to see.*
- *This idea can also be expanded into a sermon for a multigenerational worship service or a children's church. These are only a few of the hats you could use. You may think of some that are especially meaningful in your culture that can also illustrate attributes of God's character in imagery children can understand.*

A policeman's hat. Some people think God is like a policeman, waiting around the corner to catch us doing something wrong. God is more like a policeman who helps to protect us and to show us the way when we we're lost.

A judge's wig. Some people think that God is like a stern judge, who is just waiting to find us guilty and punish us. But He is really like the kind judge who pays our penalty for us so we can go free.

A Father Christmas (Santa Claus) hat. Some people think that God is like a Father Christmas, and who only brings presents for us if we've been very, very good. But God gives us good gifts every day, and loves and cares for everyone, even when they don't love Him. Some people also act as

though it's enough to think about God for a day or two once a year around the holidays. But we know God is with us every day, not just on Christmas or Easter or New Year's!

A fireman's hat. Some people think that you only need God in an emergency, when you need someone to come quick and get you out of trouble or rescue you from something that might hurt you. But God watches out for us all the time, making sure we have what we need. He cares about the little things that make us happy, or sad, or worried, or afraid, as well as our big emergencies.

A night-cap. Some people think that if there is God, He must be sleeping because there's so much trouble in the world. But the truth is that God is always awake, making

sure things always work out for the good eventually.

A crown. We know God is a King, but some kings on earth are cruel and greedy and do battle against each other to get the best for themselves. But our God is a peace-loving King, who rules with love, and only goes into battle to save us from Satan.

A builder's hat. God is like a builder, but He's not building steel buildings that will be knocked down when they get old or someone decides they want something different. God is building fantastic homes for us in heaven that will last forever.

A "Dad" hat. This is a special hat. This is the hat I like the best! It's a "Dad" hat! Lots of us have great dad's. But sometimes dad's can be a real disappointment, like when they have to go away on your birthday, or they break their promises, or they make a mistake, or even hurt us. But God is an amazing Dad! Think of the best dad you could ever imagine, and you have

only imagined a tiny part of the wonderful Dad that God is. Jesus called His Father "Abba." "Abba" is what little Jewish children in Jesus' day called their daddies.

God is:

- The Daddy who's always there for you.
- The Daddy who thinks up amazing ways to show you how much He loves you.
- The Daddy who always loves and accepts you, even when you make a mistake.
- The Daddy who protects you and helps you when you feel lost and alone.
- The Daddy who has amazing plans for your future.

Whenever you see one of these hats, remember who God really is, and best of all, think of Him with the best Dad hat you can dream of.

Mommy's Time with God

by Alicia Patterson

One Sabbath morning Mommy woke up bright and early. She looked at her watch. "It's still early," she thought. "Sabbath is a busy morning, but if I get up now, I can spend some special time with God before everyone wakes up."

She got up very carefully because Baby Aaron was sleeping sweetly beside her and she didn't want to wake him up, or Daddy either. She got her Bible and another special book about God and quietly—oh so quietly—tiptoed out of the room. She quietly—oh so quietly—shut the door to her room . . . but when she stepped into the hall, she noticed that the door to the boys' room was open and she was just about to close it, when she heard a voice.

"Mommy!" the voice called. It was Gable. "Oh dear. He must have had another bad dream," she thought. "I'll just sit beside him for a few minutes, then I'll go spend some time with God"

"Yes, Sweetheart?" she said as she sat down on the edge of the bed. "Did you have another bad dream?"

"Mmmm," murmured Gable, still half asleep.

"Want me to sit here for a few minutes?" Mommy asked.

"Mmmm," Gable muttered again, his eyes already closed again.

Mommy pulled the covers around his shoulders and held him close. Before long his breathing became slower and slower and . . . he was asleep.

"O. K.," Mommy said to herself. "Now I'll go spend some time with God." But then she thought, "I'll just check to see if Nathan is covered before I go out." So she stood on her tiptoes to peek at Nathan in the top bunk. But something was wrong! Nathan's *feet* were on his pillow and his *head* was where his feet should be!

"Silly Nathan! How did he get so backwards?" she wondered. "I can't pull up his covers because they are all underneath him!" But his legs were cold on his pillow, so she lifted him up and turned him around, head where his head should be and feet where his feet should be. "There," she smiled to herself as she tucked his stuffed dog back in beside him, "now God and I can have some time together."

She started to tiptoe out of the room—quietly, oh so—but no! "What was that? Was that the baby crying?" She quickly turned to open the door to her room again. But it was just the cats, Arthur and Boxer. What were they doing in there? "Shh!" she told them. But they ran down the stairs meowing loudly all the way to the front door.

Alicia is a mother of three, has worked as a pastor with her husband to found a church, and writes and presents monologues which portray women of Scripture.

It was a beautiful morning and she was so looking forward to a little quiet time reading and talking with God. Maybe she would sit outside on the back porch. Boxer ran out quickly, but Arthur stayed by the door, just looking out. "It *looks* nice enough outside," he thought, and he took a step forward. "But you never know, there could be a storm coming. . . ." He stepped back and sniffed the air. "Smells fine," he thought. He took a slow step forward. "Yes, it does look nice and smell fine," he thought, "but there *could* be a dog around that bush." He looked around cautiously, his body half inside, half outside the door.

"Oh come *on* Arthur," said Mommy. "It's a *great* day to be outside, just go *out!*" It was getting late and she was worried that their pet birds would wake up and make their usual racket telling the world they were glad to be alive. Sure enough. "Tweet! Tweeeeeeeeet!" shrieked Gilligan and Skipper the two Cockatiels, just as Arthur finally decided to go out.

"Please hush, you birds, no, no!" whispered Mommy. "You'll wake up the baby! And I'm just on my way outside to talk to God for awhile!" But it was too late. Just then the baby started crying. She ran up the stairs and lay down beside the baby again. He was happy to see her and snuggled close to drink warm milk. "As soon as he's done nursing, I'll get to spend my special time with God," Mommy thought sleepily. But at 7:00 o'clock she woke up again with a start. "Oh, my! If I don't get up right now, I won't be able to get everyone to Sabbath School on time!" she thought. And she jumped out of bed.

"There is no time for special time with God now," she said to herself, "but maybe I can work it in later." She put her Bible and the other book in her diaper bag. "Maybe there'll be time for me to read in the van on the way to church," she thought. But in the van the

baby needed toys, and Daddy needed to talk, and on the way home she was handing out lunch, and when they got home the neighbor lady came over and needed to talk, and then it was supper time, and it wasn't until she had finished tucking all the little boys into bed, that it struck her: "I never got my special time with God today!"

"Dear Jesus, she prayed, I'm so sorry I didn't get my special time with you today." But then she thought she heard a little voice say, "I had lots of special time with you today!"

"But, Jesus, when did we have our special time?" she asked. "I never got to do it, remember?" But then she thought she heard him say, "I had a bad dream and you comforted me, I was cold and you covered me. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was hungry and you fed me. I needed to talk and you listened."

"But, Jesus," she said, "That was Gable who had the dream, and Nathan who was cold and the baby who was thirsty, and the neighbor lady who needed to talk."

Again the soft voice in her mind said, "What you have done for the little ones and those in need you have done to me." "Jesus," Mommy said, "Do you really mean it? That you love my family and everyone on earth so much that even when I help the children it's like helping you?"

"Yes. Yes. Remember I told you in the Bible? We'll have other special times together alone, just you and I, but I loved the times we spent together today taking care of all the little people—and big people too—that need to know I love them. I do love them so much. And I love you." So that was the end of Mommy's busy day. It turned out very special after all.

Prodigal Joe

by Karen Holford

Storyteller's Notes

This story sets a well-known Bible story in a setting familiar to today's children. It is designed to be an interactive children's story in which the children participate by doing actions or making sounds when they hear key words. You will need to practice the words and the actions with the children a couple of times before telling the story. First run through the words and actions, then choose words at random to see if the children can remember what to do. You may wish to have an adult helper who leads the children, prompting the actions and sounds as key words are spoken.

*Tell the story, as expressively as possible, leaving plenty of time after the **key words** for the children to do the actions and make sounds in the right places. At the end of the story there is a group hug, with all the children standing in a circle and hugging each other. The children may need help to form a circle, and if there is not enough space to do this safely, then just use the action given for hugs.*

You can introduce the story by telling the grownups that the children are going to help tell the story today. Tell the children that you need them to help you make your story more interesting with sound effects and actions, just like people sometimes do on story tapes or the radio.

Sounds and Actions

Farmer/farm: Mime pulling on boots, or choose whatever action would suit farmers from your region. If the children know the song, "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," or another song about a farm, you may also wish to sing the first line or phrase as an alternative.

Work: Wipe sweat from brow and say "Whew!"

Tractor: Chuga chuga!

Cows: Moo moo!

Pigs: Oink oink!

Chickens: Cluck cluck!

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- Sheep:* Baa baa!
- Pizza:* Rub tummy and say “Mmmmm good!”
- Money:* Chink chink!
- Smelly:* Hold nose and say “Phew!”
- Hug:* Cross your arms over your chest as if to hug someone.

Story

Once upon a time there was a **farmer** who had two sons. One son, Jim, was very well-behaved, well . . . most of the time. The other son, Joe, was well-behaved, well . . . every now and then.

They both **worked** hard, most of the time, on their father's **farm**. They looked after the **sheep**, fed the **chickens**, fixed the **tractor**, and milked the **cows**.

After what seemed like a whole lifetime of **working** on the **farm**, Joe thought, “There must be more to life than all this **work**. I want to go and have fun.” But when he opened his purse, he only had enough **money** for a large vegetarian **pizza** with sweetcorn and peppers, and three orders of fries.

Joe thought again. “My dad has lots of **money**,” he thought, “One day I'll inherit my share, but by then I'll be too old to enjoy it. I'll ask my dad for my **money** now, so I can go and have some fun.” And that's just what he did, even though his dad had to sell off half the **farm** to pay him.

The next day Joe packed his clothes and his **money**, said good bye to his family, and set off on a long walk to the big city. He found a very nice hotel, and bought himself

some really smart clothes. Then he threw a big party for all the new kids he had met. They were happy to come, and eat all the **pizza** with sweetcorn and peppers, and french fries and ice cream they could eat. It was so much fun, he did the same thing again the next week, and the next. This went on for months, until there was no more **money** left in Joe's suitcase, so there could be no more **pizza** parties. Suddenly, there were no more friends left either.

Joe thought that he had better get a job, but the only **work** he knew was **farm work**. So he left the big city and walked for miles and miles, trying to find a **farmer** that needed some help. Finally a **farmer** took pity on him, and said he could look after his **pigs**.

Well, it was very **smelly work**. And Joe was very hungry, because all he had was **pigs'** food, and it didn't taste much like **pizza**. And he was very tired too, from all the hard **work** and no sleep. (The **pigs** were so fat, there wasn't any room left for him to lie down in the **pigpen**.)

One day Joe thought to himself, “This is crazy! Even the **cows** on my father's **farm** smell much better than these **pigs**! I would gladly sleep in the barn and **work** from morning till night, if I just could go home,

and eat **pizza** with my dad's helpers every now and then. Anything would be better than this!"

So Joe set off home again. It was a very long walk, and all he could think about mile after mile was what his dad would say. Finally he could see the **farm** in the distance. Who was that standing at the gate? It was Dad! Dad saw Joe too, and when he saw how tired and dirty he was, he started up the **tractor** and came down the lane to meet him. Joe thought his dad might be really mad that he had taken half his money and made such a mess of things, but Joe was wrong. Dad just **hugged** and **hugged** him, even though he still **smelled** all **piggy**. Then he drove him back to the **farm**.

Mum and Jim came out to see what all the fuss was about. When Mum saw it was Joe, she **hugged** and **hugged** him too. Then she went inside to pour him a bath and find him some clean clothes. Meanwhile, Dad phoned all Joe's old friends and asked them to come over for supper. Then he ordered twenty of Joe's favourite **pizzas** with sweet corn and peppers, and lots of fries.

It was a great party! Everyone was so glad to see Joe—everyone, that is, except for his brother Jim. Jim was upset because he had **worked** very hard on the farm all these years, and been good too, and Dad had never let him have a **pizza** party. Dad noticed Jim was angry, so he went and **hugged** him too. "Jim," he said, "I really appreciate the way you have helped out around here! Everything I have is yours. I should have told you this before. And any time you want to have a **pizza** party with your friends, you just let me know! I love both of you boys, no matter what. And I love **pizza** parties!"

"Next week I'll have my own **pizza** party," thought Jim, "but I'll order my pizzas with mushrooms and pineapple!"

So Jim **hugged** his dad, and went back into the party to **hug** his long-lost brother, Joe. When everyone at the party saw Jim **hug** Joe, they all smiled their biggest smile, and **hugged** all around, because Joe had been lost, and now he was found. And everyone was together again, safe and happy on the **farm**.

Marriage Matters

Lessons on Marriage with Children

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Skits are great fun as well as a powerful way to stimulate discussion and couple dialogue. Scripture has preserved bits and pieces of the lives of a number of fathers and mothers and their marriages. God has left us these stories to be told and retold because they draw back the curtain on couples facing the real life challenges of parenting. Parenting can both strengthen and put great strain on marriage relationships. Most couples with children experience both kinds of seasons. These stories from the married life of Bible couples can connect us with the wisdom of the past. As we lift the curtain and see them living out their lives as marriage partners and parents, we can make application to our lives today.

These skits and the thought questions that follow may be used as discussion starters for marriage enrichment growth experiences for couples, as part of a worship service, as openers to generate dialogue between parents and youth in a Sabbath School or youth meeting, in evangelism, as a prayer meeting series, etc. The reflective exercises included after each drama script are designed for couples to share privately, either “knee to knee” as part of couple time during a seminar, or at home.

Of course, these are only a few of the skits that might have been written from the lives of Bible couples with children. You may want to write some of your own that lend themselves to thinking about issues especially meaningful for your time and place.

Skit 1: We’re Pregnant!: Manoah and Angela’s* Story [Judges 13-16]

Angela: (*Speaking excitedly, but with some reservation.*) “Manoah, I think we’re pregnant! I mean, I’m quite sure we are, but we’ve prayed for this for so long I’m still afraid to believe it, for fear it might not be true!”

Manoah: “Oh Angela! You’re really serious, aren’t you! (*Manoah gives Angela a big hug, then takes her by the shoulders and holds her at arms length while he barrages her with questions.*) We’re going to have a baby? Well, are you sure? How do you know? Oh what am I talking about. Women always know about these things! (*Hugs her again, then takes her hands and starts to dance around the floor.*)

Angela: “Oh Manoah! I’m so excited. I’ve wanted a baby more than anything for as long as I can remember! But all of a sudden I’m scared too. What have we asked for, Manoah? What have we done? Think of the responsibility. I don’t know if I can do this! Our lives will never be the same again!”

Manoah: “I know. My mind is just reeling too. But God gave us this baby, I’m sure He did. Let’s just pray together—for our baby, for us—right now before we get any further into this venture. (*Kneeling together.*) “O Lord, I beg you, . . . teach us how to bring up the [baby] who is to be born”

*Scripture does not tell us her name.

Group Discussion

1. Invite couples to share voluntarily their thoughts and feelings when they learned they were pregnant for the first time.
2. How did having a child change your lives as a married couple forever?
3. What are some of the blessings having children has brought into your lives together?
4. Knowing the rest of the story of Sampson [see Judges 13-16], what stresses and strains do you think being his parents put on the marriage of Manoah and Angela?
5. What comfort and encouragement for parents can be found in the end of this story?

Couple Reflections

1. Times when you have been a great source of encouragement to me as a father/mother . . .
2. Changes I couldn’t have anticipated that becoming parents brought into our lives . . .
3. Times when the stresses and strains of parenting have impacted our marriage . . .
4. Courage I draw from the story of Manoah and Angela . . .
5. A prayer I would like to share with you—for us as a couple, for us as parents, for our children . . .

Skit 2: Managing Anxiety: Amram and Jochebed [Exodus 2:1-11]

Jochebed: (*Seated in a rocking chair, holding a baby.*) “Oh Amram, isn’t he beautiful! Look at those feet. You can see already he’s going to be tall like his father. And those bright eyes. He doesn’t miss a thing! I just can’t believe we did this—you and me together!”

Amram: “He is a fine lad indeed! Who could have anticipated how you’d feel when he fell asleep on your chest or curled his little fingers around yours . . . It’s just so amazing!”

Jochebed: “Oh Amram, I’m so happy and so scared at the same time! What if the soldiers find him? It has been bad enough living in hiding these last few months, concealing my pregnancy, unable to share our joy, afraid a slip of the tongue would give away our secret. But now I live in terror! Every time he makes a peep, my stomach knots. I wake up in a cold sweat from the most horrible nightmares, of soldiers wrestling him from my arms”

Amram: (*Reaching out to comfort his wife.*) “I know Darling. This is a nightmare in real life. I’ve been through a million plans in my mind, but I haven’t been able to settle on anything practical. There’s always a reason it’s too risky, or just won’t work.”

Jochebed: (*Urgently.*) “Well, risk or no, we’ve got to do something! Amram, I can’t keep him quiet any more! He’s starting to coo, and babies do cry, even when you’ve done

everything . . . ! Look, I know I wanted a baby, but I really don't know what we were thinking. . . . Well, *I've been* thinking. . . . Promise me you'll hear me out. What if we put him in a basket and hid him in the reeds at the river's edge. There are many sounds along the river. Maybe a baby's cry would be lost among them. And we could send Miriam to play nearby and keep watch. I know it's risky, but I don't see us having a lot of choices. So unless you have a better idea . . . I've nearly finished weaving a basket." (*Amram just looks at her, not sure how to respond.*)

Group Discussion

1. What dangers lurk in your time and place that threaten the well-being, if not the very lives of your children?
2. How does living with the realities of these risks affect the stress levels of married couples?
3. Why is a strong marriage relationship so important to the safeguarding of the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of children?
4. How does the life narrative of Moses bring encouragement and hope to parents and families concerned for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the children God has given them?

Couple Reflection

1. Times when I have been able to relax and enjoy our children as God's wonderful creation . . .
2. Thanks you deserve for the way you have mothered/fathered our children . . .
3. Times when I am most afraid for their well-being . . . and ours as husband and wife . . .
4. Ways I wish we could stand together to support, protect, and prepare them for the realities of life in this world . . .

Skit 3: Growing Together, Growing Apart: Isaac and Rebekah [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." (*Turns and gestures 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 is it about becoming parents that can cause a couple who love each other deeply to drift apart?
2. People who know about families and how they function observe that the forming of an inappropriate alliance between a parent and a child is often a signal that things are not going well in the marriage. What evidence do you see in the relationships between Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob, that signal the reality that things are not going well in the marriage?
3. Why do you think Isaac and Rebekah have stopped communicating?
4. How do Isaac and Rebekah resolve the conflicts between them? What problems do you see with Rebekah's methods? With Isaac's? How are the children caught in the middle? How might they better resolve their differences?
5. 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 the children and parenting them have come between us . . .
3. Ways our love for each other has sustained us through these difficult experiences . . .
4. Ways I can strengthen our communication and our ability to resolve conflicts in ways that meet the needs of both of us and that do not use our children as pawns . . .
5. My commitment of love to you as long as life lasts . . .

Skit 4: Better Than Ten Sons: Elkanah and Hannah [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: (*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 about the pain of childlessness?
2. What unique strains are placed on a marriage when a couple wants and prays for a child, but no pregnancy is forthcoming?
3. Which responses from Elkanah are the most helpful? Which are less helpful?
4. What does Hannah really need from Elkanah? From the rest of the family? From the community around them?
5. How could Elkanah better convey his love by listening and accepting Hannah, rather than offering solutions?

Couple Reflections

1. Times when you have listened to and accepted me, and made me feel completely understood . . .
2. Times when God didn't seem to be listening and you ministered to me in disappointment, discouragement, grief . . .
3. Disappointments and losses we must somehow cope with together . . .
4. Ways I would like to be there for you in moments of pain . . .

Script 5: Table Talk: A Fictitious Meeting of Eunice, Lois and Mary Over Lunch [Acts 12:11-12, 25; 13:4-6, 13; 15:36-40; 2 Timothy 4:11 and 2 Timothy 1:2, 5, 13; 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 5:20]

Mary: "I can tell you, raising John Mark by myself has not been easy. He's a good boy, but I have worried a lot over the years about the absence of male role models in his life. Of course my family has done what they could to help, but a single mother raising a boy alone has these concerns."

Eunice: "Yes, I'm sure it has been difficult. I remember when my mother and I became Christians. I prayed so hard for my husband. I wanted so much for him to join us and share our joy—for himself, for us as a couple, and for Timothy! My husband is a good man. He provides well for us, and I know he loves us. But he just hasn't grasped the good news. There are so many things that seem to create barriers to his making a decision to follow Jesus. I pray for him every day, and I try to be the best wife I can to him, but I don't know . . . For now, thank God, Timothy is very happy in the church. He has many friends among the other young people . . ."

Lois: And thank God for men in the church like Paul who have taken such an interest in these boys. He's been like a second father to Timothy. When he talks to him about spiritual things, Timothy really listens. The boys just seem to sense that he is really interested in them personally and in what they are thinking and doing.

Mary: Yes, I'll be forever grateful to him for taking John Mark on that mission trip. I know my son got homesick and came home early—that was really hard for Paul to understand—but there was also Barnabas who saw John Mark's potential and gave him another chance. Now even Paul affirms John Mark's strengths. It makes him feel so special and important to the church.

Lois: There's something about this church that is so caring, so supportive, so helpful. I don't know how I would have made it through the tough times without them. I couldn't begin to enumerate the times the church members have come through with practical help just when it was needed.

Eunice: And with my husband . . . the church leaders have helped me see the importance of finding every possible way I can be part of his life, even as I participate actively in church life as well. The couples at church have been great about including us

socially, too. Their friendships fill a real void in our lives. My husband really likes a lot of them. I think it's because he can tell they like him too.

Mary: It's amazing, isn't it, how the gospel has changed every dimension of our lives. I have never experienced this kind of community spirit before. Truly there is no evidence of the power of the gospel like the love the Christians in this place have for one another. I know. I have felt it, and you have too. Somehow I think that when we all meet in the Kingdom, we will know we are there together because of the love we have found in this church. Life isn't easy, but it sure helps when you know you're not alone!

Group Discussion

1. What hurdles confront couples where one spouse is not a Christian? How does the presence of children in the home make mixed faith marriage more challenging?
2. Why is it important for the church to intentionally work to strengthen marriages, all the more when one spouse has yet to experience the joys of the gospel and the community of faith?
3. How can Christian couples demonstrate love and care and support for all the couples whose lives they touch?

Couple Reflections

1. Strengths of our marriage which open the way for us to minister to other couples . . .
2. Times when we have needed support as a couple . . .
3. Things that couples in the church said or did—or might have said or done—to be helpful during these times . . .
4. Couples we sense need our love and support . . .
5. Things we can do to reach out to fold them into the fellowship of other couples and the community of faith . . .

Script 6: Child of Promise: Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:13-22)

Naomi: (*Picking up a baby from a blanket on the floor and holding him close as she rocks him in her arms.*) "Now, now little one. It's time for your nap. Sh-h-h-h. Close your eyes. Yes, you're Grandma's little precious one, you are." (*Humming a lullaby as she continues to put the baby to sleep, then turning to address the audience with a personal monologue.*) "So much has changed in the last year I can hardly picture myself as I returned to Bethlehem scarcely a barley season ago. Hmmm! My friends in the village did well to accept me in all my bitterness and anger against God and the world! And Ruth . . . what a daughter she has been to me. I'm not proud of what I said when she insisted on coming back to Bethlehem with me. 'Your people will be my people,' she said with such compassion.

"My response was vitriolic: 'What people? Can't you see, I'm an old woman. My husband and my sons are dead! My womb is barren! There will be no more people!'

"And your God my God!' she continued in an amazing affirmation of faith for a Moabitess.

"What a God He has turned out to be,' was my kurt reply.

“Who could have dreamed I would be smiling this morning into the face of Ruth’s baby—the pain of the loss of my husband and sons comforted, my day bright and full of joy, and my future sure. And all because of the provision of the kinsman-redeemer.

“What a fine son that Boaz is to me. On the first day when Ruth returned from the fields and told me where she had gleaned that day, I knew he was up to something good. And from that day forward his generosity knew no bounds! The love he has showered upon my Ruth and me could be the inspiration for poetry! Everyday she told me of his provision, his attentiveness, his care, his thoughtfulness, his words of encouragement, his affirmation, his commitment, his love. And even as she was falling in love with him, I felt my own anger and bitterness giving way to anticipation and joy.

“Don’t worry, I told her. He is our near kinsman, and he will not rest until the matter is settled. You will be his, and he will be yours forever. Just you wait and see! Their wedding day was the happiest day of my life, until the birth of this little one. Just look at him. (*She pauses and smiles.*) I wonder if he might one day be the Messiah, or the father, or the grandfather of the Messiah If ever there was a child of promise, this is one”

Discussion Questions

1. Read the book of Ruth. What evidence do you find of the deep love relationship that grew between Boaz and Ruth? Note especially his gestures of kindness and support in chapter 2; his protection and care in 3:9-14; his extravagant love gift in 3:15; and his brilliant plan for securing her hand as his beloved wife in chapter 4.
2. How does knowing that Boaz is a type of Christ enrich your understanding of the love story between Boaz and Ruth and your understanding of God’s love poured out to us in Christ?
3. How is the birth of baby Obed a living illustration of the wise man’s words, “Children are a heritage from the Lord Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them”? (Proverbs 127:3-5).

Couple Reflections

1. When I think about the highpoints in our love story, I remember . . .
2. Ways you have shown your love to me which have meant so much . . .
3. Ways in which our children have brought joy and blessing into our lives . . .
4. Courage I draw from the difficult seasons we have successfully navigated together . . .
5. Understanding I have of God and His love made manifest to us in Christ because I have known your love . . .

It Takes a Church

Four Evenings for Parents of Adolescents

by Gary L. Hopkins, M.D., Dr. P.H. and Joyce W. Hopp, Ph.D., M.P.H. with Karen Flowers

This parenting resource is based on the newly-released book *It Takes a Church* by Drs. Gary Hopkins and Joyce Hopp (Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 2002). Drs. Gary and Joyce are Seventh-day Adventist researchers from the Loma Linda University School of Public Health who know as much as anyone about what's going on in the heads of Adventist adolescents, mostly because they listen to them by the thousands on a regular basis. These researchers are true friends of Adventist parents and church leaders. They are ready to let us in on what our kids are telling them and able to bring their expertise to parents and church leaders in understandable and practical “doables” that can make a real difference in adult-teen relationships. You won't want to miss what they have to say.

It is suggested that parents and/or church leaders meet weekly or bi-weekly for 1 to 1½ hours to process the ideas generated from a reading of the book, or at least the excerpts provided. The questions in this study guide can be used as discussion starters. Using the following schedule, the discussions can be finished in four sessions.

- Session 1: Chapters 1-3
- Session 2: Chapters 4-6
- Session 3: Chapters 7-9
- Session 4: Chapters 10-Appendix

Groups using this study guide are encouraged to expand the input of the authors into their discussion by purchasing a copy of the book for each family. It is available at Adventist Book Centers or on the Internet at <http://adventistbookcenter.com>. Special thanks to the Pacific Press Publishing Association for granting permission for the use of the “From the Authors” excerpts taken from each chapter.

Session 1

Chapter 1: Matt and His World

From the authors:

Matt is a mainstream high-school sophomore who does more good than bad by a long shot. Because his grades in school are reasonably good (B's and C's), and he generally stays out of trouble both at home and school, his mother doesn't feel that she needs to pressure him to study more. She doesn't spend time lecturing him on the need to avoid things like alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. She

does take time just about every evening to chat with him—just friendly mother-son conversations.

She often tells him how she is concerned for him and that she often fears that he might someday get involved with drugs or one of the other dangers that seem to surround kids of his age. There are no harsh threats—just caring conversations. Matt knows that his mother cares for him and clearly understands her position regarding the choices that he is already facing day-to-day. His mother feels that one main reason he has generally stayed out of trouble is that the family attends church together every weekend; they never miss. . . .

When you see Matt at the store, school or church, you will notice his broad smile and vibrant youth. You can't read his face and determine all that is going on around him on a daily basis or even identify all of the traps that lie in his path. Matt is growing up in a world where an awful lot can go wrong.

Discussion starters:

1. In your specific cultural setting, what would a typical day in Matt's life include?
2. What's "right" with Matt's world?
3. What are the "traps that lie in his path"?
4. What's already in place in your family, church, and community to keep "bad things from happening in Matt's life"?

Chapter 2: Education/Information

From the authors:

When Matt was in elementary school, he attended the same kinds of classes your neighbor's kids or your own children might have—mathematics, history, geography, reading, and so on. As he moved through the lower grades, the curriculum contained more and more information related to health. . . . He learned about the heart and the muscles; and in the third or fourth grade, he started learning about the brain, lungs, and digestive tract. He learned how substances such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs can cause harm to these organs. In the fifth and sixth grade, his teachers started to teach about human reproduction. . . . They learned about conception and where babies come from. Eventually they learned about sex. . . .

School-based approaches . . . have typically been knowledge/information based. . . . One technique that was used along with this information was fear-arousal—attempting to scare kids into not using tobacco [or alcohol, or drugs, or becoming involved in sex before marriage]. The strategy to provide . . . information was based on the assumption that young people who [are involved in these behaviors] did not understand the health-compromising effects Kids just didn't know enough, so informing them would solve the problem. . . .

Matt and his peers knew pretty much all they needed to know about these issues, yet this information somehow didn't translate into their avoidance of these potentially dangerous behaviors. . . .

All young people need instruction about the obvious harm of drugs and premarital sex, but also about the temptations they will be exposed to on

television, videos and the Internet. Education about these problems is not only essential but it should be mandatory. They all need it. But this information alone will not prevent your youngsters from these dangerous behaviors. Education and knowledge is important and essential. But if that is all you do, it probably won't work.

Discussion starters:

1. When you were Matt's age, who were your main sources of information regarding the risks of smoking, alcohol and other drugs, and sex outside of marriage?
2. Where are your children getting their information? How reliable are their sources?
3. Visit the General Conference Department of Family Ministries website [<http://familyministries.gc.adventist.org>] for information on how you can get a copy of *God's Good Gift of Sexuality: A Seventh-day Adventist Curriculum Framework for Sexuality Education*. How much of this information have you conveyed to your teens?
4. Why do you think parents are in the best position to educate their children about sexuality? How can the church and school support the family in this important work?
5. How would you evaluate the efforts of the adults in Matt's life to provide the information he needs?
6. Why do you suspect information alone is not enough?

Chapter 3: Self-Esteem**From the authors:**

Self-esteem is a person's attitude about himself or herself. It's a person's estimation of how capable and worthwhile he or she is. It isn't pride, it isn't conceit, nor is it a boastful, over-inflated opinion about a person's own ability. These things are actually signs of low self-esteem. People with positive self-esteem generally perceive themselves realistically. They understand their strengths and are ready to admit to their weaknesses. People with positive self-esteem do not compare themselves to others or devalue the success of those around them. . . .

Cooley, a psychologist, described self-esteem as something that comes from the feedback, real or imagined, we receive from others (Joseph, 1994). So, how do we give our children . . . positive self-esteem? We give them unconditional positive acceptance. To do this, we need to focus on loving them rather than judging them based on their behaviors or academic successes. . . . They need to have the sense that we have an honest interest in them and that we are able to put aside our duties or chores because of the genuine interest we have in their lives. . . .

Children need to know where their strengths and weaknesses lie. They learn some of this through trial and error. But much of it comes because a parent or other adult spends time with them and takes the opportunity to identify what

they have done well. And it is equally important to assist them by pointing out what might have been done better or maybe what they do not have an apparent talent for. . . .

In order for kids to develop positive self-esteem, they need other people in their lives. . . . They need to have people to whom they can turn for questions, sometimes very sensitive ones, and unless you have a well-established relationship with them, they won't even know that they could go to you for assistance.

Discussion starters:

1. In your particular cultural setting, what additional evidences of positive self-esteem can you identify?
2. Who in your lifetime has contributed to your positive feelings about yourself? What did they say or do that helped you accept yourself as a person?
3. Make a list of the young people in your church. Identify at least five things you could affirm about each one. Talk about opportunities you have as parents and members of the community of faith to pass along your affirmation to the young people themselves. Make a plan to pass along affirmation to each one in the next week, making sure no one is left out.
4. Keep a journal this week of all the ways you find to affirm each of your children. Tabulate the negative exchanges between you as well. Experts say the ratio needs to be about 10:1 (10 positive to 1 negative) if you are to help your child develop positive self-esteem.

Session 2**Chapter 4: Social Support****From the authors:**

Social support is an emotion-based attachment between two or more people. It is simply a meaningful relationship. When you get to know individuals, when you call them by name and ask how they are doing, you become a friend, and good things begin to happen. They will actually benefit emotionally and become healthier physically. If they are already healthy, maybe you will be helping them to stay healthy. Your willingness to form a relationship will not make them perfect, but it will give them strength. . . .

Social support, or relationships with others, particularly adults, is part of what kids need in their difficult journey through the troubled waters of life. Having people around them who care makes them stronger and more resilient; they are more able to survive and do well in spite of the heavy odds against their success in life. . . .

Social support, relationships with others, a network of people who care, or love is very powerful. And it doesn't take much effort or cost any money!

Discussion starters:

Donald Joy in his book *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God* (1996) suggests that human beings need a social support network of 20-30 persons to maintain health. He pictures this network as like a trampoline, with support persons in the family, work place, church, and neighborhood symbolically stretching the trampoline taunt on all four sides, so as to provide good “bounce” in the life of the person. In order to be included in someone’s list of support persons, the person named must be someone with whom they have a positive relationship, someone who can be relied on to help in a time of need, someone with whom they are in regular contact, and someone who would go out of their way to make contact given the chance.

1. Work individually to name every person in your church under the age of 20. Combine your lists. How many could you name personally? How many could the group name?
2. Think of them one by one. Who’s holding their “trampolines”?
3. Are there a good number of adults as well as peers represented in their support networks?
4. Overall, are their networks strong or impoverished?
5. What can you do to strengthen their networks?
6. Draw a trampoline for each of the children and teens in your family. Take note of where support is strong and where it is less so. Plan a strategy to strengthen the network of family and adult support your child has available to him or her.

Chapter 5: Resilience**From the authors:**

Behavioral research typically looks at what puts young people at risk for their involvement in risky behaviors. Recently, a new and powerful concept has arisen that has inspired hope among researchers and educators; it is the concept of resilience. Resilience is the capacity to maintain competent functioning in spite of adversity or life stressors. Resilience appears to develop over time as a result of environmental support (Kaplan & Turner et al., 1996). Resilient individuals are those who, despite severe hardships and the presence of at-risk factors, develop characteristics or coping skills that enable them to succeed in life (Kaplan & Turner et al., 1996). . . .

In a careful review of the available research of what fosters resilience among young people, one important influencing factor emerges repeatedly. That factor is valuable, sincere, and enduring relationships. . . .

Relationships with individuals who provide care, warmth, and unconditional love appear to provide young people with a sense that the odds they face in life can be overcome. . . . One study found that “resilient youngsters all had at least one person in their lives that accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence” (Brooks, 1994).

Discussion starters:

1. Share stories in the group of one person in your life who accepted you “unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or

intelligence.” How did this relationship make you more resilient in the face of difficult circumstances?

2. Are there particularly vulnerable teens in your church who need you for support?
3. How will you go about forming and maintaining a relationship with them, so that one day they might tell a story about your influence in their lives in a group like this?
4. Talk to your family this week about what you think are the strengths of your family that would see you through a difficult time.

Chapter 6: Communication and Sex

From the authors:

“The risks of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease (STD) is one of the most significant and immediate risks to the health and well-being of adolescents. . . .” (D’Angelo & DiClemente, 1996). . . .

The increase in both the number of STDs and the rates of these infections in young people are directly related to the decrease in the age of sexual initiation by teenagers. The average age of first intercourse is less than sixteen years and much lower in some specific groups. Women who initiate intercourse by the age of fifteen are four times more likely to have ten or more lifetime sexual partners than women who initiate intercourse by the age of twenty years (D’Angelo & DiClemente, 1996). . . .

[One] study examined communication about sexual issues with mothers, fathers, and friends. The researchers report that both male and female adolescents are more likely to discuss sex-based topics with their mothers than with their fathers. Adolescents in this study who reported discussing a number of sex-related topics with their mothers were less likely to have initiated sexual intercourse and more likely to have conservative values about sex. Both males and females were more likely to have discussed sexual intercourse with friends than with parents (Dilorio & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999). . . .

DiBlasio & Benda (1990) report that sexually active adolescents are less likely than non-sexually active adolescents to report a feeling of closeness to their parents while at the same time believing that their parents would be upset to learn that their child was sexually active.

Many young people live in homes where parents don’t take the time to develop strong relationships or communicate. A very large number of kids have only one parent in the home who is so busy providing for the family that the kids are left unattended, often during the afternoon after school hours. . . . This suggests that your responsibility is greater than to your children alone. You must get involved in the lives of other youth.

Discussion starters:

1. What unique challenges do today’s young people face in managing their sexuality that were not issues a couple of generations ago? Think about the implications of the fact that the age of puberty has been steadily decreasing, that the educational requirements for today’s job markets are extended, that meaningful jobs and careers are often unavailable to the young until they are in their late 20’s.

2. What makes communication about sexuality so difficult? What will this generation of parents have to do differently from their parents to be more effective in teaching their children about sexuality?
3. What's encouraging about the fact that researchers report that "when parents are perceived as having friendly, attentive styles of communication, their adolescents report less sexual activity in junior high school, high school, and college. Conversely, when adolescents perceive their parents as contentious, dramatic, and dominant, they reported more sexual activity" (Mueller & Powers, 1990)? What do you think the kids mean by "friendly, attentive styles of communication"? How can parents become more friendly and attentive in their approach?
4. Research also highlights the importance of monitoring the activities of young people in lowering the incidence of behaviors that put their well-being at risk. Do you agree with the authors that the fact that many parents are working outside the home means that "your responsibility is greater than to your children alone"? How will you take responsibility for supporting parents in providing and monitoring activities for your church's youth?

Session 3

Chapter 7: School as a Community

From the authors:

"The importance of positive interpersonal relationships to moral socialization is hardly surprising. As social beings, we have a need to belong to a group, to feel accepted and valued by others. We seek relationships with those who meet this need, and strive to maintain these relationships by complying with the wishes of those who care for us, adopting their beliefs and values, and imitating their behavior. Although their relative importance varies over the course of development, this applies both to relationships with significant adults, such as parents [and] teachers, and to relationships with peers. Thus, a school environment which is characterized by caring and supportive relationships between teachers and students and among students should be optimal for promoting prosocial and moral development, in that such an environment is one which both provides abundant models of behavior consistent with prosocial and moral attitudes and values, and motivates the student to adopt and internalize these attitudes, values and behaviors" (Battistich, 1998).

Another study conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota examined students' perception of "connectedness" and its relationship to problem behaviors among young people. Connectedness is very similar to "sense of community" as previously described. The questions examined were to what extent young people felt connected to a parent or parents and also their connectedness at school. The findings, again, are powerful:

"Regardless of the number of parents in the household, whether families were rich or poor, regardless of race and ethnicity, children who reported feeling connected . . . are protected against many different kinds of risks including

emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and attempts; cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use; violent behavior, and early sexual activity” (Resnick, 1997).

Discussion starters:

1. To what extent do you think your church/school is a place where young people feel connected and a part of a well-functioning community?
2. Evaluate on a scale of 1-10 your church/school community’s contribution to the transmission of Christian values to the generation of young people now in your midst. How could you increase your contribution?
3. Predict how you think your teenagers will respond to the following survey. Then ask one of your teenagers to interview 10 more of your teens anonymously this week. Ask them the following questions and report the results, being sure to honor your pledge of anonymity. Talk about how their answers compare with your predictions and your discussion of Question 1. What did you learn?

Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

- My church/school is a caring community where I feel accepted.
- There is at least one adult in my church/school with whom I can talk about sensitive issues.
- Adults in my church/school listen to the young people’s point of view.
- Adults in my church/school care enough to know what’s going on in my life.
- Adults in my church/school open their homes to the young people for activities.
- The young people are really involved in my church/school.
- The adults in my church/school are good sources of information about drugs, alcohol, and sex.
- The adults in my church/school practice what they preach regarding drugs, alcohol, and sex outside of marriage.

Chapter 8: Drinking, Drugs, and You**From the authors:**

. . . [We] asked 1,748 students—of whom 93.3% were Seventh-day Adventists . . . regarding their personal use of several substances and compared their use of several different drugs based upon whether or not they had a parent who used alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana. We found that when the parents used at least one of these three substances, there was a much greater risk that their students were using all drugs measured. . . .

Further, we investigated whether the use of substances by the students and by the parents might be associated with the students’ sexual experience. We found that students who used or had tried drugs were more sexually experienced than those who had not. We also found that students were more likely to be sexually experienced if they had a parent who used alcohol, tobacco, or

marijuana (Hopkins, Hopp et al., 1998). The findings of this research are powerful. Among the students who had never tried a drug and whose parents were not using any drugs, only 3.5% of the students were sexually experienced. When both the student and parent(s) used any substance, the students' rate of sexual experience increased tenfold. Substance use and sex among kids are intimately related. . . .

When our kids do experiment with substances or sex, . . . we must not give up and reject them. We must get closer to them and find ways of assisting them in making better decisions in the future.

Discussion starters:

A drug expert being interviewed on the radio was heard to say, "Before it happens, rehearse with your kids what they will say or do when faced with drugs or sex."

1. You discover a marijuana joint in your son's jacket pocket. Role play the kind of parental response you think will make it possible for your child to feel comfortable talking to you truthfully about how it got there and the tough decisions he is confronted with among his peers.
2. Why is modeling the values we are trying to convey to our children so important?
3. Ask a teacher, school counselor, or youth leader to speak to the group about the kinds of scenarios with which your teens are confronted every day regarding drugs, alcohol and sex. How might you help to prepare your teens to navigate these scenarios safely?

Chapter 9: Pornography

From the authors:

Our kids have access to so many different Web sites that contain sexual content that a person could spend twenty-four hours a day and probably not visit all of them in a year. Online porn is one of the most profitable areas of e-commerce. Estimates of annual revenues range from half a million to billions of dollars. The number of people who visit sex sites each day has been estimated at 60 million. . . . All of these sites are available to . . . every kid with access to a computer. . . .

Internet porn is so large that it is probably accurate to say that it is here to stay; likely it will never be completely blocked. Every day, approximately 400 new pornographic Web sites open on the Internet. . . .

In the United States, an estimated 10 million children go online every day. Nearly all of them are anxious to make "e-friends" where they can chat. In a recent study of almost 1,500 children ages 10 to 17 researchers found that one in four had an unwanted exposure to some kind of naked people or people performing sexual acts. One in 33 received an aggressive solicitation, meaning that some person on the Internet asked them to meet, phone, or sent them regular mail, money, or gifts (Hughes, 2001). . . .

Jenkins (2001) reports: . . . "The Internet makes porn imagery even more easily available, and in virtually limitless variety. It would be a miracle if kids weren't finding this stuff, even if it means going around the 'filters' provided by their parents or their Internet service providers. . . . If exposure builds up

tolerance, and tolerance makes the problem worse, having unlimited porn imagery within easy reach of every computer is likely to produce social effects that we haven't yet reckoned with."

Discussion starters:

1. Ask a computer expert to demonstrate for the group how easy it is to access Internet pornography. Contact your local service provider for information on how to limit your teens access to pornographic sites and to monitor the sites he or she has visited.
2. Talk together about how you as a parent can open discussion on this sensitive subject with your teens.

Session 4

Chapter 10: Religion, Prayer, and Benefits

From the authors:

What about spirituality and prayer? Is there evidence of the power of these things?

Regarding drug use:

- *Religious factors, including personal commitment to Christ and belief in God, family values, church teachings, and participation in personal and private religious practices are associated with lower drug use among adolescents in a conservative denomination (Dudley et al., 1987).*

- *Positive religious attitudes and commitment are related to less alcohol and drug use and to less permissive attitudes toward these substances among adolescents (Hadaway et al., 1984).*

- *Religion and parental influence are the most common factors associated with abstaining from alcohol (Hughes et al., 1985).*

- *Spirituality and religious involvement may be an important protective factor against alcohol/drug abuse (Miller, 1998)*

Regarding sexual behaviors:

- *More religious attitudes and church attendance of both mothers and their children, along with less permissive attitudes towards adolescent sexuality . . . is associated with reduced levels of sexual activity among adolescents (Thornton & Camburn, 1989).*

- *Young men and women who are frequent church attendees from conservative religious affiliations and who grow up in a two-parent household are less likely to engage in premarital sex than other Christians (Beck et al., 1991).*

- *Higher religious commitment is related to less-permissive sexual views (Haerich, 1992)*

Discussion starters:

1. If being part of church is protective against involvement in at-risk behaviors, what can you do to make your church a warm and winsome place for your teens?

2. What can you do to create a support network among the parents of teens in your church? How will you make it possible for parents of teens to turn to one another for help?
3. Pray for your teens by name.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

From the authors:

It is time for love. It is time to get to know every young person, every person by their names. Let the power of love be demonstrated through relationships that begin very simply. Test the power of the Lord, and use His love in helping to prevent the dangerous behaviors that face our young people. . . .

Now go and do it! Transform your church into the caring community young people need.

Discussion starters:

Read 1 Corinthians 13.

1. Vision what your church would be like if 1 Corinthians 13 really described your community of faith.
2. If your church were to live this vision, what would be the first changes your teens would notice?
3. Prioritize these changes and make plans to implement them one by one.

Appendix: Adolescents and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

From the authors:

It is not uncommon to hear that abstinence for sexual behavior before marriage is just a religious philosophy and that young people should be allowed or even encouraged to explore their sexuality before marriage. But, in fact, there are excellent reasons why young people are not developmentally ready for sex.

Dr. Allan Handysides, Director of Health Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is uniquely qualified to discuss this issue. Dr. Handysides is a physician who is board certified in both pediatrics and obstetrics-gynecology. He . . . comments:

Most people do not have a clear set of values when it comes to sexuality. So many people think of sex as no more than a little affectionate interlude, without implications, complications, or commitment.

Human sexuality has implications. Regardless of all the arguments, it is one of the most important ingredients in the glue that binds couples together. Compatibility, intellectual equality, friendship, and emotional balance are important, but sexuality has always been a critical part of the bonding. If it becomes a common thing, shared with any and all, or even with a series of partners in “serial monogamy,” much of its potency, mystique and power is

dissipated. This is one of the most important implications of “free love”—it weakens the bonds of marriage.

There are also complications to unrestrained expression of sexuality in today’s world. These are seen in the sexually transmitted diseases. . . .

The National Study on Adolescents shows that parents whose views are made clear to their children—both in the way they live and in what they say—have an effect on the behavior of their children, even though the views may be disputed and argued over. Parents need to talk straight and to know their facts. Young people need to know the facts too.

Discussion starters:

Invite a doctor to talk to your parent group about the physical and emotional risks of promiscuous sex outside of marriage and to answer your questions regarding sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

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Making Connections

*Bernie and Karen Holford
with Karen Flowers*

Often faith learning activities are organized around age groupings. These activities are organized with the specific intent of bringing the generations together to have fun, to learn, to connect with one another and with a family whose story God preserved because their experiences can shed so much light on our own.

There are several important things to remember when planning for an intergenerational learning experience:

- Activities are specifically designed to create interaction between the age groups. The success of a multigenerational faith-learning experience is as much about the connectedness it engenders between people as it is about the content messages it conveys.
- A primary goal is to enfold every person present into a “family” grouping. No one is left sitting on the sidelines. You will want to encourage the formation of small family groupings (four to eight persons) that encourage families to participate together while at the same time drawing in all the singles and any others who don’t have other family members present. It is best to let the groupings form naturally, but be sure to watch out for anyone who has been missed.
- Learning is facilitated more by doing than by telling.
- Activities are simple, but the lessons are often profound.
- Noise and bustle are quite compatible with learning and growth.
- Careful advance preparation is an important key to success.

You may wish to introduce the activities with a short dramatization of episodes from the story of the Abraham family. You might ask several families to plan in advance to present 5-minute-or-less skits from several episodes of the story recorded in Genesis. The skits could be set in Bible times, with costuming, etc., or they might be modernizations of the story that emphasize the family dynamics evident in the story. There is no “right” way to do this. Let the families use their creativity and affirm everyone for their productions and their insights into family life in the Abraham household. The following group activities that involve the generations with one another can then be adapted for use in several different ways. You may wish to:

- Engage the entire group in a sequence of experiences, perhaps transitioning between the intergenerational activities with singing, short Bible readings,

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storytelling, etc. There are more ideas included in this resource than can be used in one session. Choose four or five if you decide on this option for structuring your program. Success is definitely related to keeping the session short enough so that children and adults alike will wish it could have been longer, rather than the other way around!

- Create learning stations around the room and invite the family groups to create their own experiences by visiting several stations in any order. At each station have photocopies of instructions and all the materials needed for the activity. Let families move around at their own pace.
- At the beginning, let the different families groups choose one of the activities to do together. When the groups have had time to experience their activity, invite each group to lead the other groups in the same experience.
- Make a booklet of these activity ideas for families to use in their own family worship times.

Packing for the Journey

Connecting with the story:

- Read the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12:1-9.
- When the Bible says they took all the “possessions they had accumulated,” what do you think that meant? Let each person think of one thing Abraham and Sarah may have taken with them on their long journey.

Things you need:

- Plain paper (i.e. copier paper)
- Child-safe scissors
- Pencils, crayons, markers, etc.

Connecting with each other:

- Give each person a sheet of paper. Fold the paper in half. Leaving the fold intact, cut out the shape of a suitcase, with a handle on the side opposite the fold. Open the paper so it is no longer folded.
- Ask each person to draw or write ten things inside their “suitcase” that they would take along if they were travelling to an unknown place and didn’t know when they would be back. Starting with the youngest, take turns letting each person describe what they have put in their suitcase and why.
- Together as a group create a “family” suitcase containing three things from each person’s suitcase. Adults may have to choose items from their lists that will round out a more useful collection of items for a journey!
- Spend a few minutes thinking what would happen if your family were forced to live in a desert tent with this one suitcase. Think of different ways to use some of the more unusual items to make your lives in camp easier or more interesting.

Two-Way Blessings

Connecting with the story:

- Ask the youngest person in your group who can read to read God's covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3. Then ask the oldest person in the family group to read Galatians 3:29. Paul is telling us that this promise is not only for the Abraham family, but for all our families in Christ.

Things you need:

- Large sheets of paper or posterboard.
- Pencils and markers.
- Strips of brightly colored paper cut 1" wide and long enough to be glued as a loop around the wrist.
- Paper paste or glue.

Connecting with each other:

- Look again at God's covenant promise in Genesis 12:2-3. Can you find how the blessings go two ways? [God first says, "I will bless you . . ." and then says, "and you will be a blessing. . . all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."]
- Write the alphabet down the side of a large sheet of paper or posterboard. Use the letters to help you make a list of blessings God has given to you as a family. [For example, the letter "A" might make you think of things like angels, acceptance, adolescents, adoption, adventure, advent, affection, affirmation, air, allowance, ancestors, animals, apples, assurance, ability, etc.]
- Pray sentence prayers as a family group, thanking God for all His blessings.
- Give each member of the group a strip of brightly colored paper on which to draw or write one way in which they plan to be a blessing to someone in the next week. Share ideas around the group. Glue the ends of the strip together and put the loop on your wrist as a take-home reminder of God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through you.

Altar Builders

Connecting with the story:

- What common activity is reported of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? See Genesis 12:6, 7; 26:23-25; 33:18-20. What can you find out about how altars were built? See, for example, Joshua 4:1-9 and 1 Kings 18:30-32.

Things you need:

- Modelling clay to use as mortar.
- Stones.

Connecting with each other:

- Joshua and Elijah both used the altar stones to help the people remember the times God had been especially close to the children of Israel to take care of them and save them from trouble.

- Create a family altar with the stones and clay provided. As you put each stone in place, tell each other stories of times when God has been especially close to you and taken care of your family.

Disagreeable Parents

Connecting with the story:

- Read Genesis 27:1-11.
- What evidence is there in the story that Isaac and Rebekah didn't always agree about how to manage their children? Why do you think they disagreed? How did their disagreement affect their children?

Things you need:

- Lots of colored plastic building bricks.
- A box, bag or cloth big enough to hide a small brick model.

Connecting with each other:

- Each group chooses two adults to act as “parents.”
- Each “parent” quickly creates a small model using no more than ten building bricks, carefully concealing their creation from the view of the group.
- Once each parent has finished their small model, they hide them in their boxes/bags/cloths.
- The parents then take turns giving one sentence instructions to their family group toward a step-by-step building of a model like the one they have built. Each member of the family group uses the remaining blocks to try to follow the parents' instructions to construct models as coached. [Because the parents are each giving instructions for building different models, the instructions will, of course, be conflicting, confusing, and difficult to follow. But do not comment about the process now, just let the family members do the best they can to follow the instructions given.]
- After five minutes or so, both parents uncover their models and the family has a look at how their models compare. Likely none of them will look like either model produced by the parents.
- Invite the family group to debrief about their experience. What made this assignment difficult? How are the models made by the group members different from the parents' models? What happens in families when parents disagree? How do the children feel? Who do they listen to and why?
- It's normal for family members to disagree about some things. What can families do when there are disagreements among them? What are the positive benefits of working toward a solution satisfactory to everyone on important issues that affect the entire family?

What's In a Name?

Connecting with the story:

▪ Sometimes parents name their children after someone in the family. Other times names are chosen because of what they mean. In Bible times, God sometimes gave a person a name that specifically fit that person's character. You can often learn a lot about a person when you know what their name is and how they came to be called by that name. This is surely true about the Abraham family. How many of their extended family members can you name?

Things you need:

- Bibles and other reference works such as Bible dictionaries with lists of Bible characters and the meaning of their names.
- Paper and pencils.
- Name badges.
- Markers.

Connecting with each other:

- Make as long a list as you can of the names of the extended family members related to Abraham and Sarah.
- Look up the meaning of their names. Which names seem particularly fitting, given what you know about the person? Which names are the most interesting?

Abram	Exalted Father
Sarah	Princess
Abraham	Father of Many
Isaac	He laughs
Jacob	He grasps the heel - Deceiver
Esau	Hairy
Rebekah	Cow
Rachel	Ewe
Leah	Cow
Ishmael	God hears
Joseph	May he add
Reuben	See, a son
Asher	Happy
Gad	Good fortune
Naphtali	My struggle
Zebulun	Honour
Levi	Attached
Simeon	One who hears
Dan	He has vindicated
Issachar	Reward
Benjamin	Son of my right hand
Judah	Praise
Israel	He struggles with God

- Share stories in your family group about your own names. Where did they come from? What do you know about how they were chosen? What do they mean? Why is it so important to know someone's name?

- Sometimes we call each other names that aren't helpful, such as Lazy, Clumsy, Stupid, Coward, Ugly, etc. What characteristics could we identify in each other that would build one another up without limiting one another by labelling?
- If you could pick a name or descriptive phrase that you wish characterized you, what would it be? For example, would you like to be known as Believer, One who Loves, Supporter, Caring Strength, Smile-Sharer etc.
- Make badges for one another with new names that affirm one another's strengths, positive character traits, and/or spiritual gifts.

Good Food, Good Friends, Good Talk

Connecting with the story:

- Eating together is a very important part of being a family. There are several times in the stories of Abraham's extended family where a meal is an important part of the story. Sometimes, we even know the menu! And you may be surprised at who was doing the cooking!

Things you need:

- A copy of the Special Meals table for everyone (Handout 1).
- Menu paper [You could use parchment paper or paper with a pre-printed border, etc.]
- Pencils and pens, etc.

Connecting with each other:

- What have you learned about Abraham's family from reading about these family meals? What special meals do you remember enjoying in your family? What makes a meal special for your family?
- Work together to create a menu for a special meal that everyone in your family would enjoy. Be sure to let everyone share their ideas. Make menus for this meal to be put at each person's place at the table, like you might find them in a fine restaurant or at a banquet table.
- Plan a time when you will make this meal together. Plan for where you will eat the meal, the tableware will you use, how you will decorate the table and who will do this, who you might invite as guests, and what you will do after the meal to extend the good time. If your family group includes individuals who do not live in your household, consider preparing the meal as a potluck and sharing it together in one of your homes.

Family Trees

Connecting with the story

- People in Bible times kept careful track of who was related to whom. Many families were very proud of their ancestors and their family heritage. Family lines were important for inheritance, and especially for the preservation of the covenant line in which the Messiah would one day be born. When you read your Bible, you might have been tempted to skip over passages like Genesis 11:27-32; Genesis 21:20-23; and Genesis

24:23,24. But don't pass them by too quickly. You can learn a lot about a family from their family tree!

- It's very interesting to note the seemingly insignificant people God makes a special point of mentioning by name. Read for example Genesis 35:8. We might pass right over this verse, but Ellen White's comment helps us to understand why this verse is there:

At Bethel, Jacob was called to mourn the loss of one who had long been an honored member of his father's family—Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, who had accompanied her mistress from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan. The presence of this aged woman had been to Jacob a precious tie that bound him to his early life, and especially to the mother whose love for him had been so strong and tender. Deborah was buried with expressions of so great sorrow that the oak under which her grave was made, was called "the oak of weeping." It should not be passed unnoticed that the memory of her life of faithful service and of the mourning over this household friend has been accounted worthy to be preserved in the word of God (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 206).

Things you need:

- Paper.
- Pencils.
- Assorted buttons of different shapes, sizes and colors.

Connecting with each other:

- Start with your grandparents and write your family "begats." What special people would you be sure to name? Are their pets in your household who are almost like members of the family?

- The *Reader's Digest* (October 2001) printed the following piece from an unknown author:

Try to name the five wealthiest people in the world. Name the last five winners of the Miss America competition [or a similar competition in your culture]. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.

Now, name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.

The people you'll never forget are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most awards. The people who make a difference in your life are the ones who care. And they will live forever.

- Choose a button that reminds you of a special person in your life, either in your family or in your church or school or neighborhood "family." Share stories about how that person has made a difference in your life.
- As an alternative, you may wish to create an advertisement for each of your family group members, highlighting their strengths. The advertisements can be in the form of a poster, jingle, song, or even a mini-drama like a TV advertisement selling the person by their strengths. You may want to work in pairs, letting the older ones help the younger group members. For example:

*Our grandma is so great!
She bakes brownies for our plates!*

Family Messages

Connecting with the story:

▪ All families pass messages from one generation to the next. Often these messages are bits of wisdom learned by experience. At other times, they are important things passed along by relatives or the wider culture that families want to share with their children. Most families want to pass along messages that will help family members relate to one another and to the world around them in healthy, positive ways. However, some messages that get passed along through many generations are messages that have grown up as a result of sin and do not promote health and well-being. Some messages can be understood in both positive and negative ways.

▪ See if you can identify some of the messages, good and bad, that were passed along in Abraham's family. For clues, look at the following passages:

Genesis 15:1-6: God told Abraham that he would make him a great nation, with as many offspring as there are stars in the sky, too numerous to count, in Genesis 15:1-6. This was a very special promise to an old couple without any children. It was also a very special reminder to the whole family for generations that God had a plan from the beginning to restore all the blessings of Eden to the entire human race in Christ.

Genesis 16:13: When Hagar and Ishmael were fighting for their very lives in the desert, God led them to a spring where they could find food and water. Hagar was the first person in the Bible to give God a name. She called Him, "the God who sees me." This name for God is one of the messages passed through Abraham's family to our time as reassurance that when we are in trouble, our God's eyes are open to our needs.

Genesis 25:21-24: God told Rachel that her eldest twin, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob. The "upside down" nature of God's way of doing things is a theme that plays often in the Scripture (for example, see Matthew 20:26, Mark 10:31, Matthew 10:39).

Compare the stories found in Genesis 12:14-20, 26:1-7; 27:1-36. How might you verbalize the family message that is beneath the thread of deceit that runs through this family's history? (For example, the message might be "Say whatever you need to say to protect your own interests.")

Things you need:

- Bibles.
- Posterboard.
- A selection of brightly colored paper
- Markers.
- Paper paste or glue.

Connecting with each other:

▪ Have every person in the group write the best message that has been passed along to them from their family on a piece of brightly colored paper. Tear the message papers into various creative shapes and let the smaller children create a poster with these messages by gluing them into a collage on the posterboard.

- While the children are busy creating the poster, read Ezekiel 18:1-4. In this passage God is helping His people to understand that while a proverb that has often been quoted says that children are the victims of their parents' choices, in reality God has given the power of choice to every human being and each person will ultimately reap the consequences of their own choices. The good news of this passage is that individuals and families have a choice to reject messages that come to them through their families and their societies that do not promote personal well-being and healthy relationships.

Learning to Live in Community

Connecting with the story:

- Abraham and his descendents lived and travelled in extended families where everyone needed the support and help of all the others. For example, if the shepherd boy didn't take good care of the sheep, the family members may not have enough food to eat or clothing to wear. If the parents took the family to a place where there was no water, they could all die, etc.
- Look at a few of the stories listed below and see how many people and animals were living together in a community. What do you think life was like for them?
 - Genesis 12:1-5
 - Genesis 13:1-13
 - Genesis 14:14-16
 - Genesis 26:12-16
 - Genesis 32:1-21

Things you need:

- Bibles
- A ball of string or yarn for each family group.

Connecting with each other:

- Look up the following passages and identify as many ways as you can that the Bible tells us to care for one another. You can probably think of other texts that could be added to the list.

1 Thess. 3:12
Romans 15:7
Eph. 5:21
Eph. 4:2
Eph. 4:32
Eph. 4:29
Col. 3:16
Rom. 15:14
1 Thess. 4:18
Gal. 5:13
Col. 3:13
1 Thess. 5:15
James 5:16

- When you have finished, stand in a circle as a family group. Give one person the ball of string. The person who has the ball of string throws it to another member of the family group across the circle, while holding on to the end so that the string connects them together. When the connection is formed, the person who threw the string thinks of one way they could support and encourage the person to whom they threw the ball. You can use the ideas you have gotten from your Bible study for starters. The person holding the ball then throws it to another person, repeating the process, but maintaining their hold on the string as the ball leaves their hands. As the ball is thrown among all the family members, a web of string connecting all the members of the family group will be created.

- As you work together to rewind the string, talk about how important family connections are, and also connections with the wider circle of extended family, church family, school family, work family, community family. All can be sources of strength to the family in good times and bad. How many supportive persons and organizations can you think of that make your family strong? How can we build even stronger networks of support for one another?

Givers of Good Gifts

Connecting with the story:

- Read Genesis 24:42-54. Make a list of the gifts Abraham had sent with his servant for the family and future bride of his son Isaac.

Things you need:

- Small strips of paper
- A hat or container of some kind
- Gift wrapping paper
- Child-safe scissors
- Assorted ribbon or yarn
- Paper paste or glue
- Assorted craft supplies

Connecting with each other:

- Jesus made reference to the fact that it's natural for parents to want to give gifts to their children. Here's a chance to give gifts to one another in your family group just for the joy of it.

- Write everyone's name on a strip of paper and put them in the hat. Each person then draws a name and makes a symbolic gift for them. Think, "If I could give you the best possible gift to this person, what would it be?" Then make a symbolic "gift" that conveys your thought and love.

- Share your gifts.

Family Blessing

Connecting with the story:

- In Genesis 49, Jacob gathered his sons around him and gave “each the blessing appropriate to him” (vs. 28). In Jewish families, fathers and mothers bless their children every week on Friday night with the coming of the Sabbath. A blessing is like a prayer for that person.

Things you need:

- Plain index cards.
- Pencils

Connecting with each other:

- Write the name of every person in your family group on an index card. Mix up the cards and redistribute them so everyone in the group has someone to pray for.
- Take a few minutes individually to think through the blessing or prayer you would like to say for this person. You may want to write your thoughts on the card.
 - A thank you prayer for this person . . .
 - Praise to God for their unique gifts . . .
 - A prayer request for them . . .
- Share your blessing prayers around the circle.

Special Meals

Scripture	Menu	Guest(s)	Chef (if known)
Genesis 18:1-8	Fine bread Tender calf meat Curds and milk	Angels	Abraham with Sarah's help
Genesis 19:1-3			
Genesis 25:29-34			
Genesis 27:5-17			
Genesis 29:22			

Commitment to Purity

A Family Ceremony to Help Teens Make Right Choices about Sex

by Elaine and Willie Oliver

Theme

Parents can be proactive in helping their children to save sexual intimacy for marriage.

About This Resource

Sexual messages—often the wrong ones—are widely proliferated in our modern world. Now more than ever, parents have the privilege and responsibility to be the primary teachers and shapers of their children’s sexual values. How can parents help their children to navigate the turbulent waters of adolescent sexuality and follow God’s ideal of preserving sexual intimacy for marriage? This resource helps parents go beyond simply hoping that their children will choose to wait until marriage before engaging in sex. The authors offer a model for a family ceremony led by parents to commit their young person to sexual purity.

Introduction

Silence is not golden for Christian parents when it comes to teaching healthy and responsible attitudes about sexuality to their children. Young people must be taught about sexuality on an ongoing basis as they grow. The need for sharing age-appropriate information on sexuality is extremely vital if children are to experience normal, healthy development. Parents who abdicate this serious and important responsibility miss important opportunities that may leave their children with moral development gaps and emotional and physical pain. In worst cases, the unfortunate toll may even be physical and/or spiritual death. To pass on healthy and responsible attitudes about sexuality to their children, parents must grasp the profound significance that God attaches to this important aspect of human nature and come to grips with their own sexuality, resolving any personal reticence they have in speaking about this topic with their developing children.

Desiring Sexual Purity for Our Children

Today’s statistics show that young people have sex at higher rates and at earlier ages than previously. We personally were conscious of the need to help our children enter adolescence with an intentional commitment to deferring sexual intimacy until marriage. We recalled that, throughout history, rituals have always played an important part among various cultures and peoples to signal the transition from childhood to adolescence. So we decided to create a rite-of-passage ceremony for our daughter, Jessica, which would strengthen her decision to remain chaste until marriage.

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

The *True Love Waits* movement was started a few years ago by Christians with concerns like ours. Their premise is that when children and teens make a public commitment to remaining sexually pure their rates of sexual activity will be lower than when they do not make such a commitment. This is similar to the premise that has been used with success by the *anti-drug* campaign in their efforts to discourage children and teens from smoking cigarettes and doing drugs.

In the spirit of *True Love Waits*, we talked with Jessica, with whom we have had many conversations about sexuality, about our desire to have a special ceremony on her transitional birthday. It would be a time to affirm her decision to remain sexually pure until marriage. Jessica agreed. We then invited relatives—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, her brother—as well as our family friends and their children, kids that are Jessica’s peers and with whom she often plays and socializes. As it turned out, this birthday and ceremony fell on a Sabbath. We held it in our home after returning from church and before we shared the Sabbath meal together.

The Ceremony

With friends and family, we gathered around Jessica in our living room. We, her parents, stood on either side of her chair. I (Elaine) welcomed our guests and described the purpose of our gathering: “Thank you for coming. Today we have come to celebrate the life of Jessica Danielle Oliver and to affirm her desire to remain sexually pure until marriage. Jessica has accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior and has already been baptized as a public expression of that very important decision. Throughout her life, her father and I have spoken with her about God’s plan for our lives in relationships. Our conversations have included God’s special gift of sexuality, which is to be shared with a special person only in the context of marriage. To this end we have come today as family and friends to support Jessica in her decision and to celebrate her transition from childhood to adolescence.”

The ceremony continued as I (Willie) stated: “Jessica is our firstborn and a gift from God which her mother and I have cherished deeply. I can remember as if it were only yesterday the day that she was born. It was a Monday afternoon in busy New York City. Our hearts, however, were oblivious to the rushing traffic, the hustle and bustle outside our hospital room at Cornell Medical Center. We were glad, rejoicing in our new God-given blessing, our daughter. The years since then have been filled with great and challenging moments. We have enjoyed trips to many zoos, museums, and parks. We have celebrated God together at family worship, Sabbath School, church services, camp-meetings and sessions of the General Conference in Indianapolis, Utrecht, and Toronto. We were with her as she learned to walk, talk, read, write, ride a bike, swim and snorkel. I will never forget the day I had the privilege of baptizing her at the Pathfinder camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Today is a culmination of these celebrations and more, many of which you have witnessed with us. As Jessica enters this new phase of her life as a teenager, it is our desire to rededicate her to the Lord and to affirm her commitment to remain sexually pure until marriage.”

Vows

I (Willie) then led Jessica, and the friends and family who were gathered, in making the following vows: “Jessica, in the presence of God, family and friends, because of your love for Jesus and belief in His perfect plan for your life, is it your desire and commitment to remain

sexually pure until marriage through the power of God which is available to you? Do you so declare?" Jessica responded by stating: "I do."

I then turned to the relatives and friends—making special eye contact with the teenage boys present—and asked: "Is it your desire to affirm Jessica's decision to remain sexually pure until marriage, and do you solemnly promise before God that by His power and grace you will do everything you can to help Jessica remain true to the vow she has taken today? Do you so declare? They, too, responded by stating: "We do."

Dedication

We anointed Jessica, daubing a few drops of olive oil on her forehead as a symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit in her life to give her the strength needed to be true to her vow. Then we parents shared in a prayer of dedication:

Elaine: "Dear God, thank you for being so good to our family despite the trials, temptations, and troubles that have come our way. Thank you for Jessica and thank you for her decision to do your will by remaining sexually pure until marriage. Help Jessica to know that in her strength she can do nothing. However, help her to know that with your strength all things are possible."

Willie: "You have promised, O Lord, to supply all of our needs and to be with us until the end of the world. Today, we ask that you will provide Jessica with the desire, determination and strength to be true to her vow to remain sexually pure until marriage. May she grow to understand that Your will is always best and that if she follows Your directions she will experience the joy You have planned for her. Help her to know You will NEVER leave her alone. Bless those who are present, and especially bless her peers. Help them to take stock of what has happened here today and to know that You can help them to keep the same vow Jessica has made. Keep Jessica healthy and strong and ever close to you, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Affirmation

After the prayer of dedication, there were speeches of affirmation given by several relatives and friends. We also gave an opportunity to Jessica's peers, both male and female, to share words of affirmation for her and her decision to remain sexually pure until marriage. We, her parents, both hugged her and told her that we were proud of her and her courage to make this vow in the presence of her relatives and friends.

The Token

Then we presented her with a token* that she could keep with her as a reminder of the promise she made to remain sexually pure until marriage. As her father, I (Willie) handed it to her saying, "Please take this token as a reminder of your vow to remain sexually pure until marriage. It is the hope of your mother and me that you will be able to present this token to your husband on the day of your wedding as a symbol of your gift of sexual purity to him. We love you and will continue to pray for you and support you in anyway that we can, so that you will be able to honor God in the life that you live each day."

Conclusion

Is this all it takes to help your child remain sexually pure until marriage? Of course not. This is only a part of the discipleship process. However, we believe this public expression of her determination and ours that she will remain sexually pure until marriage to be a moment of great significance in the discipleship of our daughter.

To get to this point, however, it is important for parents to realize that this kind of discipleship in sexuality education begins before children are born, by developing a healthy and Biblical understanding of the role of sexuality in our own lives, which God intentionally created for our joy and for us to be a blessing to the world.

Keep praying for Jessica and for Julian, our son, whom we hope to soon lead through the same type of ceremony, in order to help him also to remain sexually pure until the day of his marriage. These are the things in life we need to do more than just hope for them; we must decide, work and pray for them. We remember the promise made by God to all parents who trust in Him: "I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save" (Isaiah 49:25).

** The type of token is optional and should have meaning in the cultural context in which it is employed.*

Recommended Resources

Jones, S. L. & B. B. (1994). *How & when to tell your kids about sex: A lifelong approach to shaping your child's sexual character*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress.

Laaser, M. (1999). *Talking to your kids about sex*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press.

Payne, D. (2000). *True love waits takes a look at courting, dating, & hanging out*. Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press.

Continuing Your Family’s Spiritual Heritage

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Each generation has the responsibility of learning the truths of God and passing them along to generations that follow them. Moses made this clear: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9, NKJV). An echo of Deuteronomy is heard in the words of the wise man: “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and reject not your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8, RSV). How can parents go about increasing the likelihood that their children will find the values they hold dear to be attractive and will make them part of their lives?

Creating a Thirst for the Things of God

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6, NKJV). The Hebrew verb “train” or “train up” is related to an old Arabic word for “initiate” that described the way a mid-wife helped an infant that was reluctant to take its mother’s breast. By rubbing the baby’s gums with a tasty substance like date juice, she started the sucking response. “The way” likely means “the way he *ought* to go,” i.e., in “the way of wisdom and right paths” (Prov. 2:20; 4:11), though it has become popular in Christian child-rearing literature to read “his way” or “the way he should go” as “according to his individual aptitude.” Taken together, the verse conveys the thought that, like the mid-wife luring the infant into taking its mother’s milk, parenting children and adolescents is about making godly values winsome and attractive, creating a thirst for spiritual things such that youth will find them irresistible. Roger Dudley develops this idea:

I like to think of value transmission as a huge smorgasbord where all the tempting dishes of competing values are displayed. Here the youth will eventually get to choose the items that are most appealing to them. And which will they choose? Those that are most colorful and attractive, most delectable, most tasty! It is not our responsibility to force our values upon our young people. It is our responsibility to model our values so attractively that these youth cannot help seeing that they are vastly superior to the competition, and will freely choose them. (Dudley, 1986, p. 117)

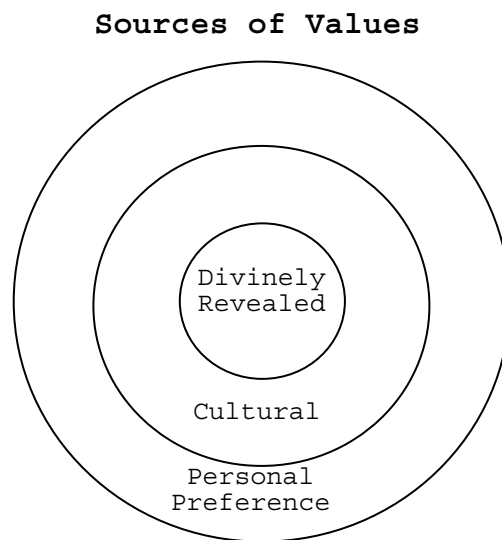
Focusing on Core Values

What are values? The noun “value” means “something of worth.” Values are those clusters of truths, attitudes, convictions, behaviors, objects, etc. which we believe to be important, especially as we are forced to make choices between these values and other alternatives by the experiences of our lives. Merton Strommen, a well known researcher of youth, writes in his book *A Study of Generations*:

Values are ideas people have about the ‘good life’ and about what life means. They are the ideas we use to tell whether we like something or not; whether it is important or unimportant to us; whether we are frightened of or feel good about an object, an event, a course of action, or a person. (Quoted in Dudley, 1986, p. 15)

Ultimately, values determine everything we do. Important choices always call values into action. When we are confronted with situations where we cannot behave in a manner in keeping with all of our values, we are forced to prioritize our values and choose among them. “Teaching youth the process for making these choices and resolving these conflicts lies at the very heart of value transmission between the generations.” (Dudley, 1986, p. 24)

Value sources. Sources of values can be arrayed as in the diagram below which resembles an archery target.



Individual likes and dislikes or “personal preferences” as we call them, might include tastes in food, clothing, reading, music, hairstyles, even choices of friends. Parents often wage battles with their children over issues arising from conflicts in personal preferences. These, however, must be kept in perspective as a source of values that are most likely of lesser value than some others. Cultural heritage constitutes another basis of values. It is not unusual for parents to want their children to adopt their national or cultural identity and the cultural beliefs and practices that accompany that heritage. Culture encompasses a wide range of beliefs and

attitudes about social structure, lifestyle, and traditions surrounding salient life events such as births, weddings, funerals. Many religious practices are often confused with core spiritual values, yet they are probably more in the arena of culture or sub-culture. Ultimately, cultural values deserve less weight than the core spiritual values which must form the center of our Christian lives.

The source of one’s values is an important factor in determining their level of importance. For example, Christians elevate values rooted in a clear “thus says the Lord,” i.e., spiritual value statements like Matt. 5:3-9, 6:25-33, 16:24-26, Phil. 4:8, Heb. 11:24-26, above other values which they hold that come from their particular culture or personal preference. The level of our spiritual maturity, the experiences of our lives, the quality of relationships we have known, the alternatives open to us, are also among the factors which determine the level of importance we place on particular values.

Jesus summed up spiritual values, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37-40). In His mind, love is the value which overarches all others—timeless, self-emptying, covenant-keeping agape love which is born of God (see also John 3:16, Phil. 2:5-8, 1 Cor. 13, 1 John 4:7-21). In our endeavors to pass our heritage of faith to the next generation, we must put our primary focus on core values.

Creating a “First Generation” Experience

Judges 2:6-12 presents one of the central challenges of values transmission: “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.” Studies regarding the passing on of values in a society, organization, or religion verify that the first generation which determines the values of the group knows exactly why they have chosen these values over others. In Adventism, for example, our pioneers knew exactly why they believed what they believed. They participated in the process of earnest Bible study and prayer which established these values and they determined to make them their own. The second generation, for the most part, adopts the values of the first generation, but primarily because of the role-modeling of their parents, although they understand some of the reasons that precipitated the development of their system of values. However, by the third generation, the young have largely lost sight of the principles behind the values. Most of them will, nonetheless, go along out of habit with the behaviors that reflect those values. Unfortunately, in the generations which follow, habit also tends to break down, and unless the young are involved in a “first generation” experience, the values may be lost altogether.

Staying Connected with Youth

Teens tend to be interested in the beliefs and ideas of others with whom they share a warm relationship. Recent studies show the importance of youth having at least one person in their lives who accepts them unconditionally, regardless of temperament, physical attractiveness, or intelligence. The 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Blum and Rinehard, n.d.) studied 90,000 teenagers and 18,000 parents across the United States. It reveals the factors which predispose today’s children and youth to involvement in high risk behaviors and those factors which are most likely to protect them from harm: “When teens feel connected to their families and when parents are involved in their children’s lives, teens are protected” (p. 15).

Here are the significant “risk-proofing” family 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).
- 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.

Modeling Your Faith

Teens are especially watchful of the people around them. They study their actions, their words and overall demeanor. They observe how they treat others and are keenly aware of their feelings and attitudes toward them personally. Over time, they decide who they like, and who they don’t like, and after whom they will pattern their lives. In this sense, children do not “learn” values; they imitate people. They do not make lists of values they wish to accept; instead, they identify with people and absorb the values those individuals espouse.

It can be frightening to realize the extent to which our children emulate our behavior. We know we are far from perfect. But there is hope. For modeling as a means of transmitting values does not require perfection. Our task is not to raise perfect children who have no need of a Savior. Rather, we who have found the perfect Savior are given the privilege of bringing our children to Him for healing and restoration. Modeling means showing our young people what Christians do when they have made mistakes, how followers of Jesus seek and offer forgiveness and find the courage to begin again. Modeling also means demonstrating how Christians handle their disappointments, showing that it’s okay to experience discouragement and doubt, portraying how Jesus can bring comfort and peace and reassurance. Modeling means being real, allowing our children to see God at work in our lives, making new people for His kingdom amid the brokenness of our lives.

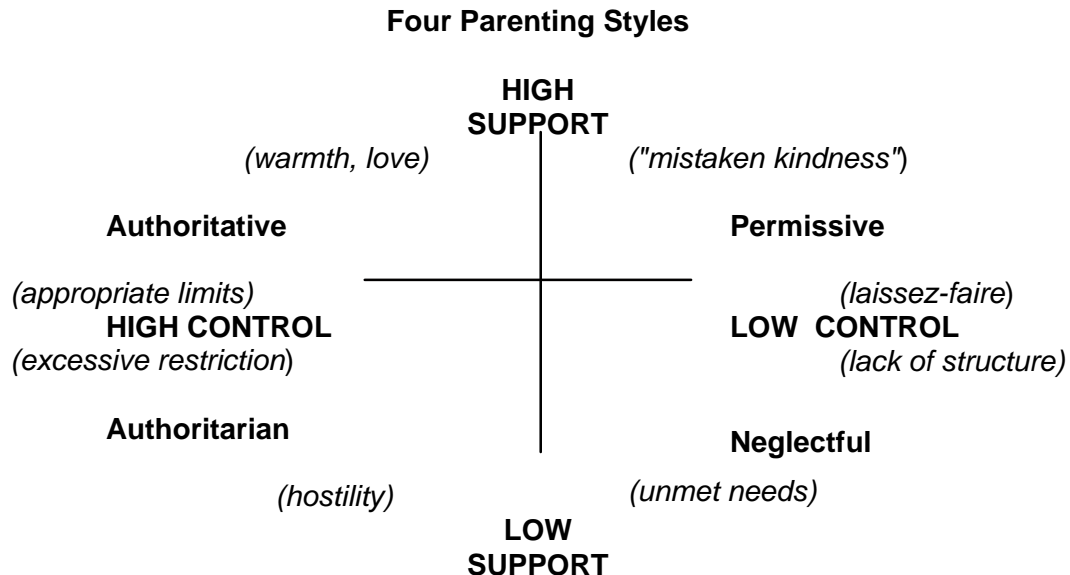
Adopting an Authoritative Management Style

Of all the factors which have been shown to increase the likelihood that children will make their parents’ values their own, family management style is the most significant. Scripture says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8 RSV). Doing “justice” and loving “kindness” are especially important to the relationships of adults with children. “Justice” (Heb. *mishpat*) responds to a basic human need for fairness and equitable treatment. “Kindness” (Heb. *chesed*) answers another need, that of warmth, mercy and compassion.

Ellen White spoke often of *kindness* and *firmness* in dealing with children: “The combined

influence of authority and love will make it possible to hold firmly and kindly the reins of family government” (*Adventist Home*, p. 308). Current parenting research shows the significance of *control* and *support* to the development of emotionally healthy, well-functioning children. *Support* refers to demonstrations of warmth, affection and sense of belonging that convey the respect of parents for children. *Control* has to do with parents providing structure, regulation, boundaries and restraints in their children’s lives that help children respect themselves and others. “Kindness” and “support” express qualities within the biblical concept of *chesed*. “Firmness” and “control” convey aspects of *mishpat*.

When kindness and firmness or support and control are placed on continuums ranging from low to high and placed on a graph together (*see figure*), four styles of parenting are portrayed, each characterized by the level of kindness and firmness displayed in parent-child relationships.



The **neglectful** parenting style has little or no kindness and support and little or no firmness or structure. Rules are absent or inconsistent, there is a lack of dependable routines, and concern for the child’s needs is missing. **Permissive** parents are kind, but provide little or no firmness. They are inconsistent in setting limits and in discipline, though they give lots of attention and affection. **Dictatorial** parenting has little or no kindness with a firmness and control that are overbearing. Unrealistic demands, harsh punishment, lack of sympathy for the child’s needs, as well as minimal parent-child conversation are also characteristics.

Optimal parenting has **authority with love**. There is abundance of warmth and love with appropriate limits. Affection and affirmation are plentiful. Expectations are realistic and appropriate to the age of the children. Rules are few and the consequences of not following them are clear. There is follow-through on consequences. Parents release responsibilities to children as they are able to assume them. When this family communicates, time is taken to make sure everyone understands each other.

In 1983, Maccoby and Martin reviewed over 500 studies on parent-child interaction (Habenicht & Murdoch, 1991), looking especially at the factors of *support* and *control* and the resulting styles of family management that emerge from the combinations of these two factors. Of the four basic styles of family management, *authoritarian*, *permissive*, *neglectful*, and *authoritative*, the authoritative style was found to most effective because:

- A higher percentage of children from these kinds of families accepted and retained their parents’ religious values.
- Children raised by authoritative parents tended to show the strongest levels of moral development.
- Children brought up in families managed authoritatively tended to be empathetic and to care about others.

Experiencing Family Devotional Time

Research has shown that family worship is a significant factor in faith development in young people. Family worship provides an opportunity for the following:

- Renewal of the family covenant with God and with each other.
- Review of the family’s religious heritage.
- An opportunity for values instruction.
- Time for relationship-building.

Thinking About Ethical Issues and Moral Dilemmas

Human beings do not progress through the stages of moral development simply because someone tells them they should or because they are “taught” good moral values. Growth is encouraged when we are challenged to think more deeply about moral issues and dilemmas. A prime opportunity for growth occurs when an individual encounters situations—either in real life or in a values learning experience—for which his/her belief system is inadequate or needs some rethinking. No matter how good or right the values may be that we are trying to pass to our children, ultimate success will lie in our teenagers’ ability to discover the values for themselves, to internalize them, and to put them into real-life action.

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. . . . It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts. (White, 1952a, p. 17)

All too often we are giving our young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants. We are stuffing their heads with earlier innovation rather than teaching them to innovate. We think of the mind as a storehouse to be filled when we should be thinking of it as an instrument to be used. . . . Instead of giving young people the impression that their task is to stand a dreary watch over the ancient values, we should be telling them . . . that it is their task to recreate those values continuously in their own behavior, facing the dilemmas and catastrophes of their own time. (John W. Gardner quoted in Dudley, 1986, p. 67)

Involving Your Family In Service

Service for others provides opportunity to put values into action. Such service might include activities that range from cleaning up a park or a highway; volunteering at a local soup kitchen, distributing sandwiches to the homeless, baking cookies to send to students away at school, helping with a church building project at home or abroad, or volunteering for short term mission service.

Words of Encouragement

When Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14), His words brought encouragement to parents. Jesus understands children of all ages. Their moral and spiritual development is of utmost concern to Him. When adolescent development occurs and changes the parent-child dynamics in the home, when direct teaching and training by parents give way to modeling and empowering their youth who are moving toward adulthood, parents may confidently rest in the thought that Jesus knows their children’s needs and their ways. Teenagers are precious in His sight. As parents’ hearts yearn for the help they know they cannot give their young people, Jesus will bestow peace, hope and contentment to their anxious hearts.

These precious words [Matt. 19:14] are to be cherished These words are an encouragement to parents to press their children into His notice, to ask in the name of Christ that the Father may let His blessing rest upon their entire family. Not only are the best beloved to receive particular attention, but also the restless, wayward children, who need careful training and tender guidance. (White, 1952b, pp. 275, 276)

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Can We Pass Our Faith to Our Children?

by Roberto Badenas

It is difficult to imagine anyone feeling greater anxiety than that felt by faithful parents as they watch their children leave the faith. Whether these children openly rebel or gradually distance themselves, the result is the same. Parents are overwhelmed with pain and often with feelings like the following:

- Failure, frustration, guilt. Parents may blame themselves, “We didn’t educate them well.”
- Rejection. Parents sense a growing distance between themselves and their child. “He doesn’t want anything to do with us anymore, even though we sacrificed so much to take him to Sabbath School, Pathfinder club events, etc.”
- Fear and anxiety. Parents may experience inconsolable mental anguish as they ponder the possibility that their son or daughter might not only leave the church and its values, which they have tried to teach them, but even more that they may at some point cut off their relationship with God, if they have not already done so.
- Helplessness. “We don’t know what to do. Somehow it doesn’t seem right to say nothing, yet, if we say something, it may make the situation worse.”
- Shame. The church, other family members, even friends sometimes cause families to feel shame over their child’s departure, rather than showing them compassion and support. Whispered gossip can be devastating, especially to the families of church leaders: “And to think that she’s a pastor’s daughter” or “Isn’t his father the head elder who was constantly lecturing us?”
- Uneasiness, perplexity, resentment. Parents may cry out to God with resentment or questioning. “God, we have done all we could. Didn’t you say, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it?’ What is this that is happening with our children? Why is this verse not coming to pass? Look at the children of So and So, who often missed Sabbath School. Their parents didn’t really make much of an effort as far as church is concerned, yet one of them is a Sabbath School teacher, and another one a youth leader. . .?” Some parents may try to bargain with God, “I promise to completely consecrate my life to you if my son comes back and is saved,” etc.

Helping Parents Have Hope

What can we do in these situations? How can we best minister to parents whose children turn away from the family’s faith or turn their backs on God? And what of Proverbs 22:6? Does God guarantee there that all prodigal children will return?

First of all, in this or in any circumstance, one should not despair. Things can and often do change with time. What seems permanent may be only temporary, related to a period of transition. In most cases, rebellious teenagers will quiet down and return. Thankfully, this is true more times than we might think. Also, let us not forget that God continues to be interested in our children, for they are also His! To encourage us, Jesus gave us three parables to emphasize that He is ever seeking the lost and that heaven celebrates each one's return with great joy (Luke 15).

Despite these encouraging words of Scripture, however, some may be tempted to think of the numerous children who have left the church but have never returned. Even as they have grown older, they still have shown no intention to return. "What does it matter," they may say, "to know that others came back when my children stay away?" What response can we give to help these hurting hearts?

Looking Again at Proverbs 22:6

For some, the biblical expression "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6) hangs like a weight around their neck. They feel burdened by it, especially when they hear stories of conversions in the church, yet their own children continue to live their lives "in the world." Many parents sadly conclude, "We thought we taught our children the way they should go, as the proverb instructs us to, but evidently we didn't. Or we did it wrong. Apparently we didn't know how to educate our children."

Let us pause here. Before we let ourselves be overcome with negative, destructive thoughts, we need to take a closer look at this text. The question we should ask is, Is this text the promise many think it is, or could it have a different emphasis as a proverb?

A promise? A promise derives its strength from the person responsible for making it. If what we have here is indeed a promise that God makes Himself responsible for our children, we should be able to rely on it as always being true. Yet, as we look closer we see, first of all, that this "promise" is qualified. It is not unconditional, it is conditional. The important condition is this: In order for the child not to depart from it, he must be perfectly instructed by human parents or guardians in the way that God would want for him. So we have here a conditional situation, with the primary responsibility resting on the human agent for instructing the child in the way he should go.

But we have got a problem if this verse is in fact a promise. Although most parents are generally proud to be the parents of their children, I have never met any parent claiming to have done everything right. On the contrary, the majority of us admit having made many mistakes, especially with our oldest children because they were our first, or perhaps with our youngest because they were our babies, or with children who are especially difficult. The parents who do have "model children" will generally not be able to tell us their secret and won't give themselves the credit. In fact, quite the reverse is the case. They will generally hold their breath, "knock on wood" – hoping that their children will continue to follow the right way, and will probably wonder what, if anything, they have contributed as parents to the successful outcome.

So the fact that this verse of Scripture sets up conditions based on the perfect instruction of children by human parents or guardians indicates that it cannot really be a promise at all. We

show greater respect for Proverbs 22:6 when we see it in its context of a collection of proverbs. Because it is a proverb rather than a promise.

The nature of proverbs. A proverb is a statement of popular wisdom which will generally contain a great truth. But, unlike biblical promises, proverbs do not always come to pass, even when the required conditions are met. For example, the proverb “like father, like son” is often true. All children inherit skills and faults from their parents. They do not, however, inherit each and every skill and fault from their parents. Another saying goes like this, “Show me who your friends are, and I’ll show you who you are.” This means that, in some cases, the influence of friends and educators is more decisive than heredity. Such sayings contain great general truths, but they may not be true in every case. How can we understand, for example, Proverb 26:4: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself,” when the following verse reads the exact opposite: “Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes”? Should we then answer a fool according to his folly? The answer is both yes and no. It depends on the circumstances. Each of these proverbs is true, but applied to a different situation.

The proverb, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” is therefore a great truth, but not a mathematical rule. The fact that this statement is found in the collection of proverbs should make us aware that it is not a divine promise but rather a biblical proverb (Proverb 22:6). It expresses what God wishes and represents the ideal result of a loyal education given by a faithful family under optimal conditions. But the nature of human experience reaffirms the fact that this is not an infallible rule.

Upholding human free will. To hold this proverb as a promise raises another significant problem. Taking it to be a promise would mean that each human being would be conditioned by the education received from their parents. What about the freedom of children to choose? How should we explain the fall of Adam and Eve, who were educated by God Himself? Was He a poor educator? To see Proverbs 22:6 as a promise would mean that human beings are not capable of choosing their destiny and becoming autonomous adults. A child’s destiny would be completely left to his parents. But the Bible clearly states that parents are not responsible for the final destiny of their children. Each one decides, according to the liberty he has as a human being, his own salvation: “The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him” (Ezekiel 18:20).

I have met brothers and sisters who suffer mental agony because their children have left their faith. They are prisoners of attitudes which are unnecessarily inducing guilt feelings in them. Let us not forget that we are only parents of our children and not their saviors. Despite our parental responsibility in the education of our children, we do not provide them with their salvation through our acts. Our children need a Savior. Their conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not due to family heredity, nor is it a conditioned response. Our children are much more than Pavlov’s dogs.

Even though this biblical proverb encourages us to do our part, it doesn’t give us miraculous recipes nor offer us iron-clad guarantees. It is not an insurance policy. The gift of

salvation, which God offers to the parents as well as the children, is available to each and everyone. But our sole mediator is Jesus Christ. God's plan of salvation for our children concerns us deeply, but His plan always takes into account our children's free agency and their personal responsibility, when they distance themselves from God as well as when they come back to Him.

When we feel overwhelmed by the incomparable pain because of a prodigal child, let us remember that God too bears this serious problem on His heart just as we do every day. Did not God instruct his children Adam and Eve the way they were supposed to go? Let us then be like Him who, in his infinite love, continues to respect the freedom of his children even as He searches for those who are lost and rejoices with great celebration when some come back.

After we have taught our children "in the way they should go" to the best of our abilities, there is something more that we as parents can do. We can pray for them without ceasing. In other words, we leave our concerns about them in God's hands. After all, He loves them more fully and completely than we do. He has more interest even than we do in the personal salvation of each one.

God gave us wonderful promises and beautiful proverbs in His Word. Understanding the difference between the one and the other is important in order to grasp the truths they contain. There is a promise that we should never forget, one which God Himself has already kept when His Son, Jesus Christ, bore the pain of separation from God for us all. Let us pray that our children will receive the truth of that salvation for themselves. It is a most wonderful promise, a wonderful truth: "I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save" (Isaiah 49:25).

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Helping Teens with Their Sexuality

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Puberty marks the onset of major sexual development in adolescence. A significant part of that development is coming to understand oneself and others as sexual beings—as individuals, male and female, and in relationship to one another. Teenagers face the challenge of creating a framework of sexual values which will serve them well in managing their sexual energy, protect them from involvement in behaviors that put their short- and long-term well-being at risk, and enable them to transition safely into adulthood.

Helping teens with their sexuality is a formidable task for Christian parents. The prevailing values of the societies around us often run counter to Christian values. It is not unusual to find among teenagers a belief system which includes values like “virginity is not cool,” and “sex in a relationship is okay” (Gordon, 2000). Social pressures that once mitigated against girls’ involvement in sexual relationships have dropped sharply (Tracy, 1994; Wolf, 1991). Teenagers now have more unsupervised time at home and opportunities for sexual activity than did prior generations. In the climate in which teenagers are growing up today, a large portion of the general population accepts sexual intercourse as a natural and healthy part of unmarried, as well as married couples’ relationships.

Raising the topic of sexuality with teens can be a daunting task. Not many parents feel comfortable doing it. Laaser (1999) points out that the sin of the first human pair resulted in a sense of sexual shame. “It is part of our nature since the Fall to have difficulty talking about sex,” he writes (p. xiv). Further, he continues, the greatest enemy of sexual wholeness is silence. It’s never too late to teach children about healthy sexuality because sexuality is something we learn about throughout life. Sexuality education is part of parents’ good relationships with their children (Gordon & Gordon, 1989).

Here are some practical steps toward becoming effective sex educators with teens:

Address Personal Attitudes toward Sexuality

One of the main reasons parents don’t talk to their children about sex is that they are uncomfortable discussing the topic themselves. . . . [T]he first task we must approach as parents is exploring and discussing our own beliefs and feelings about the subject. (Laaser, 1999, p. 2)

Our own sexual history, sexual traumas experienced in the past, and/or sexual addictions that may afflict us may contribute to our discomfort with talking about sexuality. Personal

reflection, along with dialogue with a trusted spouse, counselor, pastor or friend, can contribute to healing and a greater level of comfort with our own sexuality.

Many Christians cling to a philosophical dualism—the belief that things of the body are unholy, while things of the spirit are holy—which prevents a wholesome approach to the issue of sexuality. Scripture affirms that sexuality is God-given and pervades every dimension of human life. Many Christian books are now available which can provide invaluable aids to Bible study and understanding regarding sexuality in God’s design (Mazat, 1996; Smedes, 1994; Wheat, 1980).

Provide Access to Information about Sex

Adolescence is a season for rounding out understanding of the male and female reproductive system and the physical changes that occur in both boys and girls during adolescence. It is a time for affirming the personal worth of every human being and fostering a growing respect for self and others. One’s network of opposite-sex relationships expands, ideally first in group settings that encourage the development of many friendships and provide many opportunities for social interaction. During adolescence, education regarding sexuality enhances understanding about what it means to be in love, the deepening levels of intimacy and trust which are essential to the creation of a healthy and permanent bond, and the risks and responsibilities associated with decisions regarding sexuality.

Parents can intentionally provide books and other resources at home that contain full and accurate information regarding sexuality. These will likely be used by teenagers if they are available, though not perhaps in the presence of parents. Parents can also consult with their teen’s teachers, guidance counselor, physician, pastor, youth leaders, etc. to include them in the network of adults who offer additional information and opportunities to ask questions about sexuality.

Be Willing to Talk About Sexuality

Teens are usually interested in more information. However, it is not unusual for them to be resistant when parents bring up the subject. Parents should not be deterred by teen resistance to discussion regarding sexual beliefs and values. Alberta Mazat suggests lines such as, “When I was your age, adults did not talk to teenagers about sexuality, so I probably won’t be very good at it. But if you could give me fifteen minutes, there are some things I need to share with you in order to feel responsible as a parent.” Keep your conversations short and acknowledge that they are awkward for you both, but nonetheless important. Mark Laaser (1999) suggests that it can be helpful for parents to ask themselves questions like, “When I was my child’s age, what did I need? What would have been helpful for me to hear? What information did I need? What would have calmed my fears?” Here are some issues teens have on their minds:

- How do you know if sex is right for you?
- How do you know if your partner cares or if you are just being used?
- How often do couples have intercourse?
- Can sperm swim through your jeans?

- How do you stop if you really feel you love your partner and would like to have sex, but are afraid of getting pregnant?
- What are advantages and disadvantages of different types of birth control?
- Is it true you can get pregnant if the boy pulls out in time?
- If sex is safe with a condom, what's the big deal?
- At what time of the month is a girl most likely to get pregnant? (Buth, 1998, pp. 79, 80)

One of the greatest gifts we give our children is our willingness to talk about sexuality. Δ We must become as committed to discussing sexual matters and the multitude of experiences in life that influence our children's behavior as we are in discussing other home, school, health, and safety issues. . . . Our aim is to view all topics as worthwhile, interesting subjects for comfortable conversation" (Tracy, 1994, p. 107, 113). Some tips:

- Discussions that emphasize choices and consequences rather than "do's" and "don'ts" are easier for adolescents.
- Affirm your own commitment to the biblical ideal while listening carefully to your teen's feelings, attitudes and beliefs.
- Spring-board dialogue from news items in print or on TV, such as reports on maintaining sexual health, i.e. breast self-exams, mammograms and prostate checks; date-rape; HIV/AIDS; sexual harassment; abuse, etc.
- Affirm adolescents often for the things they are doing well, including making good decisions regarding sexuality.
- Confront problematic behavior, but avoid over-reaction:
"I know you've been visiting sexual sites on the Internet. I'm not mad at you, but I am concerned. It's normal for you to be curious about sex. But most of the sex that's portrayed on these sites is not the kind God intends for us to enjoy. I would like to talk to you about what God had in mind when he made men and women and planned for them to enjoy sexual intimacy in marriage. By the way, I know what it's like to be attracted to these kind of pictures. It's pretty normal. But from my vantage point, I'd like to share some things about sexuality that sex videos don't always tell you."
- Empower teenagers with skills and lines they can use to resist peer pressure:
Explaining why you're not dating: "I've had several invitations, but I'm only fifteen. My parents and I have agreed I can begin dating when I'm sixteen."
Avoiding behavior that is inappropriate: "I know that you want me to come over to your house this afternoon, but I have decided not to go home with a boy when there are no parents at home. It's a decision I plan to stick with."
- Admit your mistakes and limitations:
"We want to talk to you because we now understand some things we didn't understand so clearly before. There are a number of things that we haven't talked to you about. One of those things is sex. We know that what we're about to talk about might be embarrassing, and we probably won't be very good at it, so we won't talk long tonight. We won't put you on the spot, but we're interested in your thoughts and concerns too. Hopefully, this is the beginning of many conversations all of us will feel good about."

- Become an “askable parent”:
Askable parents feel positive about themselves and communicate well with each other. They also have a sense of humor and recognize that not every untoward event is a trauma. Their children tend to confide in them, recognizing that their parents have a lot of common sense. Askable parents can admit, “I’ve a better chance of bringing up children who respect my values than do those who are not responsive to their children’s sexual needs and curiosity.” (Gordon & Gordon, 1989, p. 54)

Make a Strong and Winsome Case for Chastity

Scriptural support for sexual chastity. Human sexuality was created by God and was included in that which He declared to be very good (Gen. 1:31). Sexual sin is a characteristic of the fallen world in which we live (Rom. 1:26-32). Our physical bodies, including our sexual parts, have been redeemed by Christ and belong to God. The Holy Spirit dwells in the body of the believer (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Since they belong to the Lord, our bodies are not meant for sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:13). The “one flesh” union of husband and wife—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—is God’s plan for marriage (Gen. 2:24). Ownership of their bodies is shared by husband and wife with each other (1 Cor. 7:4). Marriage is defiled when husband or wife share their bodies with others (Heb. 13:4). Sex outside of marriage prostitutes that which belongs to God and which He has reserved for marriage (1 Cor. 6:15-17). As a single person, Joseph recognized that sexual immorality was a sin against God (Gen. 39:9). The brothers of Shulamith recognized the importance of sexual chastity for her as a young person in their discussion of her as a “wall” or a “door” (S. of Sol. 8:9). Shulamith maintained her chastity (“I am a wall”) (S. of Sol. 8:10) and came to her husband on their wedding night as a virgin (Song of Sol. 4:12). Unmarried individuals are enjoined to avoid intimate sexual expression and lovemaking outside the bonds of the marriage covenant (S. of Sol. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). For further discussion, see the reprinted article included in this resource, “More Than Birds and Bees.”

Weakening of bonding strength and potential. Studies of pair-bonding in humans reveal a progressive sequence of interaction between male and female leading to deeper and deeper intimacy (Flowers, 1992; Joy, 1985). Observable physical signs symbolize a wholistic process involving the total person—eye to body (attraction), eye to eye (mutual interest), voice to voice (soothing enchantment), hand to hand (caring touch), arm to shoulder (growing sense of belonging), arm to waist (dreaming, visioning, intentional coupleness), face to face (kissing, caressing, self-disclosure), hand to head (increasing vulnerability and trust), hand to body (familiarity with and thoroughgoing acceptance of the other person), mouth to breast, hand to genital, genital to genital (sexual stimulation culminating in intercourse, complete openness and vulnerability).

The deeper levels of the bonding sequence were designed by God to culminate in sexual intercourse. The further a couple progresses into these levels, the more difficult it is to choose abstinence. In addition, the bonding sequence can be likened to a taxi ride, in the sense that the further one goes, the greater the cost of getting out. Deep sexual bonding can create emotional entanglements that are beyond the emotional capacity of the participants to handle (Wolf, 1991). Many teenagers are brokenhearted after falling in love and then breaking up in the later

stages of bonding. Some, boys in particular, become very upset and cannot pull themselves out of it. They may have serious thoughts of suicide.

Early sexual involvement cuts the process of relationship-building short, and as a result, “one fleshness”—the deepest levels of intimacy—may never be achieved. Further, research indicates that promiscuous bonding puts at risk a person’s capacity to permanently bond (Joy, 1996). Gordon (2000) thinks of sex as the healing balm that carries married individuals over rough places. “Whenever sex is shared with anyone else before marriage, a little bit of the balm is used up in each encounter, thus leaving only a fraction (if any) balm available for the tough times in marriage” (p. 128). Individuals who do opt for monogamous marriages after earlier promiscuous involvements *can* develop faithful, trusting, fulfilling marriages, but usually require more intentionality, a vigilant attention to their exclusive bond, and often require outside support in the form of counseling and therapy.

Danger of STDs and HIV/AIDS. Sexually active teens run a high risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. The risk is highest for girls whose developing cervix is particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted micro-organisms. Venereal diseases have serious reproductive tract complications including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility and pregnancy disorders. In the United States, AIDS is the seventh leading cause of death among fifteen-to twenty-four-year-olds. Young people ages 13-22 account for nearly one quarter of new HIV/AIDS cases reported.

Risk of pregnancy. The younger girls are, the more likely they will become impregnated during the first sexual intercourse. Teens who bear children are less likely to complete high school. Many will face parenting alone or bear the trauma of abortion with little support from family and friends. Many children of teenaged parents do not experience the care and nurture they need and which two mature parents are best equipped to provide.

No safe sex. There is no absolutely safe way of having sex. When intercourse occurs, the possibility of pregnancy or exposure to a sexually transmitted disease is always present. Condoms lower the risk of pregnancy and HIV transmission. But they are not fool proof.

The question of providing information about contraception to teenagers is much discussed. Many are of the opinion that such information need not convey the message that sex outside of marriage is okay. The ready availability of birth-control options makes education about God’s design for human sexuality even more imperative

There is no research that supports the idea that talking about any sexual matter, including the use of contraceptives, with a responsible adult encourages an adolescent to become sexually active. Instead, it’s far more likely, as with other situations involving difficult decisions, that the more information a teenager has about sexual matters, the better these situations will be handled. (Tracy, 1994, p. 113)

Lifting high God’s beautiful design for sexuality as presented in Scripture must be the parents’ first work. There is a strong and winsome case to be made for God’s plan to reserve the deepest levels of sexual intimacy for marriage. Apart from the protection of this lifelong

covenant relationship, sexual intimacy simply puts too much at risk. But even as we uphold the biblical design, we must not leave our youth unprepared for the reality of the temptations they will face and the consequences associated with the choices open to them. Despite their parents' urging toward sexual chastity and abstinence, and for reasons that may not always be clear or rational, many teens fail to heed the divine call to sexual purity. Mistakes happen, poor judgment is exercised, even deliberate choices are made at times which result in behaviors that fall far short of God's ideal.

Given the realities of a sexually immoral world and human frailty, responsible parents must clearly uphold God's design as the moral standard for Christians as well live it out as their own personal value. At the same time they must demonstrate concern for the safety of young people who may be engaging in behaviors that put them at risk for HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases as well as the potential physical and emotional consequences of sexual promiscuity. Appropriate education to inform youth about contraception and the use of prophylactic methods which does not condone sex outside of marriage but which does provide knowledge about the limited protection they offer should be provided. Parents should take great care to anchor such education firmly in a scriptural understanding of the divine plan for sexual intimacy in marriage and to present the material in a manner befitting their teen's moral understanding so as not to be misunderstood.

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Loved by Choice

True Stories that Celebrate Adoption

by Susan Horner & Kelly Fordyce Martindale

Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2002. 228 pages.

Reviewed by Kathy S. Russell

Loved by Choice: True Stories that Celebrate Adoption does what the title says—it shares positive stories about adoption. As one who has personally experienced the disappointments of lost pregnancies and failed attempts to adopt but now knows the joy of a recent international adoption, I liked this book. I could wish it had been available to read before my husband and I began our journey into what for us were uncharted waters.

The choice to adopt is a personal decision to share your heart, your home, the rest of your life with a needy child or children—to love them unconditionally. Though there are some similar hurdles that all adopting families must surmount, the experience is different for each one. *Loved by Choice* identifies the hurdles and gives information, encouragement and wisdom necessary for anyone considering adopting a child. The stories reveal both the heartwarming and emotionally wrenching issues involved.

Each section of the book contains chapters that focus on different perspectives of adoption. The first section sees adoption through the eyes of the young mother giving up her child, the adoptive mother receiving the child, the grandmother of the adoptive child and the adopted child herself. Other sections present stories from the perspectives of different people in the family—the adoptive father, siblings, and grandparents. Issues such as making the adoption decision, considering the child's best interests, as well as biracial adoption, international adoption, special-needs adoption, multiple adoptions, and foster care adoption are all covered. Accounts of God's special miracle-working power in composing families this way and in reuniting families that adoption has parted as well as stories of thanksgiving from children blessed by adoption all add special Christian warmth to this volume.

Useful resources are included. Appendix A has adoption terms and definitions of value to those attempting to negotiate the complicated maze of the process. Appendix B lists the adoption resources the book's authors used in their research. Though not exhaustive, the list has good information, especially about domestic adoption. Information about international adoption would strengthen this appendix. All the contributors with their short biographical sketches are found at the end.

The awareness that God is at work in creating adoptive families and the forthright sharing by the authors and contributors gives an authenticity to *Loved by Choice* that makes it a

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“must read” for those looking into adoption. What better way is there for each of us to learn about the gift of adoption than from personal stories by those who have known its blessings? Except, of course, to adopt a child and discover firsthand the joy it brings!

Start by Learning Their Names . . .

by Karen and Ron Flowers

It could have been almost any town, any place. The kids were acting out sexually and chemically, and the adults were worried. Worried enough to throw a lot of money into prevention. In fact, no one could ever say they hadn't put their money where their mouth was. They had brought in the big guns with the best resources and the most engaging props. The kids had even said Thanks! They liked it! But here again were the town fathers a year later, with the same teen pregnancy and drug and alcohol abuse statistics staring them in the face. From all appearances, little had changed. That was the reason for the town meeting. And that was the reason for the speech.

He was an unlikely speechmaker, the lanky rancher sitting on the back row in his cowboy boots, and his speech wasn't long. It was just profound. "If you want to know what I think," he drawled, "I think we should start by learning their names."

Anyone who has lived in the same house with a teenager knows the wonder and delight of watching these incredibly interesting creatures emerge from the cocoon of childhood. In the same wrapping, of course, come the challenges and worries of responsible parenthood through this delicate adolescent season of drying wings and flight lessons. There are so many influences, so many risks, and so many life decisions to be made. So many adjustments

as relationships transition from parent-child, to parent-teen, to parent-young adult.

We have enough data to know that the town meeting could just as well have been an Adventist town hall. A study conducted among Seventh-day Adventist youth attending 69 Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools throughout the United States and Canada¹ measured the extent to which Seventh-day Adventist youth use drugs and alcohol and engage in sex outside of marriage. There was some good news. Overall, the Adventist youth surveyed reported lower levels of substance abuse and were less sexually active than their counterparts in the culture at large.

There was also bad news. The study clearly showed that Seventh-day Adventist youth are not immune to behaviors that put their well-being at high risk. Significant numbers of Adventist students are using drugs and alcohol. Some begin as preteens. Nearly one in five Adventist students participating in the study reported having engaged in premarital sex.

The Adventist Family Study initiated by the General Conference Department of Family Ministries, with more than 8,000 respondents from seven world divisions, confirmed that the world church faces similar concerns to those raised by the North American Division study. The global impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic—a totally

preventable disease that threatens to obliterate whole generations and is in many cases contracted between the ages of 15 and 25—has heightened the urgency of finding the keys to better life choices.

Let's not misunderstand this study. It's not as though the concerns are new. It's not that modern moms and dads don't love their teenagers and try to be good parents to them. It's not like adults in churches, schools, and communities have put little energy into an active ministry to children and youth. On the contrary, the many positive outcomes of their efforts should be applauded! It's just that the problem hasn't gone away, and the back-row cowboy's words of wisdom may just provide us with a further hint at what is important when it comes to these issues.

Know the kids' names!

It's amazing how much difference something as simple as knowing someone's name can make.

A friend of mine told me a story. She goes to a rather large church. It's easy for a kid to get lost in a big church, particularly a kid who goes to public school or doesn't particularly shine otherwise. My friend discovered a young girl in her large congregation who had the same name as her daughter. So she introduced herself to the girl. She showed her a picture of her own daughter, now grown and moved away, and told her how seeing her in church and knowing they shared the same name made her think warm thoughts about her family.

After that, my friend made a special point of connecting with her daughter's "namesake" every Sabbath. The girl struggled through adolescence, and had a baby before she was married. But week by week my friend was there with a friendly smile and an encouraging word.

Adolescence is behind the girl now. She is married, and she is also still in church. Her bond with my friend remains. It started just with a name.

Last week we were back in our pew in our local church after nearly two months of travel for our work. Karen, along with a team of five other people, is responsible for the children's story each week, so all the children are her friends. During the worship hour, as the children go to the front for their story time, they collect offerings for Christian education. As Karen offered a dollar bill to a favorite three-year-old passing by, he stopped dead in his tracks and put his hands on his hips. Squinting and scrunching up his nose as if unable to be completely sure, he inquired, "Are you Grandma?" (We have no biological grandchildren, but we have adopted many.)

"Why, yes!" Karen responded. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Well," he announced, lest she may have forgotten, "I'm Andrew." And with that he took the dollar and moved along.

Is this too simple or anecdotal? Actually, we have it on very good authority. In 1997 the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AdHealth) was launched across the United States, collecting data from 90,000 teens and 18,000 of their parents. This study provides a suitable capstone to the growing body of research that undergirds our understanding of the factors that predispose today's children and youth to involvement in high-risk behaviors and those factors that are most likely to protect them from harm. The one word that encapsulates all this research is connectedness. In short, kids who feel connected to family, church, school, and community are far less likely to participate in behaviors that put them at risk.²

Keep kids connected

The question is, “What makes kids feel connected?” Remembering that Susie has a biology test today and promising to pray for her. Taking time for fun. Opening our homes to kids and their friends. Setting sensible limits while maintaining reasonable flexibility. Being available. Asking questions that show interest in kids’ lives and pursuits. Noticing a job well done. Treating kids fairly and equitably. Setting high expectations and clearly communicating our disapproval of risky behaviors. Becoming a reliable source of good information. Listening with undivided attention. Watching out for the vulnerable.

Drs. Gary Hopkins and Bruce Heischober,³ physicians at Loma Linda University with expertise in youth at-risk behavior, wrote a seminar for parents on building connections that make a difference in the lives of children and youth. Here is their bottom line.

Connectedness takes time and requires genuine interest in young people and their issues. It means going where the kids are. It involves listening and dialogue as well as talking. Connectedness is about warmth and caring and love and friendship. 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 attractive. It requires a willingness 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 kids who are discouraged or troubled. Connectedness is about helping someone who has made a mistake to begin again. Connectedness is about supporting parents and families. It means opening our families to include others in the circle of caring and fun. Connectedness is about becoming community.

But it can’t happen until people like us start learning names.

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2. R. W. Blum and P. M. Rinehard, *Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth* (Minneapolis: Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, n.d.).

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Bonding Our Children to Christ

by Virginia Smith

Seventh-day Adventists in the 1960s numbered around 1.55 million worldwide. Tom Ashlock, then an associate in the General Conference Sabbath School Department, wondered what would have happened if the Church had never done any evangelism but had consistently retained all the children growing up in Adventist homes.

He got out his calculator, started with the number of Adventist families in 1848, considered the average family size in each generation up to the time he was working, and made a shocking discovery. Without evangelism, but just by maintaining Adventist children in the Church, there would have been 128 million Adventists at the time of his calculation: the 1960s!

On any given Sabbath morning, the largest group of people missing from the church—and needing to be reclaimed—are the children. Not the little ones, but the ones who used to be in the church when they were little.

What's wrong? How can we keep the children in the church? How can we reclaim the ones who have left?

The Beginner and Kindergarten Sabbath Schools are happy places. The eager children are participating and enjoying themselves. In Primary Sabbath School it is much the same. But something different

takes place among the Junior and Earliteen age groups. Many of them lose interest in Sabbath School. They are likely to be found hanging around in the hallways or outside the building. Major physical, emotional, and mental changes are involved, but these do not entirely explain the disinterest that develops in church attendance during the Junior/Earliteen years.

Just when they are beginning to think for themselves, we notice the young people missing. But that is not the first time they are making decisions about Jesus Christ and the church. Those first serious thoughts came long before, probably when they were as young as five or six, and their first decisions were not made on the basis of doctrines and Bible study. Rather, they were based on you and me.

Adults stand in the place of God in the mind of a child. In a child's early years, unconscious questions arise: Is it nice to be with adults? Do I feel loved and appreciated when I am with them? So, they begin deciding what they will do when they are free to choose for themselves.

The goal should be for us to bond the children to us and to the church, because in that way they have the best possible chance to ultimately bond with Jesus Christ. Here are four ways to accomplish the goal of bonding.

Bonding the children

1. *Be their friend.* Smile, don't frown. Talk to them, especially about God and His Word. Listen to what they say, and be shock-proof. As long as they see you as a friend, you have a tremendous influence on them. If you cut them down to size whenever they say something you don't like or agree with, they will soon stop talking to you. You may think that a normal generation gap has silenced them, but actually they lost confidence in the trustworthiness of your commitment to hear from them and what they are thinking and feeling.

If we listen respectfully to children's ideas, they in turn will be willing to listen to some of what we say. As trust builds, we will learn things we never dreamed of, and we will have continuing opportunities to influence children's thoughts and actions. Children go where there is excitement; they stay where there is love.

2. *Involve each one of them in your local church.* People of all ages are more likely to attend if they feel needed and appreciated. At an early age children should be given some responsibility. It could be as simple as helping the adult greeters at the front door, straightening the chairs in a particular room, or even turning the lights on and off—something that will give them pride of possession and the significance of contributing.

As they grow, we need to increase their responsibilities: junior deacon or deaconess, elder for the children, assistant in one of the children's departments. All of them may not be totally dependable in doing the job. Neither are adults. Support, encourage, and affirm in every possible way to help the children grow in their capabilities. Each child who gains a sense of inclusion and significance is most likely to remain in the church.

3. *Provide opportunities for children to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (see 2 Peter 3:18). Grace is all the wonderful gifts of love, mercy, repentance, peace, and comfort that God gives to us. Knowledge of His Word is how He communicates with us. Grace and knowledge must go hand in hand for real Christian maturity to develop. Consider the secular influences surrounding children today: TV, videos, computers, sports, music, friends, etc. The list is long, and children are exposed to it most of the day. By contrast, the list of opportunities children have for spiritual nurture is shorter, but taking stock of them is helpful indeed:

- ◆ Sabbath School, one hour a week.
- ◆ Family worship—maybe (surveys consistently find that only 25 percent of Adventist homes have this kind of worship).
- ◆ A divine service that is interesting to children and provides ways for them to participate.
- ◆ Every local church can have Pathfinder and Adventurer Clubs, but not all do.
- ◆ Vacation Bible School—one week a year.
- ◆ Perhaps a camp meeting for one week a year.
- ◆ Of course, there is church school, but how many children attend?

The difference in the quantity and quality of what we offer the children and what the culture in general offers will change if we are truly serious about bonding our children to us, to the church, and, by all means, to the Lord.

4. *Baptize them before they are teenagers.* It is wonderful to see teens and young adults come into the church with their enthusiasm and eagerness. What they discover in the Bible is exciting and

meaningful to them. But it is seldom that way for the young people who have grown up in a local church. The Bible is an old hat to them. They've been there, done that, heard that before.

Surveys in several of our Adventist world divisions have revealed that 85 percent of young people who are not baptized by age 14 are lost to the Church. Only the other 15 percent will request baptism at a future date.

Some adults in the church take the attitude, "They are only children. They will learn when they grow up." Actually, it is only when they are children that we have the window of opportunity to bond them to us, to give them a sense of inclusion, to fill their minds with thoughts of God and His Word; in short, to do our part in their salvation.

The teenage years are turbulent. The reality and even the memory of their earlier baptism is a wall of protection even if they slip, and it creates a greater likelihood that they will remain in the church, continuing to grow in grace. Our part is to overlook mistakes in our desire to encourage and support our children's continued growth. For the future good of our youth, and even if our only concern is for church growth, baptizing the children at a sensible age is important.

Bringing back the children

What is our responsibility to the children who remain in our fellowship? Is it to criticize, command, "preach," or cajole? On the other hand we should not lose an opportunity to say a word to encourage and inspire hope. We cannot tell how far-reaching our words of kindness may be, or our Christlike efforts to lighten some burden. "The erring can be restored in no other way than in the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and tender love."* Two simple principles apply:

1. *Be friends.* As long as teens see us as friends, we still have the chance to influence them. We can determine by God's grace never to criticize or confront them about their behavior. We can watch carefully to "catch them being good" and affirm them in every way we can. They haven't forgotten what they learned in church. Their memory is better than ours. In the long run, our attitude toward them will probably determine whether they feel safe in making good choices.

2. *Pray for them.* It is a fact that God loves our young people more than we do and will use every means at His disposal to turn them to Himself. Furthermore, Jesus died to give every person a free choice.

Social involvement

One more principle is at play when relating to our people, both those who are in the church and those who have lost interest:

Provide social activities. Almost worldwide, Saturday night is an accepted time for social activities. We may not feel the need for these kinds of things. We may be old enough to appreciate a quiet Saturday night at home, but young people want to be with their friends on Saturday night. Capitalize on this by making Saturday night a part of the bonding process to the church.

When it comes to these church-centered weekend activities we should have a committee of young people to do the planning. It is good to provide some mature, friendly guidance in this planning. We need to open these activities up to all young people in the church and their friends. Some families mistakenly open their homes to a certain group of young people. The others are left out, and the negative feelings generated by this make it more likely that

some young people will look outside the church for social activities.

Not every child will choose to be on God's side, no matter how perfect the environment, but by God's grace we can and must determine to do all in our power to bond the younger members of God's family to us, the church, and the Lord, so we can have joy together here and now, and be together in the world to come.

* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1948), 5:613.

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What Are We Teaching Our Children?

by Bertil Wiklander¹

“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isa. 54:13).

In our official membership statistics, we do not count children, but they are of crucial importance to us, and they have enormous value in God’s eyes. They can play a significant role in God’s mission to His lost world. So, the church has assumed the task of teaching the children the things of the Lord, through Christian homes, schools, Sabbath Schools, and Pathfinder clubs.

What should the church teach? And how will that teaching bring our children peace? Isaiah gives us three challenges.

What do we teach our children?

Whatever we teach our children, Isaiah says, should bring them God’s peace. Peace is often associated with freedom, and freedom has often been compared to flying. For centuries human beings tried to free themselves from the limitation of being created without wings. About a thousand years ago, an English monk, Eilmer of Malmesbury, made one of the first-known attempts to fly. He fastened wings to his hands and feet and jumped from a tower. He managed to fly more than 250 yards, but his landing was less than successful.

Since then many attempts have been made to fly. Humans had curiosity, vision,

and courage. However, that was not sufficient to ensure success in their enterprise. Their problem was their limited knowledge. Not until the end of the nineteenth century did humans begin to master the art of gliding on the wind, and out of that came new knowledge concerning the laws of aerodynamics.

The history of human attempts to fly teaches us something about wanting to succeed in life. How can we experience life with a sense of freedom and authenticity? It is not enough to have curiosity, dreams, and courage. It is not enough merely to be gifted, to take an interest, to have imagination, to work hard, or to have creativity and power to act. To succeed one must be equipped with an adequate knowledge of life, of who we are, and why we are here. This applies to what we teach our children.

Ellen White says: “In a knowledge of God all true knowledge and real development have their source. Wherever we turn, in the physical, the mental, or the spiritual realm; in whatever we behold, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed. Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of

such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate.”² The knowledge we teach our children must grow from communion with God. Knowledge of God grants freedom and peace, because God stretches the capacity of our minds beyond anything we can think or imagine. Concerning freedom, Jesus said: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31, 32, NIV). Here Jesus is referring to God when He says “truth.” Children’s lives are formed by their knowledge of God. They find it in Jesus under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, our ultimate objective must be more than giving the children a great time, as if our goal were to entertain them, or of giving them information, as if it could save them. Our ultimate objective is to make them disciples of Christ, able to understand and know God who sets us free and enables us to fly in the spiritual heavens.

Sometimes, what we offer our children in church is a distorted image of God that cripples them rather than making them free; that keeps them paralyzed rather than helping them fly; that keeps them filled with anger, guilt, and fear, rather than with peace.

I can remember my childhood in the church. Devoted and pious men and women taught me how to behave. Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories reinforced their teaching. To strengthen their position, they taught me about the Great Judge, the God who was always watching me to see whether I did anything wrong. I was taught to sing a song about being careful what I did, because the Father up above was looking down at me. The song had several verses, and every verse introduced another part of me which I had to be careful with: eyes, mouth, ears,

hands, and feet. The meaning of life was to behave well, and God was the Chief of police.

This kind of teaching gave me a guilty conscience and no peace. It enslaved me and deprived me of my freedom and dignity. It reluctantly urged me to fly, but only with a head so full of vague instructions and fear that the flight often ended in failure. I was taught that God was one who made life harder than it was by itself. I didn’t learn always to see God as my friend and helper to deal with the challenges of life. I was not “taught by the Lord” but by weak human beings who struggled to produce in me a legalistically perfect behavior. To them, lifestyle was more important than life.

And the outcome was that I did not experience the church as a good place for me to be. Fortunately, I had a home where I was loved unconditionally. And God was patient with me. But I did not always get from the church the “great peace” God had promised.

We must teach our children to experience God Himself, not just dry theory about Him. They must be able to love and trust God, having a relationship with Him they can always come back to. He is the Father who is always waiting for their return, even if they have lost their heritage, status, and friends. Even if they have been prodigals in a foreign land for years, He is the God who waits for them and embraces them when they return.

We cannot teach that unless we have experienced it ourselves. Unless we come to Jesus ourselves as sinners totally dependent on God, our children will not see that it is possible to fail at times and still make it through by His grace. If our children do not see this dependent relationship in us, no matter how costly and beautiful our

teaching material, we will not give them the truth. And they will not be set free. And they will not find peace.

What are our expected teaching outcomes?

When the Bible lifts the curtain on the created world, as God wanted it to be, we behold balance and harmony, a world at peace. In fact, God's purpose in designing our world was to share the peace that existed in His own mind. Therefore, God's peace embodies life's innermost meaning and can be seen everywhere in His created world.

The Bible also teaches that God's peace must continually be defended against destructive forces. Therefore, God is always at work. In an ongoing struggle He seeks to restore His peace in the lives of men.

To believers in the Bible, therefore, the darkness of the night, the unfruitful desert, and the roaring waves of the sea are constant reminders of two opposite powers: the threat from the power of the destroyer, the chaos of evil, and God's mighty and sustaining power and the peace of God.

All that is positive flows from the God of life. Although, nothing is to be taken for granted. Having daily bread on our tables is a source of deep joy and humble gratitude, because it is a sign of God's peace that prevails over darkness. When we teach the children this dynamic view of life, we give them tools to live. This knowledge enables them to appreciate God's peace when anything good is coming to them, and to struggle against evil and darkness.

It is an alarming signal that suicides among children are growing all over the world. In Sweden, some years ago, two children committed suicide every week. In Denmark, suicide caused ten percent of all

deaths among boys between 10 and 19 years of age. The reason is lack of good relations with their parents and the lack of clear ethical principles based on the peace of God. Most important is the fact that many children felt superfluous, that they were not needed, and that they grew up with parents who had no time for them. Many of these children seek consolation in drugs and alcohol. The next step is death.

In the midst of all this turmoil and human suffering, there stands the church. It says: We are an instrument for God's peace in the world. We oppose the destructive forces at work around us. This must mean at least two things:

First, we lead our children into a life of service as coworkers with the Creator and Sustainer of other human beings. Second, we do not focus our teaching only on our children; an inward-looking approach to teaching children will breed an inward-looking church. The most important but forgotten doctrine in the church is that lost people matter to God and, therefore, to us. How vital is our work for all children, planting in them a fundamental compassion and love for other people. "Love one another even as I have loved you," commanded Jesus.

How do we teach our children?

Our text states: "All your children will be taught by the Lord." It means that someone has to be the spokesperson for the Lord to our children. Children learn by observing their adult examples.

Serving the children means that we model servanthood for them. Instead of an emphasis on right behavior, often static and measured by rules, we can teach our children the joy of service. There is no better way than by demonstrating it to them as we serve them.

I had wonderful examples of Christian servants in my childhood. I remember an unmarried, middle-aged woman who spent Saturday evenings and Sundays instilling in us children and youth a love for the church. She arranged for us to play games and stood there, very happy when we enjoyed ourselves. She did everything to make us feel part of the church family. She was a great example of Christian service. And no story, no reading, no theory, could take the place of her living example.

Jesus gave us an example of the true spirit of Christian service. He entered the suffering world and carried all human weakness and needs. He identified Himself with sinners, He suffered with them, and for them, to bring healing to their bodies and souls.

Just as with Israel in the time of Isaiah, our future depends on our children being “taught by the Lord.” Our work with children needs a new foundation. The Lord must become the teacher, and when that happens, “great shall be the peace of our children.”

1. Adapted by Kathy Beagles from an address given at the Trans-European Division Children’s Ministry Advisory, April 2002.

2. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1952), 15.

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More Than Birds and Bees

by Karen and Ron Flowers

On the only occasion in which Shulamith's brothers speak in the Song of Songs, they speak of her as a child:

“We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she is spoken for?

If she is a wall,
We will build upon her
A battlement of silver;
And if she is a door,
We will enclose her
With boards of cedar.”

(Song 8:8-9)

We do not know if it is because of cultural custom that her brothers sense a responsibility for her developing sexuality, or perhaps because they have assumed responsibility in place of the father who apparently is absent from this household. This much seems clear. They want the best for her in her childhood and as she grows into womanhood. Intuitively they sense this means a responsibility to prepare and educate her as she develops sexually.

Preparing a Child's Bonding Surface

We have come to think of this nurture and guidance for sexuality as the preparation of a child's “bonding surface” for future relationships. It is primarily and ideally the privilege of parents. Like a carpenter who readies the surfaces he intends to glue

together by spreading the cement evenly and allowing it to dry unmolested until the right moment for joining, so parents may carefully prepare their child for good bonding experiences in the years ahead.

Birth bonding. The process begins at birth when, within a matter of minutes after entrance into the world, a child discovers the warmth of his or her mother's embrace. Fortunate is the child who enjoys during the first two or three almost magical hours all manner of hugging and kissing, cooing and caressing, snuggling and mutual admiring, in the arms of both mother and father.

The script for this bonding experience was written by God and planted in the hearts of parents and babies. In most instances, mothers, fathers and newborns need only to be together, and they will intuitively know what to do. Soon relationships with siblings will round out the family circle. From the earliest moments of attachment, the preparation of the bonding surface which will set a child up for a lifetime of fulfilling relationships has already begun.

Early positive messages. Our friend Alberta Mazat, a marriage and family therapist who has specialized in the area of sexuality, offers wise and sensitive counsel to parents in her books *That Friday in Eden*¹ and *Questions You've Asked About Sexuality*.² For this chapter title, we have borrowed one of hers and credit her inspiration and

expertise for many of the ideas which follow. We highly recommend her books to families seeking Christian answers to questions about sexuality and better ways of opening this subject within the family circle. Regarding the important preparatory work begun as parents send their children early positive messages about their bodies Mazat suggests:

Parents have a wonderful opportunity early in their care of their babies to include a good feeling about their bodies. By patting, stroking, and caressing, they demonstrate not only their loving concern, but the realization that their little ones can experience good body feelings. Meeting needs in a consistent, tender way teaches trust. Using loving tones and smiling chatter demonstrates the joys of communication. Each of these early experiences . . . can be part of the preparation for good sexuality later in life.³

Unfolding the Goods News

As children grow, parents may gradually unfold the good news about sexuality. It is good to be a girl; it is good to be a boy. There are differences in girls' and boys' bodies, but both are special. As Mr. Rogers explains to children who watch his television program, "Girls are fancy on the inside, boys are fancy on the outside. Everybody's fancy. Everybody's fine." Our distinctly sexual body parts and functions have proper names. We don't need to be embarrassed or shy about these parts of our bodies, though there are appropriate and inappropriate times and places to talk about and uncover them.

Before children go to school, Alberta Mazat suggests we add to their growing knowledge the fact that "babies grow inside their mothers, but are a product of both Mommy and Daddy," and that "mommies can

nourish their babies through breast-feeding."⁴

Young children must also be made aware that nobody should be allowed to touch their genital area. They must be given permission to say an emphatic "No!" to any such attempt and be instructed to run and tell another adult about it no matter what the offender may say.

Middle childhood's crucial years. The years of middle childhood, after children start school, open many opportunities for teaching about the wonder of the human body and developing within boys and girls a sense of responsibility for the care of their bodies. In an era when little instruction was available to parents on how to teach their children about sexuality, Ellen White highly recommended to parents an article from *The Health Reformer* of January, 1873. It decried the ignorance of young girls about their development and expressed chagrin at the subtle messages conveyed to children by their parents' unwillingness to share information about sexuality. The author noted the earnestness with which we pursue our endeavors to show God's handiwork in nature, but continued, speaking of the young girls:

. . . of themselves, 'God's noblest work,' they are left in ignorance. Better far, that as little children, they should be taught of their own structure and development . . . and taught to trace it in God's loving mind and hand, than at the age when they most need care and sympathy, when mysterious feelings are pressing upon them, and the great questions of life arise before them, that they should be forced to learn from playmates those things which it should be a mother's privilege to teach, and of the sacredness of which they cannot have too high a conception!⁵

Middle childhood is a period of rapid intellectual development and intense curiosity, a good time for learning first hand how animals are born, and of the tender loving care human babies need to grow and develop. Further expansion of the story of the development of a baby to include information about the role of the father and internal fertilization is also appropriate at this age.

This is an important time for the establishment of same-sex friendships. These give assurance that it is good to be a boy, good to be a girl, during a period when boys and girls tend to spurn each others company. We found a wonderful folder of “documents” in our attic that dated to this period in our sons’ development. Ron had built them a tree house in the side yard that was the envy of every boy in the neighborhood. Soon a boy’s club headquartered in the branches, and hours on end were wiled away creating secret codes and maps and schemes for keeping out girls. There was one notable exception. One girl was allowed membership, mostly because her brother often couldn’t come over without her. But we discovered when we unearthed the records that she had been obliged to sign an official declaration that on penalty of immediate expulsion, she would *never* act like a girl!

Sexuality in Adolescence: Living, Learning, Making Choices.

However, as surely as the tree in which the tree house is nestled sprouts leaves in the spring, this stage will come to an end. One day, in what may seem the twinkling of an eye, members of the opposite sex, who were once so intolerable, suddenly turn beautiful and handsome and really quite nice. So to same-sex friends will now be added opposite sex friends who affirm developing manhood and womanhood in other important ways.

Prior to the onset of puberty, children need to know about the changes this momentous period will bring. Parents will want to prepare the way for the commencement of menstruation for girls and seminal emissions in boys. These changes should be explained as a natural part of growing up female and male, ways in which nature readies the body for its adult sexual role. Parents who talk openly with their children about the physical and emotional changes adolescence will bring, prior to its beginning, will open the way for their children to come to them with their questions and concerns as the changes occur. Acceptance and affirmation by parents, particularly that of the opposite sex parent or parent figure, are never more important than during this awkward stage when most young people are convinced the eyes of the entire world are turned on them.

Early adolescence is a period for rounding out a fuller understanding of the male and female reproductive system and the basic principles of birth control. It is a time for a growing understanding of personal worth that leads to an enlarging respect both for oneself and for others. It is a time for expanding boy-girl relationships, ideally in group activities which allow for many friendships to develop and many opportunities for social interaction. Late in adolescence, education regarding sexuality moves further into the realm of understanding what it means to be in love, learning about deepening levels of intimacy and trust, and making responsible decisions regarding sexuality.

A wall or a door? During adolescence when youth are confronted with intensifying drives and many choices, parents the world over can identify with Shulamith’s brothers. Their concerns are the same as that of these brothers in antiquity: Will my child be a wall

or a door? Will my child guard his or her chastity, pace his or her march toward maturity with appropriate levels of intimacy, proceed step by step according to God's design? Or will my child be a door, offering easy, premature access to physical intimacies apart from the maturity, commitments and responsibilities of the marriage covenant? How can I help my child to see that choices made today affect his future and the future of his friends?

But parents are not alone in their concerns. We have discovered that youth the world over have related questions of their own, though they may not openly share them. What is God's plan for my sexuality? How can I know for sure that His plan is the best? That it is right for me? How can I please God, my parents, my friends, and do what I want to do all at the same time?

Shulamith reached an important conclusion which left no doubt about her values. In no uncertain terms she resolutely declares, "I am a wall" (Song 8:10). She speaks for the countless young men and women who have resisted the attractions and the pressures around them and reserved love's deepest intimacies for marriage. On their wedding night Solomon confirms her own declaration in words that express the joy to be known by those who wait:

A garden enclosed
Is my sister, my spouse,
A spring shut up,
A fountain sealed.
(4:12)

Her decision to guard her chastity until the day she is mature enough to give herself to her chosen husband in a covenant relationship of love which is "as strong as death" (8:6), is apparently not, in the end, one forced upon her by her brothers'

determination to fortify or contain her. Rather, it is her own choice, based upon her personal understanding and acceptance of the divine laws which govern the emotional and physical makeup of human beings. Note that she pauses three times throughout the Song, in the intensity of the most intimate lovemaking described in the poem, to offer a most earnest appeal to those who walk the path toward marital intimacy behind her: "Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (2:7, 3:5, 8:4).

It is as though the experience of intimacy itself corroborates what she has believed all along. Physical oneness involves the giving of ones total being to another, a giving too complete and too risky apart from lifelong covenant. Here again, the observations made by students of the human bonding process and the personal experiences of many lend credence to Shulamith's beliefs and the wisdom of God's design which places the "one-flesh" experience only within the context of the covenant of marriage.

More than a decade ago, after our children started school, I worked on the staff of *Insight* magazine. Ron and I have reflected many times on one manuscript sent to *Insight* which made a lasting impression on me. I do not know the name of the young author though I corresponded with her at the time and have often thought of her. I want you to hear her story in her own words.

When I started going with Jason, I didn't have any problem saying no to him. But as we became very close, it got terribly hard for me to stop at my set limit. After a while, I just didn't. Anyway, I was sure that he was the one for me.

The first time we "went all the way" was great for the moment. When it

was over, Jason looked at me and said, "Now we have to get married." We prayed earnestly for forgiveness and a clean, new chance. But damage had been done. Next time emotions ran high, we couldn't stop, or didn't want to. We had given everything, but since we were too young to get married, our relationship turned stale.

I gave myself to Jason because I loved him. I tried to convince myself that Jason destroyed me, but I know it works both ways. Now I'm worried about a lot of things beyond the pain of the moment, like what will happen if I ever fall in love again. Will I be able to trust another person, risk being hurt? How will I ever tell him about my past? Can I live intimately without telling?

I never thought that I would be talking this way, this happy-go-lucky rebel. I feel kind of desperate inside that you won't hear what I have to say. About how awful it is to feel robbed of the mystery of the future, of your dignity, worth and self respect. I loved Jason and gave so much. Healing is going to take a long time. It just isn't worth the tears. I'm only fifteen years old, but I know.⁶

One does not have to listen to the stories of too many teenagers caught prematurely in the web of premarital sexual activity to recognize that in most instances pain comes in the wake. Donald Joy notes that the journey through deepening levels of friendship and trust toward marital intimacy is like taking a trip on a toll road or in a taxi. The further you travel, the higher the fare. When relationships break off, as

they most often do during the teen years, the degree of hurt and pain experienced by the couple is in proportion to the level of intimacy they have known. Donald Joy marks the stage at which couples begin to dream together about the future as the last point of departure from the intimacy highway before the toll exacted in emotional pain increases sharply should the relationship dissolve.⁷

When intimacies run too deep, too early, risks run high that the bond that is formed may be weak and vulnerable.⁸ Marriage counselors confirm that for many couples who have engaged in premarital sex there are lingering undercurrents of mistrust and whirlpools of anxiety that can haunt a marriage for years. For the promiscuous, the risks also run high. As bonds tightly fused by sexual intimacy are repeatedly wrenched apart, such damage may be done to the bonding surfaces of the individuals involved, that it may affect their future capacities to permanently bond apart from the healing touch of grace.⁹

A few years ago now I was invited to share in presenting a seminar to academy students on dating and sexuality. I was assigned the opening presentation, and as I stood before the large assembly of teens, I experienced one of those moments of deepening insight into the love of God. God, our young need to be assured, is 100% for love! 100% for sexuality! It was with great joy that He bestowed this gift on the human family in the beginning, and it is with great delight that He continues to impart His energies and blessings again and again as every new baby is formed male or female in the mother's womb, as every child develops into manhood or womanhood, as every couple leave father or mother and become one flesh. It is a gift born of His very essence—agape love. But it is a keepsake

designed to unfold across a lifetime like the petals of a rose. It is only as the full fragrance of deepening levels of intimacy is time-released with growing maturity, responsibility, and measures of commitment that its aromas will sweeten life's journey over time.

God's Forgiveness and Grace: The Second Message

This good news is our first message and we must get it to our young while there is yet time for them to make right choices, before they have had to experience the hard consequences that often accompany involvement in deep levels of intimacy apart from the protection of the marriage covenant. Our other, equally important task, is to bring a second message of hope to those whose choices have already brought pain and confusion into their lives.

I cherish in my files a letter signed "one encouraged teenager" from the young author of the *Insight* article. Her story so touched our staff, that there was no way her manuscript could be placed among the routine. Thankful that she had provided a return address, we drafted a letter to her. It read in part:

You expressed your feelings and worries so clearly as you wrote, we hurt with you. Mostly we hope you could know God feels with you too, and that He loves and accepts you even though you have been through this experience. While there are tears, even scars, the wonderful thing about our God is that He can heal and restore, even help you forgive yourself as He has forgiven you, and open the way for fulfilling relationships for you in the future. Thank you for sharing yourself; we hope you can feel our love and God's even across the miles.

Alberta Mazat extends the possibility of "spiritual revirgination" to youth who have recognized that their paths have strayed from God's plan.¹⁰ The radical forgiveness of a God who casts sins into the "depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19), always provides for new beginnings, no matter what the mistake. Teens await our encouragement that this message can really be true for them. The letter from "one encouraged teenager" is only one piece of evidence that the "second message" is much needed and will be eagerly received.

When it came time to close that opening presentation to the academy convocation, my eyes focused, as they had many times, on a row of young men and women seated at the front. Undoubtedly they had been assigned their seats. They had graciously given me their attention, and now I searched for words to send them away with something to think about. I think what I shared is a pretty good bottom line.

Next time you're with someone you really care about and find yourself wanting more, remember that wanting more is not wrong. You were created for more. But the more that you seek can only be found in completing the developmental cycles of love built into you by your Creator who will never deny you any good thing. It was Jesus who came, remember, that we might have life and have it more abundantly. You must ask yourself, "What is the more I'm really after?"

¹Alberta Mazat, *That Friday in Eden* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981).

²Alberta Mazat, *Questions You've Asked About Sexuality* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991).

³Ibid., p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 13

⁵Mazat, *That Friday in Eden*, p. 139.

⁶Excerpted from *Insight*, February 5, 1980.

⁷Donald Joy, *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God* (Waco Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1985), p. 47.

⁸Donald Joy, *Unfinished Business* (USA: Victor Books, 1989), p.98.

⁹Ibid., p. 153-157.

¹⁰Mazat, *Questions You've Asked About Sexuality*, p. 51.

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